

35. Temple Idea and Its Place in Religion

Temple is a common feature of all religions, whether it is called a Church, or a monastery, or a synagogue, or a mosque. From long ago man was impressed by the grandeur of the objective world around him, and the roaring thunder-clouds, the mighty mountain peaks and the lofty trees, began to inspire in him a feeling of awe and reverence, and the idea of worship in general and localised worship in particular places emerged. Be it the foot of a tree or a mountain cave that offered him what he wanted, with the idea of worship came in also the idea of a place of worship. So we find at all times in the history of man worship of God has gone hand in hand with specialised centres of worship.

Religion in general may be said to have three aspects, Theology, Rituals and Mysticism. Theology is the speculative science dealing with the nature and function of Godhead and it pertains to the thinking nature in man. Rituals on the other hand deal with certain physical processes, which in some mysterious way establish a link between the visible and the invisible. In Mysticism, we find the real yearning of the human soul to realise the Supreme, an eternal seeking and expansion. Temples have been closely related to rituals, though one could imagine ritualistic functions taking place outside temples. The real nature and purpose of the temple will be understood if we clear the position at the outset in regard to how temples function. I am not one of those who think that temples are only the expression of certain vested interests. It may be that in the present day temples do not function as efficiently as in days gone by. I am more concerned with the temple idea.

In the first place, the temple is a place of worship where people gather to think of God, pray to Him and worship Him. Though theoretically we could do this at any place and at any time, certain conveniences and environments are provided in temples which one cannot command always in other places. In most homes, quiet worship of the Supreme is almost impossible. Congregational or community worship provides an effect out of all proportion to the number taking part. There is a feeling of devotion and aspiration surging forth from the hearts of those assembled in such places of worship. If thought is a reality several minds and hearts tuned to a particular attitude of aspiration and devotion are bound to produce tremendous results.

Apart from all these things, there is an important aspect of temple which is often lost sight of when people talk about temple and temple ceremonies. Certain great centres have been chosen by Great Seers as most effective for the purpose of achieving certain definite results in the common life of a community. These are centres of great occult power and the Great Ones who founded these great centres magnetized those places, in consequence of which these centres became great channels for certain types of influences from on high to flow through them, not only to the people gathered there, but to all surrounding locality and so enable people coming under those influences to achieve what otherwise they might not have been able to accomplish. We may look upon these temples as some kind of occult laboratories. Certain physical adjustment coupled with certain systematized sounds (Mantras or music) gives rise to certain results as a matter of course and if these physical processes are properly gone through the results will be there, whosoever be the person or persons who did it, provided they have been taught the right way of doing it and also are competent to do it.

The personal character of the performer does not play any great part in the efficaciousness of such ceremonies, though a person of high character will be able to put more life into what he does and to that extent the effect will be modified and quality improved. One of the essentials for the proper conduct of such rituals is the proper ordaining of the priest or the bishop. Apostolic succession plays a great part in ritualistic processes. Even at the outset, some kind of adjustments seems to have been made between certain inner forces (Deva-Agencies) and these occult centres and it looks as if these inner forces can be tapped only by people properly ordained according to the rules of the ritual. Also the certainty of the results accruing therefrom seems to depend to a very large extent on the expertness of the performer in the employment of the physical processes and other ritualistic paraphernalia.

There are certain laws governing the operation of these occult laboratories. Just as in an ordinary science laboratory, certain conditions have to be fulfilled before the desired result is achieved, so also in these occult laboratories we have to provide the necessary favourable conditions if we wish to reap good results. For example, for certain experiments in a laboratory, light has to be shut out, certain experiments can be performed only in red light, so also in certain manufactures, it is dangerous to allow dust to come into the room; if by chance any dirt or dust gets in, it may lead to explosion and such serious consequences. So also, for certain experiments dealing with high electric power certain physical conditions have to be provided, not only to achieve the desired result, but to avoid danger.

Great occult centres like temples stand on a similar footing. Certain physical conditions have to be rigidly followed to enable those centres to fulfil their true purpose. Beyond a certain limit, no dirt or filth shall be

allowed. In some temples none shall enter the Holy of Holies except clad in wet cloth. In other temples even people belonging to the highest caste will not be allowed to go into the Holy of Holies. There are temples in Northern India, where apparently, there is no restriction; any one can go and worship in the Holy of Holies. There is a shrine where people actually go and embrace the idol. It all depends upon the type of the occult force which is radiating from the centre. There are different kinds of occult forces which demand different conditions and operation. They speak of *Ugra pratishtha* and *Saumya pratishtha*. In some cases, very strict adherence to physical purity is insisted upon, in other cases the conditions are not so rigid. But in any case, if an occult centre is to function on the lines laid down at the outset by the Great One who founded the centre, the conditions laid down by him should be fulfilled, unless an equally Great One well versed in occult lore and competent to modify the nature and function of an occult centre chooses to effect such modifications in the processes taking place through that occult centre, as he considers desirable in the wider interests of the community which was intended to be served by that centre.

But all this is the purely material aspect (I am using the word material in a comprehensive sense). Before Mysticism, neither temple nor theology is of any avail. The great purpose of religion is to satisfy the inner hunger of man for the realisation of the Larger Self, the Divine. All the time this inner urge is there and seeks expression and fulfilment. The world evolves and man also evolves. His nature expands; he becomes less selfish, less insular, less parochial. This eternal struggle for expansion and freedom from bondage is the vital thing in life. At certain critical times in the history of the world we see definite forms in which this urge to expand expresses itself. Temples are good in

their own way and they are still necessary and useful for a very large number of people. But temples and ceremonies and all that go with them will be left behind if they are going to be obstacles in the way of expansion of the human heart and consciousness, instead of being a help. Time was perhaps when they were a necessary help and perhaps even today they are necessary to many; but nothing shall stand in the way of the human soul realising the Larger Soul in the Universe and feeling a unity running through all the differences we see around us, in the way of man realising every man and woman to be part of that Larger Self, in the way of feeling a mystic unity with all that lives; because it is this which matters more in religion than ceremonies or philosophies.

I do not deny there is a place in Hinduism for shrines, for ceremonies, for physical talismans and all the rest of it; but the emphasis should be on the wider and deeper view of things which naturally should take precedence over other minor considerations. I for one would use every help available in my religion for the benefit of the community, just as I may use an electric battery or a telescope. I should be foolish if I throw them aside because they do not show me my God at once. At the same time, I shall be thrice foolish if I blindly believed that these are my religion and I can realise God only through them.

The future religion seems to me to be a religion of God revealed in the Man. In times gone by, we have had God revealed as the Light, as the Sun, as Dharma, as Beauty, as Purity, as Magnificence, as Father, as Son, as Child; but we are now reaching a stage in evolution when God is being revealed to us as Man. If we wish to avoid being laid aside as back numbers, we have to sense this great ideal which is coming to be realised as an inevitable anchorage for humanity and help in the consummation of the Ideal. To realise God through Man is the new religion

which is being slowly but unmistakably revealed and he will be wise who hitches his waggon to that star and realises in advance what the generality of mankind will realise perhaps sometime hereafter.