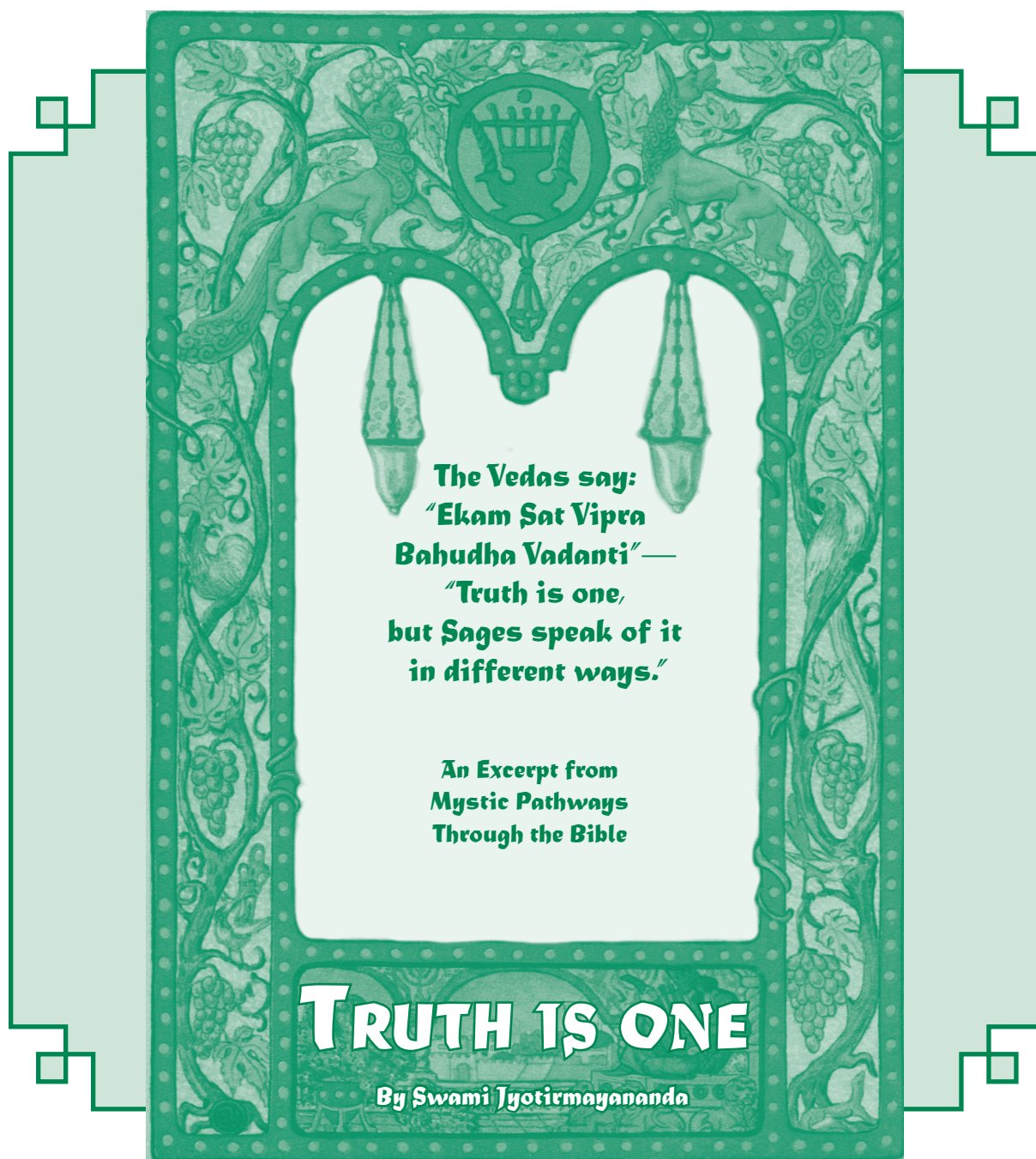




The Vedas say, “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti*”—“Truth is one, but Sages speak of it in different ways.” All religions and spiritual denominations lead one to the same Divine Self, but in ways that are beautifully unique. Every religion resembles a cherished garden that contains a variety of special flowers. You may have your own garden and truly enjoy the beautiful elegance

of its blossoms and foliage. Yet when you are invited by your neighbor to see his garden, you also admire the magnificence of his collection as well. After visiting, you might even return home with an assortment of plants from his garden. The beauty that expresses in both gardens is ultimately the same. Similarly, every religion leads you in its own artistic way to the same awareness of Divine beauty and Truth.

