

The Harmony of All Religions



by

Maharishi Santsevi Paramahans Ji Maharaj



Harmony of All Religions

Santmat

By
Maharishi Santsevi Ji
Maharaj

Translated from Hindi by

Veena Rani Howard

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First English Edition 201 copies

Printed by Motilal Barnasidas Publishing
New Delhi India

*A Humble Offering
To*

*Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj—
The Guiding Light of My Life*

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Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj's Letter of Blessing to the Editor

सर्वधर्म समन्वय एक ऐसी पुस्तक है, जो धर्म और अध्यात्म का मर्म जानने के इच्छुक व्यक्तियों का मार्गदर्शन करती है। इस पुस्तक का अध्ययन कर व्यक्ति अपने धर्म के साथ अन्य धर्मों की सारभूत बातों से भी परिचित हो जाता है। अबतक यह पुस्तक मात्र भारती भाषा (हिन्दी) में प्रकाशित हो पाई थी, जिस कारण मात्र हिन्दी-भाषी लोग ही इससे लाभ उठा पा रहे थे। मेरी पुत्रीवत् प्यारी शिष्या अमेरिका-निवासी श्रीमती वीणा रानी होवार्ड ने अंग्रेजी भाषा में इसका अनुवाद कर इसकी उपयोगिता को व्यापक आधार दे दिया है। अंग्रेजी विश्व की सर्वाधिक लोकप्रिय और व्यापक जानाधार वाली भाषा है। इस कारण अब देश के साथ विदेशों में भी जिज्ञासुजन इस पुस्तक का अध्ययन-मनन कर लाभान्वित हो सकेंगे।

आध्यात्मिक विषयों का भाषा-अनुवाद सदा से ही कठिन कार्य रहा है। पुस्तक की मूल भावनाओं को यथावत् अभिव्यक्ति देने का यह गुरुतर कार्य सफलतापूर्वक संपादित कर अनुवादिका ने अत्यन्त प्रशंसनीय कार्य किया है। उसके इस पावन प्रयास के लिए धन्यवाद सहित मेरा आशीर्वाद है।

शुभचिन्तक
'संतसेवी'

Maharishi Santsevi Ji
2006

December

Translation:

Sarvadharm Samanvya (The Harmony of All Religions)

is a kind of book that guides those who are eager to learn the essence of religion and spirituality. A study of this book provides the reader with the esoteric teachings of one's own religion as well as the religions of others. Until now this book was only available in the Indian language (Hindi), therefore, only the Hindi speaking people were able to reap the benefit of reading this book.

My dear like daughter disciple, Shrimati Veena Rani Howard, who now resides in the United States of America, translated this treatise into English. With this translation she extended the scope of readership since English is the world's most widely used international language. Now people, from countries other than India, desirous of learning about the essential Truth will also be able to benefit by reading and reflecting on this book.

Undoubtedly, the translation of religious issues written in languages other than our own has always been a difficult task due to culture-specific terminology and ideology. The translator has accomplished an admirable task by successfully editing and interpreting the core ideas of the treatise accordingly for the Western readers. For this holy effort I give her my thanks and also my blessings.

Swami Santsevi Ji
December 2006



Introduction

The old cliché, “we are the citizens of the world” never has been so true as today. Swift air-travel and the pervasive power of the internet have shrunk the distances—“the far East” is not so far and mystifying any more. In the 21st century rapidly growing globalization is generating in the hearts and minds of people a sense of liberty and interconnectedness to the beings of the world. But, it is also posing a challenge to the established values and religious viewpoints within different cultures. The expeditious industrialization, the product of globalization is also challenging age-old moral and religious values.

In this age—the age of disappearing boundaries, countries becoming the melting pots of a myriad of cultures and the validity of ancient faith traditions are challenged-- some fear the cataclysmic end to the world. Or at least many fear the end of the “world” as we know it. Some factions are outraged with the emerging new world culture and reshaping of the ancient ways of religions. The result: distrust, anger, hatred, and animosity. The naked dance of this anger and distrust became most visible on the September 11, 2001. On this day the world watched the symbols of global and industrial progress—the twin towers of world trade center—crashing to the ground.



From this day onward our whole world has changed. The “shock and awe” generated by the fall has shocked the established value systems. The feelings of fear and distrust are benumbing the hearts of people and paralyzing the sense of seeing clearly. But, this time must be taken as an opportunity, an opening to find new horizons, assess our values, and understand different cultures and religions. This is exactly what the great saint, Maharishi Shri Santsevi ji has done through his book, *The Harmony of Religions*. Shri Santsevi Ji, has been teaching the Santmat tradition for many decades and believes in the validity of all prominent world religions.

In this book, he has delved deep into each of the following religions: Vedic tradition (dharma), Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. By illustrating the main tenets of these religions, Maharishi Santsevi Ji by his wisdom has shown that all of these religions while seemingly different in nature are inherently the same. His research concerns primarily the esoteric teachings—the inner core of all religions. At the same time he has not undermined the doctrines and practices of these traditions, which give form and shape to these religions. Shri Santsevi Ji has confirmed the ancient Vedic saying: *Truth is one; the sages speak of it in various ways*. The purpose of



religion is not to divide but to unite (etymologically *re-legare* in Latin), its aim is to hold the diversity in unity (literally *dharma* in Sanskrit). Its aim is to bring peace, love, and unity and remove hate, distrust, and divisions.

Shri Santsevi Ji through this book attempts to show a path to create harmony instead of conflict, establish trust in place of doubt, and replace hate with love. This book will serve as a balm to tender wounds, and provide hope to the desperate hearts.



Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj:

A Biography

Maharishi Santsevi Ji Maharaj is a renowned saint, an exceptional Spiritual Guide, and a unique social reformer of the 21st Century. Shri Santsevi Ji is the fourth Guru in the Santmat lineage of great spiritual masters: Sant Tulsi Sahab, Baba Devi Sahab, and Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj.

Shri Santsevi Ji was born on December 20, 1920 in a small village of Bihar state, the most impoverished state of India. His family name was Mahavira. From his early childhood Mahavira was greatly interested in religious and spiritual matters. He enjoyed reading the scriptures and the poetry of saints. He was particularly fond of the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Ramacharitmanas*, and the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*.

After attending middle school he began home schooling. His intellect was keen and his heart tender. He found joy in teaching and tutoring younger students and in nursing the sick. He always felt great compassion for the sick and oppressed. This led him to study homeopathic medicine in order to help the poor and to nurse the ailing. Through his experience with sickness and



death, Mahavira witnessed the impermanence and suffering that pervades human life. As a result, the seeds of detachment became firmly rooted in his heart. He became detached from the worldly life. After considerable reflection, he chose a life of renunciation, even though his family members exerted great pressure to persuade him otherwise.

In 1939, Mahavira came in contact with the great sage of the Santmat tradition, Maharishi Mehi, who had a hermitage in Bhagalpur, Bihar. Upon seeing Maharishi Mehi, Mahavira felt drawn to him, as though he had known him for many lifetimes. Mahavira was also greatly intrigued by the principles and practices of Santmat. He approached Shri Maharishi Mehi for initiation in Santmat. Maharishi Mehi soon became very impressed by the sincerity and devotion of this young man and agreed to initiate him. Mahavira began his meditation and service of Guru, and also continued his work as a tutor.

In the heart of Mahavira a keen desire arose to remain permanently in the service of his Guru. His desire was fulfilled in 1949 when Maharishi Mehi gave him permission to stay in the Ashram in his service. Mahavira devoted his days and nights to taking care of the needs of his Guru, thereby following the ancient Vedic model of the Guru-disciple relationship. He never



cared for his personal comfort when he was serving his Guru's needs: cooking food, doing laundry, keeping track of expenses, editing his writings, and traveling to villages with him to teach the principles of Santmat to the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. Maharishi Mehi, pleased with this selfless service, gave him the name *Santsevi*, meaning "he who serves saints." From that day Mahavira came to be known as Santsevi.

As Maharishi Mehi advanced in age, he began to transfer his responsibilities to Shri Santsevi Ji. He authorized Shri Santsevi Ji to give initiation to spiritual seekers, to respond to their inquiries, and to guide them through the inner experiences of their spiritual journeys. He came to be seen as the prominent disciple among Maharishi Mehi's chief devotees. Maharishi Mehi often said, "As the English letters Q and U cannot be separated, so too Santsevi and I are connected. Wherever I may live Santsevi will also reside." Shri Santsevi Ji remained in the service of his Guru until Maharishi Mehi's passing at the age of 101 in July of 1986. After the passing of Shri Maharishi Mehi, Shri Santsevi Ji was immediately recognized as the torchbearer of Santmat. Since then, he has ceaselessly and selflessly been continuing the service of Santmat.



Shri Santsevi Maharaj Ji's personality is charismatic as a result of his accomplishments on the path to the realization of Truth. Even though he is a learned man, his knowledge goes beyond the confines of the human intellect. Despite the fact that he never attended a class in a university or a college, a number of Ph.D. students are pursuing research on his writings. He has no formal education in any Divinity or Religious school, yet scholars from various disciplines come to him to understand the subtle interpretations found in sacred texts and literature: the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Bible*, the *Koran* and the *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*, as well as various writings of the saints. He is well versed in several languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Bangala, Gurumukhi, Nepali, Maithali and other dialects of India. He has written and translated about twenty books elucidating the subject of yoga, philosophy, and the teachings of Santmat. His exposition of sacred texts is prolific, arising from his profound personal experience of the Truth.

Santmat and Maharishi Santsevi Ji

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is the present exponent (*acharya*) of Santmat, the branch which is directly linked to the lineage of Sant Tulsi Sahab. The word Santmat, usually written as Sant



Mat, literally means the “point of view” or the “conviction of the sants and sages.” Historically, the Santmat movement was not a homogenous movement; but the term is a generic label for the Sant movement in the northern part of India, beginning around the 12th century. The early sants, such as Kabir, Raidas, Namdev and Mirabai, represented a shift in religious and social attitudes—on the one hand, freedom from sectarian boundaries and ritualistic confinements; on the other hand, direct communion with the Divine without mediation of any authority or liturgy.

The word sant is derived from the Sanskrit word *sat* (Truth, Reality). The root meaning is ‘one who knows the truth’ or ‘who has experienced Ultimate Reality.’ Thus, a *sant* is a person who has achieved *Shanti* (inner tranquility) as a result of union with the Divine, as in mystical enlightenment.

The word *sant* is translated “saint” in English. However, both in etymology and definition, there are significant differences that get lost in translation. The English word saint is derived from the Latin word *sanctus*, which has come to mean a “good person whose life is moral,” or a “holy being.” Thus, in English a saint is thought of as a “spiritual exemplar,” and the word has been attached to a wide variety of gurus and holy men and women.



But, in Sanskrit, the dimension of inner unity with the Truth is inherent in the word *sant*. Some of the saints come from the lower castes, and some of them are even from the untouchable class, but they have enjoyed an honorable status in the tradition. (Although we use *sant* and saint interchangeably in this book, we imply the original meaning of the word *sant* for both.)

Santmat, the Way of Sages and Saints, as we prefer to refer to it, not only emphasizes a life of moral rectitude, but underlines the inner journey for God realization, or Liberation. Therefore, Santmat is not confined to the beliefs, rituals, and dogmas of any specific religion. It is universal in nature and embraces the truths found in most of the world's sacred texts and religious traditions, even while not advocating any particular religion. Santmat encompasses a set of ageless moral values, a belief in a Higher Power, and even more important, a methodology for realization of the Highest Reality. This method elaborates the path of Divine Light and Sound through which one attains the state of absolute Peace within one's own self. The unifying philosophy of Santmat leads the way beyond the boundaries of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and communal distrust which plague our world today. Maharishi Santsevi Ji has taught the teachings of Santmat to more than a million people from multiple religions and from many countries.



Social Reformer

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is an exceptional social reformer. Although he has traveled all over India, his teachings have been dedicated to the poorest of the poor of Bihar. And, even at the age of 86, he unceasingly continues to teach and travel to the deep villages of India and Nepal. His approach to social reform is threefold:

- Sustaining age-old ethical values: Maharishi Santsevi Ji believes that social problems arise from the lack of fundamental ethical values. He has taught people to abide by five ethical principles: abstain from lying, stealing, adultery, violence, and use of intoxicating substances. The ethical life is the foundation of all social reforms. While the world is burning with the fires of addiction, depression and distrust, the moral commitments required by Maharishi Santsevi Ji provide tools for a life of balance, peace and harmony. It is striking to see his followers from all walks of life adhering to these principles, even in the middle of the modern world culture which is in the grip of enticing material values.



- Sustaining the fundamental equality of all human beings: Maharishi demonstrates through his teaching that all people—people of different caste, color, race and gender—must be treated equally and with dignity. He teaches the ancient path of meditation (traditionally restricted only to the men of higher classes) to men and women of all castes, religions, and social status, without discrimination. He proclaims: “All are worthy to walk on the path of enlightenment.” For this claim he often faced severe criticism from many in the society—a society, founded on an inherent caste system and a patriarchal social hierarchy.
- Sustaining social peace and harmony through Inner Peace: His basic teaching is that in order to sustain outer social and personal harmony, one must follow the inner path of meditation for self-realization, as taught by all major religious traditions. This path requires devotion, not fanaticism, and both belief in and experience of the One God, not mere faith and superstition.

Maharishi Santsevi Ji is a living example of what he teaches. He represents a very significant link in the tradition



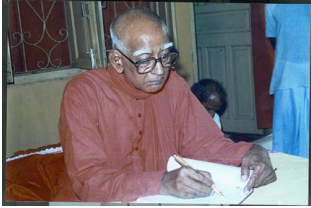
of saints. His ideology of harmony, compassion, moral rectitude, and inner realization is a testament to the eternal nature of truth, which is sought after by various religious leaders throughout our known history.

Maharishi Santsevi Ji has refused many offers to come to the western world. His heart is committed to teaching the native villagers, tribal people, and aborigines. His dedication to the service of society and his dedication to the common good are demonstrated by his ceaseless efforts to serve suffering humanity. In today's world this is an unsurpassable task. Swami Santsevi Ji remains committed to teaching the path of Truth to all, and to revealing the harmony inherent in all religions. Maharishi Santsevi Ji illuminates the path, leading to a direct experience of the Truth within.





Point of Departure



Today's scientific world is known for its swift material knowledge and progress. But with the same swiftness the great majority of people are moving away from non-material spiritual knowledge. Spiritual *knowledge* should not be confused with specific creeds and sects: we see all around us that the social fabric is being ripped apart by religious fundamentalism, religious intolerance, and narrow-mindedness. The acts of violence we see inspired by religious fanaticism could not have been committed by minds inspired with genuine spiritual knowledge. Those who cultivate the fire of hatred and prejudice in their hearts are imprisoned in the narrow cells of their religions, or what they have interpreted their religions to be. They look upon the followers of other religions with distrust and even malice. Such spite cannot be what the founders of the various great religions had intended as their gift to humanity: this hate and exclusivity is harmful not only to those they come into contact with, but it also—and to a greater degree—spoils their *own* spiritual state. Religion (*dharma*), which was given to humanity to provide a civilized path for the reformation of character in order that its adherents might reach the ultimate goal



(God), has today seemingly lost track of its purpose. It is essential, in this environment of religious crisis, to underscore the similar—in the end, *identical*--underlying concepts of the various religions. Only by this means is it possible to bridge the ever-enlarging gulf between these traditions and between their followers. This “gulf” is an imaginary difference: it is the result of sometimes superficial (exoteric) interpretations of a given religion which begin to dissolve when one investigates the tradition at a deeper (esoteric) level. When the various traditions begin to be seen as different statements or paths to the same goal, the image of religion as a provider of peace and everlasting freedom can be re-established. This book is a small effort in this direction.

What is *dharma*?

What is religion (*dharma*¹)? In its broadest aspect, *dharma* means performing one’s sacred duty and following the traditional moral customs of the community in which one lives.

¹ The Sanskrit word *dharma* means “sustaining principle.” The word *dharma*, often translated as *religion* in this book, is used by Santseviji throughout this work. *Dharma* has no one meaning in English. It means “sacred duty,” “the principle or law that orders the universe,” “Truth”; *dharma* is both the path and the Goal. Religion, considered as *dharma*, is the path (conduct and teachings) which puts one in conformity with the true—and usually unseen--reality. *Dharma* is what makes one fit to have a vision of the Ultimate Reality.



Far from being unnatural or contrived, *dharma* is a natural quality or trait of an individual, an inseparable part of the psyche. That deed or duty the result of which is described as the attainment of heaven is *dharma*. Noble deeds, good behavior, benevolent actions are all *dharmic* in nature. *Dharma* is nature, an inherent good tendency, and a daily prescribed moral and social duty.

Dharma as Virtue:

The Laws of Manu, has described the eightfold attributes of *dharma*: patience, forgiveness, self-control, non-stealing, purity, control of the senses, wisdom, knowledge, truth, and tranquility. Jain² *dharma* describes *dharma* in ten characteristics: right forgiveness, right restraint, right purity, right truth, right self-control, right mortification, right renunciation, right humility, and right celibacy.

For the purpose of making *dharma* accessible to all people Sage Manu has simplified and condensed the ten attributes of *dharma* in five ethical laws. Manu describes the five ethical laws as non-violence, truth, non-stealing, purity of body and mind and

² Jainism was originated in India. The main doctrine of Jainism is non-violence.



control of the senses.³ Now of these moral laws, which we see in all the major religions, East and West, let us first consider the ethical laws of non-violence and truth.

Complexity of *Dharma* Ethics:

The Mahabharata (ch.11/13) says,

Non-violence is the greatest of all laws (dharma)

This principle is not only *dharma* for those whose religion is based on the Vedas, but is also considered of prime importance in other religions. Buddhism (*Dhammapada* 17:3) and Christianity (*Bible*, Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:5, 5:7; 5:21; 5:38-39) also require non-violence from their followers, just as Manu did. Taking life is not the only kind of violence. Within this principle of non-violence is also included not hurting some one's mind or body. This means not doing harm to any living being. In this world all people agree that non violence is the greatest *dharma* principle to be followed.

But now imagine that someone is trying to take our life or rape our wife or daughter or start a fire in our house or steal our money. If we are unprotected and some evil person has a

³ “*Ahimsa satyamsteyam śouchamindriya nigraha.*” From the Laws of Manu (10/63)



weapon, what should we do? Should we ignore that evil person and tell him that non-violence is the greatest *dharma*. And if he does not listen to us and pay heed to our plea, should we control him with whatever power we have?

Manu says,

*One should not hesitate to dispatch that evil person and we should not care if he is a guru, old person, child, scholar or brahman.*⁴

Under such circumstances, if you kill you are not guilty of the sin of killing, because in fact the evil person was killed by his own lawlessness. The killing of a fetus is considered a most condemned act. But if a child becomes dangerously breached in the womb and the mother's life is in danger, it is a moral imperative to sacrifice the child for the sake of the mother's life.

Non-violence, forgiveness, compassion and placidity (*śhanti*) are described and prescribed as virtues by the *shastras* and sacred texts. However, it is not advised to remain resigned all the time. For instance, one must protect children from evil.

Sage Prahlad told his grandson, Bali,

*It is not always good to forgive; neither is it good always to be angry. Even so the scholars spoke about exceptions in forgiveness.*⁵

⁴ *Laws of Manu*, 8/350 [Generally speaking, it is a heinous act to harm a guru and Brahmin, but in confronting evil Manu does not make any exceptions.]

⁵ *Mahabharata, Vana Parava*, 28.6.7



After non-violence we should consider the virtue of truthfulness. In various parts of the *Mahabharata* truth is said to be “the highest all of all moral acts.”⁶

The *Mahabharata* says,

If we compare the power of truth with a thousand grand sacrifices, truth will be greater.

In the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (1/11/1), truth is given the superior place and the other sacred duties (*dharma*) are described as secondary,

Speak Truth. Follow your moral duty.

In the *Mahabharata*, when Bhishma was lying on a bed of arrows before his death, he taught the essence and importance of truth and told Yudhishtira, the oldest son of Pandu to act always in accordance with truth, truth is indeed the essence. Similarly, a great emphasis is placed on truth in other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity.

The literal and essential meaning of truth is that which always is, is permanent, is eternal, and which never lacks.

⁶ *Mahabharata*, *śhanti Parva* 162/164



Krishna tell Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:16),

The unreal [that which does not exist] never is. The Real [that which truly exists] never ceases to be. The conclusion about these two is truly perceived by the seers of Truth.

Truth is always triumphant; non-truth is conquered.⁷ The *Shastras* constantly and rightly praise truth. We should nevertheless carefully consider if there are exceptions to speaking the truth. Let us consider if a murderer with a weapon were chasing an innocent with the intent of killing him. If the fleeing person hides near us, should we tell the truth if the villain asks us the whereabouts of the fleeing person? Should we speak truth and have that innocent person killed or should we speak a lie and protect the life of that man? In such an instance, speaking truth incurs the sin of violence and telling a lie incurs the good results associated with non-violence. So there are exceptions—which are only apparent exceptions—to telling the truth. Again, let us say that a certain child is sick and the doctor has told that child to stay away from certain foods. The child, of course, does not understand and wants to continue eating the same foods. By eating the same foods, the child’s sickness will increase. The mother tells the child that that food is not in the house and that she will give it to him when she has gone to the market. In this case, the mother’s false speech protects the life of

⁷ “*satyameva jayate nānratama.*”



the child. Here again is a paradoxical example of non-truth fulfilling the law of non-violence (*ahimsa*, literally, non-harming).

Compare it to the following reference from the *Bible*,

The letter [of the law or dharma] brings death; but the spirit [of dharma] gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

One must be careful not to commit a crime simply to obey an outward rule.

Non-Static Laws of Dharma:

What is one’s *dharma* in reality? The laws of *dharma* are not static they depend on the circumstances, culture, time-period and upbringing of the person [culture- specific values] involved. In the actual, lived experience of life, there are many occasions when untruth instead of truth is the appropriate behavior or *dharma*. It happens sometimes that violence instead of non-violence protects the lives of people and this is appropriate behavior or *dharma*. In the *Mahabharata* it is said that to protect a family, an individual family member may be sacrificed; to protect a village a family may be sacrificed; and to protect a country, an entire village may be sacrificed. But to protect one’s own soul (*atman*), the whole world should be sacrificed (forsaken). [compare: *Bible*: Mark, 8:36-37].



The Bhagavad-Gita underscores the need for doing one's own duty,

Better is one's own duty (dharma) performed imperfectly than the duty (dharma) of another performed perfectly. It is better to die performing one's own duty (dharma), for it is dangerous to follow the duty (dharma) of another (Bhagavad-Gita 3:35).

But, the Gita further states, paradoxically, to abandon all duties,
Abandon all dharma-s; come to Me alone for refuge. Do not grieve, for I will release you from all evils (Bhagavad-Gita 18:66).

When compared, these two quotes from Krishna seem contradictory to most people. They are forced to think: “is it good to sacrifice our own self for our *dharma* or should we abandon our *dharma* and take refuge only in God?” In this difficult situation man becomes frozen in inaction (as Arjuna is immobile in the beginning of the Gita).

We begin to feel, when confronted with these seeming contradictions, that the path of “*dharma is subtle*,”⁸ and “*it is unfathomable and too difficult*”⁹ for us to comprehend. Therefore, to understand the subtle secrets of *dharma* we need a Sat Guru (genuine, true, or authentic spiritual teacher) to guide us in the difficult moments [as Krishna guided Arjuna].

⁸ “*sukshmāgatirīhi dharmasya*”

⁹ “Truth of *dharma* lies hidden in cave [of the heart]”



Krishna says to Arjuna,

Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service, the wise who have seen the truth will instruct you in knowledge (Bhagavad-Gita 4: 34).

Various Definitions of Dharma: Dharma as an Inherent Nature

Another meaning of *dharma* in addition to virtue and law is quality, inner essence, or nature. We cannot separate the inherent quality from the possessor of that quality. Once we separate the quality from its possessor, the one who possessed it no longer lives. For example, the nature of fire is heat or burning and the nature of ice is cold. Each sense organ also possesses one particular quality. The nature of the eye is to see. The nature or quality of the ear is to hear. The quality of the skin is the sense of touch; the quality of the tongue is taste; and the quality of the nose is smell. *Atman* (inner self) also has its particular quality: spiritually ascending movement.

Dharma as religion:

Another translation of the Sanskrit word *dharma* is religion. In Arabic what is called *majhab* and in English what is called religion; in Sanskrit is called *dharma*. The English word



“religion” comes from the Latin language: the prefix *re-* means “back” or “again” and the root *-lig-* means “to bind”. Religion, then, intends to bind us back again to our source, to unite us with God (just as the Sanskrit word *yoga*, path or method, is related to the English word “yoke”). Santmat explains the re-uniting in the following ways:

Returning to the Source Through Inner Journey is Dharma:

The individual soul has descended from the higher worlds [realm of the Divine] to this city of illusion [bodily existence]. It has descended from the Soundless state to the essence of Sound, from that Sound to Light, and finally from the realm of Light to the realm of Darkness. The qualities (*dharmas*, *natural tendencies*) of the sense organs draw us downward and away from our true nature. The nature of the soul (*atman*) draws us upwards and inwards and establishes us in our own true nature.

To go back to our origins means returning: withdrawal from the sense organs to go upward (by withdrawing consciousness) from the darkness to the realms of light and sound. In other words, to go inward from the external sense organs to the depth of the inner self (both of these expressions are exact special metaphors describing the same movement). The natural tendencies of the



soul (*atman*) are to move from outward to inward. The current of consciousness which is dispersed in the nine gates of the body and the nine senses must be collected at the tenth gate (*the sixth charka, the third eye, bindu, center between the eyebrows*) therein lies the path for our return. This is the act of leaving the gates of the sense organs and becoming established in the soul. We travel back from the realm of Darkness to the realm of Light, from the Light to divine Sound, and from the realm of Sound to the Soundless state. This is turning *back*. This is what *dharma* or religion really intends to teach us and it is the essence of *dharma*.

In the historical time [many thousands of years ago] when Krishna was teaching Arjuna, there existed the *Vedic dharma*¹⁰. Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and the other religious paradigms did not yet exist in any culture. There was only one external *dharma* (religion) for all. There was not a question of “my *dharma*” as opposed to “your *dharma*” [here the word *dharma* is used in the sense of religion]. Yet Krishna speaks of following one’s *own dharma*. Here the word *dharma* is not implying the term *religion*, but one’s own inherent tendencies, nature. In reality, the *dharma* of our senses is not really our own

¹⁰ *Vedic Dharma or Santana Dharma*, generally referred to as Hinduism is considered be the most ancient of all religions. By definition it is timeless and has no beginning in history.



dharma [following the sense cravings is satisfying the nature of sensory organs]. Our optimal *dharma* is to following the *dharma* of the soul (*atman*) [turning inward and returning to the source]. Krishna advises Arjuna to leave the sense- *dharma* and seek the *dharma* of *atman*, which truly concerns our spiritual progress. Thereby, one becomes established in ones own nature.

The ideas of turning back to our own source are not invented by the author of this book, but are founded in the teachings of the saints and sages. Here are some quotes by various saints in reference to the idea of turning back:

Saint Kabir says,

*By withdrawing (from the sense organs) and absorbed
in one's self the infinite light dawns and manifests...*

xxx

*Turn inward and move forward by gathering your
dispersed mind*

xxx

*When the water of a vessel (individual soul) merges
back into the river (God) then we call this the state of
supreme wisdom....*

xxx

Guru Nanak says,

*[Beholding] the inverted lotus which is full of nectar
[indicating the joyous experiences within], now my
mind goes not elsewhere.*



Saint Gulal Sahib says,

Go inward and see the light permeating within...

xxx

Saint Tulsi Sahib says,

Look inward Go inward and see the light permeating within...Lo by closing the eyes and behold the burst of light....

xxx

Saint Dadudyal Ji says,

O benevolent one! Enter in your inner self, and search. He [God] is very near to you. Abandon the worldly desires and distractions. By inverting your immature consciousness current (which tends to get distracted by senses) and establish in the self [within]...

xxx

Sant Paltu Sahib says,

There is an upside down well within and there one finds the burning flame of life.....

xxx

Goswami Tulsi Das Ji says,

While the world thought that Valmiki¹¹ was reciting the name of Lord Ram backwards He became like Brahman. Understand the power of Name. The great poet Valmiki became purified even by reciting Ram's name backward.

In the 20th century the great Sage Maharishi Mehi compared the ascending of consciousness to a fish swimming upstream.

¹¹ Sage Valmiki was originally a criminal and was approached by the great sage Vyasa. Vyasa asked Valmiki to repeat the name of Ram (a name of God). However, Valmiki, being of a criminal mind, refused to speak God's name. Vyasa therefore told him to repeat it backwards (MRA), which Valmiki agreed to do. Ram when recited backward becomes Ram. Valmiki continued this repeating until he became radiant with spiritual power. He then wrote the great epic Ramayana.



The Inner Journey Involves Reversing the Consciousness

Current:

The mind must go inward, which is the reverse of its usual and easy outward path. Just as the fish struggles against the current, so an equal effort must be made to go against the current of the mind. By going inward against the current of the mind, we experience the divine joy.

In the words of Shri Maharishi Mehi,

The stream of celestial nectar is flowing from the subtle canal of the sushumna nerve. Like a fish the consciousness current is moving upstream”.¹² Like a fish making its way upstream, the mind with consciousness must be recollected in concentration. This will seem to the mind a difficult and “unnatural” course!

But how exactly is this concentration accomplished? [It is accomplished by withdrawal within with intense focus.] Whenever you gather a physical substance in one place, as it becomes concentrated, [as it is gathered in a pile] it moves upward, whether that substance is a solid, a liquid, or a gas. The

¹² The *sushumna* nectar spoken of here is the divine nectar which is experienced by going inward. The experience is one of intense bliss and happiness.



subtler the substance, it is more pervasive and the movement is faster and is capable of moving higher: water is more subtle than ice, steam than water, and electric current than steam.

The mind is inconceivably more subtle and faster than even the speed light. Physicists have told us that the speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. We see light, but we do not see the mind. How fast can the mind travel when it is collected and concentrated, instead of being spread and dispersed in the external world? Now consciousness is even more subtle than mind and permeates it as radio waves travel through physical objects. When collected, consciousness is of unimaginable speed. This is the force of the soul which is capable of reaching God.

The Methods for Returning to the Divine Source:

As butter permeates milk, consciousness permeates the mind. When the mind becomes concentrated so does the current of consciousness which permeates the body and mind. Therefore, the Saints have taught ways to withdraw and concentrate the mind within. In this context the following references in part from the *Philosophy of Liberation* are particularly worth studying:



In whatever realm of this universe one lives, it is natural to get the support from the predominate element of that realm.¹³ Therefore, it is natural for one dwelling in the physical realm to take support from material elements (methods utilizing sensory elements).¹⁴ To begin, then, to concentrate the mind, one should make use of the *mānas japa* (mental repetition of the spoken name of God), and *mānas dhyāna* (focusing on a physical manifested form of God). God permeates all realms of nature and the entire universe. The saints, prophets, sages, all radiant and all benevolent beings are myriad physical manifestations of the Divine Powers on earth. Fixing their image in the mind (*mānas dhyāna*; focus on a divine form) facilitates concentration of the mind and prepares it to enter into the inner subtle realms. In order to enter into the subtle realms one must take support of the subtle element. One should therefore practice taking support of the subtle (non-material) element. Subtle support is “the infinitesimal point”. (This point is visualized in the middle of two eye-brows). The infinitesimal point is also known as the subtlest of the subtlest form of God. *Bindu* or point is defined as an indivisible point. It is too small to be drawn or indicated in

¹³ Santseviji uses the word “realm” to describe the various planes of existence. The gross realm is the everyday world that we live in while a subtler realm would be what is called an astral world by the west. The heavenly regions would be yet another realm. These realms are experienced within in the states of deep meditation.

¹⁴ Gross element here refers to elements of the mind and its relation to the senses.



any physical way. *Driṣṭi yoga, the yoga of Vision* is concentration on (literally “seeing”) this infinitesimal point. *Driṣṭi* is the power of seeing. By uniting the power of seeing of both eyes and focusing on a single point in the center and concentrating the mind on that point one attains one-pointedness. This is known as Driṣṭi Yoga. In this practice it is advised neither to focus forcefully nor manipulate the eyeballs in any ways. [Saints teach specifics of this *yogic technique*.]

By this practice inner divine vision is opened (which is beyond the sensory dimension of seeing). In the state of attained one-pointedness of mind, it is possible to listen to the divine inner sounds which arise from the juncture of the material and subtle realms (such sounds are not audible to the sensory ears). If the subtle state is reached, it becomes possible to perceive the celestial sounds of the subtle realm. Now this sound has the inherent quality of attracting the consciousness to its point of origin. Once that sound is perceived, consciousness is drawn to the sounds of each successive and ascending realm until consciousness reaches the soundless realm which is the realm of God. To achieve this, service to and association with a Sat Guru, as well as his grace and blessings, are essential. The practitioner must also be diligent in practice.



The path described above can be summarized in the following manner: The four practices are gross to subtle in an ascending order: *mānas jap* and *mānas dhyāna*, *Dirśti yoga*, *Nadanusandhana* (Sound Yoga), and the Soundless Yoga. The practice of *mānas japa (mantra) and mānas dhyāna* is the worship of the (material) qualified (personal) form of God (God perceived as name and form in the gross realm); the practice of the meditation on the infinitesimally small point is the worship of the subtle qualified form of God (God perceived as the infinitesimal point); Concentration on divine sounds (other than *Sār Śabad*, the Divine Sound of the beginning, Word, Logos) is the worship of the qualified formless Divine. And, finally, meditation on the *Sār Śabad* (the Original Divine Sound) is worship of the Unqualified-Formless (transcendent Godhead). It is the culmination of all forms of worship. But without completely mastering all these practices and treading the inward journey, it will be impossible to reach the *Soundless state* (the realization of the Impersonal form of the Divine) which is the realm of God and the attainment of *mokṣa* or total liberation.

