SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION
The difference between spirituality and religion
Extract from 14/2/03 Satsang

Q: Someone asked what the difference is between religion and spirituality.

A: I have to use these two words - ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ - because of some historical reasons. Hinduism is not a religion in the sense in which the word ‘religion’ is used. In one case at the Supreme Court of Justice, which is the highest court here, it was decided that Hinduism was not a religion, but a way of life. Therefore, there is maximum freedom for everyone. Even in one family where there may be six or seven people; they may follow different Gurus and different deities. They may follow Krishna, Rama, or certain goddesses, and it is possible that someone may not worship at all. Yet all are Hindus! In earlier Hinduism, there was no difference between religion and spirituality.

Hinduism did not originate with any man. Even Krishna was not the originator, nor Ram. One of the names given to Hinduism is also Manu-dharma - ‘the religion of mankind’ or Sanatana-dharma - ‘the eternal religion’, is yet another name. It does not have a beginning in the same manner as, for example, Christianity which began with Christ, or Islam which began with Mohammed. Later on in Hinduism many of the original features degenerated. However, for your understanding, spirituality is in all religions.

There are certain elements that no religion will deny. No religion will deny truthfulness, honesty, attention to duty, love and non-violence. Besides that, here in India, Hindus propounded for thousands of years that the final Truth, or God, can be experienced.

The real difference between religion and spirituality is that a religion is a system of belief in a higher, unseen, controlling power along with certain rites for worship. Spirituality is an awakening to the inner reality of one’s being, Spirit or Self, and a longing to be in communion and union with it through experience. This means a total transformation of the whole being of the individual.

Spirituality emphasises that you can experience your own spirit. To be spiritual means to rise above the temptations of the body and the senses and to realise the final Truth. To be religious means to observe rituals and rites. All religions have their specific rituals and rites.

We have nothing against religions. They all have their own purpose. As things are developing these days, there are many extremists or fundamentalists in every religion. This is not a good trend for humanity at large.

One has to devote time and energy to our spiritual development. We give twenty, twenty-five or thirty years or more just to become able to earn our livelihood. We study and have professional expertise. Now you say that you have been here for a week (attending Satsangs and meditating every day), so why has Self-realisation not happened?

How can you expect to achieve your greatest aim in seven days? Someone may meditate for only six months, and then complain that nothing has happened! You are waiting for God
to bring some special aptitude for you. This is a life process, and you should go on doing it. There is no other way. Some people may say that there is some change but definitely it is little. I say that you are free to abandon it and give it up. But you cannot give it up because you know that going back to the old way of life has no meaning. This is the only way to happiness.

Thus there is no definite division between religion and spirituality because they are both connected with each other.