It is due to the lack of this most important understanding that so much dissention, strife and bloodshed have been promoted in the name of religion. If properly understood, religion leads one not to disharmony, but to Divine Love.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, an Indian Saint of recent times, was a great exponent of the unity of religions. After intensely following the Biblical path, he experienced a vision of Lord Jesus. This vision enthralled him as much as a Hindu would be enraptured by the vision of Krishna. On another occasion, while continuing his spiritual quest, he was following the mystic teachings of the Koran, and the Divine Presence of Allah manifested. Thus, through his own direct mystical experiences, he gained intuitive understanding of how all religions eventually lead one to the same Truth. To him, the vision of Christ was just as inspiring as the vision of Allah; he saw no differences in the ultimate mystical experience of man's communion with the Supreme Self.

To help people understand that the various religions essentially express the same message, Sri Ramakrishna characterized this point in a parable: A number of thirsty people who all spoke different languages encountered each other in the middle of a desert. Finding themselves in a difficult predicament, each one began to clamor for water. The Arabic philosopher shouted, "Aab," the Englishman bellowed, "Water," the Hindu yelled, "Pani," the Sanskrit scholar cried out for "Jala," and the Spaniard shouted, "Agua!" A colossal fight ensued in which each man asserted that what he thought was necessary was better than what the others wanted. This, of course, was ridiculous because they were all striving for the same goal—water in order to live.

Much in the same way, people of different religions are all inspired to move towards God. They receive the same inspirational message from their inner soul; however, the symbolic images of God differ. Some see Allah, others see Lord Krishna and still others see Lord Jesus. There are multiple symbols that devotees use throughout the world for the same God that exists within all. Each feels a profound satisfaction communicating with their particular Deity, and each is convinced that their Deity will quench their spiritual thirst for true happiness and security. However, what they do not understand is that everyone is communicating with the very same God manifesting in various forms.

Religious movements are found throughout the world because the human heart is intuitively drawn to the mystical realm that returns one to God, to one's real Home. The relative world is not enough for a human being, and ultimately each person intuitively knows that this world is only temporary. Therefore, we are inwardly driven to discover our relationship with God. When people turn to religion, they are turning to a realm of reality that cannot be completely understood by human reason. Exploring that realm requires faith, purification of heart and integration of personality. It is the thirst for that discovery of Truth that has led to the development of the world's great variety of philosophies and religions.

Differences among religions are apparent and not intrinsic. Conflicts exist because people are not able to understand the implied meaning in the scriptural writings. If worshippers comprehended the true spirit of their religion, they would view every other religion with great admiration.

Unfortunately, many priests and religious leaders do not encourage a deeper understanding of the scriptural texts. Rather, they encourage the belief that their own religion is the only one that teaches the Truth. As a result, more energy is devoted to proving the superiority of one's religion than to practicing its precepts. Divine Love, which ought to open the heart of man to the perception of universal unity, is thwarted. In its place a vague, superstitious, and biased faith emerges, which is the bane of many religions.

Worshippers who are sectarian in nature are unable to accept the fact that the Truth behind every religion is the same. Such worshippers are more dependent upon the religious system that has been presented by the churches, temples or mosques than they are

upon the teachings of Christ revealed in the New Testament, or the teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, or the teachings of Mohammed in the Koran.

A ritualistic form of religion provides a good basis for a person's spiritual growth, but as spirituality grows, one's vision must transcend the barriers of all sects and creeds. It must recognize the fundamental unity behind all religious and mystical movements and should not be stifled by sectarian dogma and ritualism.

If a Hindu of simple education unknowingly reads a portion of the Bible, he might very well think that he was reading a portion of the Puranas. This is not really surprising, however, since Yoga is a universal science of mystic communion with the Divine Self.

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