Understanding the Twofold Nature of the Divine and the Material Substance:



What do *qualified* and *unqualified* mean when applied to God? The *Prashna Upanishad* states that in the beginning God created *prana*, that is, *Hiranyagarbha*, the world egg or primal matter [germ from which the perishable beings take place]¹⁵. That Divine Essence is beyond any distinctions and without qualities (*gunas*).¹⁶

The *gunas* exist only in the *manifested* universe. The essential being of God is beyond these three qualities.¹⁷ God (*Brahman*), the Primal Being is Unqualified (*Nirguna Brahman*); secondary (personal) Being (*Saguna Brahman*) is qualified.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* says,

There are two beings (purushas) in this world, the perishable and the imperishable, the perishable is all these existences (comprises all creatures) and the unchanging (jivātman) is the

¹⁵ The *Bhagavad-Gita* with the Commentary of Sri Shankaracharya, p. 410

¹⁶ From the inchoate state (*Hiranyagarbha*; golden egg; the womb of all manifested creation) emerged the three *gunas*, or qualities. [In traditional Hindu cosmology, the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*: roughly “lucidity; purity,” “active,” and “passive,” respectively) represent, on the one hand, principles of physics, in that every material object, however fine, is the result of a certain combination and “crystallization” of these three qualities; on the other hand, the *gunas* are the language of metaphysics in that these qualities are also principles of “activity,” that is, human states and principles of world creation can also be articulated by means of the *gunas*. Everything that can be said to be the result of the *gunas* in combination is “qualified”; that which is beyond the *gunas* (i.e. exists before, in time and priority, the *gunas*—this universe—arose) is called “unqualified”.]

¹⁷ “The sun does not illuminate that (the eternal state of the Supreme Spirit), nor the moon nor fire. That is My supreme abode from which those who reach it never return” (*Bhagavad-Gita* 15:6).



imperishable. But other than these, the Highest Spirit is known as the Supreme Self (paramatman) who, as the Undying Lord, enters the three worlds and sustains them (15:16-17).

The Highest Spirit is the most distinct form the two beings (*purushas*). *Prakriti* (Nature, Material substance) in its primal state is congruous. In this primal state *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* stay in perfect balance. They represent three distinct actions: Creation, sustaining, and destruction. These three, the cosmic attributes or the *gunas* are represented by three manifestation of the Personal God (manifested God): Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Sustainer, and Shiva the Destroyer.

Sant Kabir says,

The infinite impersonal supreme God is a tree. The three Lords (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) are the branches of that tree, and the leaves sprouting from the branches are the world

Just as the three *gunas* arose from the Creator; and just as the world arose from the *gunas*; so from one absolute Dharma (the Absolute Truth; The Way), a kind of proto-religion which exists at the very basis of creation, there arose three separate *dharmas*, Sanatana Dharma (Vedic)¹⁸, Judeo-Christian, and Islam, the three most prevalent religions in the world. These three *dharmas*,

¹⁸ The essential Truth, Santana Dharama is the foundations of India born religions: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism



though they may seem divergent in various external ways, are related in the same way as the leaves of a tree which arise from and are nourished by the same source.

The Holy Koran sheds light on the ultimate unity of the Truth,

In the beginning all people were of one community. Later people created different convictions and paths” (Koran 11.10). And “in the beginning people were on one Path (Koran 2.2).

Sanatana Dharma is oldest of the major *dharmas*, followed by the Judeo-Christian, and finally Islamic *dharmas*. Due to differences of geography, culture, and language, these three religions appear different, but in fact they are leaves on one tree. The belief in the unity of God is the great theme of the major religions.

As the Rig Veda says,

Truth is one; sages speak of it in different ways.

All *dharmas*, Vedic, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, as well as of the texts of the saints and great religious scholars and poets, emphasize this fundamental oneness of Truth.

In the *Katha Upanishad* Yama tells Nachiketas,

As the one wind has entered the world And becomes corresponding in form in every form to every form, So the one Inner Soul of all things is corresponding in form to every form, and yet is outside (5/13).



The Divine Essence permeates all beings yet transcends them.

Shri Ram teaches Hanumanji,

Oh, son of the Wind! Without sound, without touch, without form, without taste, without smell, and without name or caste, as the destroyer of all misery—this form of mine you should meditate on always (Muktikopanishad, 72).

Krishna, in the *Bhagavad -Gita*, advises Arjuna to meditate upon his form beyond the perishable and imperishable, which is Absolute and One. The Koran also is filled with references to the unity of God. And the Lord's prayer, the most common prayer of Christianity, addresses God as *our* Father, the Father common to us all. Following are the quotes from different saints describing the oneness of God:

Sant Kabir Sahib says,

My great Lord is one; I dare not say two. If I say two, this pleases not my Lord.

xxx

Guru Nanak Dev says,

There is only one Lord, the great Lord. By seeing His unity one is blessed with all treasures.

xxx

Saint Dadudyal says,

I found the beginning and the end within [my heart] and now this mind does not go elsewhere. Now Dadu



is colored in the color of the One and is absorbed in that One.

xxx

Sant Sundar dass says,

One God resides in the heart of each and every person. Why don't you meditate on that one God? That God helps you overcome misery. Why do you forget that Lord? Four kinds of wealth are with him, eight kinds of siddhis (attainments), and nine kinds of treasure can be obtained from Him. Sundar says: people who pray to any other than this great God have mouths full of dust [wasting away lives].

xxx

Goswami Tulsi Dass says,

The One [Supreme Being] is unspoken, without form, without name, without birth, the abode of knowledge and bliss.

xxx

Sant Surdass says,

If the mind wants to find God, it should leave the outward trappings of texts and external worship. Abandon texts and ceremonies; and be truthful in thoughts, words, and deeds! Then one will see the true Lord within one's own self.

Unifying Principles in the Spiritual Path:

Vedic dharma has its temples, Christianity its churches, and Islam its mosques. [The real temple is the heart.] God is attained within: the path to God lies within one's own self, as all the



saints have taught with unanimity. The inner path begins in *Sushmana, ajana charka* (a place between two eyebrows).

One Faqir has said,

O aspirant! Why are you wandering aimlessly outward (in the mosques, churches, and temples)? The path lies within, begins in sushumna, for meeting with the beloved (Lord.)

Furthermore,

The deluded one does not understand that, although Mohammed is manifested and seen, Allah is unseen.

Saint Maharishi Mehi says,

Look for and search for God within yourself, within your own body. God resides in your heart—look for Him there. The white point shines straight ahead and twinkles. You must concentrate in sushumna by leaving the restlessness of the mind behind. Where the subtle sounds vibrate in the ajna chakra, stay and make your dwelling. The door is subtle and sushumna is the point or window. With great effort, you can go through.

In Reference to the Inner Spiritual Practice:

The inner spiritual practices of the major *dharma*s or religions, though seemingly diverse, have the same purpose and goal. *Japa* and *dhyāna* exist in Christianity and Islam as well as Santmat founded in the Vedic dharma. In Islam they are known as *ziker*



and *fiker*; in Christianity they are known as chanting and meditating. The beginning of *dhyāna* pertains to the physical form of the object of worship. The Sufis meditate on the form of their spiritual teacher (*murshid*) and forget their bodies, just as Sutikshna Muni became unaware of his body while meditating on Shri Ram (a story in Ramayana). By meditating, both become absorbed in their guru.

The practices similar to *Driṣṭi yoga* and the yoga of Sound are described in the Sufi tradition, known as *saglenasira* and *sultanulajakar*. By these practices the sufi attains the divine states and ultimately merges in Allaha. [References to experiencing the divine glory and divine sound are made by Christian and Jewish mystics as well].

The experience of Divine Light and Divine Sound are the arms of God which embrace the aspirant who practices them, as a child is embraced by two arms of his father.

Lighting oil lamps in the temples, churches, and mosques, ringing bells, singing, praying out loud to extend our voice to God—these are all symbols of the inner experiences of divine light and sound.

Throughout this book, references to *mānas japa*, *mana*, *dhyāna* and *driṣṭi sadhana* and *Nadanusandhan* (Sound yoga) are given.



In general, all sacred traditions have these four practices, differently named, differently emphasized, perhaps, but still present. This progression of practices is a clearly marked path to God and is open to all—it does not discriminate among people of different races, religions, or sex (male or female).

The water of the ocean rises up in mist to form clouds. Then the clouds rains on the tops of the mountains, but it cannot stand still there. It rolls down into small rivers, which merge with large rivers, and finally makes its way back to the ocean. Then the water is not known as “river”: it becomes the ocean. In the same way, the individual soul, having separated from God, wanders through 840,000 forms of life. Once the soul has received true instruction from a genuine teacher, and practices the four forms of meditation diligently, it finally realizes God and becomes one with Him. The cycle of birth and death then comes to an end.

Goswami Tulsidas says,

As the water of a river merges with the ocean and becomes one with it, so the individual [in God] leaves the cycle of birth and death.

Santmat teaches and spreads this knowledge of how one can find and merge with God. This tradition is not based on any one particular name of a saint. Santmat is an ocean, a universal



tradition. In the ocean many different rivers are merged. In the same way, the voices of all the saints become one voice.

Goswami Tulsidas says,

Santmat is the unified way of all saints. It is devoid of discrimination and supported by the Vedas, Puranas, and sacred texts.

Caste and class do not exist in Santmat. In it Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Bahai's are all brothers and sisters. Santmat understands the world to be one family and therefore Santmat unifies and harmonizes all spiritual traditions. It is hoped that after reading through this book, the reader will reach the conclusion that within the various traditions exist the one essential Truth and similar essential practices. The various *dharma*s are in essence one *Dharma*, and that path for anyone who wishes to reach God is one.



Chapter One

Vedic Tradition

Vedic Dharma



What is the Veda?



The inhabitants of ancient *Bharat* (India) were known as Aryans¹⁹. Their ancient sacred texts are known as the *Vedas*. There are no known texts which are older than the *Vedas*. These profound sacred texts are collections of hymns and are known by four names, *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Atharva Veda*. (*Veda* literally means “knowledge,” and these texts contain knowledge of various types). These four collections are commonly referred to as the *Vedas*.²⁰

Rig Veda is the foundation and the most ancient text among the three: *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, and *Sama Veda*. *Atharva Veda* was assimilated as a Veda at a later date. The *mantras*²¹ (hymns) of the *Rig Veda* occur also in the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda* in

¹⁹ The word Aryans is translated as “Noble Ones.”

²⁰ This is also the opinion of Shri Maharishi Mehi as expressed by him in the introduction to his book the *Veda Darśan Yoga*.

²¹ *Mantra* is a hymn or sacred formula which is used to invoke the presence of various gods in the course of Vedic sacrifices and rituals. The hymns seek: contentment, courage, devotion, energy, fearlessness, forgiveness, mercy, good life, happiness, health, intellect, long life, peace, progeny, purification, righteousness, success, victory, wealth, wisdom.



reference to the various sacrifices. The *mantras* of the *Rig Veda* are primarily consist of adoration and invocation to gods such as Agni, Mitra, Indra and Varuna etc.

According to the *Rig Veda* all the gods are manifestations of One ultimate Being or One God.²²

There are four secondary texts (*Upvedas*: *up* prefix means subsidiary). They are of a later origin than the primary *Vedas*; and are interrelated to each of the primary *Vedas*:

- *Rig Veda --Sthapatya Veda* (Architecture and science of sociology)
- *Yajur Veda-- Dhanur Veda* (military science)
- *Sama Veda -- Gandharva Veda* (music and dance)
- *Atharva Veda--Ayurveda* (medicine)

The subject matter of the *Vedas* is divided into three sections:

- *Karmkanda* (Rituals)
- *Upasanakanda* (Prayers)
- *Jnanakanda* (Metaphysical discourses concerning the nature and realization of *Brahman* (the Ultimate Reality) and *Atman* (Inner Self)).

²² “Truth (Reality) is one; the sages speak of it in various ways” is the famous axiom of the *Rig Veda*.



Of these three the last section which consists of discourses on spiritual knowledge is considered the highest. Within it, only the essential Absolute Truth is considered. The *Vedas* are saturated with the discussions of the knowledge and experience of *Brahman* or Ultimate reality. The Vedas declare the ubiquitous nature of *Brahman*: *all is Brahman; There exists nothing but Brahman.*

Sage Manu says: “The *Vedas* are the foundation of all *dharma*s (Laws, Knowledge, Sacred duty, Truth)”²³ on which the whole edifice of knowledge and art is erected. The *Vedas* are the storehouse of all knowledge and sciences; it is the infinite repository of learning. The *Vedas* are the source of all fundamental principals of Indian *dharma*, religion, philosophy, music, medicine and science. The knowledge expounded in the *Vedas* is limitless.

Since ancient times Saints, Mahatmas (greats souls), Rishis (seers), Munis (ascetics), and scholars of India have considered the Vedas eternal and of divine origin (*apaurusheya*, without a human source). It is believed that the origin of the Vedas came about in the form of knowledge revealed by God. Therefore, just

²³ The Laws of Manu, 2/3



as God, the *Vedas* are also without beginning, infinite and eternal. In the *Upanishads* the *Vedas* are described as the *out-breath* of God.

Western scholars however, date the *Vedas* at 5000 to 6000 BCE.²⁴ In addition, they argue that since the *Vedas* have a beginning they are, therefore, not of divine origin. Their main argument is that as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* etc. texts were composed by sages such as Valmiki, Vyasa etc. so were the different branches of the *Vedas* composed by Rishis such as Katha etc. Further, since there are specific composers of the various *Vedas* they are, therefore, not of divine origin. These scholars suggest that these *Vedas* are of human origin and are not eternal and were composed at a specific point in time.

But Jamini Rishi clearly sheds light on it by saying that different branches of the *Vedas*, which are associated with the names of certain Rishis²⁵ were, in fact, not composed by them. The rishis are simply expounders of these eternal *Vedas*.

The Jamini Sutra 1/1/30 states,

²⁴ It is a earliest date assigned to the origins of the *Vedas*. However, a commonly found consensus dates the *Vedas* ca. 1500BCE.

²⁵ The word *Rishi* means a Seer, from *dris*, to see. He is the *Mantra-Drashta*, seer of Mantra or thought. The Rishis experienced the Truth and heard it. Therefore the *Vedas* are what are heard (Sruti). The Rishi did not compose them. They were the seers of thought which existed already. They are the discoverers not the inventors of the *Vedas*.



Those Rishis taught the composed mantra-samhitas (collections of the sacred hymns) which were not created by them.²⁶” Therefore, the rishis were actually seers of this knowledge of mantras. For that reason they are known as the seers (rishis) not composers of mantras. Katyayan says: “The rishis are the seers, who have memorized the revealed mantras. They are spokespersons of the mantras, not the composers.²⁷

Today’s science claims that the sound waves of spoken words are not destroyed: they disperse in the atmosphere. In the future it may be possible to retrieve all spoken words. Radio waves dispersed through the universe theoretically continue forever. This can serve as an analogy of how spoken words [sound current] may also not be destroyed²⁸. Modern science believes that sound waves are indestructible. Perhaps it might be possible to retrieve the words of Lord Krishna spoken to Arjuna during the war of the *Mahabharata*.

The scholars of the *Vedas* say,

The eternal sounds of the Vedas are always reverberating and are eternal and not of human origin.

²⁶ “*Akhyā Pravachanāt*” (Jamini Sutra, 1/1/30)

²⁷ “*Drishtār rishaya smratār,*” from the *Sarvanukrama Sutra*

²⁸ Certainly on the subtle level the thought behind the expressed word can be considered. That the thought continues to reverberate indefinitely is a metaphysical fact.



Vedic scholars use this idea to support the idea that sound or *shabad*²⁹ is indestructible.

Therefore, the ancient rishis through their divine intelligence in the state of *Samadhi* (state of union with the Divine) had manifested and perceived the spiritual eternal and divine Vedic knowledge.³⁰ Later these mystical insights were rendered into written text.

Yaskacharya says in a hymn,

the seers saw the mantras therefore, they are known as rishis. (Nirukta, 2/3/11)

Vedanta

The word Vedanta is comprised of two words: ‘*Veda*’ and ‘*anta*.’ *Veda* means “knowledge” and *anta* means “end”. Thus, it literally means the “end [goal] of knowledge.” Where does knowledge end? The wise have divided knowledge into four

²⁹ *Shabad* means gross sound as well as subtle sound. The subtle form of sound is considered the basis of creation.

³⁰ [According to Swami Sivanada, “The *Vedas* form the sound-manifestation of *Ishvara*. That sound has four divisions,—*Para* which finds manifestation only in *Prana*, *Pasyanti* which finds manifestation in the mind, *Madhyama* which finds manifestation in the *Indriyas*, and *Vaikhari* which finds manifestation in articulate expression..” From *Kundalini Yoga*]



part steps: Listening, thinking, intense repeated meditation, and experiencing. The goal of knowledge culminates in experience. The beginning stage of knowledge is listening, which includes studying. In ancient times, after listening, the students memorized the teaching. Therefore, the earlier name of the *Vedas* is *Shruti*. *Shruti* means that “which has been heard.” Later the people’s minds became feeble³¹. Then the knowledge became bound to the written texts and came to be known as the *Vedas*³².

The first part of the *Vedas* is *karmakanda*, which comprises sacrificial rituals, the latter part is known as *Jananakanda* and includes prayer and discourses on metaphysical teachings (Wisdom). The sections dealing with philosophical thought and wisdom are considered superior because in it the ultimate goal of human life is expounded. The metaphysical discourses on knowledge are distilled in the form of the *Upanishads*. In the earlier times the *Vedanta* (the later part of the *Vedas*; the goal of the *Vedas*) due to its metaphysically subtle matters and spiritual issues was also known as *Upanishad*.³³ However, later on the

³¹ The cycles of time in Indian thinking are composed of Yugas. Each succeeding Yuga the people become intellectually, morally and spiritually weaker. Hence later people have less mental capacity.

³² The word *Veda* is derived from the root verb “vid” meaning to know.

³³ *Upanishad* means the inner or mystic teaching. The term *Upanishad* is derived from *upa* (near), *ni* (down) and *s(h)ad* (to sit), i.e., sitting down near.



philosophical thoughts which were evolved from and rooted in the *Upanishads* are also known as *Vedanta*. The *Upanishads* are described as the *end of the Vedas* as well as the *culmination of knowledge* for the following reasons:

1. The *Upanishads* are the final treatise of the Vedic literature. The first part of the *Vedas* is known as *Samhita*, a collection of Vedic hymns, the mantras. Next are the *Brāhmanas*, which pertain to rituals, and the *Aranyakas* are the Forest treatises. The last section is the *Upanishads*.
2. For the sake of a comprehensive knowledge of the *Vedas* the followers of the Vedic Dharma generally begin with the *Samhita* which is the study of *mantras*. During the householder stage and for the sake of performing sacrifice and ritual worship the *Brāhmanas* are utilized. During the forest dweller stage and the *sanyasa*³⁴ stage the study of *Aranyakas* (pertaining to forest teachings) are required. (*Aranyakas* and *Sanyasis* have transitioned to the forest dweller life and seek the Ultimate truth through mediation and contemplation in the quiet life of forests. The texts

Groups of pupils sit near the teacher to learn the subtle doctrine of self-realization.

³⁴ Renunciation



are known as *Aranayaks* which pertain to this stage of life.). The *Aranayakas*—the forest treatises—eventually evolved and became developed into the form of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* are the final treatises as well as represent the crystallization of the Vedic spiritual thought. Therefore, they are known as the last part of the Vedas—the Vedanta (end of the Vedas and culmination of the Vedic knowledge).

3. *Chandogya Upanishads* (chapter 6 and 7) says: “In spite of the study of the Vedas and its different sections, without the study of the wisdom of the Upanishads the knowledge is incomplete.”

Because the *Upanishads* are considered to contain the subtle mystery of the *Vedas* they are known as *Vedopanishads* (*Tettairya Upanishad* 1/1).

The Upanishads contain a deep inquiry and analysis into the nature of *Atman* (universal soul), *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality) and the world. It is not incorrect to say the *Upanishads* are certainly a treasure for seekers of spiritual knowledge. The famous German philosopher Schopenhauer was greatly influenced by the *Upanishads*.



He writes,

There is no other text other than the Upanishads which is greater in giving peace. The Upanishads are the solace of my life and solace to me in my death.

According to the *rishis* (sages), who are the spokespersons of Vedanta Wisdom there is one Omnipresent Truth, the Reality out of which the entire creation is manifested and in which all creation is sustained. By the knowledge of that essential Truth the immortal state is obtained. This element is known sometimes as *Brahman*, sometimes *Atman* and other times as Sat (Truth).

Aitrayi (1/1/1) and the *Brahadärnyaka Upanishad* (1/4/1) say,

In the beginning there was only one Atman

Chandogya Upanishad (7/25/2) says,

Whatever is here (in this creation) is Atman.

Brahdarnayaka Upanishad further says,

After knowing this Atman all is known.

Further the *Chandogya* and *Mundaka Upanishads* also describe that to know *Atman* is to know all.

Brahdarnyaka declared.



This Atman is Brahman(2/5/19). and “*I am Brahman*”³⁵ (1/4/10).

The *Upanishads* arrive at the conclusion that the body, senses, mind and intellect, and the joys coming from them are fleeting and ephemeral forms of Atman, not the essential experience of the nature of Atman. The Pure Conscious element of Atman is the foundation of all minor joys. It is not confounded by the boundaries of sense objects. It is boundless and permeates all; it is omnipresent.

The Knowledge of Atman

Atma Jnana or knowledge of atman (Self) is considered the highest knowledge (*para vidya*). All other forms of knowledge are of a lesser type and therefore lower knowledge (*apara vidya*). The means to Self-knowledge are the following: restraining of lust, anger, etc. afflictions; and striving for the direct experience of *Atman* by successive practices of listening (to sacred texts and discourses of sages), contemplating (on what had been studied), and meditating.

³⁵ “*Ayam Atma Brahma*” and “*Ahambrhamasmi*” are the celebrated sayings of the *Upanishads*.



The highest goal of immortality cannot be achieved through ritual acts etc. say the Upanishads. As the *Mundako Upanishads* (1/2/7) states,

*Unsafe boats, however, are these rituals
and sacrifices (to go across the world sea of death and
birth) as described by eighteen (shastras) in which
are expressed these lower performances.
The ignorant who consider them better
Go time and again to old age and death.*

By means of sacrificial rituals (yajnas) one can attain the joys of heaven for a limited time, but when the rewards of the rituals perish, they again must return to this world of birth and death. By these lesser boats one cannot go beyond the world sea.³⁶

According to the Shastras, *havan* (sacrificial fire ritual) and the chanting of *mantras* are for the people who are ignorant of the essential Truth (*atman jnana*). The practice of the *atman-knowledge* (self-realization) is greater than sacrifices for gods and goddesses. Only through knowledge of self can one destroy the cycle of rebirth and the sufferings of taking birth. The one who realizes the unity with the infinite immortal *Brahman* shall attain immortality.

Katha Upanishad (6/14) says,

³⁶ Goswami Tulsi Das says in the *Ramachariatmanasa*: “The pleasures of heaven are short lived. Having exhausted the results of meritorious acts one is bound to fall below in lower worlds.”



When all the desires that lodge in one's heart are liberated, Then a mortal becomes immortal; Therein he/she reaches Brahman.

Direct Experience (Self-realization)

The Vedanta wisdom teaches us to reflect upon the knowledge gained through listening to the discourses of saints and by reading the sacred writings. Having examined it carefully and discerning the truth we must incorporate that knowledge into our lives. Having repeatedly practiced the knowledge, the practitioner becomes accustomed to it. Having perfected the practice one gains the direct experience of the Divine Self.

We hear that the nature of *Atman* is imperishable, immortal, infinite and pure (without imperfection). Having heard of the nature of *Atman* we should examine it. The intellectual understanding of the nature of *Atman* must be followed by a meditation practice for the direct experience of *Atman*. That practice is known as *nididhyasana* (inner journey in the form of meditation). Diligent spiritual discipline leads the aspirant to the direct experience of one's true nature—*Atman*.

The Sanskrit word for experience is *anubhava*. *Anu* means latter, *bhava* means arising. Experience is that which rises latter



or afterwards (experience is followed by the practice). After this knowledge nothing remains to be known.

Sant Sundar das Ji Maharaj has elaborated on the four-fold knowledge -- *listening, contemplating, meditating, and experiencing*—in an illustration of the process of satisfying the appetite:

The talk of gourmet foods brings pleasure to the mind (Listening). However, until we have eaten this food there is no true delight. When all the ingredients are gathered for cooking and the food is being prepared, the mind begins to long for the taste (Thinking). When the food has been prepared then one begins putting in the mouth one bite at a time and experiences each course of the meal. (Nididhyasana; process of meditation)³⁷ Each bite brings satisfying feel. As we progress eating we experience the joy of a satiated appetite. Then as we become full there is no more appetency. (Experience)

Sundar says that the contentment is the experience of direct experience.

Through this illustration Saint Sundadas Ji explains that by eating food body is nourished and satisfied. But mere talk of food neither satisfies the appetite nor generates nourishment to the body. Appetite is satisfied by the labor

³⁷ Until the complete satisfaction (final experience) is attained the process is known as *nididhyasana*.



of food preparation and the gradual process of eating and digestion, which results in the nourishment of body and satisfaction of the mind.

In this same way when we are practicing spiritual disciplines and making progress and moving forward we are going toward the fourth stage (the final stage of experience)—complete contentment. Three stages are stepping-stones to the final stage of the divine experience. However, the realm of the fourth stage is very extensive and requires a long journey.

As the aspirants progress in the inner spiritual journey they experience the celestial scenes of the journey. The course of this journey is known as *nidhdhyasana* (contemplation; repeated meditation). This process culminates in the absolute knowledge of the inner Self. Now there remains nothing to be attained. As long as we live in the prior stages of knowledge—listening, studying, contemplating and practicing—the knowledge is not accomplished. All the stages of knowledge culminate in the direct experience—*anubhava*. Thereafter, nothing remains to be achieved.

Let's us look at an anecdote in this regard: Once there was a gathering of philosophers of various Vedantic schools: *Dvaita*,



the dualist school, *Advaita*, the non- dualist school, *Vishishtadvaita*, qualified dualist, *Shudhadvaita*, pure dualist etc. In that gathering the representatives of each school presented their various view in discourses. Among all presenters, the proponents of dualist and non-dualist philosophy presented extraordinarily compelling arguments in favor of their convictions. Consequently, the non- dualist was influenced by the dualist's convincing arguments and vice versa. As a result the dualist philosopher converted to the non-dualist philosophical school and the non-dualist to the dualist school. .What is the essential lesson of this account? When our knowledge is founded in mere intellectual knowledge—the states of listening and speculating—it is possible to be persuaded by the convincing arguments of the other. However, when through practice we have realized the nature of Truth and have experienced it directly, there is no question of wavering or changing our position since we have seen and experienced the Truth. .It is a stage of experience beyond argument.

The Vedanta-Wisdom explains the various steps of knowledge metaphorically: the knowledge gained through listening can be compared to the household fire.. The knowledge gained through analysis and speculation is analogous to lightning. And the knowledge of diligent meditation practice is like volcanic fire in



the depth of the ocean. As common fire can be extinguished by drops of rain, in the same way the theoretical knowledge of an individual, which is merely founded on the intellectual knowledge, can be swayed by superior arguments. But, the knowledge attained by analysis and contemplation becomes like the force of lightening, which cannot be extinguished by water.. Nonetheless, as the nature of lightning is unsteady so the knowledge gained through thoughtful speculation is precarious. The knowledge gained through repeated meditation is like an underwater volcanic fire which is not extinguished by water. In the same manner, knowledge gained through meditation cannot be extinguished by the fluctuations of this world.

But this knowledge is limited like fire in the ocean: it is powerful yet does not have the capacity to dry up the waters of the ocean—*maya* (the web of illusion of duality). In the course of practice, when one becomes proficient and attains experience of deeper knowledge then the knowledge is like apocalyptic fire and devours the entire illusion of duality (*maya*). Vedanta tells us not to remain mired in only in the beginning stages of acquiring knowledge namely, listening, intellectualizing etc., but to move forward and attain direct experience through repeated meditation.



Yoga and Meditation

Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita* has given different definitions of Yoga³⁸: “Yoga is skill in one’s own duty” and “equanimity of mind is yoga.” Patanjali explains yoga as “an uninterrupted thought on a single object.” Lord Krishna gave knowledge to Arjuna in the form of the *Gita*. The *Gita* contains various types of yoga corresponding to its 18 chapters. In addition to these, several other types of yoga are mentioned.

Yoga has eight limbs³⁹: *Yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dhyāna*, *dharana*, and *Samadhi*. *Yama* has five components truth etc., and *niyama* has five components purity etc.⁴⁰ *Yama* and *niyama* are followed by the third limb of yoga is *asana* (posture) which cannot be perfected until one diligently practices the moral principles such as *yama-s* and *niyama-s*. Until *asana* is perfected one cannot achieve success in *pranayama* (breath control), the fourth component of *Yoga*. [Pranayama helps purify the distractions of the mind, then it is

³⁸ The Sanskrit word yoga is derived from the root verb ‘yuj’ meaning to ‘yoke’ or to ‘unite’. The goal of Yogic practices is to lead the human soul toward Divine Union.

³⁹ Patanjali, a great sage (ca 300 BCE) systematized the various components of the Yoga. His Yoga System is known as the *eight-fold* path.

⁴⁰ *Yama* means restraint or discipline. It has five components are: Truth, non-violence, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession
Niyama is observance: It has also five components: Purity, contentment, austerity (discipline of body and mind), self study, and faith in God.



easier for the mind to focus.] In this manner we see a sequential process. If a practitioner performs *pranayama* after achieving proficiency in *asana* then he/she becomes proficient in *pranayama*. However, yoga does not end here. [Yoga, usually, in the west, only includes postures and breathing exercises. It is utilized to enhance physical and mental health.. In India yoga is a wholistic spiritual discipline culminating in divine union.]

Next is *pratyahara*, restraining of the mind (withdrawal of the senses). *Pratyahara* is followed by *dharana*—deep focus for short periods of time, which is followed by *dhyāna* —complete absorption. When we try to concentrate our mind in meditation and worship, we find it is hard to bring the mind to focus--the mind wanders away. We sit for worship or we sit for meditation, but let us ask the mind how long the mind stayed concentrated in that task? How long did the mind stay on the object of the meditation? The mind moves and wanders around and no one even begin to count how many directions it may have gone—the unstable mind runs hither and thither. We lock our body up in a small meditation room but are we able to lock up our mind also? The mind roams from one place to another, from one country to country- who really can even remember where has it wandered off.



Saint Sundar das Ji says,

In one moment the mind can think of the immediacy of death, or the longevity of life

In one moment considers being sold out in someone's hand.

In a moment the mind roams into the nine realms of the universe desiring to look around the seen and unseen places.

This mind's trickery is ever elusive, but we have to deal with it.

No one can fathom the speed of the mind.

Whoever attempts to fathom the nature of mind can only be a mad.

Sant Paltu says,

Our mind is so swift that no other vehicle can compare to its speed: We cannot restrain the mind: it is ever strong and active. It is like a mighty combatant; its nature is mischievous

Paltu says that it is capable of traveling thousands of miles in the blink of an eye.

In today's scientific world no matter how many fast planes have been invented they are nevertheless slower than the speed of the mind. This swift mind is stubborn and difficult to control.

As Sant Kabir says,

Dear practitioners! the mind is very mischievous and whoever has to deal with this mind knows its obstinate nature."



We consider ourselves well and sound. But when we sit for meditation and when the fire of meditation touches us then we see the blemishes surfacing in the mind. Sant Kabir says that whosoever has tried to control this mind knows the daunting task of controlling the mind.

Therefore Saint Kabir says:

The mind is like the monkey of the magician. If the monkey obeys the magician, then the two win in their entertainment feat, otherwise they cannot make a living (customers will fleet).

This mind is like a monkey. When the magician and the monkey perform uniformly and entertain the spectators, the magician earns money with which their livelihood is sustained. If the same monkey acts mischievously and begins biting or is rough with patrons, the monkey is beaten with a staff and the magician loses money in his magic show. In the same way our mind is likened to that monkey. Then how are we control this mind? Until we can bring the mind to a focus and train it to follow the prescribed techniques we cannot control and subjugate the mind.

During meditation do not be defeated in the exercise of *pratyahara* (literally “bringing back”). What is the other meaning of *pratyahara*? *Prati* (every) plus *ahara* (consume) are the two components of the word: “consume everything.”



Whatever thought arises consume that thought. If you don't consume that thought, you will be consumed by it. [Consuming or actively controlling the rising tide of thought]. During meditation the mind creates air castles beyond description. While sitting in one place the mind wanders everywhere and we cannot even keep track of its ever swirling nature. Therefore, the saints instruct that first we must practice *pratyahara*. As we sit down for eating and consume the food in the same way we should consume the thoughts as they arise. We should consume them that same moment. Whatever images and fanciful ideas infest the mind during meditation, saints insist, consume them without any delay or hesitation.

If you can't practice constant vigilance of mind then when you sit down for doing *japa* (recitation of a holy name) your mind will be involved in unnecessary gossip, solving problems, creating imaginary castles, and long term planning. In this manner time will pass while meditating with the mind wandering and unfocused. Therefore, do not be defeated in this practice of *pratyahara*. If you give up in *pratyahara* you will not succeed in subduing the mind.

Keep in mind and reflect: mind is unconscious [mind-machine is powered by consciousness; it is considered be a sensory organ] and we are immortal and eternal and the repository of joy.



Sant Goswami Tulsidas says:

The individual soul is part of the eternal God and is the storehouse of consciousness and joy. But, it has been under the control of maya and is tied and bound as domesticated parrots and monkey.

Now listen to saint Kabir who says:

Oh brothers I cannot understand this mystery. The tiger cub has been taken by the cat.

Who will believe that a tiger cub has been stolen by the cat and the cat is running with it.” The individual soul (*jivatman*, tiger cub) is an inseparable part of God and is beyond old age and death. It has come into the grip of *maya* (cat).

Saint Kabir says:

Oh mind you dance in all directions owing to the effects of mayaAs the magician makes his monkey dance with the noose of his rope, so the noose of desires rules the mindThe monkey bows to everyone and forgets about his own natureO humans! You dance does not dance for the divine name,but dance night and day for the desires of the flesh. Why do you dance perpetually, deluded by this maya?

We are conscious and the mind is unconscious and the battle between consciousness and unconsciousness continues. Someday the mind will lose and consciousness will win. This is certain.



