

# TOWARDS THE RELIGIOUS 'OTHER'

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**The concept of 'the others' makes sense in contrast to 'the self'.** It emerges from the obvious fact that one thinks in terms of oneself. Anything that exists other than oneself is 'the other', in a general sense. All living beings belong to 'the others'. But other human beings are 'the other' in the right sense of the word. The dynamics between self and the other is a clue to the inter-play between the religious others.

**The reality of the 'other' is a complex phenomenon.** Though the idea of the other is simple and clear-cut, its functioning has diverse dimensions. It can be viewed from two angles-the similar other and the dissimilar other. The dictum 'similar seeks similar' explains the dynamics of similarity. The dissimilar seem to take positions and polarities, just because they are not similar and are different from one another.

**Difference is the genius of existence.** It is the basis of diversity, too. It is the mark of identification of the individual items of living and non-living beings, one from another. But for the characteristic of difference, the entire creation would have been a dead whole. Life would not have been possible at all. That would mean to say that difference defines life. Difference makes the items of life unique. The identity of living beings is decided by the quality of difference among them. 'The other' is a product of difference.

**Difference is a pro-life concept.** The creator has conceived life as male and female. The greatness of the divine power inherent in it can be duly responded to only by recognizing the beauty of this difference, which composes life. It is the pivotal reason for the continuation of life. The difference between male and female stands out significant in essence. But, there are also the immense dimensions of difference among shapes, sizes, colours, fragrances, races, languages, ideologies, cultures, nationalities and religious traditions as well as among individual persons. The diversity among them is at the service of life, too.

**Religious difference is a positive phenomenon.** The diverse religious traditions have evolved from the unique experiences of great sages and saints. They have their roots in multifarious geographical, historical and cultural settings. They are different perspectives towards the divine, the human the natural dimensions of the same eternal reality. Affiliations to these traditions are a great opportunity to one another for enriching the human lives as well as for clarifying the basic concept of life. Diversity of the religious persuasions is, in fact, the source of human betterment and spiritual enlightenment.

**Open attitude to other religious traditions situates the raison d'tre of one's own religious belonging.** All the religious traditions are of divine origin. They are all characterized by the search for the very same Eternal reality, who is the Creator of all. All of them collectively are the common heritage of the human society. They belong to each other and together they belong to Creator. Therefore, failing to respect the deities, great persons, scriptures, teachings and perspectives, values and practices of other religious traditions and to learn from them would mean not benefiting from pet tenets and practices of one's own affiliation as well. Negative inclination to people of other religious persuasions is that total defeat of the very purpose of religion.

**'Towards the religious other' is the watchword of a spiritual culture worthy of today's human society.** The diverse religious traditions, while being firmly rooted in one's faith, should cross the traditionally set boundaries and learn to go beyond. Crisscrossing each other would take all of them to a world, where there rare less prejudices and more positive information about one another. Such a higher spirituality, facilitated by 'a culture of going towards the religious other', will promote not only a joint journey but also co-operation among persons of diverse religious traditions for making of a society, more harmonious and peaceful to live in. Such a multi-religious perspective of life is the fruit of genuine religious practices and such a religiosity is the dire need of the society of today.

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