

## Is Organized Religion Necessary?

(A collection of ideas from Jiddu Krishnamurti's writings; contributed by Eswar Sivaraman)

**Foreword:** The conversation that follows is an (adapted) excerpt from Jiddu Krishnamurti's *Commentaries on Living: 3<sup>rd</sup> Series* (1960). The ideas are not old; on the contrary, they are ageless, and have never been more relevant than today, when science and technology are at their greatest. The ideas that follow are not intended to incense, but rather, to incite your curiosity and encourage you to take a more informed look at (many) things that you may have taken for granted.

The style is that of a conversation between the informed Self, which you are welcome to embrace, and three religiously secure, but curious individuals. Enough said – explore.

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Three men had come from a distant town by train and bus. One, considerably older than the other two, with a well-kept beard, was the spokesman, though the others were in no way subservient to him. Slow and deliberate in speech, he was able to quote freely from the well-established authorities, and there was a look of contentment and tolerance about him. Of the two younger men, one was nearly bald, and the other had heavy hair. The balding one seemed not yet to have made up his mind, and was willing to examine and analyze what was said, and smiled widely as he spoke. The other was rather shy, and spoke very little.

"Is it possible to find God through the established religious organizations?" inquired the older man.

"Yes, yes, that's our question," the balding one continued. "All we know of religion is what has been drilled into us from childhood. Throughout the centuries, organized religions have taught us to believe in this or that. Practically every saint we know of has followed the religion of his fathers and depended on the authority of its sacred books. The three of us here belong to one of the traditional religious organizations, and of late, we, or at least, I, have come to doubt – what is the point of belonging to any religious organization?"

What does organization imply? We organize in order to co-operate in doing something. Organization is necessary for effective action if you and I wish to do something together. We have to organize, put ourselves in a right relationship, if we are to carry out effectively some political, social, or economic plan. Are religious organizations on the same, or a similar footing? And what do you mean by religion?

"To me, religion is the way of life," replied the third one. "The way of life is laid down for us by our spiritual fathers and the sacred books, and the following of it in our daily life constitutes religion."

Is religion a matter of following a pattern laid down by another, however great? To follow is merely to conform, to imitate, in the hope of receiving a comforting reward; and surely that is not religion. The releasing of the individual from envy, greed and violence, from the desire for success and power, so that his mind is freed from self-contradictions, conflicts, frustrations – is not this the way of religion? And only such a mind can discover the true, the real. Such a mind is in no way influenced, it is not under any pressure, and so it is able to be still; and it is only when the mind is totally still is there a possibility of coming into being of that which is beyond the measure of the mind. But organized religions merely condition the mind to a particular pattern of thought.

"But we are brought up to think within the pattern, with its code of morality," said the balding one. "The temple, or the church, or the mosque, with its worship, its ceremonies, its beliefs and dogmas – to us, this has always been religion, and you are destroying it without putting anything in its place."

What is false must be put away if what is true is to be. The aloneness of the mind is essential; and the way of religion is the disentanglement of the mind from the pattern which was put together by the collective, by the past. At present, the mind is caught in the collective morality, with its acquisitiveness, its

ambition, its respectability and pursuit of power. The understanding of all this has its own action, which frees the mind from the collective, namely the oneness or the belonging that is portrayed in one's religious organization, and the dictates put down by spiritual leaders in the name of the Infinite. Only then is the mind capable of love, and compassion, and beyond that, past the layers of our senses, ego, emotion, and the notion of "I," to truly appreciate the Self – to discover the Infinite within you as much as it is in everything around you.

"But we are not yet capable of such immense understanding," said the older one. "We still need the cooperation and guidance of others to help us along in the right direction. This cooperation and guidance is provided by what we call organized religion."

Do you actually need the help of another to be free from envy, and ambition? And when you have the help of another, is there any real freedom? Or does freedom come only with self-knowledge? Is self-knowledge a matter of guidance, of organized help? Or are the ways of the self to be discovered from moment to moment in our daily relationships? Dependence on another, or an organization, breeds fear, does it not?

"There may be a few who are strong enough to stand alone and combat the world, but the vast majority of us need the comforting supports of organized religion," answered the third one. "Our lives, on the whole, are empty, dull, without much significance, and it seems better to fill this emptiness with religious beliefs, rather than to fill it with stupid amusements, or with the sophistication of worldly thoughts and desires."

In filling that emptiness with religious beliefs, you have filled it with words, haven't you?

"We are supposed to be educated people," said the balding one. "We have been to college, we have fairly good jobs, and all the rest of it. Moreover, religion has always been of the deepest interest to us. But I see now that what we considered to be religion is not religion at all. On the other hand, to break out of this prison of the collective requires more energy and understanding than most of us possess; so what are we to do? If we left the

religious organization to which we belong, we would feel lost, and sooner or later, we would pick up another belief to which we deceive ourselves and fill our own emptiness. The attraction of the old way is strong, and we lazily follow it. But, in talking all this over, certain things have become clear to me as never before; and perhaps that very clarity will produce its own action."

#### References:

Krishnamurti, J. (1960), *Commentaries on Living: 3<sup>d</sup> Series*, The Theosophical Publishing House, Illinois, USA, pp. 286-290. (<http://www.kfoundation.org/>)

Easwaran, E. (1985), *The Bhagavad Gita*, Nilgiri Press, CA, USA.

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**Afterword:** Religion has been defined as man's response to conquering his fear of the unknown when faced with nature. The notion of faith in the unknown has been both good and bad. Good, in the sense that the clothing of the Infinite in human form, or a surreal spiritual deity, serves to focus an individual's love and compassion, and to provide an inspiring ideal to strive for, as the ultimate emblem of morality. However, nowhere has it been more real, and more tragic, that, in the name of religion, countless atrocities have been perpetuated, and material conflicts undying, simply because the interpretations of a certain religion's beliefs are contrary to others. What could be more moronic than this? The instrument that man created to conquer fear has in turned caused more fear. It seems ironic that atrocities perpetuated in the name of religion are conveniently forgotten, perhaps as guiltless services to the Infinite? The purpose of religion was to discover one's true Self, to be at peace with others, and nature. Religion may have been very relevant at the time it was conceptualized, to foster a sense of harmony to a disorganized mass – is it true today? With what science has to offer today, the unknown is more accessible from the untainted windows of mathematics and logic, than through the colored windows of religion, which serve more to obfuscate, than to obviate. Perhaps, it is time to remove the golden mask of religion and allow the individual to view reality for what it is, and not for what the collective majority wants it to be.