Main Obstacles in the Practice of *Dhyāna*:

The two main hindrances to success in the practice of meditation are the following:

1. Procrastination and Laziness
2. Activity of thoughts during meditation (day dreaming, fanciful imagination, planning, rising of any kinds of thoughts)

In addition, the lulling silence during meditation puts many practitioners to sleep. During meditation we should be vigilant and awake. Whatever is our point of focus we should diligently keep our mind on that goal and we will not be bothered by sleep. Unless we overcome the magnanimous challenge of procrastination and curb the ever-rising tide of mental activity during meditation we cannot reach our Noble (*arya*) destination (state of unity with God).⁴¹ The unvigilant practitioners usually become engrossed in thoughts or fall sleep. These formidable passes must be crossed for success.

What is the place to be reached? When we close our eyes and see darkness this is the realm of ignorance. When the light dawns within you, then you understand that you reside in noble regions. In darkness resides ignorance and in light resides

⁴¹ As Aryans (literally, noble ones) crossed many steep mountains such as Khybar and Bolan to enter the Spiritual land of India in the same manner we must cross the steep mountains of procrastination and restless mind to enter the inner spiritual states.



Knowledge. For example as we are sitting in light right now we are able to see one another. However, if the electric power goes out ensuing total darkness we will not be able to see others. We will not even be aware of other people, coming and going. In this analogy light signifies knowledge and darkness signifies ignorance. In the same manner when we see darkness with our eyes closed we are in the realm of death and re-birth [we are unaware of our true nature.]. When we come out of the realm of darkness and enter into the realm of light, we will at the same time transcend the web of death. It is not possible that we can remain in darkness and be free from the net of birth and death. Having achieved inner light we can be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

Saint Kabir says:

In each house (heart) the light shines. But we are blind [ignorant of that divine light of knowledge] so we cannot see it. If we keep looking we will find the light and will destroy the shackles of death.

Various forms of Dhyāna:

Without formless or subtle meditation attainment of inner light is impossible. You must get yourself out of darkness. How will this happen? *Pratyahara*—bringing the mind back—is followed by *dharana*, sustaining of focus for small periods. At first this will be for even a small time. *Pratyanhara* is the repeated



practice of bringing the wandering mind to a focus. By repetitive practice of *pratyahara* we are able to focus for a little while on the object of meditation. This focusing for small periods is known as *dharana*.

When this *Dharana* continues for extended periods then the state of *dhyāna* or complete focus occurs. However, mere focus on a physical form or name is not the only type of *dhyāna*. [Emptiness of mind is also *dhyāna*.]

As it is said in the Jnana Sankalni Tantra,

Dhyāna (focus on the physical forms) is not known as dhyāna; the empty mind is known (focus in empty mind) as dhyāna. By the grace of this [focus] meditation, one attains Moksha.

Some one asked Saint Mira Bai,

What kind of practice did you do to control your mind—our mind wanders far away during meditation?

Mira replied,

Through my consciousness I traveled the skies and then my mind came under control and agreed to be still."

Let us ponder on this subject. What vehicle did Mira Bai use to travel the skies? Was it an airplane, helicopter or a rocket? Mira Bai's journey was not in the outer world but it was inside the



inner realms. Her vehicles divine light (*bindu*), and divine sound.

Sant Maharishi Mehi says,

Bindu and sound will come and will come to receive you as you meditation. Yes, says Mehi they will take you on the ride to observe the celestial realms of divine light and sound."

Sound is the quality of void⁴² through sound the mind comes under control.

Saint Kabir says,

Until we accomplish the mediation of complete thoughtlessness (shunya, which means emptiness or void) the mind cannot be controlled completely.

It is essential to practice formless meditation (emptiness) to restrain the mind. Without this practice it would not be possible to stay in the realm of Pure Consciousness (*Atman*).

⁴² The Five Elements:

The five gross elements (bhutas) and constitute the material world, and also the five senses. Earth possesses the property of smell and constitutes the corresponding sense, the nose. Water possesses the property of taste and constitutes the sense of taste. Fire possesses colors and constitutes the eye. To air are due the sense of touch and the qualities of touch. To ether are due the ear and sounds.

Ether, in Physics, is defined as an all-pervading, infinitely elastic, mass less medium formerly postulated as the medium of propagation of electromagnetic waves.



There are various sequential stages of *dhyāna* (meditation). First is the meditation of physical form (form of teacher or God). Next comes mediation on the formless material form (*bindu*). Following is meditation on sound and finally meditation beyond any sound or form. These are the increasingly subtler stages of meditation. In this way we are undertake sequential steps to complete focus (*samadhi*).

When we sit for meditation we meditate on the physical form. Why? As a child in the beginning writes big letters and gradually smaller and finer letters, in the same manner until we accomplish the preliminary stages of mediation on the physical forms and sounds we are unable to proceed to the subtler forms of meditation. Persistent practice brings success in the given task.

It is said,

By practicing intense focus diligently, even the dull mind becomes dazzling. Just as a rope when rubbed against a stone will eventually leave a mark even on the stone so can the mind be brought under control through repeated effort.

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad-Gita,

Oh Arjuna, this mind is controlled through constant practice and detachment to worldly desires (dispassion to worldly enjoyments).



More on the Essentials of *Dhyāna*:

One should practice *dhyāna* and sustain the state of detachment as well. What is *dhyāna*? “It is a state of ridding of mental deliberations (tranquility) of the mind.” If our mind becomes without any thoughts, that is complete focus or *dhyāna*. Our mind desires the delights of sense objects, then it persuades the senses, and then our sense organs become active to pursue those desires. Whatever the mind desires so also the sense organs desire. For example: when smorgasbord of delicious dishes are presented in front of us in a lavish manner, then of these various choices our mind decides which of these dishes to eat. Next the hand extends to take the food. The mind directs the body which one of these delicacies to eat first. It does not direct the body or hand to take all twenty five but specific ones as directed by the mind. This is how the desires of mind are satiated by five sense organs and physical organs.

The Katha Upanishad declares,

The master of the senses is the mind.

How can this mind be controlled? For this purpose *shama* (calmness; control of desires) and *dama* (control of senses; restraining the organs of perception and) are employed. To



control the senses the practice of *dama* is required; and to control the mind *shama* is required.⁴³ Until one practices these two, one cannot control the senses or the mind. As the senses feed the information the mind becomes active. For example: Where our eye is focused so there is our mind. As our eye acts so the mind follows. When our eyes quit working then our mind also quits working. As we are reading a book we see what is written. But if we fall asleep reading then we do not read. So when the eyes are open the mind is active and with the closing of the eyes we become unaware of what we are reading. After some time we awaken and then our mind becomes active and we can begin reading again.

The Method of Meditation:

In the 6th chapter of the Gita Krishna tells us a technique to meditate.

Lord Krishna says,

*Keeping your body, head, and neck erect and
unmoving and still, stare over the front of your nose
without looking in any direction*

⁴³ The practices of *sama* and *dama* aren't meant for self-affliction, but cultivating a discriminative intellect. The mind does not control our life as a master—drifting one desire to another. But we take control our life and lead it to the ultimate realization.



Krishna explains to Arjuna the art and technique of focused gazing. What is called ‘*samprekshya dhyāna*’ focused seeing meditation in the Gita, is known in Jainism as ‘*preksha dhyāna*’ (meditation of seeing or *dri□sti* yoga). Jabaladarshanopanishad says: “Gaze by making your eyes focused by fixing yourself in *samadhi*”. In the Upanishads it is described as *pashyen dhyāna* (focused gazing meditation) and in Buddhism it is called “Vipasyana.” These different traditions speak of this art of “focused gazing” in various ways,

However...this mysterious art of seeing is impossible to learn through reading (sacred texts) only. Therefore, learn the technique of unlocking this mystery from an accomplished (saint) teacher.”

If you do not have an apt guide and attempt to practice this technique there is a risk of incurring a detrimental result. Instead of benefit one could even be harmed. [Sometimes incorrect techniques of focusing may cause harm to the eyeballs].

Saints and sages have unveiled all the mysteries of the spiritual journey and self -realization in their discourses. All the techniques have been documented in books. However, unless we approach an accomplished teacher we will not be able to understand the correct technique of true knowledge.



As the Bhagavad-Gita says that for learning spiritual knowledge we must seek help of an accomplished seer [seer could be a male or female],

For learning spiritual knowledge you should go to the one who is a seer. Pay your respect him, serve him and question him and express desire for learning. Then he will fulfill your desire and answer your questions."

Consider for a moment what must be learned. After high school the student thinks and decides a field of study: liberal arts, commerce, or science. If you want to learn liberal arts and go to a professor of science instead, will you find she is of much help? And of course vice versa is also true. You must choose a professor proficient in the knowledge which you wish to learn. In the same manner, if you want to learn spiritual knowledge then you must go to a spiritually competent teacher. One who has considered and discovered the realities of *atma* and *anatma* (bondage vs liberation) and who practices a spiritual path. Such a teacher should have attained direct experience of Truth through spiritual disciplines. From such a teacher one should take instruction. For success in the spiritual pursuit the grace of that teacher is necessary. When you learn the methods for inner practice of meditation one should also practice moral rectitude. It is also essential to practice meditation diligently.



The seventh limb of yoga as has been discussed is *dhyāna* (meditation; absorption). When one is accomplished in *dhyāna* then one attains *Samadhi* (union).

Samadhi (The State of Divine Union):

*Samadhi*⁴⁴ is the 8th limb of Yoga. *Samadhi* is of two kinds: One type of *Samadhi* is *samprjanata* (joyful state in which higher consciousness working through the mind in all stages); the second type is *asamprajanata* (mind is absorbed completely and state or pure awareness is established; all desires are extinguished).

Generally speaking, the state of *Samadhi* is achieved when the subject and the object (that is, the soul and God) unite and duality disappears and oneness is established. According to the Saint tradition this state is accomplished through the practice of the yoga of Divine Sound. Without practice of sound yoga the practitioner is unable to achieve complete control of the mind.

⁴⁴ Eliade explains: "The meanings of the term Samadhi are union, totality; absorption in, complete concentration of mind; conjunction. The usual translation is 'concentration', but this embarks the risk of confusion with *dharana*." (Yoga: Immortality and Freedom)



Saint Kabir says,

Search the Divine Sound, control your mind. This yoga is accomplished through the means of sound. The true sound is the essence of creation and the physical body and world is not real.

Through the practice of the yoga of light the complete control of senses is attained and through the yoga of sound the complete control of the mind is attained.

Today various types of techniques are taught in the name of the Yoga of Sound. It is uncertain if all these techniques are valid. Some tell the practitioner to close the ears and press them with the hands to hear the murmur of the ears, still others recommend laying down on the ground and listen to the sounds under the earth and the call it the yoga of sound. Still others play beautiful music and recommend becoming absorbed in that music. However, none of these are not the correct of the Divine yoga of sound.

With regard to Sound yoga the Upanishads say,

When one focuses on a finest point and becomes established in this focus, then the divine sound automatically becomes manifest and one is able to perform sound yog.



At that point our ten senses are left behind in a state of total absorption and our eleventh sense, the mind, enters into the *ajna chakra*. Finally one is able to hear that celestial sound. Vedic seers have named this *chakra* as *sushumna* and fakirs call it *shahrag*.

Saint Tulsi sahib says,

The path to reach our Beloved lies in shahrag. Why are you wondering in the outer world to find your beloved (God)? The path to find God is within your heart. Enter into ajna chakra and you will find it. It is found not in manmade Kaba (Muslim pilgrimage place), but in God made Kaba (holy place), which means within your own heart or self. You should listen attentively to the reverberating divine sound. The celestial sound is coming to take you back to the source. Listen to it attentively. Remember you cannot hear from the physical ears. When you focus your gaze within ajna chakra then automatically your physical ears will close and the inner ears will open. By that power you can hear the celestial sounds. The original sound of the creation comes from the abode of God and it will take you to God.

In the Nadabindu Upanishads the praise of Sound is sung,

When a mad (in rut) elephant goes to a banana orchard and destroys and eats the orchard and the elephant keeper comes and pierces the elephant with a prong, then the elephant controls his mischief (is controlled). In the same manner our mind is like the mad elephant that is wandering in the garden of sense



objects and is disciplined by the practice of sound yoga.

This means when the mind withdraws from the sense objects and goes towards a state beyond worldly desires—it turns toward God.

Saint Maharishi Mehi says,

Ascending from one sound center to another sound center we reach the OM sound (original sound of the universe). Through this practice we go beyond the cycle of death and birth. When one practices listening to the original sound (OM) then the soul and God become one and unity is established.

Saint Tulsi Das says,

As the water of a river having reached the ocean becomes one and no longer has an identity of a river and becomes part of the ocean; in the same manner when the soul unites with God, duality disappears, becomes tranquil.

Now the soul is known as One or God. Then it is no longer an individual soul, it is Supreme Soul. This is the highest state of achievement: the unity of soul and God.



Chapter Two

The Jain Tradition



Lord Mahavira and the Jain Tradition



The word ‘jain’ is derived from the root word ‘*jina*’ meaning “conqueror.” A *Jina* is one who has conquered the desires of the senses and overcome ignorance, thereby, and has attaining Right Knowledge (Absolute Knowledge) is known as *Jina*. The followers of this *dharma* (spiritual path) are known as Jains. It is thought that original impetus for this tradition involved a reaction to the violence in the form of animal sacrifices condoned in the *Vedas*, a seed of resistance began to germinate. From this seed Jain *dharma* developed.

The details of the origin of Jainism are not known, but the discovery of ancient tablets found at the archeological sites in Udayagiri and Junaghara in India indicates that that Jainism preceded Buddhism.

The honorable teachers of the Jain *dharma* are known as *Tirthankaras*. They are considered to be devoid of all impurities, liberated, and granters of freedom (absolute freedom). The meaning of *tirha* is “to ferry one across the ocean of the world.” The one who has crossed this worldly ocean is known as a



tirthankara. “*Tirthakaroti iti tirthankara*” means “one who has crossed over and helps others cross the world-ocean is *tirthankara*.”⁴⁵

In Jainism, there are twenty-four *Tirthankara*—enlightened spiritual teachers who have showed the way to Liberation. Rishabhadeva was the first *Tirthankara* of Jain *dharma*. After Rishabhdeva there were twenty three more *Tirthankaras*. Lord Mahavira was the last in the line of twenty three. The names of the twenty four *Tirthankaras* of Jainism are as follows:

(1) Rishabhadeva (2) Ajita (3) Sambhava (4) Abhinandana (5) Sumati (6) Padamprbhu (7) Suparshva (8) Chandraprabha (9) Pushpadanta (10) Sheetla (11) Shreyansa (12) Vasupujya (13) Vibhata (14) Ananta (15) Dharma (16) Shanti (17) Kunthu (18) Ara (19) Mallinatha (20) Muni Suvrata (21) Nami (22) Nemi (23) Parshvanatha (24) Vardhamana Mahavira.

⁴⁵ In Indian religions, a recurrent metaphor for a sacred place where one can cross over easily and safely to the far shore of liberation (*moksha*): a limen or threshold. ... These thresholds between heaven and earth are charged with a power and purity which afford a spiritual crossing and are often associated with great events relating to the heroes of myth. ... *Tirtha* can also refer to a holy person or path which affords access to the sacred.

Tirthankara (Skt., ‘builders of the ford’). In Jainism, the title given to the twenty-four omniscient spiritual teachers who have displayed the way of salvation. [From the Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions, p 597.]



In this present discussion we will be only focusing on the first and last of these *Tirthankaras*.

Rishabhadeva

The first *Tirthankara* was Rishabhadeva, son of the King Nabhiraya, the fourteenth king among the generations of the kings of the city of Ayodhya (in North East India). After the passing of King Nabhiraya, Rishabhadeva was crowned as king. Rishabhadeva fathered several progeny from his two queens.

One day the King Rishabhadeva was seated on his magnificent throne, surrounded by hundreds of guest kings. From his throne he was enjoying the beautiful dance of a glamorous woman named Nilanjana. As the celestial performer was dancing and entertaining the kings, she suddenly fainted and died.

With her fall and sudden death, King Rishabhadeva was faced with the reality of the ephemeral nature of this transient world. His appetite for enjoyment and attachment faded and he became dyed with the color of detachment and dispassion. In spite of his family and friends' attempts to dissuade him, he abandoned his crown and left his home in search of Self- Knowledge (*atma Janana*).



King Rishabhadeva became an ascetic and sat in meditation with complete absorption for six months. It is said that he later maintained silence for 1000 years, remaining immersed in the inner practice of meditation for the whole while. Through his practice of this deep state of meditation he attained the state of *Kevali Janana* (Highest Knowledge).

Lord Mahavira

Although Lord Mahavira is the 24th (and the last) *Tirthankara* in the line, he holds the most eminent status in Jain *dharma*. In fact, it was Lord Mahavira who gathered and organized the various elements of Jain *dharma* and expounded them.

Mahavira was born about 2500 years ago (ca 599 B.C.E.) in Vaishali Republic (Bihar), in an aristocratic Kshatriya⁴⁶ clan. His father's name was Siddhartha. Upon his birth, wealth and opulence began to increase in the household. His parents attributed this sudden good luck to the baby, who was therefore named Vardhmana (ever increasing, prosperous). From early childhood he was extremely handsome and was endowed with immense intelligence and fortitude. Therefore, he became known

⁴⁶ Kshatriya is the warrior or royal caste within the caste system of India.



as Brave Mahavira, “great hero.” Mahavira's father was chief of the *Jnatrika* clan, which is reflected in his later epithets *Nata Putta* (scion of *Jnatr* Family).⁴⁷ When Mahavira attained self realization he came to be known as *Sanmati* (possessing extraordinary wisdom). In this way, Vardhaman has come to have many honorary titles.

After mastering various arts and skills suitable to a young man of the *Kshatriya* caste, Prince Vardhamana obeyed the wish of his parents and married a beautiful princess named Yashoda. As was the custom, the marriage was performed according to the wishes and arrangement of the parents. Mahavira and his wife Yashoda had one lovely daughter named Priya Dharshana⁴⁸. Nevertheless, the comforts of luxurious living and the joys of a truly loving family failed to make Mahavira content. His heart was not satisfied with the life of a house-holder. It always felt constraining like the web of *maya*⁴⁹. His inner soul ceaselessly yearned for liberation.

⁴⁷ Mahavira's tribal affiliation is reflected in one of his later epithets, Nigantha Nataputta, which means literally "the naked ascetic of the Jnatrika clan."

⁴⁸ “Beautiful looking”

⁴⁹ Maya is the cosmic illusionary veil which attempts to keep us from experiencing the Divine.



Two years after the death of his parents at the age of 30, Mahavira renounced the worldly pleasures, left his family, and abandoned his householder status for a life of an ascetic. He then received spiritual initiation and became a forest dweller. Living in caves among the hills, he began the practice of intense *sadhana* (inner meditation). Whenever he became near to starvation he would enter the city to beg for food. In this way he practiced intense inner and outer austerities for twelve years.

Once someone recognized him in his mendicant form in the forest, and offered him an arrangement for his personal security.

Mahavira replied,

Arrange security for what? I have chosen the path of equanimity and non-violence. Who, therefore, is going to protect me? I am not of the body. I am established in the Self.

During this time of his austerities Mahavira had to endure great afflictions, such as snakes, scorpions and wild beasts pestering him and threatening his life. There were also natural phenomena in the form of dust storms, heat, and vicious heat waves, which might have deterred him from his inner path of meditation. However, Mahavira, “the great hero” remained resolute and unmoved.



At the age of 42, Mahavira attained the state of complete dispassion, defeating the foes of attachments, selfish desires, and hatred. Thus, he then became a true *Mahavira*, or great conqueror. He attained the divine power of omniscience and became known as *Bhagawan* (Lord). He achieved enlightenment (*Kevali Jnana*) and he became *Tirthankara* (a bridge builder to the shore of absolute freedom). He was honored with the name, Bhagawan Mahavira.

Lord Mahavira: His Teachings

Thereupon, Lord Mahavira began his journey to spread the essential teachings of Jain tradition. He regarded the higher castes or higher classes as having superior value based only on birth. Therefore, he completely disregarded the caste system. He considered the thoughts and actions of a man to be the true measure of the excellence of a human being not the high caste or class. He protested against the established religious observances and rituals, and sought to restrain religious inexorability and squandering of monetary resources.

Lord Mahavira never tried to coerce others to follow Jain doctrines and practices. His attitude was progressive and novel. He says:



Whatever I say, you must test this with your own reasoning and verify it through your own experience.

Do not accept what I say blindly by faith alone until it passes the litmus test of intellection. Otherwise, it will never be yours. If you accept what I teach on the basis of the sacred texts, or from my convincing reasoning, or even because of my radiant personality, but not by testing with your own reasoning, then in the end this will create darkness (ignorance) in you not light.

Mahavira's teaching about the Law of *Karma* was similar to the other saints of Indian traditions. He taught that each person's own *karmas* or past deeds are the cause of each individual soul's present condition. Life and death, joy and sorrow, are all caused by one's past deeds or *karmas*. He said that it is ignorance to consider other persons as the cause of our joy, sorrow, life and death. When it is understood that living beings suffer due to the consequences of their own past errors, then it will be understood that it is only through counteracting one's own errors and recognizing one's own mistakes that a person can become happy.

The central point of Mahavira's teaching is about the liberation of the soul (*atman*). Primarily, Jainism is the path of freedom. Lord Mahavira elaborated *anuvrata* (a moral code of conduct)



and emphasized the absolute importance of the development of human character:

you are god⁵⁰ (Ishwara): recognize yourself. Develop the inner divine qualities and become God. If the soul labors in the right direction, then that soul can become God (parma atman).

Lord Mahavira's Teachings on *Atman* and Meditation

Here are we present some references to *atman* and meditation as taught by Mahavira:

Atman is Brahma (the Ultimate Reality). Brahmacharya (living in Brahma; restraint of the senses)⁵¹ is the state of being established in one's soul.. The practitioner who is freed from the body and established in the soul is the true brahmacharya. The practitioner who lives abandoning (detaching from) his/body body (desires of flesh) is a true brahamchari.

⁵⁰ [As Soul is my god.Renunciation is my prayer.Amity is my devotion.Self restraint is my strength.Non-violence is my religion. --[Acharya Mahaprajna](http://www.herenow4u.de/Pages/eng/Sections/Towards_Inner_Harmony/TowardsInnerHarmony_15.Br.htm) (http://www.herenow4u.de/Pages/eng/Sections/Towards_Inner_Harmony/TowardsInnerHarmony_15.Br.htm)]

⁵¹ In the Indian traditions the word *brahmcharya*, generally, is used in the sense of continence, but restraints of all senses is implied in this concept. The one who has restraint over sensual desires lives in Brahma (the Infinite Spirit).



Through meditation of the soul Param Samadhi (highest state of concentration; state of liberation) is attained.

Absorbed in meditation the mendicant leaves behind all impurities. Therefore, meditation is the cure for all the impurities and afflictions of the soul.

If your vision itself becomes the source of removing darkness [by the practice of meditation the divine light dawns and the practitioner's divine vision opens up], then why would a man need an outside source of light? If the soul itself is an abode of infinite joy why then would the sensual pleasures have any value for that practitioner?

In the above quote Lord Mahavira describes the divine vision which removes of darkness. His words find support in an ancient anecdote about Mragavati, a devout woman and devoted wife, who was able to see clearly in the darkness.

The bright *bindu* point [infinitesimal point] emerges when the practitioner becomes established in the discipline of focusing on one point with the beams of both eyes. When the inner light is attained, a practitioner is established in the divine light, which is not conditioned by any outward source of light. This technique is spoken of by different names in texts of the various saints and traditions.⁵² In this practice of light the practitioner sitting in

⁵² Driśhtī yoga is known by various names in different texts and traditions: *Bindu-dhyana*, *drishti yoga*, *Atama-dhyana*, *Preksha-dhyana*, *Vipashyana dhyana*, *Jyoti dhyana*,



meditation is able to observe the scenes from anywhere (clairvoyance).⁵³ The outward darkness does not hinder the power and ability of seeing. Therefore, Mahavira has asked why the practitioner would need outward light once his vision has itself become the source (instrument) of removing darkness.

Once established in light, the practitioner hears various types of sweet inner melodious sounds. The saints have named this sound the *Anahad* (Un-struck, self producing divine sound). Through the technique of *Shabad Yoga* (Yoga of Divine Sound) the practitioner goes beyond these sounds and enters the eternal sound—*Pranava dhvani OM* (the cosmic sound of OM), through which the practitioner reaches God (*paramatma*—the Supreme Spirit). Having reached there distinction between the devotee (practitioner) and God (object of worship) disappears. The soul which is united with the Supreme Soul, becomes the Supreme Soul. This is known as liberation or *nirvana*.

A discussion on the *Shabad Yoga* is found in the text, *Jnanarnva* composed by Shrishubhachandracharya:

This focus (intense concentration) moves from one sound to another, and from one yoga to another.

Shunya-dhyana, Nasagra dhyana, Shambhavi Mudra, Vaishvanavi-Mudra, Adhar dhyana, Sushumna dhyana, etc.

⁵³ It is also said in the *Yogashikhopanishad*, “Absorbing mind in Bindu behold the scenes of great distance.”



Therefore, it is known as that which is endowed with focus and logic.

Lord Mahavira speaks of the experience of the *Bindu*—point—in meditation as the experience of *sva* (inner self) by Lord Mahavira. Dr. Hukumchand Bharill in his book, *Tirthankara Mahavira and his Sarvodaya Tirtha*⁵⁴ has beautifully depicted the inner depth of meditation practice of Lord Mahavira. From these illustrations it is evident that Mahavira practiced inner sound yoga or (*Shabad Yoga*)⁵⁵.

In the Jain texts we find various references to this,

[In the deep state of meditation] Lord Mahavira experienced the divine sounds. The sound of Om was ceaselessly emanating, and the inner form of atman manifested in its utmost grandeur, and the nectar was pouring.

Mahavira knew that in a life without morality and observance of discipline it is impossible to attain liberation and well-being of the self.

Mahavira said,

Restraint (Sheela, life of moral rectitude) is the ladder to liberation.

⁵⁴ Literally, “Bridge-builder Mahavira and his All-uplifting Bridge”

⁵⁵ Jain Acharya Shshil Kuamarji Maharaj Ji practiced various steps of yoga including sound vibration.



He stressed purity of life and practice of moral behavior. He emphasized the five principles: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, *brahmacharya* (restraint in sexual misconduct), and non-possession (lack of greed; being satisfied with one's possessions). In order to apply these principles in daily life, he taught the monks and nuns *mahavrata* (great vows), and laymen and laywomen and *anuvrata* (lesser vows).⁵⁶ It is absolutely necessary for spiritual practice to be rid of sensual pleasures. He states,

Sound, form, smell, taste and touch are sensual substances which are transient. Therefore, the practitioner should not be attached or attracted to the sensual pleasures.

Until the last moments of his life Mahavira inspired many to seek world peace through the establishment in inner peace, and he encouraged people to realize their divine nature. For 30 years he traveled throughout India to spread his message. At the age of 72, on the day of *Diwali* (the festival of lights) in the town of Pawa Puri, Mahavira left his body while in the state of deep meditation and attained *nirvana*. His close disciple was Indrabhutti Gautama.

Shvetambara (White Clad) and Digambara (Sky Clad)

⁵⁶ The rules and vows for *Sadhus* and *Sadhvis* (monks and nuns) are much more detailed and strict (*mahavrata*). For the laity, the householders the rules are comparatively less severe (*anuvrata*).



In the early stage of his renunciation, Mahavira wore white clothing. However, during long periods of his intense meditation his clothes eventually deteriorated. Many centuries later, Jain *dharma* became divided into two sects. The first group wore white clothing and came to be known as *Shvetambaras* (white-clad), and the other group rejected clothing so as to emulate Mahavira's asceticism, and became known as *Digambaras* (sky-clad).

The major texts of the *Shvetambara* sect are known as *angas* (limbs):

1. *Acgaranga*: The conduct of monks and penance of Lord Mahavira.
2. *Sutra-Kritang*: Describes the principle of nonviolence and the Jain concept of the universe.
3. *Sthaanang*: It consists of the discussion of the basic substances of the universe, such as living beings, *Jeevas*.
4. *Samvayang*: provides the comprehensive knowledge of the universal constituents and concepts in the light of substance (matter), environment, time, and experience.



5. *Bhagvati Sutta*: (contains questions and answers about soul, matter and related subjects.
6. *Jnatadharmakatha*: contains stories illustrating the principles and teachings of the Jain religion.
7. *Upaska Dashang*: describes the code of conduct of Jain householders, along with the stories of ten householders who religiously followed Lord Mahavira's teachings.
8. *Antahkrit Dashang*: contains the stories of ten monks who became omniscient and attained salvation by destroying their *karma*).
9. *Anuttaropapadik*: descriptions of the lives of ten monks who attained the status of heavenly beings.
10. *Prashna-vyakarnananga*: contains questions, answers and stories regarding the five major vows and demerits.
11. *Vipaka-shrutang*: Stories that explains the consequences of good and bad *karma*.



12. *Drishti-vadang*: consists of five segments.⁵⁷

These texts are written in the *Ardhmagadhi* language and are believed to be more than two thousand years old.

The *Digambra* sect does not entirely subscribe to these texts. It has a separate canon in Sanskrit in which the parables and legends of Lord Mahavira and other *Tirthankaras* are depicted. These texts, known as *Puranas*, are 24 in number. Nevertheless, there are no significant doctrinal differences between these two groups.

The Method of *Sadhana* (Meditation Practice)

In Jain *dharma* is based on the following three principles *Samyagdarshan* (Right Belief, View), *Samyagjnana* (Right Knowledge), and *Samyagchartira* (Right Conduct). These are known as *ratna traya* or “three gems.” These three in unison constitute the path to liberation:

Determining the true nature of self (atman) is “Right view”;; knowledge of the nature of the soul is “Right knowledge;,” and immersing in the true nature of the soul (divine spirit) is “Right Conduct. (Purusharthsidhopaya, shloka 216)

⁵⁷ The details of these *angas* are accessed on June, 26/2005 from <http://www.jainstudy.org/jsc7.03-QfromS.htm> (the editor)



In their discourses on inner meditation, the saints [enlightened beings] describe two specific techniques: Divine light and Divine sound. However, these techniques are not always clearly stated in the various saints' teachings, and often there are only covert references to these methods are mentioned. Light and sound are said to be the energy [facets] or the celestial form of *Paramatma* (the Supreme Spirit). Usually, in the Saint Tradition two techniques which are sequential are described to experience the divine nature. First is *Bindu Dhyan* (*preksha dhyana*—the focused seeing; the yoga of Light); the second is *Surat Śabda Yoga* (the focus on inner sounds; the yoga of Sound). We have briefly presented these techniques above.

Many of the saints discuss the need for *mantra japa* (recitation of a divine name) and meditation on a sacred form as a preparation for the practice of *Bindu Dhyan* and *Surat Śabda Yoga*. These disciplines, the recitation of a holy name and the focus on holy forms, enable the practitioner to have success with the subtler forms of meditation.

Here we give some references from Jain scholars which describe the essential beliefs and practices of Jain *dharma*. These readings will facilitate the reader's understanding of the unique and essential forms of Jainism.



Mantra Japa

Acharya Tulsi speaks about *mantra japa* in his book, *An Outline of the Science of Life*,

We have only one consciousness stream. When we associate with truth we ascend upwards and when we associate with untruth we fall down. The japa, mantra method was developed to control the mind so that it would be stabilized and it would be prevented from wandering into wrong thinking.

The following thoughts are from some of the great teachers of Jainism explaining *mantra japa*.

Mahamanasvi Shri Jinendrivarani says,

The easiest form of meditation in dharma is mantra japa. It is very significant for spiritual progress. The practitioner may choose, according to his or her interest and faith, any mantra such as an arhant (the enlightened one), siddha (the accomplished one) or omkar, etc. (divine sound, OM).

Shubhchandracharya says:

Arhant is the mantra of four letters. Therefore, it bestows accordingly four desired fruits of life: dharma (Lawful conduct; ethical conduct), artha (wealth), kama (worldly desires), and moksha (liberation).

Manas Dhyana



With regard to *manas dhyana* Shubhchandracharya says,

In the meditation of manas dhyana, the practitioner should meditate on the physical form of arhant (divinity). Arhant is endowed with great fame and is a self-existing being in the midst of omniscience, Lord, and effulgent light of sun and moon. (Jnanarnva—sarga—39—shloka,1)

One should meditate upon the flawless arhant Jindeva (the one who has conquered his desires) who is all knowing and devoid of all impurities.” (Jnanarnva, p. 361)

Drishti Yoga (Preksha Dhyana)

Preksha Dhyana (The Yoga of Vision or seeing⁵⁸) is the subtle form of meditation. It is known by various names in the Jain tradition. The word *preksha* is derived from the Sanskrit root verb *iksha*, which means “seeing.” With the *pra* prefix it means “seeing by entering in depth” or “observe carefully.” In Jain literature, two words are used to describe the Yoga of Light meditation: *preksha* and *vipashyana*. However, the term *vipashyana* is also used Buddhist meditation techniques. Therefore, in the present Jain context we use the term *preksha dhyana* to avoid confusion with the Buddhist techniques.

⁵⁸ “Seeing” does not mean external vision, but subtle concentration by mental insight.



In the *Dashvaikalick Sutra* it is said:

See the atman through the atman. Seeing is the essential element of this meditation and therefore it is named preksha dhyana.

Acharya Tulsi says,

*The Center of “seeing” or inner focus is known as ajnachakra (the third eye)
When the mind is focused on it the divine light pervades every part of the being.
The life of one who focuses on this center of life (in front of the nose between the two eye-brows)
is ever filled with the smile and joy.”*

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Acharya Mahapragya says:

The goal of the Yoga of Vision is to know one’s self. As long as the soul is covered with afflictions and desires we are unable to know our self. Therefore, to remove this veil or coverings it is necessary to concentrate the mind.”

The Yoga of Vision is the technique of looking at the soul. Whom shall we see? We shall see our Self and experience our own nature. We shall manifest the true form of our own nature. Seeing the true form of oneself is the Yoga of Vision.

Collect your consciousness in the sushumna or in the (tenth gate), ajnachakra.

