

CONSCIOUSNESS OF REALITY AND TRUTH IN EASTERN AND WESTERN THOUGHT AND GURBANI

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ABSTRACT

Sensing and knowing of oneself and all else is a necessary condition of being and becoming in existence, and consciousness is the intangible ground of the perception of reality and understanding of truth of life, death and the Universe. How the primal awareness of these transcendental realities developed and became formulated in the antiquities of Vedic-Upanishadic –Buddhist East and the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman West have formed the respective psychologies, civilizations and even attitudes to the subject of consciousness itself.

Western thought has arisen on the ground of self-consciousness and man-centeredness, and is fundamentally dualistic, atomistic, objective and analytical. It has developed a fragmented, compartmentalized and conflict-ridden view of reality. Subjective or inner knowing and a wholistic understanding of life and existence have not been a major part of its story. Rather, its themes have been that man is the measure of all things, ego is the knower of reality through sense-derived information and personal enhancement and immortality are the main purposes of human life. Consciousness means the objective awareness of self and others and is considered as one aspect of ego.

The Eastern Indian thought has been founded on a vision of Unitary, unbounded and timeless Reality / Truth / Consciousness that gives rise to and pervades all existence of time and space objects and forms. It is not realized in our ordinary state of awareness because of limited grasp and fragmentary perceptions of the ego-bounded mind. Perception of an existence of separate and independent objects as the reality and truth is a fundamental error of understanding and a source of conflicts and suffering. The objective existence is an illusion of truth and the sublime purpose of life is not self-adoration and enhancement but an inner transformation to realize the Truth. This highly abstract philosophy was, however, accessible to a select few who often retired from worldly existence or ruled over the masses. In time it came to provide the rationale for the Brahminical caste system on the basis of knowledge of Vedas, supposed purity and birth. Since Prakriti or objective existence was considered as the primal cause of ignorance and impurity in the realization of the sublime truth, life-denying practices such as mortification of the body, renunciation and sacrificial rituals came into being. Available to the masses was a polymorphic lower religious form of numerous deities, idol worship and rituals.

The advent of Guru Nanak brought forth a message that affirmed the One and only One Self-illuminated and Self-Created Truth and Reality and then showed the Way of realizing That without the life denigrating ideas and practices that had taken over Indian psyche. Those ideas can also bridge the great East-West divide. Three ideas are the key to this message: 1. All existence is within Hukm or Divine Law and is suffused by one Light or Consciousness, and cannot, therefore, be rejected or condemned; 2. Mind is the source of suffering and ignorance but it too is within Hukm and is also the way to understanding and salvation; 3. Transformation of the mind to realize the Truth comes through absorption in Sabd or Divine Word with the essential grace of the Guru, the shower of the Way.