

[A Chat with Swami Satchidananda](#)

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Q: Could you comment on the effect Christianity is having on Hinduism in India?

A: Even if they [the Hindus] do not agree with them [the Christians], in one sense, even conversion [is justified]. They are given all the facilities - education, job. And more than anything, at least in the name of Christianity, an ordinary pariah would be called "Brother John" the next day. Are the Hindus ready to do that? We say "Anbe Sivam," God is love. But in the name of caste we don't even show that kind of love for our own brother. Even pets! We take them on our laps and play with them. But another human being may not even be allowed to come close. So, if the Hindus are not going to do this - changing this kind of caste system and treating everybody equally - these people are going to change themselves to Christianity where they will get at least some reasonable treatment.

Q: How do you see the interrelationship between the various religions? Is there a unity? What is the diversity?

A: Unity and diversity should not contradict each other. Any religious person, if he goes deeper into his own religion and understands the foundation of that religion, will not act as he would normally act. He will realize that everyone is his brother. We are all one family. Actually, we have to have diversity. But the diversity will not create a problem if we realize the unity. So, we are one in spirit but different in appearance. Our essence is the same. Keep that unity in mind and function in the variety.

Q: Everyone seems to understand ecumenism in his own way. How do you define it?

A: The real ecumenism means unity in diversity. It's not uniformity. There is a difference between unity and uniformity. There can never be uniformity. All the religions say their essence in God. Strictly speaking, God has no form and no name. But Tirumular said, "those who say love and Siva are different, they are ignorant. They don't seem to know that Love is God. But the minute that they realize that love and God are the same, then they realize God." What is the difference between this and "love thy neighbor as thyself?" And as one of the beatitudes says: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see god." Sambandar said, "My Lord cleaned up my heart, made my heart pure and made me Shiva." But the people who can't understand don't talk like this. They simply say, "These are the rules; if you don't believe in this you will go to Hell."

Q: What is the essential thrust of your teaching: Does it include bringing forward the ancient Hindu teachings concerning God, soul, karma, reincarnation, etc.?

A: I talk about reincarnation, but at the same time the children insist that they do not want to believe it. But you do not have to believe this to experience God. Maybe you are not yet ready. Leave it there. Just think of the present incarnation. Do what is right - now. Don't worry about what will happen after death - only about what will happen right now. I don't insist that they have that knowledge. The Jivanmuktar will never worry about the past. The past is past. He will never worry about the future. It has not happened yet. He will simply experience what he is enjoying in the golden present. And for him nothing has changed. If all of a sudden a dead body gets up and walks, it will not be a surprise to him. He accepts everything as it is. He doesn't let his mind expect this phenomena. It's just natural to him. God did that. Fine. God did not do that. Fine. Some people say it has to be like this; it has to be like that. Then if it doesn't happen, they get disturbed. So then they are not liberated from the disturbance. So, a Jivanmuktar is one who is liberated from all of these mental conceptions.

Q: What is your view of the issues and events surrounding the 1985 Calcutta High Court ruling which granted the Ramakrishna Order "non-Hindu" status as a minority religion?

A: Sometimes bending down a little is good - at least for the time being - rather than destroying yourself if you know that you cannot fight it out. Then you are taking the victorious withdrawal for political reasons. Sometimes if you go fighting you lose more than you get. As an individual it is alright, but for an organization

you must think like the King. The spirit is more important. The Tirukural says, "even a lie is treated as the truth if it will bring some good result." So, it may be a lie that they are not Hindus but for the moment they are avoiding some bloodshed. Just political tactics.

Q: How do you perceive the abortion issue and what practical advice do you give to those seeking your help on this matter?

A: This often comes up. Under most circumstances the abortion should not be done. Only when the mother's life is in danger - not for any other reason. Not for any social reason such as, "How can we take care of this boy?" All those reasons are not good. But there is an old Tamil saying: "Even the cow, if it comes to kill you, must be killed." But that is the only time. Some say, "Oh, after six months the life is there, after six weeks the life is there." No, even the sperm has life. So, at no point is it not living matter. You are not destroying the soul but you are destroying the body of the soul. So we don't want to do that.

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