XXX



According to Maha Manaswi Shri Jinendra Varni:

Meditation beyond physical forms is known as Shukla Dhyana (light meditation). This meditation is beyond name and form. One sees only the inner light, and it is therefore called shukla. The yogi experiences the indescribable form of God in the form of light. Therefore, this meditation is known as the meditation of light—shukla dhyana.

XXX

According to Shubhachandrachrya,

[In this way] The Ascetic who has understood the technique of mantra meditation, must then meditate on a point in front of the nose and in the middle of both eyebrow, focused on the unmovable form.

Surat Śabada Yoga (Yoga of Divine Sound)

In the Yoga of Sound (*Surat Shabda Yoga*), the gross material sound (*anhad* sound) manifests initially, and thereafter the essential inner divine sound, OM (*anahad*), which is the cosmic sound of the beginning.

There are several references to the essential cosmic sound in the in the context of Lord Mahavira's teachings:

Taking hold of this essential anahat element (the sound of OM) or Shivanam, the ascetics have gone across [beyond] this world of delusion and pain. In this way meditation upon the mantra and the essential sound are described. (Jnanarnva (sarga: 38)



Also the technique of meditation on the OM sound is described,

O Ascetic! Meditate on the cosmic sound of OM because it is like rain for extinguishing the fire of suffering. And it is also like a lamp which illuminates the subtle essence of the sacred teachings. It is the governance of good deeds.

xxx

Acharya Tulsi says:

From the infinitesimal point and the divine sound the subtlest waves (vibrations) reverberate.

xxx

In his book, *The Method of Using Preksha Dhyana*, Acharya Mahapragya writes:

Close both ears with your hands and listen to the inner sounds.

xxx

The *Jnanarnva* (sarga 36) says:

The mendicant should meditate on the sky with rainbow, lightning, and the sound of thunder, and full of clouds.

xxx

Swami Jnananada says in the *Pandita Puja*:

In the divine sound of God (Bhagawan) all the mysteries are revealed.

xxx

Shri Jinendravarni states,

What does one hear with these ears? It is a sweet sound. . . Closing my eyes, as if I were united with



God, I was away from this world. Only my Peace incarnate and dispassionate Lord (Mahavira) and I existed [ego and worldly concerned had vanished in the state of complete tranquility].”

Atma

[Here we present some references representing Jain view on the nature of Atma]

This soul in itself is illumined by the light of knowledge. However, in this body it is covered by three coverings: the gross body and two subtle bodies (Taijas and Karman shareer). As long as this soul does not recognize its enlightened form the bondage remains. (74)

An ascetic established in the Self (atma) is liberated. The ascetic who is not thus established does not attain liberation through mere observance of niyama (outer observances). The state of being established in Atma is the Right Faith (belief verified by experience) and firmness in this is the ‘discerning character endowed with knowledge’. (76)

Both the *Sankhya* system and the *Nyaya* systems of Indian philosophy consider that liberation can be achieved through reasoning—that is not the conviction [in Jain teachings].

It is said in the PunditPuja Tika:

The person who has recognized the true nature of the soul (atma) and experienced it through self knowledge,



merges into the Pure Form and becomes parmatma (Lord, the Supreme Soul).

Further,

Those who have recognized the true form of the Self (soul), their life only is an accomplishment.

Acharya Tulsi proclaims,

The only method to know Consciousness is to experience (the true nature of) one's Self and thus to purify and uplift the mental tendencies. It is most desirable for the practitioner to search for one's self by one's self.....There is no other means other than meditation which verifies subjectively and substantiates objectively that which previously was only known through listening or teaching.

The Nature of Paramatama (Supreme Soul)

The Jain text, *Jnanarnva* elaborates on the nature of Supreme Soul:

Human beings without knowledge of the Supreme Soul wander through the law of karma in the deep forest of the world. By the knowledge of the Supreme Soul a human being attains a prominent place—even greater than Indra (king of the gods). Know Him to be the true manifested Supreme Soul. He is the abode of all joys. He is the brilliant light of knowledge. He is the protector. He is the Supreme Person beyond thinking and His nature can not be described.



The One, who can not be described by words and is not conceivable as matter or material stuff is the Supreme Soul. He is infinite and transcends sound and has no birth, and is not subject to wandering in the world. Without thoughts meditate on the Supreme Soul.

The Pundit Puja Tika states,

By merely meditating upon Him all inflictions of the living souls (jivas) which have arisen from the world are destroyed. These are not destroyed through any other means. He is the Lord of three worlds, and is the Indestructible Supreme Soul.

Whatever is the Supreme Soul so am I. Whatever is my essential nature is the essence of Supreme Soul. Therefore, I am fitted for meditating on my inner Supreme Soul- none other.

Thus, we see that in Jain tradition (*dharma*) we are told that the destruction of *karmas* is accomplished through self realization. For this self realization three essential Jain doctrines are stated: right perception, right knowledge, and right action.

Jain *dharma* recognizes nonviolence as the highest *dharma* (duty). It believes in an egalitarian society that is built on the foundation of tolerance and good moral character. It proclaims that if you remove the dirty layers and coverings from the soul and abstain from harmful actions you will attain the knowledge of *Kevali* (“oneliness”) and you will become the Supreme Soul.



Jain sages have described various forms of meditation, but have mostly elaborated on the *shukla dhyana* –meditation of light. In the *Vedic* literature this is known as the Yoga of light, and as meditation on the third eye. But in Jain literature the final step of meditation or the Yoga of Sound is spoken of sparingly. The Yoga of Sound is preceded by the Yoga of Light. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the great *tirthankaras*, ascetics and sages of Jain *dharma* were accomplished in the essential practices.



Chapter Three

Buddhism



Lord Buddha and the Buddhist Tradition

The 6th century B.C.E. holds a significant place in the history of humankind. This time period is known as the age of spiritual awakening. During this period many religious leaders were born and there arose many waves of spiritual knowledge in various regions of the world. In Iran, there was Zarathustra (the founder of Zoroastrianism); in China Confucius (the founder of Confucianism), and Lao Tzu (the founder of Taoism), were influencing people through their philosophical teachings. There was also a wave of spiritual revolution taking place in India. Its pioneers were Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha. The revolution in India was not merely one of religious fervor, but also involved the political and social arenas. Throughout this time of transformation the people raised their voices against the rituals and violent sacrifices of the established Vedic tradition. The caste system was also questioned openly during this time, and many other aspects of the prevailing tradition were seen to be powered by selfish motives.



Social Stratification

At the time of Buddha, Indian society was divided into four castes. These were the *Brahman*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and *Shudra* classes. This division was not related to merit or deeds, but was a tradition simply based on birth. The four groups engaged in distinct and separate life styles. Marriage out of caste was simply not allowed. It is clear from Jain and Buddhist texts that *Brahman* and *Kshatriya* castes were the ruling castes. They were always in tension with regard to their authority to govern. The *Kshatriya* consistently competed with the *Brahmans* in knowledge, science, and ascetic practices. The *Vaishya* class held an inferior status to the Brahman and Kshatriya. The word householder is commonly used to refer to the *Vaishya* class. They were respected in royal circles only on the basis of their wealth and status and therefore their representatives were quite influential in the King's court. The *Shudra* class were all non-Aryan or were aborigines. In addition to these four castes there also were the *Chandalas* (untouchables) who were so low they were not even considered a caste. It was a sin to even see a *Chandala*, and even more so to touch one. They were segregated from the society. In addition, at this time the people in the society were also in the grip of charm of various cults organized on the basis of black magic, spirits, and demons. The fire of ingratitude, selfish attachment, hatred and atrocities prevailed



throughout the land. The country was fertile ground for revolution.

Religious Conditions

At the time of Lord Buddha's birth the condition of religion (dharma) was chaotic and very confused. The society had fragmented into hundreds of subcastes. Religious practices had been reduced to empty rituals and outward display. People worshiped materialism (worldly gains in this life and after) while leaving true spirituality unattended. At this time animal sacrifice was at its zenith. Each day the priests of the temples satisfied their selfish needs by slaughtering animals. Their blood covered the sacred sacrificial altars. Sacrificial rituals had begun to be thought of as the path to liberation (*moksha*). Wealthy people began thinking that they could be absolved of sin by having sacrifices performed. The common and poor people were unable to afford such opulent sacrificial rituals. But these less fortunate people were engaged in equally delusional paths to liberation. Many practiced physical austerities for the sake of their spiritual well-being: standing on one foot, meditating with one arm always raised, and extreme fasting, for example, were all employed for this purpose. Thus, an immense illusory web of



beliefs based on these austerities was spreading, and even Lord Buddha practiced some of these in his early ascetic life.

At the same time there were those in the society who supported neither the sacrificial sects nor the severely austere practices. Predictably, a few of these aspirants protested against these established norms. Showing their back to these prevalent rituals, they sought the truth as wandering monks. Result: before advent of the Buddha various sects and schools of philosophy arose. During this time of religious confusion, the hearts of many people were longing for a way to eradicate suffering and find answers to the essential questions of life. None of the prevailing cults offered such a path. What was needed at this crucial time were the key human virtues of compassion, loving kindness and sympathy. The Lord Buddha descended upon this earth for the purpose of reviving these vital virtues (benevolent samskaras).

Birth of Buddha

In 563 BCE Lord Buddha (whose family name was Siddhartha), the founder of Buddha dharma, was born in the valley of Nepal near the city of Kapilvastu in the forest of Lumbini.. His father's name was Shudhodhana and his mother's name was Mahamaya Devi. Shudhodhana, who belonged to the famous Ikshvaku clan,



was the king of Madhya Pradesh. Kapilvastu was the capital of his kingdom.

When the Buddha's mother was pregnant with this beautiful child she expressed her desire to the King that he allow her to go to her father's house in the city of Devdeha. The King gladly gave his permission and she set out for her father's house with a caravan of her attendants. On the way Mahamaya went into labor and gave birth to this radiant child. She then returned to Kapilvastu with her newborn child and her retinue in order to be with her [husband] king. According to tradition, as the King was so overjoyed by the birth of his son, that he summoned the wise sage and priest named Kaldeval to consult about the child's horoscope. After seeing the brilliant face of the child the sage proclaimed: "This exceptional child will be a great and wise (enlightened) man. Further, if he chooses to stay as a householder he will become a sovereign king. If he however chooses to be an ascetic he will become a Buddha—an enlightened being." All the rituals of a newborn were performed and he was named Siddhartha. But after the seventh day of giving birth to her son, his mother Mahamaya passed away. The responsibility for raising him fell on the shoulders of his aunt, Gautami. Later, the king made Gautami his highest queen.



Having been raised by Gautami, Siddhartha became known as Gautama.

When the child Siddhartha became a youth the king sent him for education and study to the family Guru whose name was Vishwamitra. Siddhartha had an exceptional intellect and he quickly grasped the knowledge of all subjects. Once while he was walking in the royal gardens a swan who was crying pitifully suddenly fell at Siddhartha's feet. The swan had been struck by an arrow and was throbbing with pain. Siddhartha pulled the arrow from its body and proceeded to care for the stricken swan. In the meantime his cousin, Devadatta came running and informed him: "This is my swan! It was struck by my arrow". Siddhartha replied: "I have protected this swan. It sought refuge in me and it is mine". The argument grew fierce and the two boys finally took their dispute to the king. The king listened to both stories and pronounced that the one who protects the life of a creature has the right to that creature. This was a great disappointment to Devadatta. He became envious and felt malice towards Siddhartha.

In the midst of all the comforts and luxuries in the palace, Siddhartha still loved solitude. This concerned the father who sought to insulate Siddhartha from the harsh realities of everyday



life. He succeeded in doing this until the day Siddhartha expressed a desire to take a walk in the forest outside the confines of the palace. Siddhartha set out for the forest riding in a beautiful chariot. The crowds of the city were eager to catch a glimpse of their prince who had been virtually cloistered for many years. While going through the crowd on the way to the forest the prince saw a man who was very old and feeble. The old man walked with the help of a cane and exerted a great effort. His body shook from old age. The prince asked the charioteer: “What kind of man is this?” The charioteer replied: “This is an old man who once was like you, but he has become as you now see him because of old age. We will all become like this when we are old”. Upon hearing this Siddhartha felt distressed and detached, and he immediately returned to the palace. The king found out about this event and became alarmed. When he discovered the cause of Siddhartha’s distress he ordered the chief minister to prevent even the shadow of an old person to be seen anywhere near the palace. Once again the prince went for an outing to the forest. On his way this time he saw a sick and ailing man, who was lying on the ground crying in pain. The prince asked the charioteer to stop and then he asked the charioteer who this man was. The charioteer told Siddhartha that this man was diseased and sick. He explained that disease is the nature of the body. The prince was



overwhelmed with compassion and was unable to bear the sight of the ailing man. He had to return to the palace. Due to the sudden return of the prince, the king discovered what had happened. After finding out the reason for Siddhartha's anxiety he ordered that neither old nor sick people should be allowed near the palace, thereby hoping to shield his son from these realities. Nevertheless Siddhartha became disturbed and restless from these two sights of suffering. He considered: If old age and sickness are the nature of the body then there must be a way to get freedom from these menacing phenomena.

Thereafter, his mind could not find peace within the walls of the palace. One day he went out walking and as he was strolling he saw a corpse being carried to the cremation grounds. The loved ones of the deceased were following and weeping in great pain at their loss. This was the first time in his life Siddhartha had seen this, and he was astonished. He again asked his charioteer what was happening. The charioteer explained: "Some man has died and his relatives are taking his lifeless body to burn it at the cremation grounds." Thus Siddhartha learned, to his despair, that all living beings will meet the same end. Overcome by dejection the prince returned to the palace. Again the king came to know of the event and thought it must be a bad omen that his son was repeatedly distressed by these common life events. He



remembered the prophecy spoken at the time of Siddhartha's birth, and in his concern the king quickly arranged for bondages to worldly attachments to keep the prince tethered to the material world. However, Siddhartha continued in this vein and his detachment to this world only increased. Seeing the prince's growing aloofness, the king hurriedly arranged for Siddhartha to be married to a most beautiful girl named Yashodhara, the daughter of a neighboring king.

Yashodhara was always eager to serve her new husband with her devout love for him. When the prince became 26 years of age he was blessed with a son. When he heard the news of the birth of his son, instead of rejoicing, Siddhartha withdrew into a very contemplative mood. He observed in his mind that the birth of his son was a bondage which pulled him away from spiritual thoughts. Therefore, he named his son Rahul. Rahu is the mythical deity in Hinduism who obscures the light of the sun during an eclipse.

The king arranged for the prince to be continually immersed in worldly pleasure and distracted from the spiritual path. Nevertheless, even a wife, son, throne, beautiful women, and all means of enjoyment were unable to satisfy or divert Siddhartha. One day on his way to participate in a garden celebration he



noticed an ascetic (*sadhu*) passing by. Curious about the man who appeared to be an embodiment of detachment and filled with contentment, Siddhartha asked his charioteer about the man. The charioteer said: “Prince! He is a mendicant.” The prince further inquired, “What is a mendicant?” The charioteer replied, “A mendicant is one who remains detached from the world and stays immersed in meditation. He abandons worldly pleasures and attachments. He has overcome the sorrows of old age, disease and death.” This discourse about the life of a mendicant was very pleasing and consoling to Prince Siddhartha.

Inspired by this example of renunciation, Siddhartha approached his father with great respect and requested: “Father, now that your grandson has been born please give me permission to renounce this householder’s life as my heart feels no pleasure in these worldly things.” The king was utterly shocked and tried to persuade Siddhartha with various arguments. Still determined, Siddhartha further asked: “Father, if you could find me a remedy for these four things I will abandon my desire to leave the palace life. These four things are as following: I should never die, never become old, never experience sickness and never face any kind of deficiency. The King replied: “All these matters concern the natural laws. Who is there that has control over these things?” The king refused to give him permission to leave.



That very day the child Rahul was seven days old, and the king arranged for a great celebration to mark the auspicious day. The celebration included opulent festivities with performances by attractive dancers. As Siddhartha was watching these extravagant festivities he slipped into a state of deep contemplation and then fell asleep. When the exhausted dancers saw the prince sleeping the maides exhausted from dancing too dozed off. sleeping wherever it was immediately convenient. After some time the prince awoke. He saw in the bright light of the lamps that these beautiful dancers, scattered here and there, were completely unconscious. He noticed that some of these sleeping damsels' mouths were hanging open, some were drooling, and some had their clothes disheveled. What had looked like a scene of rejoicing now appeared to Siddhartha as a cremation ground filled with dead bodies. An overwhelming sense of detachment consumed him. He returned to his private royal quarters where his wife and son were fast asleep. Seeing the beautiful face of his son he wanted to hold him, but he did not do so as this might awaken his wife and thereby ruin his secret plans. He decided at that moment to flee from his life as a householder.



Under cover of the silence of night, Siddhartha asked his charioteer, Chandak, to prepare the horses. In the midst of a summer night gleaming with the light of a full moon, Siddhartha exited the great gates of the palace. Crossing the boundaries of three states he reached the Anoma River. Siddhartha stopped at the banks of the river and with the sharp edge of his sword he cut off the locks of his hair and removed his princely ornaments and garments. Handing over his precious ornaments to his charioteer Chandak, Siddhartha asked him to return to the kingdom. The charioteer, much taken aback and distressed, returned to the kingdom and reported the incident. This flight of Siddhartha is known as “the Great Renunciation.”

As he continued on the way to Raj Graha Siddhartha came across three *ashrams* and stayed with their *acharyas* (teachers). However, their meditation practices seemed inadequate and incomplete to him. He decided to spend some time in solitude in the Pandava hills. After that he went to Uruvella (Bodhagaya) where there lived a pundit named Alara Kalama, an acclaimed teacher of Samkhya philosophy. Siddhartha studied under him and learned certain yogic techniques. Yet again, the inner quest of Siddhartha was not satisfied. From there he went to study with Acharya Ruddrak (the son of sage Uddalak) who was a renowned teacher and scholar. He too could not fulfill the



spiritual need of Siddhartha. Siddhartha then undertook a path of intense meditation and self mortifications on the banks of the river Niranjana (Falgu). The practice of intense austerities made him frail and weak. At times he would become unconscious due to lack of food. Even with this practice of self mortification Siddhartha felt no closer to realizing the Truth. In this way many years passed during which he was performing arduous austerities.

After living and practicing in this manner for many years, Siddhartha began to feel disheartened. It is believed that in this state of mind Siddhartha saw Indra in a dream. Indra was playing a stringed instrument. One string of this instrument was too tight and the sound coming from it was discordant, while another string was too loose and was equally displeasing. A third string was neither too tight nor too loose and its sound was very pleasant. Siddhartha felt inspired that the lesson from this dream was that the middle way was the superior path. He could see that extreme austerities would not lead to the attainment of enlightenment. He came to the conclusion that it was proper to follow the middle path, and to abandon both the hard austerity of asceticism and the life of leisure. After coming to this realization he bathed in the river Niranjana near Bodhagaya (in Bihar



state)⁵⁹ and sat in meditation on a grass mat under a Banyan tree. In this way determined Siddhartha, by one-pointed focused meditation, attained enlightenment (bodhi) at the age of 35. His inner heart was radiating the light of spiritual knowledge (*brahmajnana*). He realized the Truth and Inner Peace (Shanti). This is known as “the Great Realization of Enlightenment” (Buddhahood). From that point on Siddhartha was known as Lord Buddha and *Tathagata* (literally, “thus gone like that”). Having attained Buddhahood, the all knowing state, he spoke these words

I have run through a course of many births looking for the maker of this dwelling (body) and have not found him. Painful is birth again and again. Now you are seen, O Builder of the house (body), you will not build the house again. All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is destroyed, the mind, set on the attainment of nirvana (enlightenment,) has attained the extinction of desires” (Dhammapada, Jaravaggo: 8 - 9)

Lord Buddha explained that the word “Buddha” means to be filled with unbounded knowledge as vast as the infinite space. He further said,:

I Gautama have attained this state and if you try wholeheartedly you also can attain this state.

⁵⁹ According to a legend, after his bath Siddhartha is offered milk and rice by a maiden Sujata. In receiving the food Siddhartha marked the end of his life of asceticism, as well as the turning point—attainment of enlightenment.



After his great enlightenment (*nirvana*) Siddhartha, now the Buddha, proceeded to share the path to nirvana with others. His first sermon, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law,” was given in Rishi Pattam of Sarnath, near the city of Banaras in northeastern India. As a result of this, five men became his disciples. During the remaining 45 years of his life he spread his message to all, from kings to poor alike, by traveling through neighboring states, such as Avadha, and Bihar. Most of his teaching took place in the states of Bihar near the city of Ayodhya. In his first talk the Buddha taught: “Mendicants should avoid these two extremes: First, avoid sensual pleasures and second, refrain from pain-inflicting austerities. Avoiding these two extremes I have found the Middle Way. This path leads to knowledge and truth. Also this is the bestower of Peace (*shanti*)”.

Prasenajit, the king of Koshel kingdom, Bimbsara, the king of Magadha, and Ajatshatru accepted this message and became the disciples of Lord Buddha. The Buddha established a community of his mendicant disciples. To them he gave this three-fold proclamation: “I take refuge in dharma, I take refuge in Buddha, I take refuge in the community of monks.” In the time of the Buddha, Sanskrit was the established language of sacrament, therefore the word *dharma* is used; however, in later times, Pali



and Prakrit became the languages] of the common people. Thus the Sanskrit word *dharma* became *dhamma* in the Pali language.

In accord with Lord Mahavira of Jain dharma, Buddha was a great proponent of non violence. He was always eager to sacrifice his own life for the sake of protecting the life of other beings. He once said to a king: “If you think you will attain heaven by sacrificing some helpless animal, then you should be able to find the greater reward by sacrificing a human being. Oh, King! Cut the shackles of that animal, and free the animal! Instead, sacrifice me. I ask you, will it not be, that you will acquire a greater merit through human sacrifice?” The king was shocked.

Many years had passed since Buddha had left Kapilvastu. The king, Shudhodhana, his father, having not heard from his son for a long time, became eager and anxious to meet with him. The king sent many letters through various channels to contact him. Finally, the king sent Buddha’s childhood friend, Kalaudai, as an ambassador to carry a letter to him. When Kalaudai reached Buddha he undertook the vow of a mendicant as a follower of Buddha and never returned to the king. After six months had passed, Kalaudai finally gave the letter to Buddha and told him the news of his father. On the day of full moon in the month of



March, considered an auspicious time to travel, Lord Buddha and his entourage set out for Kapilvastu. The whole city was overjoyed by the return of the prince, who was now the great Buddha.

The King, meeting with his ascetic son, became overwhelmed with emotions. He escorted his son to the palace along with his followers. All the townspeople came to see the great Buddha, but his wife Yashodhara could not gather the courage to see this sight—her husband as an ascetic. After persuasion by his father Buddha proceeded toward the inner quarters of the palace of Yashodhara. She came to meet him, and overwhelmed with emotions, fell at her Lord's feet. Lord Buddha soon left the palace and the kingdom of King Shudhodhana. As the time passed both Yashodhara and the King were initiated into the Dhamma (the Path) by the Buddha. The Buddha's step brother Nanda was to be consecrated as the heir of the kingdom after the king Sudhodhana. But Nanda became deeply impressed by the sacred teachings of the Buddha, and in the middle of the celebrations of his consecration and wedding ceremony, he decided to be initiated by the Lord Buddha. That very day he chose the life of a mendicant instead of that of a sovereign king.



Yashodhra, gripped with love for her husband, desired that if Buddha stayed in Kapilvastu longer and she would be able to see him often. One day as Buddha turned back from the kingdom after begging for alms Yashodhra sent Rahul her son to see the Buddha, his father. Rahul uttered the words his mother had instructed and asked: “Dear father, give me my inheritance rights”. In response, when the Buddha went to his ashram he told his disciple Sariputra to give Rahul the honor of renunciation. Thus at the age of seven, Rahul became a renunciate and a part of the community. The King was very distraught when he heard about this.

At the time of the Buddha there was a *sanyasi* named Sanjaya residing with his disciples in Rajgraha. Two of his disciples were Sariputra and Modgalyayna, both sincere students who were always engaged in spiritual practices. When they heard the enchanting knowledge given by the Buddha, they quickly became his disciples. Buddha proclaimed: “These two will be my chief and most trusted disciples.” In time the Buddha’s words came true. Devadatta and Ananda, cousins of the Buddha, also became his disciples. At the age of sixty the Buddha appointed Ananda as his chief attendant. Ananda remained in this service wholeheartedly until Buddha’s death.



Towards the Setting Sun (End of Buddha's Life)

Buddha continued to teach the path to the ultimate freedom which is achieved by following truth, practicing nonviolence, and maintaining purity of conduct. He gave understanding to people with regard to Atman (Self) and Inner Light. In 483 B.C.E., at the age of 80, while in Kushinagar (Gorakhpur district in the state of Uttar Pradesh), the Buddha left his physical body and attained *Mahanirvana*. In the last moments of his life he gave final words to his disciples:

O! Mendicants! Be a lamp to thyself and take refuge in yourself. Be your own support and make Dharma (the path of the Buddha) your lamp, taking refuge in it.

Doctrines of Buddhism

When we look at the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism we can see that they were derived from the prevailing *Sankhya darshana* (Sakhya Philosophy) and the latter Upanishads. This is validated by the reference from Lokamanaya Balgangadar Tilak: “This has been established indisputably that just as *Jain Dharma* so also *Buddha Dharma* is a son of the Vedic Dharma. As a son after taking his inheritance from his father follows his individual path in the same way the Buddha Dharma separated from the Vedic Dharma. In other words, Buddhism is not a



stranger or foreign to Vedic Dharma. Moreover, it is a branch of the prevalent *Brahman- Dharma*.” The foundation of the teaching of Buddha Dharma is understanding atma (self) and purity in action, conduct, and thought.

Buddha says:

Abandonment of all evil deeds and sins, accumulation of all meritorious deeds, and purification of the mind and conduct is the discipline of Buddhism

The Buddha emphasized that the middle path is the most desirable path. To have pure conduct one must avoid both of the extreme paths: intense austerities and sensual pleasures. The Buddha condemned violent acts such as animal sacrifices. He also spoke out against needless rituals, self-claimed superiority of the pundits (priest class) and Brahmans, and the inequity of the caste system. He taught a path which was pure, simple and based on moral conduct. By treading this path humans can attain freedom and be rid of the cycle of birth and death.

Buddha taught his path in the form of the four noble truths:

1. In this world there is suffering.
2. This suffering has a cause.
3. There is a way (cure) to become free from suffering.
4. The eightfold path is prescribed to attain freedom.



In order to escape the cycle of death and birth and the suffering of the world a human should follow the eight fold path. This eightfold path is as follows:

1. Right view
2. Right intent
3. Right speech
4. Right conduct
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right vigilance (Mindfulness)
8. Right Samadhi (Concentration)

The essence of Buddha's teaching is as follows:

1. Do not criticize others. Do not speak ill of others.
2. Do not commit any kind of violence.
3. Control yourself by choosing following moral conduct.
4. Eat in moderation.
5. Live in solitude.
6. Yoke the mind to meditation (Yoga).

The Main Texts of Buddha Dharma

After the Mahaparanirvana (the final liberation) of the Buddha, his prominent disciples recited and compiled his words on the



basis of their memory. These have become the main texts of Buddhism. They are known as *Tripitika*, “the three baskets”: *Vinya Pitika*, a collection of the rules of discipline for Buddhist monks; *Abidhamma Pitika*, the philosophy and discourses of the Buddha; and *Sutapitika*, the principal doctrinal teachings of the Buddha’s Dharma. There is an additional text (of later date) which is quite essential to the teachings of the Buddha. This is the *Melindpanha*, a compilation of the discourses between a Greek king named Melinda and the great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna.

The Spread of Buddhism

The Teaching of Buddha Dharma

Due to the influence of the Buddha’s teachings, the monarch Ashoka’s heart was transformed when he witnessed the great devastation and killing that took place in the battle of Kalinga. The Buddha’s message of peace and non-violence inspired King Ashoka to raise the flag of the Buddha’s Dharma rather than lifting arms for destruction. Thereafter Ashoka played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism. He sent emissaries to various countries, and as a result there are many *stupas* and relics with engraved Buddhist teachings in lands far from India.



Ashoka's legacy is useful in reconstructing historical accounts of early Buddhism.

Buddhist Dharma had an important influence on many of the doctrines of Christianity, a Western religion, and it also became popular in Eastern countries including Nepal, Tibet, China, Sri Lanka and other parts of central Asia.

The Branches of Buddhism

About a hundred years after the death of the Saint Buddha, Buddhism split into two branches due to different interpretations of his message and basic doctrines. These two branches, Hinayana and Mahayana, each developed according to their understanding of the principles of Buddhism. Hinayana means "Small Vehicle." This tradition accepted the essential teachings of the Buddha as its foundation. It is also known as "Southern Buddhism".

Human life is filled with suffering. The individual soul goes through the cycles of death and rebirth. Therefore, putting an end to this cycle ends suffering. This can be accomplished through self-restraint and control of all the selfish desires. This central doctrine of the Buddha is also delineated in the



Upanishads. Buddha adopted the eightfold path in order to end the cycle of death and rebirth, and to put an end to selfish desires. This doctrine is the foundation of the Hinayana sect of Buddhism.

The followers of the Hinayana sect do not consider Buddha as God, and do not prescribe his worship. According to the Hinayana way, a human being can escape the cycle of birth and death and attain liberation by his own unaided effort.

In contrast to this, the Mahayana or “Big Vehicle” sect thinks of the Buddha as a form of God or a celestial being. For this reason, the goal of Mahayana followers is the attainment of Buddhahood for the purpose of helping other living beings. In order to attain Buddhahood this sect teaches that it is necessary to take the vow of a Bodhisattva, an enlightened being who has chosen to incarnate in this world to help fellow beings. The Mahayana sect gives importance to the ideal of the Bodhisattva in place of the ideal of the Buddha, an enlightened being who does not return to the cycle of death and rebirth. The followers of this sect recognize Bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteshwara. They further believe that one can attain liberation by worshipping representations of these Bodhisattvas in the form of *murtis* and symbols (various representations of the Bodhisattva)



Teachings of the Buddha

When we study any particular episode in the life of the Buddha, the essence of his teachings is revealed to us.

One time there were five Brahmins who approached the Buddha and requested: “Lord, please be the judge of the merit of our arguments.” One of the Brahmins said: “In my Shastras and the Sacred texts the form of God is described as such and such, and the method to attain that God is described such and such”. And then the other Brahmins heatedly spoke: “No sir. This is all erroneous since in my text it is written the opposite. These texts which I have studied have prescribed a different path for God realization.” With increasing excitement and frustration the other Brahmins proudly presented their views, citing the respective Shastras and holy texts concerning the nature of God and His attainment. Lord Buddha listened calmly, and said: “Have you heard in any Shastra that God ever becomes angry or does harm to anyone or that God is impure?” They all replied in unison: “No, our scriptures tell us that God is pure and without any imperfections and that He bestows prosperity and well-being.” Lord Buddha replied: “Friends, Why don’t you first strive to be practicing a pure and moral life that by doing so you can attain the knowledge of God?”



As described earlier, the *Sutrapitika* is one of the three sections of the *Tripitika*, the Pali Scriptures of Buddhism. There are five sections of *Sutrapitika*, one of which is *Khuddaka Nikaya*. Within *Khuddaka Nikaya* there are fifteen books. One of these fifteen books is the *Dhammapada*, where the main teachings of Buddha are as follows:

One should not associate with friends who are evildoers nor with persons who are despicable. Associate with friends who are virtuous, and who are the best (in conduct) of men. (Panditavaggo)

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy and whatever a hater may do to a hater, a wrongly directed mind will do us greater harm. (Chitavaggo).

Sandalwood or tagara, a lotus flower or a Juhe flower, all possess great fragrances. However, the fragrance of virtue surpasses even these (Puphaavaggo)

A person who constantly practices reverence, and who gives respect to the elders and seniors, for that person four things will increase: life span, beauty, happiness and strength. (Sahasavaggo)

One who has not practiced control of sexual desires and has not acquired wealth in youth pines away (in old age) like old cranes in a lake without fish. (Jaravaggo)



Follow the law of virtue but do not follow the path of unrighteousness. He who practices virtue lives happily in this world as well as in the world beyond. (Lokavaggo)

One who becomes a sluggard or a glutton, rolling himself about in gross sleep like a hog fed on wash, that foolish one again and again takes birth. (Nagavaggo)

It is difficult to obtain a birth as a human being. Difficult is the life of mortals. Even more difficult is it to hear the true law. The [most] difficult is to rise to Buddhahood (enlightenment). (Buddhavaggo)

He who destroys life or kills, who speaks untruth, who takes what is not given to him in this world, who goes to another man's wife committing adultery, or who gives himself to intoxicating liquors, such a person uproots himself (digs his own root in his world). (Malavaggo)

As rain breaks through an ill thatched house, so passion makes its way into an unreflecting mind." (Yamkavaggo)

"Better is one day of life for he who is wise and reflecting, than a life of a hundred years for one who is ignorant and unrestrained. Sahasvaggo)

There is no fire like passion and no ill like hatred; there is no sorrow like this physical existence and no happiness higher than tranquility. (Sukkhavaggo)



Lord Buddha's Sadhana (Meditation Practice) (Buddha's Teachings Compared with the Vedic Dharma and Santmat)

It has been two thousand five hundred years since the passing (*paranirvana*) of Buddha. However, the *Bhagavad Gita* predates Buddha by at least 2500 years.⁶⁰ It is interesting to find similarities between the teachings from these two sources. Therefore, it would not be out of context to cite references which convey these similarities.

A good example is found in the Gita (Chapter 6: 5- 6):

Let a man lift himself by himself; let him not degrade himself; for self alone is the friend of the self, and the self alone is the enemy of the self. For he who has conquered his self by the self, his self is a friend, but for him who has not possessed his higher self, his very self will act like an enemy.

This can be compared with a similar teaching in the *Dhammaapad's Attavaggo* where the Buddha states:

the self is the lord of the self.

⁶⁰ Various Indian scholars date the Bhagavad-gita around 2500BCE. The Western scholars argue, however, that the Bhagavad-gita was composed around 3rd century BCE.



As well, and the *Chittvaggo of the Dhammapada* (verses 10-11) states:

Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, a wrongly directed mind will do even greater harm. Neither mother nor father nor any relative will do a greater service than a well directed mind will do.

