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“How should we live in this world?”

Many individuals and communities are trying to answer this question from different perspectives, but in this moment this question is going to be answered from the religious point of view by using the aspects of Jainism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Sikhism. Those religious traditions might be different in their fundamental views which means their belief is different from each other, but their values are unshakable to live a life with the highest moral standards. In sixth century, BCE, a religion emerged in India which would place non-violence in the center of their faith that pertains to all living creatures, and this tradition is called Jainism. The Jains (followers of Jainism) are taking this task of non-violence very seriously because they are strict vegetarians (they do not eat meat) which means no butchering of animals. In China, a quite different religion came to life to the same time period, and it received its name Confucianism from its founder Confucius. This ethical tradition was based on moral perfectionism as the ultimate goal because to be considered a gentleman was a notion of the greatest honor. Christianity might not be looking for moral perfection in human beings, instead it considers the ultimate love for God and other human beings as the ultimate goal for a believer which is a simple idea and has to come from our most inward feelings. Sikhs like Christians believe in one deity, but their ethical beliefs are worn on the outside through the commitment to the five Ks which are Kesh, Kara, Kangha, Kachha, and Kirpan. Those religions have different approaches in their faith, but each single tradition promotes a lifestyle which can be considered as morally and ethically. So, the question, “How should we live in this world?”, should be answered positively with integrity.

“Mahavira centered his community on five vows: non-harm (ahimsa), followed by truthfulness (satya), taking only what is given freely, referring especially to food for mendicants (asteya), celibacy (brahmacarya), and the non-accumulation of goods (aparigrha)” (Donaldson 2019). The five vows are the backbone of Jain belief and cannot be removed from the foundation of the tradition which relies on its ethical values, especially with ahimsa in mind. The act of non-violence is the first and most important attribute of a tradition which has a strict dogma against any violent acts that are performed by anyone. Of course, this attitude is not welcome everywhere where are different ideas of living together, are the norm. This norm can lead to discrimination and violence against members of the Jain community because being different is seen by some as suspicious and mistrusting. But on the other hand, a community, who values honesty and charity, can be seen as a source of richness through their positive and moral attitude which can be beneficial to other communities outside the Jain orbit as well. Gandhi preached the way of non-violence and lid a flame which was carried through the world that was occupied by colonialism and discrimination until he achieved freedom for his nation of India. By him living this way, he set an example for generations to come after his violent death through an individual who despite the notion of non-harm for others.

The idea of being a gentleman is not such as strange idea to the West either, but we are talking about Confucianism which relies on this notion that is the goal to reach for every male in this tradition. “Confucians initially articulated the concept of justice in relation to their own explanation of the world and their ideal, which distinguishes and rewards men’s actions according to their merits and social condition” (Duvert 2018). Being judged after external moral standards takes a lot of discipline for the individual not to become vulnerable and disregard the teachings of the religion which is seen as immoral as showing disrespect against one’s family, an important part of Confucianism. Even that the role of women is truly little, and it is seen as normal for a man to have a concubine which makes it for Western culture look confusing, but Confucius as founder never thought to much about it for it to change. It is a society which is built on a patriarchal principle which is known for its politics and justice system that leaves little room for female equality. The man has to be the head of the family like a ruler over a kingdom, but it cannot be a tyrant without any moral integrity which denies him the goal of being a proper gentleman in the end. Step by step, he has to become a virtues character that knows about loyalty and righteousness towards others because his actions, if they are bad, are going to serve to judge him in a negative way. On the other hand, positive actions are going to be rewarded and lead to the ultimate price of being a respectable member of Confucianism. The tradition might be the idea of a patriarchal paradise, but it promotes basic rights which is an important part of every society and religious tradition.

Love (expression of Christian ethics) is the ultimate key which should fulfill a Christian heart, and this love needs to come from the most inward feelings which can possess a human being towards God and other individuals. On the other hand, Luther’s expression of ethical understanding is more complex in nature than the explanation of love being the foundation of Christian ethics. “Nevertheless, this fundamental distinction between the two kingdoms reveals that Luther differentiates between, on the one hand, a worldly ethics that does not originate from the church, and on the other hand, a Christian ethics that should be embodied by the Christian church” (Nikolajsen 2021). Since Luther is the founder of the Protestant church which is distinct in their attitude towards worldly business from the Catholic church through their separation of church and state. Before the Reformation, church and state were one unit everywhere, and it resulted in the belief that the monarch was sent directly from God which also resulted in Christian ethics being the standard for daily living. Luther’s distinction was revolutionary because it also gave more power to the secular movement, and people recognized that their ethical standards were not only dependent on their loyalty to the church but also on the love for their state.

Our book tells us that “Love must entail justice” (257). Justice is also to forgive someone, if they did the wrong thing without realizing that they caused misery and or even death. They should be judged with caution because their sin was not done with intention and without malice against their victim. How can we forgive somebody who does bad things intentionally without any concern for others? Jesus teaches us to forgive everybody because deep down everyone is longing for forgiveness, and even the greatest sinner is not aware through his carelessness that he did something wrong. The love of God is essential to live as human beings together because only love makes it possible to realize that even an intentionally committed crime is a cry for human attention like a child who breaks something to receive the attention of his parents. God loves us all with the same equality.

What for Christians is love, is for Sikhs the commitment for the five Ks which can be the reason why many of them are victims to discrimination and intolerance for their appearance which is part of their ethics. “It is well known that Sikhs are required by their religious faith to wear unshorn hair” (Singh 2014). Men and women are not allowed to cut their hair or trim their facial hair because their faith demands it, even that it seem not practical in the world today where being different is a sign of being suspicious. But this notion could also be the appealing part that Sikhs are so committed to their ethics which is demanded from them, even if it means, they have to go through pain and suffering in the name of their belief. Our book states that “The dress, daily routine, and relationships are all imbued with the highest ethical requirements laid down in the teaching of the Gurus” (317). This devotion to ethical standards is remarkable, and the individual has to go through a transformation of personal attitudes and habits, once he is a member of Sikhism. Our Western culture would not even understand how important those standards are for Sikhs everywhere in the world, their belief in the teachings of their leaders which go through their whole society and beyond, and their willing to live the life of a devoted believer.

On the end of my essay, I would like to point out that all those religions have the capability to set standards how we should live in this world without any doubt. The problem occurs that they cannot force anyone to live by their standards which is done by choice by the members of each religious tradition. Some people are born into their faith and feel, they might be trapped, but they have the choice also to leave their religion and find something more ethical accommodating which does not mean, if I leave my faith, I failed as a person. It simple means, I want to start something new which I am more convinced about than the tradition into which I was born. Failure exists only, if I am staying with something which I do not believe in and have to live the rest of my life with it. This would be lying to oneself and to others who are devoted to this particular tradition which I stopped having faith in.

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