Did Religion Take Us Away From God? A Case for the Original Purpose of Faith

The statement "religion has taken humanity away from God" may seem to be true at first glance. The times have changed, and people generally see religion negatively. They feel that it is the main reason for division, manipulation, violence, and hypocrisy. However, this view is nothing but a mere reflection of recent times, where people hardly even notice the good and clean intentions that are the core of the religious traditions. If we dig deep, the original world religions candidly state that their mission was not to cut humanity away from the Divine but to help us understand more about truth, love, the meaning of life, and God.

According to this piece, religion in its primal state is nothing but a sacred road to the Divine. Religion is the primary source of these changes, but, because of historical manipulation, political influence, and human greed, it was no longer a source of spirituality at certain periods.

Christianity: The Kingdom of God is Within You

Jesus of Nazareth was the central figure in Christianity and a spiritual teacher of revolutionary nature who utilized the concept of the deeply personal and internal relationship with God. He was the one who talked about love, mercy, humility, and the innermost transformation of the heart. In Luke 17:21, Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God is within you." Such a statement redefines faith away from external rituals and religious hierarchy towards the inner spiritual awakening.

Jesus confronted issues that were the result of the religious elite's corruption of their power and spoke out against their hypocrisy. The main focus of His teachings was not on coming up with religious institutions but rather on changing lives and reconnecting people with God. In its nature, Christianity was intended to help restore that very direct relationship.

Still, the truth of Jesus' words was twisted due to the efforts of human organizations many years after his death. The Council of Nicaea held in 325 CE was a major event in history, and Roman Emperor Constantine was the one who organized it. The core message was not taken away, but given new meaning in a larger structure that enabled a slow change of focus from the inner spirituality to the outer compliance.

Islam: Closer to You Than Your Jugular Vein

Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) character was the reestablishment of God (Allah) and humans' direct relationship with God (Allah) in the message that Islam was also the same. The Quran highlights God's nearness to every individual: "And certainly, We have

created man and We know what his innermost self whispers to him. And We are closer to him than his life vein" (Quran 50:16).

Islam is the religion that solidly establishes the concept of monotheism, the just conduct of human beings, their accountability to the universe, and compassion for all living beings. The Prophet's conduct was exemplary of humility and servility. His task was merely to call the people of the earth to a remembrance of their Creator.

Wars for power among different groups existed soon after the Prophet's passing. An instance of this is the split between Sunni and Shia Muslims, which resulted from a conflict over leadership and not due to different theological issues. History indicates that dynasties, sultans, and caliphs won over the support of the people through religion for their power over successive periods. Although the Quran remained unchanged, its interpretation and application were gradually altered by different political goals, which were far from the main message of the Quran: justice, mercy, and worship.

·Buddhism: The End of Suffering Through Inner Awakening

Buddha never directly spoke of God but focused on the soul's realization, tranquility, and illumination. His words, one could say, aimed to address the inadequate understanding that riddled society at that time, when people indulged in empty rituals and the rigid Brahmanical system incessantly. He called people to be mindful, kind, and let go of the pain (dukkha).

Buddhism states that the root cause of human tragedy is ignorance, not sin. By becoming more perceptive and living ethically, one approximates the truth, which some Buddhist sects understand as oneness with the Supreme Being.
Then again, the time passed, and Buddhism turned into something institutionalized with political power in certain places, and the monastic system became inflexible.

·Corruption Came from Power, Not the Prophets

A distinct sequence is visible through these religions: the founders and the original teachings merely discussed a divine connection, inner transformation, and love as the main themes. The splitting up started when the religion was taken over by the political powers, economic interests, or the religious elites that were searching for control.

In every age, some people and organizations aroseonly to dominate others instead of promoting spiritual growth. These are examples such as the Crusades, the Inquisitions, the Jihads, the Caste Systems, and the Religious Courts, which all show that those who have misused religion are the main culprits, not the failure of religion itself.

This is very important: Religion did not take us far from God—it was the people who did. The systems formed around religion got corrupted; however, the teachings remained uncorrupted. Lots of believers, saints, mystics, and reformers from each tradition have made numerous efforts to get back to the original purity, which is a strong indication that the light is still there, even though it is covered with some layers of dust.

·Conclusion: Reclaiming the Original Vision

The fault is not with religion but the people who misinterpreted its message to satisfy their greed. And still, the spiritual power of these religions is very much alive in the hearts of the sincerely searching ones.
We must take a stand and distinguish between the everlasting truth and the temporary corruption. If we go back to the fundamental messages of our prophets, sages, and saints, we might discover the way not a detour from God, but a direct path to Him.