In the *Dhammapad's Dandavaggo*

He who in seeking his own happiness inflicts pain on other beings who are also desirous of happiness, does not obtain happiness after death.

The identical ideas were stated in the older texts, such as the *Manu Smriti* and the *Mahabharata*:

Those who seek pleasure by harming other beings are happy neither in living nor in death. (Manu Smriti, 5/45)

We can also compare the sources of teachings on the subject of merit in serving the elders: *Mahabharata* 13 book 55-60:

To him who constantly practices reverence and respects the aged four things will increase: life, beauty, happiness, and strength. (Sahsavaggo, 10)

Manu Smriti (2/121) states:

To the one who is endowed with the nature of serving the elders and showing reverence each day, four things will increase:

- 1. Life*
- 2. Wisdom*



3. Fame

4. Strength

In the *Mahabharata's Ashwamedhaparva* it is stated:

As a man spins and pulls a strand (fiber) from a spool of jute, in the same way a yogi witnesses his atman by separating it from the body.

In this analogy, the jute represents the body and the strand represents the soul. This reference is known by the accomplished yogis. The same images are used in the *Dighanikiya's Samanifalsutta* (1/ 2):

As a man pulls out a strand from a spool of jute, in his mind he determines that the jute and the strand (fiber) are now separate. But the strand was originally taken from the jute itself (it was a part of it).

The Vedic texts are replete with images of various deities, such as Brahma, Indra, Varuna, Vaksha, Gondarva, and Kamadeva, The Buddhist texts as well speak of many celestial realms with multiple deities. It can also be seen that both sets of texts elaborate on several philosophical concepts in identical ways: sinful and meritorious deeds, heaven and hell, bondage and liberation, the cycle of *samsara* (death and rebirth).

Stealing, consuming of intoxicants, violence and adultery. The Vedic texts maintain that it is essential to abstain from these five



sins for the practice of inner meditation. Later, the Buddha gave the very same instructions to his disciples. He mandated that establishing oneself in the five virtues (*Shilas*) the practitioner must practice meditation (*dhyana*) .

Similarly, in the early text *Yogshikhopanishad* (Chapter I) it is said;

Knowledge (wisdom) without yoga, and yoga without knowledge can not give freedom. Therefore, a practitioner who seeks freedom must practice both knowledge and yoga.

And we find in the Dhammapada's *Bhikkhuvaggo* (13);

There is no meditation for one who is without wisdom (knowledge), and no wisdom for one who is without meditation. He in whom there are meditation and wisdom is close to nirvana.

Sant Goswami Tulsidas Ji also echoes the familiar theme in the *Ramacharitamanas* when he says:

Wisdom coupled with yoga is the giver of moksha (liberation).

There are many other examples of this correspondence of concepts. Even when there is a variation in language, there is no difference in essence. In fact there are also many discourses in which there is not even a language difference. And it should also be noted that there are many variations of words which still



have the identical meaning. Due to the lack of space we cannot explain all of the specific references here. But a few will be further elaborated below.

Understanding the Definition of *Nirvana*: The Essential Concept of the Buddha's Teachings

Let us now look at the word *nirvana* which is ubiquitous in the teachings of the Buddha and in the texts of Buddhism. We hear the word '*nirvana*' not only in the teachings of the Buddha, but also in the Jain texts, in the *Bhagavad –Gita*, and in numerous places in Santmat.

An early reference to *nirvana* is found in the words of the 24th Tirthankara, Lord Mahavira, where the character of a true seeker of *nirvana* is described:

Those who are guileless and simple, their souls become pure. In those pure ones resides dharma (truth; the sacred law). Just as fire burns hotter and gives off more light when ghee (clarified butter) is added to it, in the same way the aspirant who is simple and chaste reaches nirvana.

The word '*nirvana*' and '*brahmanirvana*' appear frequently in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

This is the divine state, O Arjuna. And having attained this, a man is not deluded. Fixed in that state, even at



*the hour of death, he reaches Brahmanirvana.” (2/72)
“He who finds his happiness within, his joy within,
and his light only within, that yogi becomes divine and
attains Brahmanirvana. (5/24)*

The teachings of the saints are also replete with references to the word *nirvana*. Now we will present some of the words of the saints in this regard.

Saint Kabir says;

*Where that the Purusha (Supreme Being) resides,
nothing else exists . This I know (from my experience).
Whoever understands what I say [this mystery] has
achieved nirvana.*

Guru Nanak Dev Ji speaks about nirvana as a permanent and eternal state which can not be attained without first purifying the heart. He elaborates further that nirvana is only possible by immersing oneself in celestial sound: “The Divine Palace (Divine Abode of the Supreme) cannot be achieved unless one is pure in heart. By immersing oneself in the celestial sounds one is able to attain the state of nirvana.

Shrichand Ji Maharaj, the founder of the Udasi community, says:

*Guru is eternal and knowledge of the Vedas is subtle;
the knowledge of nirvana is very mysterious.*



In the words of Jagjivan Sahib:

[Those are fortunate] who are intent on listening to the inner celestial sound of unqualified nirvana.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji Maharaj says:

Unnamable, unapproachable, unseen, is the abode of Truth (the Supreme Reality). When the consciousness (soul) immerses in this Reality, the saints declare it reaches the state of nirvana.

Sant Gareeb Das Ji says:

Allah and Ram are both beyond our understanding and without qualities. My lord, resides in me, not in a palace or other abodes.

Sant Tulsidas Ji says:

People who want to attain the state of nirvana without meditation on God (Rama), even if these same people are endowed with learning, are like an animal without a tail.

What exactly does the word *nirvana* mean? In the Pali language, the term *Nirvana* is comprised of two words: *nih*+*vana*. The word *vana* means desire (*tanha*) and the prefix *nih* indicates negation. Thus *nirvana* means ‘without desire’. . Another way *nirvana* could be translated is ‘the extinguishing of a flame’. In other words, when the flame of selfish desire is extinguished, *nirvana* is achieved. A third way the word *nirvana* can be translated is ‘without an arrow.’ I once heard this



presented by a prominent Buddhist scholar named Bhikshu Jagdishkashyap who told a story about a certain man who approached the Buddha with a metaphysical question. The Buddha responded:

If a man is struck by an arrow and is in excruciating pain, will he not remove the arrow and place medications on the wound? Or will that person first search for the cause of the arrow being shot at him? Will he first seek to know the intention of the person who shot the arrow?

The man with the question answered that the person will first remove the arrow and treat the wound. Buddha then said:

Dear friend, you have been struck by the arrow of death, the cycle of death and rebirth (Kala), and therefore you should first rid yourself of the suffering, just as the man struck by an arrow first removed the arrow. Then you may consider questions about who created this world, and why, and by what means

This example shows that getting rid of the arrow of suffering is a way to understand *nirvana*, which is ridding ourselves of the cycle of birth and death.. It is not an exaggeration to say that one who conquers death through *sadhana* (meditation) attains *nirvana*.

Several definitions of nirvana are given in the Buddhist texts:

Nirvana is a state in which all the samskaras (imprints of karmas and tendencies) are erased. It is a state in



which all afflictions and pains are destroyed, selfish desires are overcome, and one is devoid of attachments.”

(*Dighanikaya, Mahapadansutta*) Another text recounts of a time when an ascetic approached the Buddha and asked: “What is *nirvana*?” Buddha replied: “Dear one, *nirvana* is cessation of passion, hatred, and attachment.” (Buddha Philosophy and Literature)

The Way to Attain Nirvana

After exploring some background on the literal definition of *nirvana*, more questions arise. How can a person attain *nirvana*? How can we have knowledge of this state? To begin to answer this, we must turn to the Buddha’s teachings on meditation practice and the state of *Samadhi*, the final step of the eight-fold path. The Buddha taught about the four stages of concentration in the practice of *dhyana*. (They are described in detail in *Dighanikaya’s Samanjaphalsuta*). There is also a well known story about an ascetic who once approached the Buddha to ask: “What is the path for realizing *buddhahood*?” Buddha answered:



This is the noble eight-fold path. Only by walking on this path is one able to arrive at the goal.” (Boddha Philosophy and Literature)

It will also be important to make a general comparison of the relevant practices in the Santmat and Buddhist traditions.

In Santmat we practice four stages of meditation. This is similar to the Buddhist tradition, which speaks about mantra meditation, visualization of a sacred form, the yoga of vision (intense focus) and the yoga of sound.

However, Buddhists are not in agreement about certain aspects of *mantra* meditation, and they do not all recite the same mantra. Tibetan Buddhists recite “*Om Mani Padme Hum*” whereas Japanese Buddhists (SGI sect) recite: “*Namyo Harengé Kyo*”. Most Buddhists use the “OM” or “*Namo tasya bhagavato arhato sammāsambuddhas* (Honor to Him the Blessed One, Who Conquered all Obstacles, and the Fully Enlightened One”) mantra. [Many recite the triple gem (*I Take Refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha*.)

Another practice that is common to both traditions is mental concentration on a physical form. Buddhist texts elaborate on this in a similar way to *manas dhyana* of Santmat. In the Buddhist text *Digha Nikaya*, mendicants are given these instructions:



A bhikkhu should sit in a crossed legged posture, keeping the back and neck erect, and become mindful of all directions. He should then collect the wandering mind which is scattered in all four directions

By focusing within, the aspirant purifies the mind. This text goes on to details about concentration on a physical form: The aspirant focuses mentally on a physical form, and to use the mind to create a mental body that is different from the physical one. The mental image thus created will be more vivid, will be endowed with physical power, and will have radiant physical organs.

In my understanding this is an equally valid interpretation description of the the Santmat technique for meditation on the physical form (*manas dhyana*). There doesn't seem to be any other way to describe it. The The Buddhist text, *Digha Nikaya*, next elaborates about the divine eyes and divine ears. We find also in the *Buddhacharya*, written by the great Buddhist scholar Rahul Samskratayn, a record of a story about Rahul, the son of the Buddha:

Rahul sat in a yogic pose with erect body. He kept his mind in front (focused mind in front of the eyebrows).

The *Rig Veda* also speaks of keeping the mind focused in front while sitting in a yogic pose. In Santmat this same technique is known as *Drishti Yoga*.



The *Digha Nikaya* continues: “A mendicant sits in a forest under a tree or in a calm empty space in a firm posture while keeping his body erect.”

The *Buddhacharya* also refers clearly to the inner light in several passages. For example:

Oh Brahman! I light the inner light, leaving aside the wood fire (fire of ritual sacrifice). I remain concentrated in light while practicing brahmcharya (celibacy; abiding in the divine state).

And also says:

Oh Brahman! This ego is a fire pit for the fire ceremony, anger is the smoke of the fire ceremony, speaking untruths are the ashes, and the heart is the place of light. One who disciplines the self attains this inner light (performs the true sacrifice⁶¹).

The *Digha Nikaya* further describes this experience of seeing the inner divine light and hearing the inner divine sound. It says:

Oh Mahalee, through deep concentration the mendicant attains one-pointed samadhi, and beholds the celestial forms in the east. This is known as ekangi samadhi (one-fold samadhi), in which the divine sight opens up. In this deep concentration, the mendicant only sees the divine forms, but does not yet hear the

⁶¹ Referring to the Vedic ritual of fire sacrifice. This text interprets the fire ritual as symbolic.



*divine sounds.*⁶² *However, in the state of ubhyangi samadhi (two-fold samadhi), the meditator sees the divine forms in the east, and also hears the divine sounds.*⁶³

⁶² The texts of Tibetan Buddhism elaborate on the experience of Light and Sound:

"O nobly-born, when thy body and mind were separating, thou must have experienced a glimpse of the Pure Truth, subtle, sparkling, bright, dazzling, glorious, and radiantly awesome, in appearance like a mirage moving across a landscape in springtime in one continuous stream of vibrations. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed. That is the radiance of thine own true nature. Recognize it. From the midst of that radiance, the natural sound of Reality, reverberating like a thousand thunders simultaneously sounding, will come. That is the natural sound of thine own real self. Be not daunted thereby, nor terrified, nor awed."

(Extracts from "The Tibetan Book of the Dead" (Bardo Thodol), edited by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz (London, 1957):

Divine Sound is also known as the Sound of Silence:

As you calm down, you can experience the sound of silence in the mind. You hear it as a kind of high frequency sound, a ringing sound that's always there. It is just normally never noticed. Now when you begin to hear that sound of silence, it's a sign of emptiness – of silence of the mind. It's something you can always turn to. As you concentrate on it and turn to it, it can make you quite peaceful and blissful. Meditating on that, you have a way of letting the conditions of the mind cease without suppressing them with another condition. Otherwise you just end up putting one condition over another.

(Ajahn Sumedho, a bhikkhu of the Theravada school of Buddhism, from, "The Sound of Silence")

In the Buddhist text the Surangama Sutra Bodhisattva relates to the Sound meditation:

Ananda and all you who listen here
Should inward turn your faculty
Of hearing to hear your own nature



In his teaching about the mysterious and ineffable nature of *nirvana*, the Buddha said:

This is that space in which there is no earth, no water, no fire and no sky. . . . It is not this world, it is not the other world, and there is no moon and no sun. Dear aspirant, no one goes there and no one comes from there and no one stays there. No one gets separated and no one gets born. It is without beginning or support of any [? prime]. All sorrows end here. (Boddha Philosophy and Literature)

It is said in the *Digha Nikaya*,

In that space there is no talk of creation, sustaining of creation or death. In this space infinity abounds. There is no water, no earth and no light. There is even no air.

Which alone achieves Supreme Bodhi.
That is how enlightenment is won.
Buddhas as many as the Ganges' sand
Entered this one gateway to Nirvana.
All past Tathagathas
Have achieved this method.
All Bodhisattvas now
Enter this perfection.
All who practice in the future
On this Dharma should rely....

(The Surangama Sutra: Selections from the
Upasaka Lu K'uan Yu Translation,
Published by Rider and Company, London)



Thus it can be seen that the state of liberation that both the Buddha and the sages of the Upanishads referred to as *nirvana* is the same as the state of liberation that the saints call *mukti*. The Buddhist and Vedic texts, as well as the Santmat texts, are in complete agreement with respect to these concepts of *nirvana* and *mukti*. This will be clear as we compare some of the particular references from various texts.

The *Katha Upanishad* describes the state of *nirvana* as follows

There the sun does not shine, nor the moon. There is no light and not even fire can exist there. But due to its existence it gives light to all of creation. And all creation is seen by its light.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Lord Krishna says:

There the sun does not shine nor moon nor fire. Having reached this Divine abode (My abode) no one returns.

Saint Kabir Sahab says:

Let me give you a depiction of that realm. In that realm there is no day, no night, no sun, no moon, no stars, neither light nor darkness, no air and no water. The only ones who have knowledge of this realm are those who have visited there (have experienced this state). There is no earth, no sky, and only a few saints dwell in this mysterious realm. There is no fear of death; there is neither sunlight nor shade. A Yogi (hatha yogi, through physical exercises) cannot fathom this world through yoga. The ascetic can not find it through penance, and it can only be attained through the constant practice of meditation. The one who



knows the inner workings of consciousness, in the mind, realizes this realm (state).

Guru Nanak Dev describes this state in these words:

There is no shimmering of moon or stars, no rays of the sun, no flash of lightening in that place. One cannot even speak about this place. There are no symbols or words that can describe it. Only accomplished souls [enjoy] experience this heavenly realm.

Saint Charandas Ji says:

There is no sun, no moon, and no twinkling stars. There are no gods (the trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) who dwell there, and even maya (creative power of the divine) with the three qualities (gunas) has no power there. It is devoid of the Vedas, yoga, sacrifice, and austere practices. There is no air, no earth, no fire, no sky, no day, no night, no sins and no good deeds.

Charandas also says that this state is *Brahman* Itself—the beginning, middle and end of all.

We have seen that the saints, the Buddhist monks, and the Jain [as elaborated in the previous chapter] teachers all describe the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey as liberation. After attaining this state the Buddha proclaimed in ecstasy:

O builder of the house! I have seen you and you will not build the house again. Your rafters are broken,



your ridgepole is destroyed! The mind established in nirvana has extinguished all past karmas, and all selfish cravings have been destroyed.” (Dhammapada, Jaravaggo)

The *Mahopanishad* tells of a sage who was immersed in the holy river of wisdom, devotion, and meditation. This sage cries out:

Having seen the transcendent (beyond), the knot of the heart (ignorance) is disentangled, all doubts have disappeared, and all karmas have been destroyed!

This is a brief discourse on Lord Buddha’s *nirvana* and *sadhana* (the meditation practice).

Was Buddha an Atheist?

All the theistic religions of the world recognize the existence of God. The Divine Being is referred to by various names due to different languages: *Brahman* (*Hindu*), God (*Christianity*), Allah (*Islam*), Buddha (*Buddhism*), Tao (*Taoism*), Yahweh (*Judaism*), and Ahur Mazd (*Zoroastrianism*). We can say that a religion with a belief in God is a theistic religion. Religions which do not have a belief in God would be called atheistic.

Upon careful consideration we can see that there are in fact two types of atheism: entirely atheistic and partially atheistic. The Belief Systems which do not have a belief in the existence of either God or soul are considered to be entirely atheistic. Those



which do have a belief in the soul but not in God are considered partially atheistic.

In modern times some scholars have interpreted the Buddha's silence on the issue of the existence of God as atheistic. In their opinion, Buddha refused to answer any questions regarding the existence of the Divine Reality and the Soul (*Atman* or *Jivatman*), and therefore they have concluded that Buddha was an atheist.

However, in my opinion these kinds of conclusions demonstrate limited knowledge and ignorance about the essence of the Buddhist texts. In fact, Buddhist literature contains multiple references to the soul (*atta* or *atman*), the Lord (*Natha*), and the maker of the body. Examples can be found even in the fairly short book *Dhammapada*, where Buddha elaborates on Soul or self (*atta*): “The *atman* is the lord of *atman*. What else could be the Lord? When the individual self (*jivatman*) is well subdued, a man finds the Lord (*Natha*) who is difficult to fathom” (*Dhammapada* 12/4).

Some scholars have interpreted the word ‘lord’ in this verse as if it literally means ‘lordship’. However, even a cursory examination of the words in Pali, the original language of these texts, yields the true meaning. In Pali the word ‘lord’ is in the



second case accusative, and therefore it would best be translated as ‘to the lord’. The noted Buddhist scholar Bhikshu Rahul Sankrityayan has explained this in his rendering of this verse of the *Dhammapada*:

*A man is the lord of himself. Who else then could be the lord?
If the self is wholly disciplined then he is able to attain a lord
who is difficult to be attained.*

There are other places as well in the *Dhammapada* where Buddha addresses the creator of the body:

Oh maker of the house I have seen you. . .” (Jaravaggo)

Impermanence of Buddhism and Maya of the Vedic Dharma

In the Vedanta literature, the Upanishads, and in the literature of the saints, this physical world is said to be comprised of name and form, and is referred to as *maya*. It is understood to be illusory and not real, to be ever changing, and dependent upon a higher reality. In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, *Brhidarnyaka Upanishad*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, and *Prashna Upanishad* it is repeatedly stated that the nature of the world is transitory, destructible, and not real. Therefore, we must seek for that



essence which is constant, true and unchanging by transcending these realms of name and form.⁶⁴

The world of name and form is also described as *avidya* (ignorance) in the *Katha* and *Mundaka Upanishads*. In the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, the world is also described as illusory *maya*. The Upanishads also explain that:

The soul (atman), which is beyond name and form, is brimming with joy and tranquility. In its Turiyatita form (the fifth state⁶⁵—a state of cosmic consciousness; a state of unity with the source), atman is beyond good and evil” (Teja bindu Upanishad).

Lord Buddha says:

A mendicant is one who has no attachment to the world of name and form. He is one who does not grieve for what is not real (asat, the ever changing reality). This is the true mendicant.(Dhammapada, Bhikkhuvaggo).

In the *Ramchitmanasa* Saint Tulsida says:

Name and form are the two obstructions to God.

⁶⁴ The Madhyamika School of Buddhism states that reality (*shunya*) is the transcendent, indefinable and immanent in all beings. This is also called *Shunyam Tattvam*.

⁶⁵ The first state is the conscious state; the second is the dream state; the third is dreamless sleep; the fourth is *Turiya*, a serene transcendental state; the fifth is *Turiyatita*, a mindless state of cosmic consciousness.



All of these references from the Upanishads and the texts of the saints, show agreement with the words of the Buddha, not difference.

Ineffable Divine and Silence

One person may say the true form of God is Nameless (transcending any human definition), a second person may say the true form of God is Soundless (*niḥśhabda*), (beyond sound), and yet a third may keep silence in regard to the nature of the Divine. Is it logical to simply label the one who keeps silence an atheist? The wise person should reflect on this matter. If you say that the Divine Reality is nameless and then proceed to describe Him, are you not contradicting yourself? How can you describe something which is nameless? In thinking about this example, one might well conclude that the third person, who was silent when describing God, was actually closer to the nameless description of God.

Keeping silence in answer to the question of the nature of the Divine, is also found in the Upanishads. A prime example of this is found in the famous discourse between Sage Vashishta and Shri Ram in the *Yoga Vashishta*. Shri Rama had queried Guru Vasistha about the nature of *Atman* and *Brahman* (the Supreme Reality). In response the Guru remained silent. Ram repeated



the question. Guru Vasistha remained silent. Shri Rama asked a third time, and still the great sage remained mute. With joined palms Ram asked his teacher Vasistha: “Reverend Sir! Are you displeased with me and therefore not answering my question, since you always assist me in understanding?” Guru Vasistha replied: “My dear son! I am not displeased with you. I have been answering the question which you have posed. The answer to your question is only given in silence, since the the Divine is ineffable, unmanifest, and beyond the senses. How could I describe the nature of the reality which transcends the senses through these very sense organs (speech)?” The point here is that if we were to call the Buddha an atheist when he is silent on the question of the nature of the Divine, as some people have, then logically we must also call Guru Vasistha an atheist when he is silent in answer to the same question.

Shunya and Transcendent Reality

Some scholars have discounted the Buddha’s teachings, claiming that he is [promulgating a belief in “emptiness” or “nothingness.” These scholars have determined that the Buddha, as they have interpreted him, does not believe in a Higher Reality (God). Therefore, they claim, his philosophy should be dismissed as nihilistic. According to their reasoning, it would



follow that those who teach about “emptiness” or “nothingness” (shunya) [the transcendent form of Ultimate Reality is also referred to as shunya] can not be theistic. However, teachings about *shunyata* (emptiness) are not only found in Buddhist literature, but are also prominent in the writings of many of the saints. Here are some examples:

Gorakh Nath Ji says:

*It (God) is neither existent nor non-existent (shunya);
its nature is beyond the reach of senses and thought.*

Saint Kabir Sahab says:

*Meditation on the Formless (shunya) is enjoyed by all
knowers of Truth*

”

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

*In the thought-less state of Samadhi (sunna,
emptiness), neither maya (illusion) nor the web of
mind exist. Only the gracious God exists.*

Paltu Sahab says:

*Staying in solitude and meditate on emptiness
(shunya).*

Saint Dadu Dayal Ji says:

*That [Ultimate] Reality is beyond the dual categories
of qualified and unqualified; it is Emptiness which
transcends emptiness (shunya).*

Saint Charan Das says:



When the soul is absorbed on the peak (highest inner realm) of emptiness, then it experiences rapture.

This emptiness is also known as ether (*akasha*) or void (*avakasha*). In the *Ramcharitamansa*, Goswami Tulsid Das Ji invokes Lord Shiva:

I invoke the name of Shiva--Lord Shiva, who dwells in the space of infinite knowledge (akasha)]”

There are discussions about *shunya* in the *Tantra Shastra* and the *Jnanasankalnii Tantra*, where it says,

Meditation is not meditation unless the mind is united with Shunya” (57).

Maharishi Mehi says:

Consciousness that is traveling beyond sunna (void) and mahasunna (the great void) traverses the realm of bhanvar gupha (the whirling cave). There it experiences the sound of Truth (sat), which is the Original Sound. This Sound embodies the essence of the spiritual preceptor. O Practitioner! Hold on to that sound and become one with that True Sound.

In the Upanishads there are multiple references to Emptiness or Space (*shunya*). In the fourth *Brahmana* of the *Mandala Brahmanopanishad* it is said;

There are five kinds of celestial Shunya (ether) which are increasingly more subtle: akasham, parakasham, Mahakasham, Suryakasham and Parmakasham. The infinite light permeates all of these akasham, but the



Parmakasham is ineffable and is brimming with infinite bliss. It is the essential element.

When one considers all these descriptions of *Shunya* (emptiness or void), the question arise about whether the composers of the *Upanishads* and the saints were atheists. The univocal response is of course that they are not atheists. How then could one logically consider the Buddha to be an atheist? The Buddha regularly speaks of both *nirvana* and *shunya* in almost identical terminology, and yet he is accused of atheism solely on the basis of his silence on this question about the nature of God.

Purity of Conduct and Nirvana

Throughout the Vedas, Upanishads, and the literature of the saints there are exhortations to follow the path of morality. For example, in the *Brahmanda Puranottar Gita* it says that one cannot attain *Brahman* without first being purified:

This body has nine gates. Without purifying this body no can attain Pure Brahman. Thus say the wise ones.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

By carefully tending to the life of morality, the bride (atman) and groom (God) enjoy bliss.

Guru Nanak Dev says;



The Truth can only be placed in a clean vessel, and few indeed are those who live a pure life.

In the *Katha Upanishad* it says:

Those who have not abstained from wicked acts, whose senses are not calm, and whose minds are agitated, can not attain this [the Ultimate Reality] through prajna (spiritual knowledge).

The Buddha gives instructions to follow five essential ethical principles. He teaches abstention from lying, stealing, intoxicating substances, violence, and adultery, and claims that the one who indulges in these sins brings his own destruction. In *the Dhammapada* it says:

He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who steals, who goes to another's wife and who takes intoxicants; even in this world he digs up his own roots" (Dhammapada, Malavaggo).

In the words of Maharishi Mehi we find:

Untruth, intoxicants, adultery, violence (in the form of harming other living beings or even eating meat), and stealing, are the five sins which humans should avoid.

Right Association (Satsang); Guru (Spiritual Guide), and Dhyana (Meditation

The ancient sages and *rishis* sang the praises of these three— the spiritual preceptor (*guru*), meditation (*dhyana*) and fellowship



(satsang). Lord Buddha also glorifies these three in the form of the *Three Rrefuges* , also known as the Triple Gem:

Take refuge in Buddha, take refuge in Dhamma (the path of meditation), and take refuge in the community of monks. Thus the Buddha is clearly in agreement with the ancient sages.

The Concept of No-Soul (anatta) and Reincarnation: A Contradiction?

It is generally accepted that someone who holds to the theory of no-self would not have room for reincarnation in his philosophy. It is also assumed that a believer in No-self cannot also believe in the concept of transmigration. But, the Buddha, who is accused of propagating this no-self theory, speaks about his own multiple lives. His Jataka Tales (past lives)] are the prime evidence. The following verse from the *Dhammapada* testifies to his belief in the reincarnation of the soul:

I have run through a course of many births looking for the Maker of this dwelling and have been unable to find Him. Painful is birth again and again” (Dhammapada, Jaravaggo).

In Praise of the Highest Goal

Theorists of Atheism do not believe in an afterlife, and therefore, for them this life is the extent of fulfillment. They do not



consider that there is life after the death of the gross body, and they disregard the traditional belief in heaven and hell. Consequently, the happiness of this physical body is their ultimate goal. In contrast to those opinions, Buddha unequivocally speaks about life after the physical death of the body and gives great details of heaven and hell. He does not consider the pleasures of this body to even be fulfilling. The atheists say, “However insignificant the contents of your hand may be, it is greater than the hope of possessing golden coins tomorrow.” They would also say that the hope of finding a peacock tomorrow would never justify throwing away the mere pigeon which you hold today. In contrast to such statements, we read in the words of Buddha:

If by giving up trivial pleasures one might acquire higher joy, the wise man must give up the pleasure of little value, looking toward the larger pleasure.

By reflecting upon the essential teachings and beliefs of the Buddha, such as *nirvana*, the life of moral rectitude, his belief in heaven, hell, and reincarnation, we see that his teachings are fairly similar to the ancient teachings that were prevalent at the time that the Buddha taught. It would be short-sighted and, too simplistic to call Buddha an atheist solely on the basis of his silence in regard to the nature of the ineffable, transcendent Ultimate Reality. It is ironic that Buddha has the status of “the



ninth incarnation of Vishnu” in Hinduism, and at the same time is rejected by some as an atheist. This calls for careful study of his teachings, and cautious consideration of the question: Was the Buddha a theist or an atheist?



Chapter Four

Judaism and Christianity



The Roots of Christianity: Biblical Judaism

Christianity has its roots in the ancient religion of Biblical Judaism⁶⁶. Ancient Judaism arose in middle eastern Asia⁶⁷. For many centuries before the time of Jesus, the religious and political identities of the people of the Judaic tradition had been quite unsettled. The geographical basis of Judaism was originally the country that is today called Israel. This tiny sliver of land was located along major trade and travel routes connecting the empires of the continents that touch the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the land of Israel⁶⁸ was invaded and ruled by various foreign powers throughout history.

⁶⁶ Biblical Judaism is to be distinguished from other commonly known designations of Judaism, such as ‘the religion of the Jews,’ Rabbinic Judaism, and Kabbalah. Each of these stems from a different point in the rich history of development of this religion. Biblical Judaism is based on the *Torah* of the Hebrew Scriptures, traditionally attributed to Moses. This is the primary source for the religious and historical roots of the Christian religion, before there was a ‘Christ’. The significance of the ‘*Messianic* expectation’ only emerges in the context of the interpretations and traditions of Biblical Judaism.

⁶⁷ The term ‘Middle East’ is used in various ways in different contexts, but generally refers to the geographical area of the Near East or Southwest Asia. From the perspective of India, the Middle East is thought of as Western Asia.

⁶⁸ According to Jewish tradition and scripture ‘Israel’ is the name given by God to the patriarch Jacob. In this tradition, God identified Jacob as the chosen son of Abraham who would inherit the Promised Land of Canaan. When the descendants of Abraham conquered and took possession of this land, it came to be called Israel. The same



The inhabitants of this land also experienced cycles of famine, causing periodic migrations to other territories. Thus, largely due to geography, the early generations of the people of Judaism were made into slaves during their sojourn in Egypt, had been taken into captivity by Babylonian conquerors, and had experienced the destruction of their holy temples and towns at the hands of the Assyrians, the Greeks, and the Roman empires. These people of ancient Judaism are commonly referred to as the Jews⁶⁹.

The Jews had been dispersed, partially re-gathered, re-combined and re-located several times. The people and their religious traditions carry the marks of these disruptions and historical

geographical area is also referred to as Palestine from alternate political and historical points of view.

⁶⁹ The terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Jewish’ are of recent construction. Most often these terms are used anachronistically, reading back into history through Christianized and modern categories. The words derive from the tribal and territorial name Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). In the time of Jesus’ ministry, the first century C.E., the Temple, the priesthood, the religious rulers and the scholars were centered in Jerusalem, which is in the region of Judea. It was common practice for Israelites who lived in other districts (and even other countries) to refer to the leaders and teachers of the Temple-based religious system as the ‘Judeans’. Later, this term was translated outside of its original context as ‘the Jews’.



interventions. This can be seen in the texts of their Scriptures⁷⁰ where layers of re-interpretation and re-application are compounded and recorded as hopes alternated with national tragedies.

The Mosaic Religious System of Judaism: Exile, Liberation and Covenant

The core beliefs of Biblical Judaism first crystallized during the years of the Exodus of the Hebrew tribes from Egypt where they had been enslaved. The history and tales of the formative years of Judaism are said to have been recorded by Moses. Moses was the prophet who facilitated the Jewish liberation from Egypt, led the people through the desert to their promised land, and also presented the people with the words of the covenant from their God⁷¹. In their original and most basic form, this covenant was a

⁷⁰ The Hebrew Bible is commonly called the Old Testament from a Christian perspective, which assumes that Christianity is the new and improved revelation known in the “New” Testament. The two collections of Scripture together are often referred to as “the Bible.”

⁷¹ The Hebrew Scriptures refer to the Supreme Deity as *YHWH*, the consonants of the Hebrew verb ‘to be’, commonly pronounced *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah* in later transcriptions. Modern Jews often refer to God as *HaShem*, literally ‘the name’ in Hebrew. The name for the deity has been, and still is, a major religious issue in many branches of Judaism. Pronunciation of the name of God is forbidden by many, and is even considered blasphemous by some. In modern American Judaism it is unacceptable to write the English word, and the practice is to instead write ‘G-d’. It was common in ancient texts to substitute the



list of laws inscribed on tablets of stone, what we today know as the Ten Commandments. These were further elaborated and codified and comprise large sections of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. When viewed from the perspective of history, it can be imagined that the new identity of the miraculously liberated former slaves would have been forged in a spirit of exclusive and purposeful favor bestowed upon a chosen people who needed to survive the conditions of a large mass of wanderers trekking barefoot through the desert wilderness.

The basis of the early Mosaic religion was belief in a single transcendent deity who was revealed through the mediation of prophets. This deity was to be honored and obeyed. Social consequences for disobedience were severe, including being stoned to death by the community and being banished from society. Rewards for loyalty and compliance were extreme as well. The driving motivation was the attainment of the Promised Land, the final destination of the wanderers. In this Land the “Jewish” people would be prosperous, would live long and healthy lives, and would enjoy all of the blessings of a bountiful deity. The prime social value was Justice, and this was extended

holy name with less potent forms, such as *Adonai*, which means Lord or master. It is also common to refer to the deity by the attribute that is demonstrated in a Biblical narrative. There are hundreds of names that have been canonized.



to foreigners and slaves. Even those accused of murder were provided with cities of refuge until guilt was determined fairly. The King was to be appointed by God. His task was to stabilize the settled tribes in their God-assigned territories, and to enforce the moral, social, and religious laws that had been revealed. Specific directions for the contents, structure and functions of the Temple were contained in revealed texts. A priesthood was designated by divine selection of the tribe of Levi. These priests and their helpers were to mediate the religious rituals of temple service and animal sacrifices as proscribed in the Mosaic Covenant. The origins of the religious system of ancient Judaism were very land oriented, and the divine promises were focused on material rewards, military victory, and freedom from foreign disruptions. All of these were viewed by the Israelites from within an identity of being a chosen race belonging to the one true God.

Alternate Jewish Traditions

Alongside of this textual Mosaic tradition there also came to be an oral Mosaic tradition. This “Oral Torah” contained additional revelations to Moses, along with layers of interpretation and applications made by generations of Hebrew sages. There were also additional written traditions within ancient Judaism, based



on the spoken words of various Prophets in Israel over several hundreds of years. These were preserved and recorded by scribes and disciples on scrolls.

The foundational way of understanding the nature of God is revealed within the first chapters of the Hebrew Bible in the stories of the Creation. The God of the Jews is here described as the cause of all that exists, which he brought into manifestation through the sound vibration of his Word.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. [Genesis 1:1-31]

All of these traditions within ancient Judaism were further developed over time as families and tribes relocated, bringing their remembered traditions into new political and social settings, and even into new languages.



Not all of these traditions were centered on political or social systems. In all times there were threads of mystical and esoteric teachings woven into the tapestry of the Jewish religion. Embedded even in the core stories about Moses, we read about his personal experiences of the deity. Moses expressed his visions of God in metaphors of light and sound. The God who is transcendent also manifests his immanent presence to Moses at the same time.

Centuries later we again hear of the mystical experiences of the prophets of Judaism. This is a detailed example given by the Prophet Ezekiel in which he expresses his mystical vision in metaphorical dream symbols. The imagery is reminiscent of the metaphysical visions of reality within the religions of India.

The Prophet Isaiah had visions of the glory of God filling the earth, radiating the Presence of Yahweh through sound and light vibrations. Isaiah mediated the divine judgments against the false teachers and rulers of his day. These are the words that tell of Isaiah's calling. Within them we can detect the devastating influence that was imposed on the spiritual development of the people of his day.



The central prayer that Moses taught the Israelites is memorialized in the words which crystallize the essence of Biblical Judaism (and Rabbinic Judaism even today). This is called ‘the *Shema*’ because in Hebrew tradition, the initial word characterizes the whole. *Shema* is the Hebrew verb ‘to listen, to hear with attention.’ It describes the focus of the mind of a true seeker of God. It is a way of life.

Historical Changes in Judaism

As happens over the course of history in all places, these ideals and expectations had to be modified and re-interpreted in response to the contingencies presented in the actual world. Many forces influenced the common understanding, and many powerful voices emphasized particular issues. By the time of the centuries before the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people were splintered into many factions and geographically isolated groups. There was no central political leadership within Judaism after the Babylonian Captivity of 586 B.C.E. The land was occupied by a series of foreign powers, and the influences of multiple religious beliefs and practices led to divisions along lines of traditions ranging from magical superstition to legalistic obedience.



As we move closer to the time that Jesus was born to a Jewish family in Israel, we see an increasing prevalence among the common people to participate in practices of black magic and witchcraft, and to be influenced by false teachers and their false doctrines about sacrifices and strict laws of purification. Corrupt living and immorality became the norm among some Jewish sects. During this time, paradoxically, there also emerged other Jewish groups which emphasized extreme morality and almost obsessive outward conformity to the avoidance of any sign of sin. In the more legalistic sects, the Sabbath⁷² [insert footnote] was considered so holy that anyone who did any work on that day, even collecting wood for fuel, could be sentenced to death. In other sects of the time, the slaughter of hundreds of animals to be placed in the sacrificial fire was an important and holy element of religious practice. In the beliefs of some of the people, obedience to ancient rituals of animal sacrifice and the correct application of animal blood were essential to righteousness and worship. Today, we may instinctively view these practices as atrocities, but to many people in ancient Israel, this was thought of as the revealed way of life, the only true and holy religion of the only true God.

⁷² The Sabbath, traditionally celebrated on Saturday, is a holy day set apart by divine decree in the earliest Scriptures. It is to be a day of rest dedicated to the worship of God.



The Wisdom Tradition

In the years when early Judaism was taking root in Israel, the religious systems of other world cultures were undergoing transformations as well⁷³. In India, the ancient religions were being greatly influenced by the light of the teachings of both the Buddha and his contemporary, Lord Mahavira of the Jain tradition. In China, the wisdom of both Lao Tzu and Confucius were being spread. These four great teachers and their teachings bore great similarities to one another. As Judaism developed during this age, it too experienced an emergence of new waves of spiritual teachers, and diverse prophetic pronouncements spread through the land of Palestine. A new body of literature was being formed. In the Hebrew language this came to be known as *Hochmah* (the Hebrew word for Wisdom) literature. In these writings many spiritual truths were expounded.

This Wisdom tradition within Judaism is reminiscent of the teachings in the other religions of the world referred to above. It is based on a way of understanding the nature of the whole universe as operating according to the divine law. One of the

⁷³ Scholars of religious history refer to the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. as the Axial Age. At this time there seems to have been a spiritual awakening around the world. The spiritual teachers who emerged during this pivotal time are the founders of most of the major world religions that we know today.



major principles of the way of Wisdom asserts that a life of moral rectitude is better than one of merely conforming to ritual. A central tenet is that ‘a man reaps what he sows’. A corollary of this teaches that it is better to remain poor than to become rich by oppressing others.

This law is sometimes referred to as the Word (*Logos*, in Greek) and the Teaching (*Torah*, in Hebrew). In the Jewish Scriptures of the early Christian era this divine law is spoken of as the Way (*Derekh*, in Hebrew). The significance of this profound idea about the divine law which acts from within all creation and consciousness has been greatly misunderstood by critics from outside of Judaism. It has been misinterpreted and caricatured as legalistic obedience to external laws (*nomos*, in Greek) of righteousness, whereas the inner kernel of the teaching is actually about the intentions of the heart and mind. In the Wisdom tradition, the dynamic of divine law reflects the eternal source which holds the created world together in a patterned cohesive system. Some of the most revered Jewish scholars and prophets of this time also claimed that the soul existed before this life, and taught that the soul came from God and would return to God.



The Essenes and Other Sects of Judaism

In Egypt and Palestine, sometime before the advent of Christ, there had arisen a community of ascetics known as the Essenes⁷⁴. The Essenes can be understood in light of the Indian concept of a forest dweller, although the Essenes dwelt in desert lands near the Dead Sea. The term is sometimes said to be derived from a word that means holy, pious, or one who is silent. The Essenes are said to have set themselves apart from the commonly accepted religious boundaries of Jewish tradition. They saw the path of nonviolence as the correct way, and accordingly practiced vegetarianism. They were very disciplined in their daily activities, and worked hard for their sustenance. They lived communally and freely shared all food and material possessions. After performing their work, the Essenes spent their time in meditation and other spiritual practices which sought union with God. In these ways, this sect lived a lifestyle that was similar to the followers of the Buddha. Their written records indicate a belief in reincarnation and the karmic principle.

⁷⁴ The Essenes were a religious sect of Judaism that flourished from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. in Qumran, a plateau in the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea. The origin of the name is debated, but may derive from the Greek word for holy or an Aramaic dialect term for pious. In their writings they refer to themselves as the “Sons of Light”.



Also during this same time period before Jesus lived, many great scholars and social reformers were born in Palestine and Egypt. They studied the philosophical and spiritual texts of China, India, Greece and Persia, and sought to reform the traditions of Judaism. One of these was the son of Sirach, also surnamed Jesus (a common name in Judaism). He spoke of God's omniscience [? the right word here? was that his issue? was this a contemporary concern?] and the importance of living a virtuous life of moral integrity. Ben Sirach taught that a life of virtue is characterized by compassion for others, and is expressed through good deeds. Another contemporary Jewish reformer was the sage Hillel. He saw the necessity of reminding the people of one of the central tenets of their ancient tradition: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to yourself." He also objected to the empty rituals of the priests.

One of the greatest Jewish scholars of this period was Philo⁷⁵. He lived in Alexandria, a center of Jewish life in Egypt. He studied Indian and Greek philosophy, and wrote many volumes in which he interpreted these ideas in the context of Jewish thought. One of his most significant contributions is his treatise "On the

⁷⁵ The writings of Philo (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.) are the most important surviving documents from the period of Hellenistic Judaism.



contemplative life” in which he explicitly makes the case for moral integrity and its importance in leading a spiritual life.

Although there were so many reformers speaking out during these centuries of turmoil in Judaism, they were unable to significantly influence the common people or gain much support. The Jewish people at this time were very fragmented socially and politically, as well as geographically. Israel was an occupied territory of the Greek and then Roman Empires. There was no legitimate King of the Jews, and had not been for some time. The government officials were appointed by the foreign powers, and even the priesthood of the Temple (which had been rebuilt in Jerusalem) was subject to manipulation by the powers in control. Some of the dominant sects of Judaism at this time still insisted on old forms of ritual worship involving animal sacrifices. One of the popular schools within Judaism during the early part of the first century A.D. was based on the teachings of the rabbinical scholar Shammai⁷⁶. He was opposed to the reformers, and sought to suppress any signs of spiritual awakening or new thinking. .

⁷⁶ Shammai (c. 50 B.C.E. – 30 C.E.) was a Jewish sage known for his opposition to the spiritual teachings of Hillel. He and his school interpreted the Law (*Torah* of Biblical Judaism) extremely rigorously. They emphasized the external behavior of deeds rather than the intent of the heart. The great debates between Hillel and Shammai are recorded in rabbinical texts.



His influence served to sustain the traditional ways of ritual worship.

At this time there arose a great seeker of God named John. This sage would have a significant role in the unfolding religious drama. He seems to have been deeply influenced by the Essenes and also by Indian thinkers. He preached a philosophy of nonviolence and self control and lived a life of ascetic simplicity near the Jordan River, outside of Jerusalem. Before he would instruct spiritual seekers, they were asked to bathe in the river. This same custom is prevalent in India, where aspirants on certain spiritual paths must bathe before initiation. The initiation by John has come to be known as baptism, which means “to take a plunge in the water”. This rite of baptism was based on the traditional practice of ritual cleansing (*mikveh*) that was customary in many of the sects of Judaism. This was a regular practice in the Essene communities, and is recorded in many of their documents. John proclaimed that the promises God had made to His covenant people were available to the spiritual seeker. The Jews of first century Israel had come to refer to the Promised Land as the Kingdom of Heaven. John taught these people that the Kingdom they sought was nowhere else to be found but within each individual. He explained that they would continue to suffer until they found this heavenly kingdom within.



John taught the Jews who came to him that discipline of the senses was important, and he also modeled the practices of fasting and prayer. He taught that justice and moral rectitude were essentials of the true path of religion (*dharmā*). He spoke to the people about the ways of true reform and the attainment of salvation.

The Descent of Lord Jesus

The common understanding of Christianity is that Jesus was the founder of this religion. Most people do not grasp the significance of the fact that Jesus was a Jew in the land of Israel. The teachings which later came to be thought of as Christianity were actually a particular voice of religious and political dissent during the age of turbulence we have just been describing. All of the words and works of this Jewish prophet-teacher were originally oral traditions that were shared among various groups of Jews in Israel. Later these stories were collected and recorded, and have been preserved in various texts which are now considered to be sacred history. The foundational stories about the life of Jesus are contained in the books of what has now come to be called the New Testament of the Bible. The spiritual ideas were molded into a religion by later interpreters



and teachers who revealed the meaning of the events as they had come to understand them after the death of the prophet.

It is not known exactly when Jesus was born, but it is believed that it was between 4 B.C. and 6 C.E. As we have seen, the land of Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire at that time. The local Roman administrator for the Jews was Herod. The legends that have been told about the birth of Jesus speak about his mother Mary, who is said to have been born in the village of Nazareth. Mary was engaged to Joseph, who was a common carpenter. It is believed that Mary became pregnant before the marriage and that this was solely by the grace of God acting through His Spirit. It is central to the legend that Mary was nonetheless still a virgin when she became pregnant. In the story, Joseph was divinely inspired and proceeded to marry Mary because he understood the divine origin of her pregnancy. During the later months of the pregnancy, it is told that Mary and Joseph traveled to the southern district of Judea in order to be counted in a census. When the couple arrived in the town of Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus.

The Childhood of Jesus



Little is documented about the early years of the life of Jesus, but we can imagine the lifestyle of this family. Joseph was a carpenter by trade and Mary took care of the household. We can picture that Mary used to weave. The family would probably have lived in a small house where they carried out the typical daily routine of a simple Jewish life in a village. It is possible that Mary and Joseph would have taught the boy Jesus how to read and write. As the boy grew older he would have attended services with his father at a local Jewish synagogue⁷⁷, and perhaps would have had some religious education. As the eldest son, Jesus would have looked after his younger brothers and sisters and also helped with the household tasks. We can imagine that from his earliest childhood Jesus was compassionate and always treated others well and with kindness. As Jesus grew older he would have learned the trade of carpentry from his father. It is thought by some that Jesus was a carpenter in Nazareth until the age of 30 when his public ministry began. We will discuss this again later and see some other possibilities of what Jesus did during those years.

⁷⁷ The synagogues were small gathering places for Jews in the villages. Most of the people were not able to travel regularly to the central place of ritual worship at the Jerusalem Temple. The sacrificial cult did not take place on a local level. The synagogues were buildings where local sages, called rabbis, would teach and lead the people in prayer, singing, and worship.



From the tales that have been preserved in the traditions, it seems that all who knew Jesus in these early years were amazed by his truthfulness and honesty. In one of the historical records we are told that at the age of 12 Jesus went to Jerusalem with his parents for the Jewish festivals at the Temple. Perhaps during this visit to Jerusalem Jesus would have been greatly affected by seeing the priestly rituals of animal sacrifice. We can imagine that he would have been curious about the religious meaning of all the activity, the loud screams of the countless animals that were being slaughtered, and the overwhelming smell and gore involved in the ritual use of the animal blood. It could have been at this time that his mind was cast into doubt concerning the merit of what he saw. The actual record of this episode does not include any details about the thoughts of Jesus on this occasion.

During the first century A.D. the major religious schools of Judaism were in Jerusalem. This is where the great Rabbis held public debates, proclaimed their interpretations of the scriptures, and educated students in their traditions of Judaism. A story is related in the gospels that on the occasion of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem with his parents, at the age of 12, he became involved in discussions with the Rabbis. While his parents were occupied with adult involvement in rituals and prayer, Jesus was pursuing spiritual understanding. Many days passed in this way as they



were visiting Jerusalem. Upon returning to Nazareth the parents discovered that Jesus had not returned with their group and they immediately returned to Jerusalem to find him. After searching for three days they found him questioning and debating with the learned rabbis of Judaism. This story tells us that even as a boy of 12, Jesus was very resolved and sincere in his desire to know the nature of the Divine, and had an intense interest in studying with the Jewish teachers. Upon his return to Nazareth we would assume that this desire to learn about God continued to grow. The written record and legendary tales have no further information about the life of Jesus from the age of 12 until his baptism by John around the age of 30.

The Search for Truth

By nature it seems that Jesus was a shrewd observer of the social situation, and also had an interest in the religious teachings that set the tone of life in rural Israel. He would have noticed that the common Jewish people were oppressed by the domination of the Roman rulers, as well as by the false teachings and rigid standards of righteousness imposed on them by the priesthood down in Judea. Jesus was a contemplative person. He would have pondered deeply about the web spun by the priests about the requirements for animal sacrifice and personal purification



laws. The particular combination of Jesus' thinking and social observations seems to have compelled him to help people out of this bleak situation. Attentively he served others. Although he could have lived the life of a householder, as was typical for his day and age, he instead chose a life of social and spiritual service.

Jesus would also have noticed many contradictions and ambiguities in the religious traditions. For example, in the Hebrew Scriptures there are multiple references to detailed commands about the slaughter of animals for sacrifice. But there are also numerous places, especially in the declarations of the prophets, where it is stated that God desires compassion, and in fact prefers this to animal sacrifice. It is said, "I desire compassion not sacrifice. I prefer the path of contemplation on God rather than sacrifice of innocent animals. However, the people transgressed these true teachings of God just as Adam transgressed the command of God. They have distorted the teachings."

In the book of the Prophet Isaiah it is written: "God says: 'You sacrifice many animals in My name. What is the use of killing these goats and lambs? Upon their slaughter I do not become



pleased. I hate the smell of the sacrificial fire. Stop doing evil and learn to do good.”

Jesus would have been familiar with the common Jewish teachings about justice that were based on the Biblical Judaism practiced in his day. Although there is a frequently quoted verse from the Torah which says ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,’ this has often been interpreted out of context and with retribution in mind.⁷⁸ But even in Jesus’ time it was apparent that there were other Torah teachings that said people should not take revenge. The underlying principle is that God always desires the welfare of all creatures

Prophets, saints and mystics do not search for a new truth. Rather, by simply removing the layers of dirt of misinterpretations that have corrupted the truth, they bring forth

⁷⁸ Exodus 21:24 read in context shows an intention to limit vengeance. This verse is quoted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In that context he is urging his followers to turn the other cheek when confronted by violence (Matthew 5:38-39). Christian interpretations often unwittingly criticize the religion of the Hebrew Bible without understanding it in its own context from a pre-Christian era. Mahatma Gandhi added another layer of response when he commented: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and the whole world would soon be blind and toothless.”



the same truth in a new light. The same original truth must repeatedly be presented to suit the current age. Jesus faced two challenges. First he would have to extricate the truth [veena: no matter what I tried, I could not eliminate this spae] from the fabricated norms within the prevalent tradition. Then he would need to teach the path of realization of God within that is attained through self-control.

In the stories in the gospels we see that Jesus felt a desire to have the association of a true teacher. He had heard about the ministry and teaching of John⁷⁹ who was baptizing people in the Jordan River for the remission of their sins. Jesus approached John in his hut in the wilderness. He felt very peaceful after listening to John's teachings and he desired to have John as his spiritual mentor. According to tradition, John took Jesus by his hand and immersed him in the water of the River Jordan. This baptism was the way of initiation into the teaching.

After his initiation, Jesus sought the quiet of the wilderness and spent time there in meditation and prayer. He fasted on one occasion for forty days. After this discipline, a story is told in the gospels about all the temptations that Jesus had to conquer within himself. He overcame all. Jesus attained a great spiritual

⁷⁹ Several versions of the traditional stories indicate that John and Jesus were cousins.



awakening and his inner spiritual eye was opened. In some traditions, Jesus also practiced meditation of the divine inner sound. Jesus says: “See the door to heaven has been opened. The first sound I have heard was of such a nature that it sounds like a trumpet talking to me. It said, ‘Come this way. I will show you things ahead.’” Jesus further says: “I was in my soul (I left my body and came into the sound) and I heard the deep sound of the trumpet.” At this point Jesus would have realized that the goal of his life was to teach the true path of liberation of the soul to the suffering people of his own country. He continued even after this to go to the wilderness and spend time in prayer and contemplation. John was very pleased with the spiritual progress of his disciple Jesus.

During the years of John’s ministry, the political situation in Galilee, a northern province of Israel, continued to deteriorate. Herod Antipas had been appointed by the Roman government. He was a morally decadent individual who abandoned his wife in order to marry his brother’s wife. John raised his voice against this moral outrage. When Herod heard about this public criticism of his private affairs he became greatly angered and had John imprisoned. John maintained his position and was unremorseful. Herod simply had John beheaded. In the gospel tale about this incident it is reported that Herod then paraded the



head of John on a platter at one of his parties. Many Christians regard John as the first martyr of Christianity.

When Jesus heard of John's demise he became very saddened and retreated to seclusion in the wilderness for time in prayer and contemplation. Afterwards he began traveling from place to place teaching the message of John. From a common way of seeing this story, this was the beginning of Christianity.

Jesus' ministry mostly took place in the northern districts, around the village of Capernaum and the city of Tiberius. There were many people in this region that followed Jesus even from among the Gentiles⁸⁰. Jesus lived a humble and disciplined life. He wore simple clothing, walked barefoot, and slept under the starry sky. He rejected the comforts of the easy life of wealth and status, and instead embraced the lifestyle and fellowship of the people in the villages. Jesus regarded the life of non-attachment as a great virtue, and had meager possessions. He pursued the way of non-violence, and found that hurting anyone's heart was impossible for him. He was a living example of the axiom: 'Hate the sin but love the sinner.'

⁸⁰ From the Jewish perspective, all non-Jewish groups of people are known as Gentiles.



Jesus lived the life of his ideals, much like a Vedic *sadhu* or monk. He was often considered to be a fool, or even worse, an unbeliever. Frequently he was flatly rejected by some of the Jews, and some even threw stones at him. He was evicted from several towns. Nevertheless, his actions and teachings had a great impact on the common people. He regularly healed people of their illnesses, depressions and superstitions, and was available to all who earnestly sought salvation from God. For this reason the Jewish people began to think of Jesus as the Messiah, calling him the Prophet and the Deliverer. The title ‘Messiah’⁸¹ literally means ‘anointed One’, and derives from the tradition of pouring oil over the body of a king or other personage being honored and inaugurated into office. The title always referred to a person who was recognized as the divinely appointed king or messenger of God’s will. The title ‘Christ’ (*christos* in Greek) is commonly assumed to be the Greek translation of the Hebrew (Jewish) term *Messiah* in the Hebrew language.⁸² Jesus had a special love for the poor and for those

⁸¹ The term *Messiah* originated in the Near East where the kings were anointed with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. The title is found in several texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, both in the historical records of kings and in prophetic speeches. The Persian king Cyrus is called God’s Anointed when he is selected to be an instrument in God’s dealings with Israel.

⁸² The major distinctions in the underlying meanings of the terms *Messiah* and *Christ* reflect deep and complicated issues that reach beyond the purposes of the present discussion.



who were suffering illness or injustice. He mingled and ate with them and taught them the path to peace and light. He healed many sick people with the power of his purity. He was kindhearted while at the same time he was able to stay detached. He used to call himself the son of God and the giver of liberation to the world. Even so, he remained profoundly humble. Jesus loved God with all his heart and mind, and often spent entire nights in prayer and meditation.

Jesus referred to the town of Capernaum as his very own. It was a town of illiterate fishermen. Many of the families from this village were his devotees. Simon and Andrew, two brothers who were devout followers lived in Capernaum. Simon is the disciple who was later known as Peter. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, lived nearby. These followers from this small town were instrumental in spreading the message about Jesus and his teachings in all directions. It is believed by many that Peter, James and John received esoteric teachings from Jesus. Some think that this private instruction from the Master was about the practice of inner meditation. This is thought by those who also believe that Jesus was quite familiar with Indian non-dualism as well as the Greek philosophy of the time.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ



Jesus taught many principles that are very similar to the Indian concepts presented in the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Vedanta* texts, and also in the teachings of the Buddha. For example, people often asked Jesus how the Kingdom of Heaven would be established. He would answer:

“First of all, man should know that humans and God are essentially one. The duality which we perceive is due to the veil of love for the world which creates this illusion of separation from True knowledge (unity of God and humans). The world as we perceive it is not real and it is a deception. God is ever living, eternal and is the truth. To remove this veil of ignorance, one must be detached from this world and should strive for the new life. One should develop control of the mind and learn from within how to discriminate between the truth and non-truth. One should ask for help from one who knows the path. This is the way to find unity with God. One must understand that I am in all and all are in Me. All is God and God is in everyone. The all and God are one. The cosmic Soul participates in the [Kingdom of] heaven of God. This is the goal of human life, this is heaven, and this is liberation.”

[Veena: the source of the preceding quote would be useful for checking the wording]



The main teachings of Jesus [the Christ] are as follows:

1. Know the commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures: Do not kill (do not hurt anyone), do not steal, do not be a false witness, do not deceive, and honor your parents.
2. Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you.
3. If anyone shows animosity to you or inflicts injury on you, you should pray for their well being.
4. Do not take the life of another. He who takes the life of another is sure to be punished by God.
5. Do not commit adultery. But even if you look on another with lustful eyes, you have already committed adultery in your heart.
6. Beware of false prophets. They appear as sheep but inwardly they are fierce wolves.
7. Whoever tries to save his own life will lose it. The one who sacrifices his life for the sake of my teachings will gain life. If a man loses his soul, even if he has gained the whole world, what is the use? [**What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?**]
8. Do not hoard wealth in this world where worms and decay will destroy it. Instead collect your wealth in heaven where it will not decay nor become tarnished and where thieves will not steal it.



9. Do not perform spiritual practices in a way which shows pride or arrogance. If one disregards this advice, no spiritual benefit will be given from the heavenly Father.
10. If a man says: “Lord, Lord” he will not necessarily enter into the kingdom of heaven. The person who will enter the kingdom of heaven is the one who acts according to the will of the heavenly Father.
11. If you truly desire something and ask for it, it will be granted. When you seek you shall find, when you knock it shall be opened to you.
12. ***Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV)*** Enter through the narrow gate, because the path and the gate which is broad and easy is the path to destruction. Many take this path. However, the narrow and difficult gate takes you to life. There are very few who walk on this path.
13. The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light. If your eye is evil then your whole body will be filled with darkness. If the light which is in you is covered, how great is that darkness! It is so, because the light which is



in you, although covered or obscured, is greater than [
 ??? the light.]

14. In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was
 with God and God was the Word.

15. All [? this] is created by the Word and without the Word
 nothing could be created.

16. In that Word there was life and that life was the light of
 people's lives.

Analysis: Correspondence of Teachings

From this review of the main teachings of Jesus it becomes clear that on the one hand, Jesus gives guidelines for moral as well as practical living. On the other hand, he teaches the inner mystical path of the Saints and Prophets. The correspondence between these two sets of teachings is quite remarkable. The Saints tell us that in the body there dwells the light and sound which are the energies of God. Through practice the spiritual seeker will experience the inner light and the divine sound, which is the Word. Through that Word the aspirant reaches God.

This spiritual practice is known as *Dhristi Yoga*. It involves bringing the vision of the two eyes to one point of focus. The practitioner is then able to go through the 'narrow gate' which is



called the tenth gate, the third eye, or the *ajna chakra*. This is the point when the practitioner comes out of the darkness and becomes established in light. Through the technique of Sound *Yoga* the practitioner is then able to hear [? listen to] many sounds, but then, leaving these sounds behind, the practitioner reaches the original sound (the Word). Through this Word all of creation came into existence and is maintained. At this point the *yogi* merges with that Word and becomes one with God. Meeting with God, the person realizes that in essence, he is God. With this insight, all suffering ends. This is the Kingdom of Heaven of which Jesus spoke.

The teachings of Jesus correspond with these practices of Sant Mat. It is these meditation practices which enabled Jesus to enter the Kingdom of God. This is the path by which Jesus merged with the divine, thus becoming a son of God.

Furthermore, it can be seen that Jesus emphasized the need for celibacy, just like the Indian Saints and Mahatmas. The early disciples refrained from the married life. But as time passed, the followers eventually forgot the importance of some of their master's teachings, such as celibacy.



Another similarity is that Jesus did not desire to display the inner powers that were the source of his miracles. The Saints in the Sant Mat tradition also despise the show of miraculous powers. Often Jesus was challenged about the healings he performed, and he sometimes responded by declaring that he was not the source of such miracles. He always directed attention to ‘His Father in Heaven’ as the source. However, it is certainly understood that his compassion is what made many sick people well.

It is also of importance to note that Jesus believed in life after the death of the physical body, just as is taught in the Vedic Way.

All of these traditions and stories were preserved after the death of Jesus. It has been thought by some that Matthew was the most learned among the first disciples. It is likely that Matthew would have treasured his memories of his Master’s teachings, and it is thought that he became a spiritual teacher himself in order to transmit these teachings to other believers. The community that developed around Matthew’s teaching preserved the stories he told about Jesus. These have been collected and recorded, and have come to be known as the Gospel of Matthew. There are many versions of these Gospel stories that have been recorded in



writing, passed on through generations, and multiplied into various traditions.

Jesus Travels to the Indian Subcontinent

It is a fact that there are no known accounts of the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30. There is a lack of any clear, systematic and sequential records from these years. But there are many followers of Jesus who are always looking for ways to know more about his life. A prominent Russian scholar named Dr. Nicolos Notovich has been investigating these lost years of Christ. Dr. Notovich spent forty years doing research in the Middle East as well as in Europe. He has studied hundreds of temples, libraries and ancient manuscripts across these lands. Dr. Notovich discovered some long abandoned records in a small monastery in the Angadys desert. These records indicate that at the age of 14 Jesus embarked on a journey which led him to Tibet and later to India. While searching inside a monastery called Hemis in Ladakh, Dr. Notovich found a handwritten scroll in the ancient Pali language. In this text there is a detailed and lengthy description of Jesus' travels to Tibet and India. This account was later published as "The Unknown Life of Jesus". These are some of the stories recorded in this manuscript:



[Veena: should these quotations be edited further, or are they straight copies?]

“At the age of 13 the Marriage of Jesus was discussed. Jesus desirous of leading a life wholly dedicated to God decided to leave his home rather than be bound by marriage. Accordingly, he left his home as a seeker of Truth. He desired to learn about *Buddha dharma*. Joining a trader’s caravan he first came to *Sindh* and later India. In India he stayed among many of the Jain teachers. He visited Jagannath, a pilgrimage place in India. For six years he journeyed to Rajgraha, Kapisvastu, Benares and many other pilgrimage places. He also studied the Buddhist tradition from the monks of the day. Finally, through Nepal he went to Iran and thereafter returned to Israel. He then began teaching the life of truth, love, and non-violence.” (The above account is the compressed version of the 18 missing years in the life of Jesus.)

Many people are skeptical about this alternate account, and find it very hard to believe that it is based on facts. However, when we closely examine what Jesus actually taught, we see that his teaching was of a very different nature from the other teachings of his time. It appears that Jesus taught a path that corresponds closely to the teachings of Buddhism and Indian thought. The



theory that Jesus may have traveled outside of Israel and may have experienced other religious teachings has some appeal when viewed in this light. Perhaps there is more to consider. The traditional interpretations based on the accepted sources may not have the only claim to credibility. It is beyond the scope of this work, but it must be suggested that a more intensive analysis of this correlation would be most compelling.[veena: this space too was resistant to being eliminated in my editing]**Rising Voices of Mutiny**

It would not be unfair to say that the teachings and methods of Jesus were like a revolution within the prevalent traditions of Judaism. Moreover, many of the common people were dissatisfied with the rigid practices and dogma of some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Many were disgruntled by the injustices of a system that seemed to have become corrupt. There was great resentment toward some of the rabbis and scholars who paraded their righteousness in front of others, while claiming that outer conformity to their interpretations of the purity laws was of more value than the attitude of a person's heart. To be certain, the teachings of Jesus, which contained messages of love, peace and equality, were greatly savored by the common man. However, the Roman rulers and certain



Jewish priests found these teachings too threatening to their own selfish ends. For this reason, they viewed Jesus as the enemy.

Jesus himself was repelled by the arrogance he saw in many of his fellow Jews. He was outraged by the greed and materialism that pervaded the sacrificial system of the Temple, and was offended by the practices of animal slaughter that had come to define worship. He publicly confronted the priests at the temple during the time when multitudes of people had come there to celebrate the holy festivals. He interrupted the activities of the money changers and those who were selling the animals for the sacrifices, and accused the priesthood of turning the house of God into a house of thieves. This would have caused some of the worshippers to become disillusioned, and might have resulted in loss of income as well. The pride, ego and arrogance of the priests, along with their corrupted and materialistic system, had been delivered a significant blow.

[Veena: I made some major revisions here ... to unpack anachronism etc] The Jewish religion before the Christian era was fundamentally an ethno-national entity grounded in the land of Israel. The worship structure was not thought of as a 'path to God' in the way that we today might think of spirituality. Rather, the priesthood and temple rituals were a surviving remnant of the



ancient cultic expression of a people who already considered themselves to have been chosen by God. The sacrificial system was viewed from within Judaism as a response of obedience, and understood to be the only means of making atonement for the sins of the people who were already members of a relationship bound by covenant. Worship was essentially mediated through the priestly functions.

These religious premises did not fit well with the social conditions that had unfolded in the thousand years of historical complications since the era of the founding of the monarchy. Nor were these early layers of religion meeting the spiritual needs of a people in crisis. Ancient Biblical Judaism had been formulated during the generation of Moses and the exodus. The religious system had then assimilated the responses that arose to meet the challenges of forging an identity and a loyalty within an emerging political and social entity. By the first century of the new era, the ancient religion had been stretched to a breaking point.

The message that Jesus was proclaiming showed the people that God is everywhere, in everyone and is the life of everyone. The revolutionary core of his teaching claimed that a true worshipper could worship God within himself. This worship would be



worship of the Truth. Further, Jesus proclaimed that all good people are able to attain God--even sinners, prostitutes, and people who were not even Jewish. These subversive ideas were intolerable to the orthodox Jewish leadership. In their legalistic adherence to the ancient commands of Scripture, they were stuck on the external level of the appearance of behavior. From their perspective, the Sabbath was a holy day, and all work of any kind was prohibited and automatically judged sinful. Even the showing mercy and caring for the sick was considered unlawful on the Sabbath. But at the same time, the orthodox understanding of the Law deemed animal sacrifice at the Temple to be acceptable, and even honoring of God. Jesus spoke out strongly against this hypocrisy, and thus further threatened and enraged the Jewish leaders of the Temple.

Taken out of context and understood from a literalistic mindset, Jesus committed the ultimate blasphemy by referring to himself as the son of God. To many of the Jews this was high heresy. All of these reasons combined together to trigger an uproar even among the few orthodox followers of Jesus. They now became his enemies as well.



The Evening of Life

There were many people who were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the masses. At the time of the Passover holiday, Jews from all over Israel, and even from the nearby lands of the *diaspora* (dispersion, scattering), gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. Although the ministry of Jesus had primarily taken place in the northern regions of the Galilee, on this particular Passover he and his disciples had come to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Multitudes of Jews therefore heard about the teachings of this itinerant rabbi Jesus from Nazareth who was said to preach with authority. The stories of his message, rumors about the miracles he performed, and tales about his own personal example had various effects on people. Many were intrigued. Revolutionary possibilities filled the air in the crowded city. Civil unrest and dissension among the crowds was further aroused by a diverse group of rebels, political activists, and prophets who each had a loud and appealing solution to the misery and chaos. The social fabric of Jewish society was pulling at the seams. All of this was taking place under the military occupation of a puppet government. The Jewish ruling class was itself also subject to this foreign authority. Peace and survival were potent desires for all.



There were many who were threatened by the teachings and personal example of Jesus' life. They labeled him a traitor to the Jewish religion. It was the custom for the leaders of the priests to convene to discuss political and religious situations. They gathered together to evaluate their options in responding to the mounting crisis in Jerusalem. They pooled their wisdom and concluded that blasphemy against God would pollute the Jewish religion. In their way of thinking, it sounded like Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. This term had political implications: the Son of God as the "Anointed One," would evoke images of the King appointed by God to rule Israel legitimately. If Jesus was also inferring that he was the expected deliverer, the Prophet like Moses whose appearance had been prophesied, then it would be expedient, and righteous for these leaders of Israel to pronounce their judgment by condemning Jesus to death. However, as an occupied Roman province, the Jewish council had no authority to perform execution. So they plotted to kill Jesus. They realized that Jesus had many followers and that a revolt could arise if they killed him outright.

The New Testament records the inner workings of the plan they devised. They manipulated Judas, a close disciple of Jesus, by contriving to pay him thirty pieces of silver in exchange for his



identification of Jesus to the authorities. The betrayal was enacted by Judas kissing Jesus. The priests involved the Roman soldiers in the capture of Jesus, and brought him before the Roman Governor as a prisoner. All night he endured physical and mental torture at their hands, and in the morning he was brought before the Roman court.

The Jewish priests accused him of many wrong doings and presented many false witnesses. However, Pilate the governor heard all the accusations and declared that he saw nothing illegal in these accusations. The priests however aggressively pressed their demand for a death sentence. Pilate who considered Jesus sinless was nevertheless concerned that an out-and-out revolt might occur if he released Jesus and subsequently yielded to the desires of the Jews. Jesus was condemned to hang on a cross until death. It was the custom to allow the condemned to have a great amount of alcohol prior to execution to alleviate some of the pain. Jesus refused this and they nailed him to a cross. Jesus cried out, “O Lord, why have You forsaken me? Please forgive these people; they don’t know what they are doing.” Jesus forgave his tormentors even as he was dying on the cross.

Some of the Gospel stories offer details about the day of the execution. In the stories it is said that when his soul left his body,



the skies darkened and the earth quaked. Even the heavy curtain inside the Temple was miraculously split down the middle⁸³. In some traditions these events took place on Friday, April 3rd, 29 C.E. It is believed that the body of Jesus was buried in a tomb, but on the third day he returned to earth. The New Testament tells that the Risen Jesus then remained with his close disciples for forty days, disclosing deeper understanding to them. He then ascended to heaven in their sight.

Chapter Five

⁸³ The significance of this curtain lies in its symbolic role as the Veil which separates the people from the Holy of Holies. In ancient Biblical Judaism, only the High Priest was ever permitted to enter into this most sacred place.



Islamic Tradition

Islam

Vedic religion, Christianity and Islam combined comprise a significant number of followers in the world. Of these three, the Vedic religions are the oldest, followed by Christianity and then the Islamic tradition. The word ‘Islam’ is derived from the Arabic word-root *s-l-m*,



meaning ‘to r or surrender’, and specifically, to surrender to the will of God. Thus, in the Islamic tradition, the one who has surrendered to God (Allah), is called a Muslim. The prophet Muhammad, the messenger of God in this tradition, taught the importance of discipline and obedience. Humility is a principal virtue of Islam.

The Birth of Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad was born in the sixth century C.E. (approximately 1440 years ago). At that time, the Arab world was in great turmoil. There was social and religious confusion, and the community was divided into many factions. The nomadic tribes and aboriginal peoples of the Arab region had diverse objects of worship, including the heavens, ghosts, spirits and stones, as well as other inanimate idols. The Jewish people had established their communities in the Arab world and their tradition and, religious practices were also present in the Arab communities. With so many options for worship, the people were not united under the canopy of any single religious belief system. Moral values were declining and social



chaos was at a zenith. Worship, sacrifice and prayers were performed either out of ignorance, habit, or to justify and gratify the individual ego. Prayer and sacrifice were often aimed at extorting or humiliating other individuals or groups. Social vices such as use of intoxicants, adultery, communal discord, and bribery were prevalent. The times were characterized by the absence of a central ethical code, coupled with a lack of any systematized or coherent religious belief. This unfavorable environment was pervasive in the entire Middle Eastern region at that time. There were also many peace loving people, and these felt a strong need for reform. The combination of these various factors created fertile ground for change and reformation. It was at this time, and under these socio-religious conditions, that Prophet Muhammad was born.

The Life of Muhammad

It is believed that in the year c. 570 CE, Prophet Muhammad was born into a Kuraish family, in the city of Mecca, in what is today known as Saudi Arabia. His mother's name was Aminah and his father was Abdallah. His father, Abdallah, died several weeks before



Muhammad's birth, leaving Muhammad fatherless. Muhammad's mother, Aminah, also passed away when he was only five years old. He was then raised by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib.

Even as a young child, Muhammad already was different from his peers. He was calm and serene by nature. He avoided social and religious celebrations that encouraged disgraceful behaviors. Speaking the truth came naturally to Muhammad, he never imbibed intoxicants, and he always returned what was not his. He avoided the popular festivals, which he viewed as idolatrous, loud, and filled with idle talk. His good nature was well known, and he was content to earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow. Under the guardianship of Abu Talib, he grew into adolescence and took up the job of tending camels. Later in life he married a wealthy widow.

From his early years, Muhammad enjoyed solitude. He frequently visited a hill, named Heera, in the wilderness near Mecca. He would stay in a cave there, subsisting on a few items which he would bring with him. In this cave he



would spend days in worship and prayer to God (Allah). Descriptions of Muhammad's experiences at Heera have been documented by various Muslim writers. For example, Molana Rum relates Muhammad's description of his meditative experiences:

*My ears reverberate with the sound of God. But
God's sound hides from fleshly ears.*

And Molana Sheikh Muhammad Akaram Sabari has written that Muhammad remained

immersed in vibrant unceasing inner sound while living in this cave (*Iktbas-Ul-Anwar*, p. 106). Sabari also claims that the founder of the Qadari Sufi Community, Hajrat Kadar Jilani, meditated in this same cave for extended periods of time.

From these examples, it is clear that the Prophet Muhammad practiced the Yoga of Sound in the same way as various saints of different traditions. In Sufism (mystical Islam) the Yoga of Sound is known as *Sultanulajakr*, and in the Vedic tradition it is known as *Nadanusandhana* or *Surat Shabd Yoga*. This practice of the divine sound is considered to be the highest practice of the saints. It is



believed that the experience of sound meditation was also attained by Muhammad Dara Shikoh, the eldest son of the Mughal Emperor of India, Shah Jahan Khan. He has written:

The entire world is filled with the divine light and sound of God. The blind still ask where God is. Cleanse your ears that are filled with the wax of arrogance and skepticism, and then you will hear the sound in every direction coming from the heavens above. It is a mystery why we wait to hear the divine trumpet resounding on the Day of Judgment when the sweet sound of the divine trumpet resounds unceasingly. (Risala-E-Haq-Numa, p. 16)

Dara Shikoh also states that before Muhammad became a prophet, as well as after, he practiced the meditation of divine inner sound or Word.

Prophet Muhammad and the Divine Vision of the Angel Gabriel

By the grace of God, and through the power of spiritual discipline, the angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad during a spiritual retreat in the cave of Heera. Muhammad was forty years of age. At the time of this divine vision of



the angel Gabriel, the verses that would become the Holy Koran, were also revealed to Muhammad. After these events he became known as a prophet. He had full faith that Allah was the only God, and was the only true master. He told other people about the divine message he had received, and that Allah had made him a messenger for the benefit of humanity. Sometimes he was faced with distressing reactions from those who did not believe him. Such people were engrossed in traditional beliefs and found such talk useless, and in fact, even threatening to their established beliefs. In this way he made many opponents. There were also some who were envious of his large following and recognition. So it happened that these sought to do him harm out of their jealousy.

For many years Muhammad taught the divine message in secret, tolerating these abuses. After this period Muhammad received Divine instruction to teach this message in the open. His enemies reacted adversely, continued to inflict abuse, and even threatened to take his life. Due to this increasing threat and danger, at the age of 53 Muhammad was forced to leave Mecca to take refuge in



Medina. The people of Medina welcomed him wholeheartedly. It can be said that the Islamic faith actually began to spread from Medina. This year of Muhammad's migration to Medina came to be called the *Hijri* by the followers of Islam. The word *Hijri* literally means "to abandon a place". The Islamic calendar reckons the year of the *Hijri* as the first year. At the age of 63, Muhammad left this material world. His last words were:

Every person should work toward their own liberation.

The Principles and Practices of Islam

According to Islamic doctrine, every individual [the follower of Islam] must have faith in Almighty Allah and his prophets. It is believed that a day of judgment will come when Allah will hold each human being accountable for his actions. On that day people will be judged according to their good or evil deeds.

There are five obligatory practices that are foundational to the Islamic faith. These are known as the five pillars:



1. *Kalimai Taiyab* or *Shahada*: This is the proclamation and confession that Allah is the one and only true God, and that Muhammad *Sahab* is the prophet of God. It is expected to be a public testimony of commitment made by each Muslim. This is also called *Kalima*, and it corresponds with the Vedic term *dharma mantra*.

2. *Namaj*: [other sources call this *Salat*] Five times each day there is obligatory prayer. This is preceded by ritual purification of the body by washing with water. The followers of Islam must go to a mosque every Friday to perform the afternoon prayers.

3. *Roza* or *Sawm*: This is the daily fast during the holy month of Ramajan (Ramadan). It is believed that the Divine message, in the form of the Koran, was revealed to Muhammad during this month.

4. *Zakat* or *Zakaah*: Muslims should give one fortieth of their income to the poor and needy as charity. They must see this charitable act as their offering to God.

5. *Hajj*. Each Muslim is expected to travel to Mecca on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Money



spent to go on this pilgrimage should have been earned honestly and with pure work.

In addition to these five pillars of Islam there are other doctrines which deal with specific activities of living. Some examples of doctrines which a devout Muslim must abide by are:

- Muslims must not worship idols. For this reason, photos or representations of the physical form of the prophet Muhammad are not available.
- They must not eat the flesh of swine which is considered an unclean animal.
- They should not make loans that bear interest.

Muslims must follow the various rules concerning marriage and divorce. These rules are written under *Shariat*. Muhammad did not approve of the practice of slavery and stated that it is benevolent for Muslims to free slaves. The central message of Islam is equality of all human beings.

Fundamental Beliefs of Islam



1. *Kalimaitaib: La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.* “There is no God other than Allah. Muhammad is the true messenger of Allah.”

2. *Kalimai Sahadat: ashhadu a la ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu wa ashhadu anna Muham- madan 'abduhu wa rasooluh.* “I bear witness that there is no other God than Allah and I confess that Muhammad is his His messenger.”

3. *Kalimai Tamjeed: Subhana-Allahi walhamdu lillahi wa la ilaha ill-Allahu wallahu Akbar, wa la haula wa la quwwata ilia billahil 'aliyyil-'Azeem.* “Allah is pure Being. All praise and all good words pertain to Allah. There is no other God than Allah. Allah is the most great and there is no other deity greater than Him. All strength, abundance and radiance are in Allah.”

4. *Kalimai Tauhid: La ilaha ill-Allahu wahdahu la sharika lahu, la hul mulku wa la hul hamdu, Yuhyi wa Yumeetu, biyadihil-khairu, wa huwa 'ala kulli shai-in Qadeer.* “There is none worthy of worship, but Allah; He is One and



has no partner. All praises are for Him. He is the life giver and the cause of death. All well being is from Him and He has power over all things.”

5. *Kalimai Istigafar: Astaghfirullah Rabii min kulli dhanbin adhnabtahu amadan aw khata'an, sirran aw alani-yatan wa atubu illaih minadh-dhanbilladhi, la a'lamu, innaka anta allamul ghayub, wa sattar ul'uyoubi, wa ghaffarudh-dhunubi, wa la hawla wa la quwwatta illa billahil alliyil 'adheem.* “I seek forgiveness for all my sins, those which I have committed knowingly as well as unknowingly. Whether they were committed in the open or in secret I ask for forgiveness for all these sins. Allah, You are the knower of the other world and our fate. You are the Concealer of our sins and mistakes and the forgiver of our sins and weaknesses. There is no power or strength except from Allah, the Most High.”

6. *Kalimai Raddi-Kufr: Allahumma inni a'oozu bika min an ushrika bika shai'an wa ana a'lamu wa astaghfiruka lima la a'lamu innaka anta 'Allam ul-ghuyoobi tubtu 'anhu wa tabar- r'atu 'an kulli deenin siwa deen il-Islami wa aslamtu*



wa aqoolu la ilaha ill-Allahu Muhammad-ur-rasool-ullah.

“O Allah! Verily I seek refuge in Thee from associating any partner with Thee knowingly. I beseech Your forgiveness for the sins which I am not aware of. Verily, Thou art the Best Knower of all secrets. I repent for all my sins, and for any abuse, shameful discourse, back-biting, and I accept the blame for any disobedience against any of the teachings of Islam. I have taken refuge in You, and I hereby declare: There is none worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah.

Pilgrimage to the Ka’ba (Hajj)

Many devout Muslim go to the Ka’ba for pilgrimage. This is a small sanctuary inside of a great mosque located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is believed that Abraham had this sanctuary built for the worship of Allah. In this building there is a sacred black stone. According to legend, this stone was given to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. All Muslims, no matter where they live, pray facing the holy Ka’ba.



The Day of Judgment

The followers of Islam do not subscribe to the theory of reincarnation. Rather, the Islamic belief is in a catastrophic end on the Day of Judgment. In this system, on that Day, all souls will take up their physical bodies again, and Allah will judge each according to their good and evil deeds. All souls will present themselves to Allah. Justice will then be administered. Each soul will be sent to heaven or hell according to its respective deeds. Those whose good deeds are in preponderance will go to heaven while those whose evil deeds are in preponderance will go to hell. Those who go to heaven will find all comforts and joys, while those who go to hell will find torture and misery.

Koran

The Koran is the sacred text of the Islamic faith. Muslims believe that the very words of the Koran are the words of light of knowledge which were received by Muhammad from Angel Gabriel. The Koran was revealed to the



Prophet Muhammad from the time he was 40 years old until he was 63 when the revelation was complete. The words of the Koran were revealed by the angel Gabriel and Muhammad transcribed them word by word.

The Koran contains thirty sections and 114 chapters. The chapters are called *surahs*. In each chapter there are many *rukua* (pauses) within which there are many sayings of wisdom. The language of these verses is Arabic. The Koran comprehensively elaborates the details of leading a moral life, as well as observing social norms. With regard to political life, the Koran teaches that political tenets should be predicated on the religious principles of Islam.

Kafir (Non Believer)

The concept of an nonbeliever is very important in the Islamic system. However, in modern times this term has been interpreted in a most controversial tenor. Mr. Ahmed Bahir has written in his commentary on the Koran:

Kafir means one who denies. According to Islam the one who denies the unity and power of God is a non believer. The non believers are of two kinds: Those who do not accept Islam or the unity of God. They worship other gods. The second



type of non believers pursues active opposition to the faith of Islam. These of the second variety wage wars and commit atrocities against the Islamic faith. The atrocities perpetrated against Muhammad and his followers caused them to retreat to Mecca. With respect to the second type of non believer, the Koran recommends that wherever they are found they should be killed. Keep on killing them until there is only the rule of God (Islamic faith). Concerning the first type of non believer, toleration is recommended by the Koran. For example, the guardian and uncle of Prophet Muhammad, named Abutalib, never converted to the Islamic tradition; however, he was always respected by Muhammad and other Muslims. When Muhammad went to Medina the worshippers of many different gods and faiths continuously assisted and supported Muhammad.

The Community

Different Sects within Islam

After the death of Muhammad there developed a great controversy over the question of his successor arose. As a result, the followers divided into two groups. One group



considered that the rightful successor of Muhammad was a relative. The other group thought that a close friend and follower of Muhammad should be the successor. The first group proclaimed Muhammad's son in law, Ali, to be the rightful successor. According to that tradition, Muhammad gave instructions which are not found in the Koran. The followers of Ali are known as Shi'ate. Shi'a literally means the group of Ali. The second group of followers, who opposed this, and had greater public support, became known as the Sunnis. Sunni comes from the word *sunnah* which means the tried and true path. This path is believed to be the one that Prophet Muhammad journeyed.

The Muslims of the Sunni tradition always give preference to the community of the Islamic faithful in making day to day decisions. However, the Shi'ates consider the voice of *Immam* as the determining authority. Another difference between these groups involves the rules of prayer. If a Sunni cannot recite his prayers during the five allocated times each day, then he can recite them some other time of the day. The Shi'ates say conversely that prayer can be



recited ahead of the allotted times. Sunnis are not allowed to do this.

In the 11th century there arose the mystical branch of Islam, known as Sufism. Sufis emphasize that one can attain realization of God in this life through trust, devotion and meditation. In Sufism, the practitioner attempts to unite with the infinite God through devotion and inner light of the soul.

The Teachings of Islam

Islam teaches a series of disciplines which are practiced daily. These practices are considered necessary to become a true human being. Following are the prominent teachings of Islam:

1. This world is a prison house for the people of faith. However, this is a heaven for non believers.
2. If you are not desirous of the world, God will be pleased with you. If you do not desire human possessions, God will be pleased.



3. Feed the hungry and tend the sick. And if someone has been unjustly imprisoned then liberate that person. If one is suffering then help that person whether that person is Muslim or not.
4. The worst enemies of Allah are those who accept Islam as their religion but are in fact corrupt, and needlessly shed the blood of others.
5. Those who show mercy to the people of Allah, Allah is merciful to them. Show kindness to all people, whether they are good or evil. To show mercy to the wicked is to protect them from evil. Then the heavenly beings will show mercy to you.
6. When you speak, only speak truth. If you give your word, then fulfill that promise. Fulfill your responsibilities. Do not commit adultery. Be pure and block evil thoughts from your mind. Stop your hand from harming others or from taking what is not yours.
7. The Faith instructs against acts of harm of any kind. The believers do not let others kill.
8. He is a believer who does not commit adultery, does not steal, does not take intoxicants—alcohol, drugs,



etc.—and does not take that which is not his.
Beware of these vices.

9. This life is preparation for the next life, like a crop which should be tended with great care for harvesting. Do good deeds so that you can harvest the good in the next life. Hard work is the royal decree of Allah. Only through hard work can the commands of Allah be obeyed.
10. A man who even has a speck of ego in his heart can not enter heaven.
11. If you face some adverse situation it is a result of your own actions.
12. The person who has spent his life in an effort to attain knowledge of God will never die.
13. One who knows himself also knows God.

Islam and Spirituality

The Koran is comprised of practical knowledge for day to day living, with spiritual teachings interwoven. Just as



there are people who study the Hindu epic tale *Ramayana* without grasping its subtle teachings, there are also some readers of the Koran who fail to grasp the subtle teachings embedded in this holy Book. The Koran contains many descriptions of the nature of God and references to inner meditation:

1. This world is like a play or drama. In reality the next world is the best for those who desire to escape harm.
2. In the beginning all people were on one path.
3. Do not follow your selfish desires, for they will lead you astray from the path of God.
4. God is truth.
5. Those who deviate from Truth become the fuel for hell.
6. God creates the world and we create our world, and He will mark the return. Ultimately, we all must go to God (go back to the source).
7. East and West belong to God. Whichever direction you face is the direction of Allah. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.



8. One who holds the garment of Allah with strength will always find the right path.
9. Those who trust God have Allah as their helper. God will take them out of darkness and bring them to light.
10. In the realm of Allah, that which will go upward is the Holy Sound. The good deeds take us upward.

The Essence of the Teachings of Islam

The Mystery of Aliph:

It is said in the Koran, that the beginning all peoples followed one path.

Today, however, people have strayed onto many paths and are consequently suffering in many ways. If we could just properly read the first letter of Arabic (*aliph*) then we could attain knowledge. There was a great Fakir in Punjab by the name of Bulle Shaha. He said that by studying *aliph* one can attain liberation. We study many books, and receive degrees, and even read *aliph* many times in a day, but do we understand what kind of *aliph* Fakir Bulle Shah is



referring to, that brings liberation from the suffering of this world?

Hajarat Anwar Ali Rohataki, a scholar and devout Muslim, has written a book called *Kanune Ishak*. In it he says that the *aliph* one could study which bestows liberation, is not simply a letter of the alphabet of Urdu, Persian or Arabic languages. Neither can it be written on the chalk board. This *aliph* is without form and is the all pervasive Divine. This is a matter of experience, and it is knowledge which can not be written. A comparable idea is found in Christianity, where God is described as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end

When Guru Nanak was a child he went to a Mullah (Muslim clergy) to study. The Clergy gave him letters from the Arabic alphabet—*aliph*, *be*, etc.—to memorize. Guru Nanak duly repeated each letter of Arabic. He asked the Clergy to tell him the meaning of *aliph*. The teacher replied that the meaning is one. Then he asked for the meaning of *be*. The teacher replied, two. Guru Nanak said,



“Please let me understand the *one* [One Divine Reality], before I take up the study of two.”

What kind of understanding of *aliph* was Guru Nanak referring to that enabled him to become a great sage? Muhammad himself, although not a scholar, received the verses of the Holy Koran. How was he able to receive and repeat the Divine Revelation? Those whose heart is pure and stainless, the voice of God—Allah’s revelation—emanates in their inner being.⁸⁴

The day that we see the direct knowledge of God is the day we see all as the same. At that time you will not see the black or white or tall or small or Hindu or Muslim or

⁸⁴Mystic Attar says,

Strive to discover the mystery before life is taken from you.
If while living you fail to find yourself, to know yourself,
how will you be able to understand
the secret of your existence when you die?



Buddhist or Jain. In the animate and inanimate you will see One God.⁸⁵

Allah is all pervasive. It is written in the Koran:

In east and west—all directions—are of Allah. Whichever direction you face, Allah faces the same direction. Allah is all pervasive and all knowing.

⁸⁵ Baba Kuhi of Shiriz, a Persian dervish-poet who died in 1050 A.D., also composed these words:

In the market, in the cloister--only God I saw.
In the valley and on the mountain--only God I saw.
Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation,
In favour and in fortune--only God I saw.
In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet--only God I saw.
Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
Qualities nor causes--only God I saw.
I oped mine eyes and by the light of His face around me,
In all the eye discovered--only God I saw.
Like a candle I was melting in His fire,
Amidst the flames outflashing--only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes--only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo, I was the All-living--only God I saw.

Baba Kuhi, in *The Mystics of Islam*, translated by Reynold A. Nicholson



Now we shall consider the first letter of the Hindi alphabet, A. In Hindi we study consonants and vowels. First come the vowels and then the consonants. In the same Allah comes first and His Creation. In addition, in each consonant, a vowel is hidden or embedded. Just as no one can take a vowel out and separate it from a consonant in Hindi, in the same way, the world is permeated by God and no one can separate God from this world. This same relationship underlies the Islamic way of thinking about Allah.

The Inner Sacred Place

How are we to understand this Allah? The Koran says Allah is compassionate and merciful. All the saints say that we must seek the One. To know that Allah, it is not necessary to wander anywhere. To find Him simply look within.

A Fakir has said,

Man is oblivious to the fact of God's all pervasive and mysterious nature. The Prophet Muhammad is visible, but God is not visible with these eyes.

If you want to find Allah (*Khuda*) you must turn within. He will not be found outside and therefore, you must make



your heart pure and keep the heart clean in order to invite the Divine guest within.

Another Fakir has said,

Purify the heart to invite the presence of God. Leave aside thoughts of others if you want to seat God within. One heart with many worldly desires leaves no room for God. Then, there is no place for the Divine to sit in such a heart. It is heartbreaking that you go to the fake (manmade) temples and mosques, but God is only found in the inner mosque—in the pure heart.

[Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari (1250 - 1320), one of the most celebrated authors of Persian Sufism, also writes,

Go sweep out the chamber of your heart. Make it ready to be the dwelling place of the Beloved. When you depart out, He will enter it. In you, void of yourself, will He display His beauties.⁸⁶]

We go to temples, mosques, churches and we build these fine structures. They become places of worship and are places to sit quietly and remember God. However, God

⁸⁶

Mahmud Shabistari - 'Rose Garden of Mystery'



does not live in the temple, church or mosque. The Divine temple of God is the body. The Body is the mosque and within we will find Allah.

True Prayer

Once we have understood the true place of worship, we can now discuss the true nature of prayer. We say prayers, but, what is a prayer in reality?

A Muslim poet says:

True prayer is bringing joy to sick and suffering beings. True prayer is giving refuge to one who has no refuge. We have learned from touching the mentor's holy feet (learning under their tutelage), that if you desire to find God, you must know yourself (your own true nature).

The Divine Unity of the Soul and Allah

Until we know ourselves we will not be able to find God. The moment we know our self is the moment that we will find God. At that time, God will not be lost from us. That moment of self realization is the same moment that we will have God realization. A great Sufi, Sa'd al-din Mahmud Shabistari, eloquently says:



*What are "I" and "You"? Just lattices In the
niches of a lamp Through which the One Light
radiates. I and You are the veil Between heaven
and earth; Lift this veil and you will see How all
sects and religions are one.*

*Lift this veil and you will ask When "I" and "You"
do not exist What is mosque? What is
synagogue? What is fire temple?]⁸⁷*

We should carefully consider that it is impossible to see
God with the physical eyes.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

*You cannot see God with the physical eyes. You
must see God with the eyes of the soul.*

And,

He who has seen his soul has seen God.

If one is able to recognize a drop of water, then he will be
able to recognize the water of a small pot, the water of a big
vessel, the water in a well, river water, and the water of a
vast ocean. He/she will then be able to see the same water
in whatever form it appears. In the same way, the one who
has recognized the true nature of his soul will see an

⁸⁷ Mahmud Shabistari, *Perfume of the Desert*, translation by Andrew
Harvey and Eryk Hanut.



elephant, a horse, a bull, a camel, a human, and even animate and inanimate creation, all as the one God. There will be no question of different castes or religions.

How to Experience the Divine Within

The question now emerges, how can we recognize this soul and God within? In order to do this, we must use specific techniques. First, one must experience the Divine light, and then one can listen to the inner Divine Sound.

The Koran addresses this:

Oh, God of the Day of Resurrection! Kindly show me the straight path. Show me the blessed path, but not the path which will anger my Lord and cause his harsh eye to be upon me.

There are three important elements to note in this quotation. First, the path is straight. Second, it is a blessed path. The third is asking protection from Allah's evil and harsh eye. The people who do not act according to the Koran have lost the path. Gods' vengeance will be upon them. People who do evil deeds and who have strayed



from the true path deserve God's vengeance. Those who walk on the true (spiritual) path, will have the kind gaze of Allah upon them.

Now we should consider carefully what is meant by 'the straight path'.

In the Koran it is written:

Those who have faith in Allah, then Allah is their protector and helper. Allah takes them from darkness to light.

The Koran further elaborates on the experiences of the Divine Light when it says, Moses saw the stars, moon and the light of the sun.

These references from the Koran indicate movement from darkness to light. They can be compared to references in the Vedic literature:

Oh God lead me from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.

A scholar and great teacher, Venoba Bhave, said:

To some of our prayers God listens and to others he does not.



What kinds of prayers then does God listen to? And what prayer does He not listen to? Vinoba Bhave (a well known Indian scholar) explains:

If a train is going from Ranchi to Patna and you are sitting in that train praying to God to take you to Patna safely, God will listen to your prayers, and will help you arrive at the Patna railway station. However, if you are praying to God to take you to Patna while sitting in a train traveling from Ranchi to Calcutta, God will not listen to that prayer, and you will reach Calcutta, not Patna. The lesson: wherever you wish to go, first sit in the appropriate vehicle which is going to the desired destination, and then pray to reach that destination safely. In the same way, Allah is compassionate, and the one who walks on the right path—the path which leads from darkness to light—will have his prayers answered.

What is this path from darkness to light? The Koran gives this prayer:

*Show me the straight path.
This straight path is not in the world. In darkness, the path is not easily found. However, in light the path is easily discerned. What, then, is the technique for going from darkness to light? The Koran answers this as well: Keep your face and body firm, keep your vision fixed straight ahead in front of your nose and fix your vision on that place.*



Compare this to the verses in the Bhagavad Gita which state:

Keep your body, head and neck in a straight and erect position. Sit without moving and without looking in any direction; stare straight in front of your nose. (Bhagavad-Gita 6/13)

In the New Testament of the Bible it is written:

The light of the body is the eye. Therefore, if the eye is single the whole body will be full of light. However, if the eye sees evil then the whole body will be full of darkness. (Luke 11:34)

Now we should glance within and take our bearings. When we close our eyes what we see is darkness. How then do we move from darkness to light? What then is the means and technique to do so? How is this path found? Muhammad came to this world to show this path. He said we should walk on the straight path. This is the inner path, and it is subtle.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

The path of devotion is very subtle. There is no desire, neither is there desire for no desire. One must always be immersed in God.



This path of devotion is subtle, and the gross physical body is unable to tread on such a subtle path. Only the inner spirit, the soul, can go there. It is impossible to see God with the gross physical eyes. If we desire to experience God by using the gross senses of sight and touch, this will prove impossible. What then is this world? What is that God? The world is permeated with God and God permeates the world. With these eyes we are able to see a flower, but we can not see the fragrance that permeates it. We cannot experience that fragrance using our eyes. However, we can experience it with the sense of smell, using our nose. In the same way, we can not experience God through the gross senses, but only through the soul.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

*Whoever has seen his soul (ruh) has seen God.
Our true form is the essence of the Divine.*

Only the soul can have a direct experience of the Divine. Where then is this true and straight path on which to reach the Divine? One Fakir has said,

This path is found in the sushumna (subtle spiritual nerve current). By traversing the sushumna one attains the Divine.



He further says,

If you want to drink the Divine nectar and to see the light of God, then you must walk the path taught by the great masters.

If you want to get a glimpse of the divine light—the celestial form of the Divine walk straight. The aspirant may then ask: “What kind of path is this, and have others traveled this path?” The Fakir assures us that this path has been well traveled, and many sages and mystics—Mansur, Sarmad, Shams, Buali, and others—have traversed its road. This is the path of pure devotion and love of the Divine, and it is not a difficult path.

Sant Tulsi Sahib says:

The path given to you is the highest goal. Tend it with great care. This secret path is not achieved merely by talking about it. This path is the inner mystery, and one should carefully tread its course.

Now today we do not have the living Muhammad with us. Who then was Muhammad, one may ask. Muhammad was the light of God, and he was the messenger, the prophet. He was also a Fakir and great sage. Where then would we find the light of God?



Sant Kabir Sahib says:

*My prophet (the Divine light) lives in my eyes.
When I focus between my eye brows I see the light
of the Divine. I live in this inner space of my heart
where resounds the celestial music of stringed
instrument. [delete? Says Kabir that] My Beloved
is always with me and takes me to the Palace of
the Divine Sound.*

Amir Khusro, a Muslim poet, writes:

*With the blessing of my teacher Khwaja I went to
the Ganga River. There I saw the great Guru
Swami Ramanand. He blessed me with his grace,
and my heart became pure. The radiance of God
manifested in my purified heart.*

How do we see that inner light? The answer: When you have the grace of a pure spiritual teacher. Khwaja Sahib, a Muslim Fakir, says that just as Muhammad went from Mecca to Medina, in the same way we have to leave the nine gates of the body and enter in to the tenth gate. This is the door to the divine realms (*ajna charka*), It is the practice of piercing the *ajna chakra* (third eye).



Now we live as slaves in the nine gated body. The gates are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, and two organs of excretion. We are living in this nine gated body.

Saint Radha Swami, who lived in Agra, wrote:

This body is permeated with darkness. We are under an illusion and we are deluded. Now we should search within for light and leave this nine gated body.

To repeat, as long as we live in the nine gated body we live in darkness. We must leave the nine gates and go through the tenth gate. How do we go from darkness to light, and what is the means for accomplishing this? This is only possible if an accomplished guru teaches us the path of escape from the darkness. Otherwise, we will remain in darkness.

Sant Tulsi Sahib says:

Approach an accomplished teacher with reverence and patience. He/She will tell you this mysterious path to tread the path within.

The teachers of the worldly sciences can teach those worldly subjects, but with regard to the science of



spirituality, only the accomplished spiritual teacher can give these teachings of the spiritual path. All the great teachings in the sacred texts talk about the importance of a teacher. This mysterious path is described in the holy books, but it cannot be found simply by the study of sacred texts. It is found by the grace and guidance of an accomplished teacher.

Saint Maharishi Mehi says:

Without the grace of an accomplished teacher, we cannot find the path. This has not happened in the past, nor will it happen in the future. It is essential to have this grace of a teacher.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

O Feeble Disciples! Take refuge in Guru. Go get the key to this (spiritual) gate from an accomplished teacher if you want to open this tenth gate, the gateway to the spiritual realms. None other has the key to open this gate.

As you open this gate you will be immersed in the Divine light of God. When you leave the nine gated body and go through the tenth gate, then you will go from darkness to light, and from untruth to truth. When you are able to see



this divine light then you will begin to hear the divine inner sounds. This inner sound can not be heard with the physical ears, but only with the inner spiritual ears.

Just as we call out to a dog and he listens to us and comes to us, so also God calls out to us in the form of celestial sounds, and we also are drawn to God. We can only go toward God, and in this there is no doubt. After seeing the pure form of God we will become pure just as God is pure. Through this, all our suffering will end.

We should strive just as the Prophet Muhammad did, and meditate and traverse the spiritual journey within. In this way our human body and our human birth is worth living.

A Sufi Fakir, Yunus Emre, has written:

We entered the house of realization, we witnessed the body. The whirling skies, the many-layered earth, the seventy-thousand veils, we found in the body. The night and the day, the planets, the words inscribed on the Holy Tablets, the hill that Moses climbed, the Temple, and Israel's trumpet, we observed in the body. Torah, Psalms, Gospel, Quran-what these books have to say, we found in the body. Everybody says these words of Yunus



are true. Truth is wherever you want it. We found it all within the body.⁸⁸]

⁸⁸ Yunus Emre, translated by Kabir Helminski and Refik Algan , “The Drop That Became Sea”.
http://wahiduddin.net/sufi/sufi_poetry.htm#Rabia%20al-Adawiyya%20al-Qaysiyya, accessed on October, 1/2005.



Chapter Six

Sikhism



Guru Nanak Dev and Sikh Dharma



Approximately 650 years ago, Indian civilization was reeling from the severe attacks of the Mogul invasions. The subsequent erosion of Indian culture was profound, and religious suppression escalated. When the Mogul invasion was at its zenith, many people were forced to abandon their native religion and turn to Islam or face persecution. In the ensuing cultural assault, the gap between the lower and higher castes widened while the rift between various sects within the religion had become so enormous that the very fabric of Indian culture was threatened.

¶During this crucial time of social, religious and political upheaval, Guru Nanak emerged as a reformer and guardian. His teaching and his exposition of devotional *sadhana* (practices) revived the ideals of Indian culture and helped to restore Indian civilization. The flow of reform and revival began in Punjab in Northern India, and is attributed



solely to Guru Nanak. He sought to establish true religion and emphasized the unity of Hindus and Muslims. He also emphasized that humans should possess the best attributes of all castes: Brahman (priest), Kshatria (ruler), Vashya (trader), and even Shudra (laborer) classes. The tradition he established is known as Sikh Dharma or Gurumat (the Path of Gurus).

The Gurus of Sikhism

The tradition of the strong relationship between (Guru) spiritual preceptor and disciple is unique to Sikhism and is not seen elsewhere. All ten Gurus of this tradition are unmatched in world history. They have proven to be prominent social, political and religious leaders. They were always ready to sacrifice all for the protection of Truth.

The names of the ten teachers (Gurus) are as follows:

1. Guru Nanak
2. Guru Angad
3. Guru Amardas
4. Guru Ramdas
5. Guru Arjundev



6. Guru Hargobind
7. Guru Hari Rai
8. Guru Harikrishan
9. Guru Teg Bhadur and
10. Guru Gobind Singh.

Descent of Guru Nanak

In former times there was a small village called Raipur in the state of Punjab, about 48 miles from Lahore. After the partition of India and Pakistan this village was reconstructed and came to be known as Talwandi Raymoi. At the current time this village is in Pakistan and is famous as Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak.

In 15th century Punjab there lived a noble and religious man named Raibular. He was very wealthy and owned a considerable amount of property. He appointed Shri Capuchin, a good and kindly person, as his manager. Kaluchand was from the *Surya* clan and was Kshatria by caste. He was a trustworthy man who made a special effort to honor and follow the noble path of his virtuous



ancestors. His wife's name was Trapta Devi, and she was a poised intelligent as well as a devotional woman.

The first child born to Shri Kaluchand and his wife was a daughter named Nanaki. On October 20th, 1469, when Nanaki was five years of age, their second child, a son, was born. The infant boy was of matchless brilliance and is said to have smiled at his birth instead of crying. According to tradition a pundit was called to cast a horoscope for the newborn. The pundit studied the horoscope and was quite astonished. He declared that this child was a great soul, and predicted that he would either be a great king or a great sage. The child was named Nanak.

Childhood of Guru Nanak

From the time of his childhood, the actions and signs (*samskaras*) of Guru Nanak were divine and pure. Whenever his mother gave him something to eat, he always shared it with his sister Nanaki and his friends before he fed himself. If a sage, mendicant, or fakir would come to their door, Nanak always enjoyed giving money, clothes or



food to them with great generosity. From a very early age it was clear that Nanak's proclivity was toward the divine. Whenever he heard any religious discourse he would become absorbed in devotion with religious fervor. He enjoyed all thoughts of the divine, and always loved chanting and reciting God's name. If Nanak happened to meet a Muslim Fakir, he would greet him by invoking the name of Allah, *Allah Hu Akbar*. When he would come across Hindu believers, he would greet them with the names of Lord Ram and Govind, the Hindu gods. He delighted everyone whom he met by virtue of his pure nature.

When Nanak was five years of age he was sent to school. His teacher was Gopal Pandha. Nanak had a prodigious memory and quickly learned whatever he was taught. One time the teacher asked Nanak to write an explanation of the practical elements of life. In response he composed a poem and wrote on his writing board:

*God has created the whole universe and He is the
One who permeates it. Whosoever serves God,
his life is worth living. Why, Oh foolish mind,
have you forgotten this?*



The teacher was astounded when he read this mystical and delightful writing by this child. However, he tried to dissuade Nanak of his notions by stating that they were impractical. The child Nanak replied:

Human beings do not achieve true happiness from wealth or political power. True happiness is only achieved with high morals and the development of the soul.

At the advice of this teacher, Nanak's father sent his son to study the Vedas and scriptures with a great scholar named Pundit Vrajnath. This pundit taught the hymns of various gods and goddesses from the Vedic scriptures. However, young Nanak wrote poems about the unity of God and always talked about the One Almighty God, *Parabrahman*. It usually took about five or six years to achieve proficiency with the teachings of the pundit, but in just two years Guru Nanak had full command of this knowledge. Finally, the pundit told Guru Nanak's father, "Nanak is a fountain of spiritual knowledge and I have nothing left to instruct him. He asks deep philosophical questions about religion which can only be answered by an enlightened yogi."



When Nanak was ten years old, Jagirdar Raiabular became quite fond of him and called his father to suggest that Nanak learn the Arabic and Persian languages. He assured Nanak's father that knowledge of these languages would help him secure a profession of high status. At that time, India was under Moghul rule. The language of the courts was Persian, and Islamic literature was primarily written in Arabic, so fluency in these languages was essential. Nanak was therefore sent to the school of Mullah Kutubudeen. In just two years Nanak attained full proficiency in these most difficult languages. It is said that Guru Nanak received his knowledge of Sufism and of Islam from a Sufi Dervish, Sayad Hassan. Nanak's writings reflect his deep study of the foundational teachings of Islam as well as the philosophy and literature of Vedic tradition, including the Upanishads, Yoga Sutra, Bhakti Sutra, Tantra and Hatha Yoga.

The Youth of Guru Nanak

By the age of 10, Nanak began to emerge as a bridge between various religious traditions. Sometimes he would



visit mosques and pray with the faithful Muslims. At other times he would visit the Hindu Temples and chant bhajans with the Hindus. At this age, Nanak's family felt that he was old enough to receive the sacred thread (the Hindu rite of spiritual manhood). Therefore, an appropriate and auspicious time was set for the ceremony. Initially it was arranged that all the higher class friends and relatives would be invited to attend. But Nanak insisted that Muslim fakirs, sadhus and many common poor people of a lower caste should also be invited to the ceremony. His father accommodated his son's desire, even though some of the upper caste guests were not pleased with the plan.

When all of the guests were present, the pundit, Hardy, sat Nanak down for the ceremony of receiving the sacred thread. All were present even though the upper classes were uneasy with the lower classes seated nearby. The pundit said: "From today I am your guru and you are my disciple. You must first bow your head and pray to the Shaligram (Lord Vishnu worshipped in the form of a stone)." Without hesitation the youth replied: "Why should I bow down to this stone?" The pundit responded:



“Because this is the qualified (manifested) form of Lord Vishnu.” The young Nanak picked up the Shaligram and said: “How could this stone be the qualified form of the infinite God? If this small stone can become a deity such as Vishnu and Brahma, then should we as well consider the large mountain as the qualified form of the Infinite God? Isn’t it true that the whole universe is the visible qualified form of God? And isn’t it also the case that the light of that Infinite Divine Form and His energy are ever shining in each human being? Instead of praying to this stone wouldn’t it be better to recognize God in each human being?” When the pundit heard this he was speechless. Nanak’s father became apprehensive and asked the pundit: “Why are you arguing with this ignorant boy?”

The Pundit resumed the sacred thread ceremony and chanted the sacred *Gayatri mantra* from the Vedas in the ear of Nanak and instructed him: “You must repeat this *mantra* over and over.” The boy replied with respect: “If you are giving me this *mantra* and have become my guru, are you yourself in fact enlightened? Have you experienced the Absolute Knowledge? Have you achieved self



realization by meditation with this *mantra*? What kind of change should I expect within myself if I take up the use of this *mantra* and wear the sacred thread?"

The pundit explained the significance of the sacred thread: "A Ksatriya who is established in his sacred duty (*Dharma*) finds it necessary to wear this sacred thread. Without this you will not get the rights of the higher castes." Nanak asked with patience: "Please provide me a thread which will never break." The pundit replied: "What kind of sacred thread could that be? Have you seen such a thread?" Young Nanak said: "Yes I have seen it. I have prepared it and I have worn it as well. Now listen to how to acquire this type of thread." Then he sang,

Let Compassion (mercy) be the cotton for making this thread; contentment is the thread and is woven with the truth. This is the true sacred thread of human beings, O Pundit! It does not break or get soiled, neither does it burn. Nanak says, those who wear this thread are blessed.

The wise youth subsequently refused to wear the thread presented to him by the pundit, causing a wave of concern among all. The outraged priests called it an abomination of



Hindu Dharma. However, the pundit who had cast Nanak's horoscope at his birth had great faith and trust in him. He told the boy Nanak: "Oh child, *rishi*, all your words are true. I have worn the sacred thread for many years. I have taught religious principles for years, but it has not been my good fortune to acquire self knowledge. Now please show me this path to inner knowledge and knowledge of the Self." Nanak, the great teacher albeit youthful, gave this pundit the teaching and blessed him. The priest then experienced the mystical light of Knowledge.

Guru Nanak remained more and more immersed in thoughts of God, and gave little importance to the day to day duties of life. After repeated demands from his father Nanak finally agreed to enter into a business. His father gave him money so he could purchase the merchandise he would need to establish a small business. A man named Bala who was skilled in commerce accompanied the young Sage at his father's request. Bala and Nanak set out on their journey. On the way, they saw a group of holy men near a jungle. The compassionate Nanak sat near the holy men and engaged them in conversation. He discovered that



these holy men had gone days without eating and were terribly hungry. The kind heart of the Sage melted and he immediately went out to buy food for all of the holy men. He spent all his money on food for the holy men, and when he returned home, he was empty handed. When Nanak's father heard the entire story from Bala he became quite upset. Nanak defended himself by explaining that the commodities he had purchased were a "true bargain" and there was no business that could be better than this. As the father listened he became increasingly irritated with the reasoning offered by his son, and his anger grew. Finally, unable to restrain himself, he flew into a rage and began hitting his son. Nearby, Nanak's sister Naniki could not bear to see her brother treated this way, so she ran and touched the feet of her father, begging for his mercy. This caused the father to collect himself and calm down. But he was not appeased. From his perspective, Nanak's indiscretion had caused his own plans of entangling his son in business to crumble.

Jagirdar [Rai Bular] Raibular, a local land owner sympathetic to Nanak, arrived at this time and rebuked



Nanak's father. He also told his the father and mother that if in the future Nanak should incur any further losses on his father's account, he would personally reimburse any losses. Then he told Nanak, "Whatever charity or good works you want to do, please obtain the money from me."

After some time Raibular arranged for the marriage of Nanaki (sister of Nanak) with Jai Ram Palta, a courtier of the King Daulat Khan Lodhi. According to the established tradition, after the wedding Nanaki left for her new home; her husband's home. There was no one left at home who understood Nanak's inner emotions. He began to spend much of his time in solitude with his heart engulfed in the fire of love for God. Nanak's father became concerned about Nanak's indifferent attitude toward worldly affairs. He considered this behavior so peculiar that he suspected his son had some kind of health condition, or even worse, some form of mental illness. Accordingly he called for Haridas, an Ayurvedic doctor (*vaidya*), to cure Nanak. As the doctor began to look for his pulse, Nanak recited the following lines:

*My father has called a vaidya (physician) for me
The poor man he searches for a pulse in my arm*



The naïve vaidya does not know the reason for the pangs in my heart.

The doctor (vaidya) declared his helplessness in finding a cure for the disease of Nanak whose illness was none other than his yearning and mad love for God.

Time passed. One day Nanak came across Mardana, a singer who was also a master in playing the *rabab* instrument. Nanak was very impressed with his music. Inspired by Nanak's knowledge, Mardana decided to stay in the tutelage of Nanak. Nanak was then 16 years of age. After observing Nanak for so many years, his family began in earnest to worry about his mental state. Their greatest fear was that he would forsake householder life and choose the life of an ascetic. To avert such a crisis they hurriedly betrothed him to Sulakshani, the daughter of Mulchand, a pious merchant and landlord. The wise Nanak, always in accord with the larger Divine plan, allowed for his marriage to take place. However, as he was opposed to rituals and baseless customs, his wedding ceremony was not performed according to Vedic rituals, but instead, hymns and chants praising God were sung on this auspicious day.



Meditation Practice (*Sadhana*)

Nanaki's husband Jairam was the manager of the Modhikhana (stores) of Nawab Daulat Khan. When Nanak was persuaded by his family to take a job, Jairam invited him to Sultanpur to meet with the Nawab. The Nawab was a good man, and was very impressed by Nanak's honest demeanor. As it happened, the Nawab was captivated by Nanak's devotional charm and found his spiritual magnetism to be irresistible. The Nawab consulted with Jairam and promptly offered Nanak a job as the manager of the storehouse of Daulat Khan Lodi. As would be expected, Nanak was very dedicated and sincere as a manager. He always advised his employees to work with honesty. After a few months in this position Nanak purchased a house. His family, as well as his close friends Bala and Mardana, were all able to live together in his house.

Each day before the break of dawn, Nanak went for a bath in the river Vei (Bein). After immersing himself in the



water he would plunge into the depths of meditation at the banks of the river. He would then return home and spend time chanting the praises and prayers of God. Only then would he go to work at the court. Once, when Nanak was weighing an order of wheat flour, he counted loudly “one, two, three...” until he reached the number thirteen. At this point he began repeating the word “tera.” In the Punjabi language the word *tera* means both “thirteen” and “thine”. Nanak was repeatedly calling out the word *tera*, meaning “Thine! Thine! Thine. This induced him to become absorbed in thoughts of the Divine. Many times he was so overcome with the ecstasy of God that he gave much more wheat flour than was paid for. The customers did not understand his bountiful way.

Satsang was held every evening in Nanak’s home for all of his followers and devotees. He would always offer his teaching to everyone who was present, Muslim and Hindu, lower caste and upper caste. All sat together without any feeling of favoritism.



Through his presence and discourses Baba Nanak would dissipate the clouds of religious and social delusions embedded in the hearts of the people. He taught that the purity laws, the hierarchical superiority of the upper Hindu castes, as well as the communal sentiments of the Muslim clergies, were against the spirit of truth. He taught that these sentiments actually lead seekers away from God.

Not surprisingly, the teachings of Nanak threatened both Hindu priests and Muslim clerics. For them religion was a business and Nanak was seizing their customers. Therefore, they complained to Devadatta, the *Diwan* (Minister of Commerce). This suited Devadatta as he himself secretly felt threatened by the honest conduct of Nanak. The Nawab had become so taken with Nanak that it was rumored that the Nawab might even appoint Nanak as the *Diwan* (Minister of Commerce). Nanak had thoroughly won the trust of the Nawab, the Muslim governor.

Devadatta discovered that Nanak was abundantly giving food to the poor and needy every day out of the royal treasury. He also found out about Nanak's habit of



becoming rapt and overfilling grain orders. Devadatta went to the Nawab to present his case, and had complete confidence that he would destroy Nanak's reputation. As soon as he saw the Nawab, and not being a man of self control, he got right to the point and claimed that Nanak's reckless conduct would bring the treasury to bankruptcy. He reported what Nanak had been doing and accused Nanak of depleting the Nawab's resources to the point of emptying the treasury. He warned the Nawab that bankruptcy would put an end to business in the kingdom. The Nawab became alarmed and quite fearful. He appointed the accountant Jadorai and immediately ordered an inquiry. After examining the books carefully and in the greatest detail for five days, the report was presented to the Nawab. To the astonishment of the Nawab it was revealed that the money in the treasury had actually increased rather than decreased as his rival had alleged. Having had his integrity questioned, Nanak promptly and humbly gave his resignation to the Diwan. He told the Diwan that it was not fitting for him to continue to work where there was no respect for hard work. Further, he said he did not desire to associate with a place where deceit and immorality seemed



to be condoned. The Nawab then realized the conspiracy and injustice of the situation, and offered the position of Diwan (Minister of Commerce) to Nanak. He also sent his heartfelt apologies to Nanak, pleading with him to become the Diwan. The Sage respectfully declined, and so began his true life's work—the divine mission—of Guru Nanak.

The next day, Nanak went to take his morning bath in the river. But, after his first dip in the waters he remained submerged and remained as such for three days. When people found out about this incident they became overwhelmed with great concern and confusion. Nawab and Jairam (brother-in-law of Nanak) called out for the boatmen and ordered a search with nets in the river, but the search proved futile. Nanak's sister Nanaki, his wife Sulakshani, and his two little sons became flooded with grief.

But just as swiftly as Nanak had disappeared, after three days he suddenly emerged at the same place where he had entered the river. His face was gleaming with peace and radiance. News quickly spread of this miraculous event



and people began to recognize Nanak for the great sage that he was. It is thought that during those two days he was immersed in the Samadhi of the Infinite. The Nawab was exceedingly happy to hear of Nanak's miraculous return. Without hesitation he offered him the job of Prime Minister of the kingdom. The saint had no interest in worldly ties or power and replied, "I have accepted the service of my true master (God) and now taking on any other service is impossible."

When Nanak returned home he gave away most of his possessions to needy people. He became increasingly detached from worldly affairs, and began to spend a good deal of his time in meditation and *satsang*. On one occasion he was asked: "Are you a Hindu or a Muslim?" Nanak replied, "With respect to my body neither. I am no different from Hindus or from Muslims, but the divine light which is unceasingly shining within me is neither Hindu nor Muslim."

One time on a Friday, the holy day of the Muslims, the Nawab and other Muslim courtiers were going to the



mosque to do their routine prayers (*namaz*). A Muslim cleric said that if Nanak believed in only one God, Allah, then he should join them in prayer in the mosque. So Nanak went to the mosque with them and stood in the line of Muslim worshippers. During the prayer the worshippers bent down and put their heads on the ground to show their servitude to Allah, but Nanak stood in silence without taking part in the Namaz. After the prayers the Muslim cleric questioned Nanak: “We showed our respect to God. Why did you not partake in this with us?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your prayer cannot be accepted in heaven.” The clergy asked, “Why do you say this?” Nanak replied, “Your mouth indeed was murmuring the prayers, but your mind was intent on your mare which today has given birth to a colt. Your mind was filled with fear lest the newborn colt might fall in the well. Now, you tell me, how can this kind of prayer be accepted by God?” The cleric felt embarrassed and was mortified.

The Nawab, who was listening to the conversation, asked Nanak, “Tell me, will my prayer be accepted in the heavens?” Baba Nanak replied, “Your mind also was not



in the prayer. You were anticipating the arrival of the horses that you have ordered from Kandahar. Your mind was distracted by concerns about buying and selling horses.” The Nawab responded with exasperation, declaring: “Nanak is a mystic, he is a prophet. But, this is my misfortune--- he was my minister but now he has become a fakir!” The Nawab implored with devoutness, “Dervish Nanak! Please bestow upon me that light with which you came to dissipate the darkness of the world. Please show me the right path and make me your disciple.” In his divine compassion Nanak made him his *sikh* (disciple) and the Nawab benefited immensely.

One day Daulat Khan said to Baba Nanak, “I have heard that Khizar is a living mystic. I greatly desire to have *darshan* with him (be in his presence).” Baba Nanak said, “Go, sit in meditation.” Khan complained: “My mind does not focus in meditation.” Baba Nanak said, “As you meditate, continue focusing with great intent.” Khan accepted the advice of his preceptor and diligently obeyed. As the years went by Khan meditation became so accomplished in meditation that Pir Khizar, the mystic,



personally came and fell at his feet. Due to his progress in meditation, Khan is considered to be one of the more prominent disciples of Nanak.

During this time, Nanak visited with his family. He saw his sister, his brother-in-law, his wife Sulakshani, and both of his sons, Shri Chand and Lakshmi Chand. He then left to live in the jungle across from the river Vei, where he spent most of his time immersed in meditation. When people came to visit him he taught them the True *Dharma* (Path). Many of the visitors achieved great progress in the new way Nanak was teaching. They began to call this Way *Guru Mat* (the Teaching of the Guru). Whether Hindu, Muslim, Brahmin (Hindu priest), or Shudra (lower caste), all were becoming his disciples. They would not remain Hindu or Muslim but simply began to be known as the disciples of Nanak. Thus, Nanak shattered the walls of communal, cultural and social status which had always stood between Hindus and Muslims, and between higher castes and lower castes.



Historical Journey to Spread the Sikh Dharma

Through arduous meditation Nanak realized the nature of *atman* (inner self) and had direct experience of the Infinite. He was no longer Nanak, but became Guru Nanak (spiritual preceptor). He perceived the great need to dispel the darkness of hatred, hypocrisy, and animosity which was permeating the earth. The sage could see that this formidable task would be difficult to accomplish if he just stayed at his home. So he set out on a divine journey for the purpose of teaching the true dharma. Everywhere Nanak went he taught the importance of good will and moral integrity, and also emphasized devotion to the formless, unborn, Infinite Being. He taught that liberation is attained only by worship of the formless God. His words rang like magic to the ears of listeners, and they would be colored by the dye of the devotion of Nanak.

The Four Famous Great Journeys of Guru Nanak

1. On the first journey, Nanak visited Eminabad where he stayed with a poor and low caste carpenter, Lalo.



He chose to stay with Lalo in order to demonstrate that the laws of purity of the high castes are nothing but figments of superstition. Next he traveled to Haridwar (the holy city of Hindus), Delhi, Benaras, and Gaya, teaching the essence of true dharma. He concluded this first journey in Jagannath Puri, (temple). Jagan Nath is the foremost sacred pilgrimage place for Hindus. There he taught how to perform the true *arati* (ritual devotional song of dedication) of God (Kartar, the Creator).

2. On the second journey Nanak set out toward the south. He taught his way of devotion in Arbudgiri (Koh Abu), Setubandh Rameshvar, Singhal Dweep and other prominent places in the South of India.
3. On his third journey Nanak visited Sarmaur, Hemkut, Gourakhpur, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. On this journey his teaching focused on the way to meditate on one God.
4. The fourth journey was toward the West. Many stories are told about this portion of Nanak's travels. Nanak reached Mecca, the holy city of Muslims, via Blauchistan, where he questioned and



condemned the Muslim custom of praying to the Almighty and All-pervasive God by facing only one direction. A story is told about Nanak's visit in Mecca. He lay down to sleep at night with his feet turned towards the Kaaba. A Muslim priest kicked him and said, "It is sin to sleep with your feet towards the House of God!" Guru Nanak replied, "Turn my feet in the direction in which God is not." This so angered the Qazi (the Muslim priest) that he seized the Guru's feet and dragged them in the opposite direction. As the story is told, the priest was astounded to see that the Kaaba (the holy shrine) had turned around and followed the revolution of the Guru's body. Whatever direction the Qazi moved Nanak's feet, the Kaba also moved in that direction. The priest soon realized that Nanak was not an ordinary being, but must be an omniscient sage. He sought his mercy and begged for forgiveness. Those who witnessed this miracle were astonished and saluted the Guru as a supernatural being.



Guru Nanak traveled through Rume, Bagdad, and into Iran spreading his teaching of Sat Nam (One true Reality). In Kabul and Kandahar he visited Hassan Abdal (now known as Punja Sahib). While in Kandahar an event transpired which shattered the pride of a Muslim fakir named Valikandhar.⁸⁹

[On the top of a small hill, there lived a Muslim Faqir called Vali Kandhari who was well-known in the area for possessing miraculous powers. Mardana needed water which could only be obtained from Vali. Mardana told Vali that Guru Nanak had arrived and he advised him to see the Guru, who was a great saint of God. Vali, who claimed holiness exclusively for himself, became offended on hearing the Guru's praises. He refused to give water saying that if the Guru were such a holy man, he could provide water to Mardana. When this reply was communicated to the Guru, he sent Mardana back to the Vali with a message that he (Guru) was a poor creature of God, and laid no claims to be a saint. The Vali paid no heed to this protestation and still refused to provide water.

Upon this the Guru picked up one stone and a stream of water immediately issued forth. In fact this water came out from the Vali's tank which then dried up. This naturally increased Vali's rage and it is said that through his miraculous powers he hurled a small hillock upon Guru Nanak's unoffending head. The Guru, on seeing the descending hillock, held up his right hand, and as it touched the hand of the Divine Master, the hillock came to a standstill. With the divine touch, the stone melted and softened like wax and left the mark of the Master's palm indelibly deep into it. Vali Kandhari was very much astonished and at last fell at the feet of the Guru and begged for forgiveness. The Guru exclaimed, "O friend, those who live so high, should not be hard at heart like a stone." Vali was blessed by the Master.

The imprint of the Guru's hand (Punja) is still visible on the stone and the pool of crystal clear water still flows from there. There stands a Gurdwara which is known as 'Punja Sahib'. It is now situated in West Pakistan.
<http://members.dancris.com/~sikh/chap03.html>, accessed on August 28/05]



Middle Years of Guru Nanak

After traveling 25 years teaching the glory of the True Name, Guru Nanak returned to Katarpur and settled there. He himself had established this place. In that same year the mother and father of Guru Nanak passed away. While he was in Kartarpur, Guru Nanak engaged in meditation and *kirtan* (chanting of the Lord's name and praise). He also conducted many spiritual discourses. Whenever there was a visitor to the ashram of Guru Nanak no one was allowed to leave hungry and all were fed.

During this time Guru Nanak found an apt disciple in Shri Angad. Guru Nanak decided that Guru Angad was qualified to be his successor and carry the torch of spiritual teaching. By appointing Shri Angad his successor and not his own son, Guru Nanak demonstrated that a person is not qualified for Guruship by birth but by degree of knowledge and spiritual attainment



The Evening of Life

On the 22nd of September in the year 1539 Guru Nanak was sitting under a tree in Kartarpur in his ashram. His face was radiant and peaceful and all his disciples were chanting spiritual hymns in devotion and great ecstasy. The sound of a special Sikh hymn called Japaji infused the whole ashram. At that time Guru Nanak drew a sheet over his body and began chanting. He left this body and merged into the Divine forever

After the shock of realization of what had transpired his followers began to consider the funeral arrangements. There was a considerable and heated debate between his disciples as to whether the rites should be Hindu or Muslim because all considered him to be their guru and master. It is said that after some time spent in this heated debate, the sheet covering Guru Nanak's body was lifted. To everyone's amazement Guru Nanak's material body had disappeared. The disciples were humbled, and they divided the sheet, giving one piece to the Muslim followers and one



piece to the Hindu followers. The funeral rites were duly performed for the respective traditions using the sheet in place of the missing body of the great sage. According to one legend, flowers were found under the sheet instead of his physical body.

Shri Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Text of Sikhism

By studying the childhood of the boy Nanak it is evident that Guru Nanak composed poetry prolifically. Most of his poems were composed under the influence of the ecstasy of devotion. Even in his later life he spontaneously composed an abundance of poems and prose. All the words of Guru Nanak were first compiled by the fifth Guru Shri Arjan Dev. This sacred collection is known as the *Shri Granth Sahib*. The most famous hymns of Guru Nanak are *Japji*, *Patti*, *Arti*, *Dakhni Omkar*, and *Siddha Goshth*.

The *Granth Sahib* is the holy text of the Sikhs. It was initially comprised of the *Banis* (sacred words; chants) of the first five Gurus of the Sikh tradition. Later, the tenth guru, Shri Guru Gobind Singh added the hymns of the



ninth Guru, Guru Teg Bhadur. In addition, *Shri Guru Granth Sahib* includes the sayings and poems of Sheik Farid, Sant Kabir, Ravidas, Jaidev, and other prominent saints. The sacred words of the Gurus also contain the essential teachings of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The language of The *Granth Sahib* is Gurumukhi, which was standardized by Guru Angad Dev. After studying the *Granth Sahib* one feels well acquainted with the way of communal harmony and social unity. The Guru Granth Sahib's celestial banis (words, hymns) are read and chanted daily in the Golden Temple in Amritsar in Punjab India; in Sheeshganj and Bangla Sahib Gurudwars located in Delhi; and in hundreds of other Sikh temples (Gurudwara) throughout the world.



Central Doctrines of Sikhism

Guru Nanak taught a monotheistic view of Divinity instead of the polytheistic approach. Just as many other mystics and saints, he regarded God as One without a second. He described this One Divine Reality as Truth, Timeless, Omniscient, Indescribable and Mysterious. This Reality is indeed the object of worship and is brimming with Love. According to Guru Nanak one is able to have knowledge of the Divine only through the grace of a spiritual preceptor. The Sikh Gurus gave the following instructions to their followers:

- Maintain brotherly feeling for all human beings. Further, always be eager to help others whether in body, mind, or material wealth.
- Follow the path of truth; practice moral integrity and maintain a virtuous character.
- Be ready to serve your country and tradition (Dharma); carry a sword for protection.



- Chant the name of God, give glory to the Guru (*Vah guru*) and meditate on the True Name.

The last of the ten Gurus was Guru Govind Singh. He gathered and united his followers and named the tradition as Khalsa Panth, the “Pure Path”. When he initiated his disciples he required them to wear warrior clothing for the protection of the Indians *dharma* (traditions and freedom), cow, Brahmin, and saints. He instructed his disciples to remain prepared for any adverse situation and to always be vigilant. To this end he required the need of five things. Many Sikhs keep these five items even today. These five requirements are also known as symbols of Sikh Dharma:

1. Uncut and unshaven hair. Keeping uncut hair had been the tradition of the ancient rishis and sages.
2. A comb to clean and groom the hair.
3. Long under shorts as a symbol of celibacy and energy.
4. A bracelet symbolizing discipline and moral rectitude.



5. A sword for protection of *dharma* and for self defense.

A close look at the basic teachings and doctrines of Sikhism reveals that it was greatly influenced by Indian Vedantic philosophy as well as the fundamental philosophy and mystical aspects of Islam. For this reason, Guru Nanak the first of the ten Gurus is considered a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Teaching of Sikh Tradition (Dharma)

These selections from Shri Guru Granth Sahib explicate the teachings of Sikh Dharma:

In the association of Sadhus and Saints is found the divine powers as well as knowledge and wisdom.

xxx

To recite the name of God and to perform pure deeds is the highest sacred duty of all.

xxx

Attachment to family and worldly affairs bears no fruit, therefore abandon the selfish attachments.

xxx

Due to ignorance the mind has become entangled in the worldly illusion (Maya). Driven by illusion as well as greed it becomes increasingly bound by actions (karmas).



XXX

Illusion (maya) is like a venomous snake who has gripped the whole world. The most astonishing truth is that those who willingly serve the snake of illusion, in fact are devoured by her (in the form of death).

XXX

If by the grace of God one finds the association of a Saint (satsang) then illusion (maya) cannot touch that person.

XXX

The human self (jivatman) and the Supreme Self (The Divine) live together. In spite of living in the same house (the body) they do not meet each other. This is because there is a wall called the ego which separates the two.

XXX

Insects, fish, bumble bee, elephant and deer are each driven by one of the five sensory attachments—sight (insect), taste (fish), smell (bumble bee), touch (elephant) and sound (deer) which eventually leads all to death's door. [How much more does this describe the condition of the human being who is attracted by all five senses?]

XXX

Truth can only live in a pure vessel [God's true form can only reside in a pure heart], however there are very few who have such pure lives and who are free of lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.

XXX

The mind is very attracted to sensory objects; even if many means are employed the mind does



not desist as its nature is to love the senses. Mind is engrossed in duality and experiences many kinds of suffering. It gives much hardship to the inner self.

XXX

Conquer this mind and then meet the Divine. After meeting the Divine there will be no suffering left.

XXX

Oh mind, why are you so engrossed in the body and attached to the ego? Consider that this body is filled with foul smells and is most impure. Whatever things you may be delighted by in the body are all marked for destruction (at the time of death).

XXX

Meditate on the form of God repeating the Divine name while keeping the holy feet of your spiritual preceptor fixed in your heart. Show reverence to the preceptor as though he were the Lord himself.

XXX

Those who have performed the repetition of God's name live naturally within the will of God. Even the god of death and the god of time are slaves of their holy feet.

XXX

If you keep the form of your spiritual preceptor (God) in your heart then you will have all your desires fulfilled.

XXX

Oh wandering deranged mind, remain at the Guru's feet and repeat the name of God meditating on the holy Name. Only then the god



of death (Yama) will be fearful of you and suffering will also cease to exist.

xxx

As a wave of water becomes one with the ocean, in the same way the practitioner's atma (soul) merges with the great Divine light. Guru Nanak says that the veil of ignorance of the practitioner lifts and the soul is no longer trapped in the net of illusion (maya).

xxx

Those who are ignorant of the inner celestial sounds madly pursue the pleasures of this world. They waste their precious human life and squander their time chasing these pleasures. Guru Nanak says that only one inner sound, which is OmKar, is the nectar. The one who can find this sound (submerge in the ecstasy of the divine sound) is the Guru's true disciple.

The Method of Meditation

“The meditation technique of Guru Nanak sets an exemplar of how to seek the Divine while living in this world. Guru Nanak says:

Just as the lotus born from the water cannot be drowned by the rising of the waters but always stays above the water, in the same way we are born in this world and live in this world. We should live in this world just as the lotus does and rise above the world. The water of worldliness



should not be able to drown us. As the sweet fragrance from the lotus permeates the air in all directions so also we must attain knowledge and that knowledge and glory will spread through the world as the fragrance of the lotus.

Guru Nanak gave the knowledge of the Divine in his essential doctrine when he says:

God is Omkar, that is the primal sound of the universe as well as the True Name, the Creator, the Ancient one, without fear, without hatred, Timeless, and Birthless. One can only know God by the grace of the preceptor (guru).

He clearly stated that God is beyond human comprehension, beyond the realm of time and space, beyond birth and death, and transcends the senses.

The question arises of how to discover this God. Guru Nanak answers:

Everything is in the house (within the body) and whoever looks outside of the house for the answer is deluded.

One house is the one in which our body lives, and the other in which the soul lives. Therefore, in this bodily house we can find everything necessary to make the journey to God.



Those who look for God outside the body are deluded. The outside is delusion and the inside is the Divine (*Brahma*).”

Guru Nanak says,

To find the Divine it is not necessary to go to the forest for God is always within. He resides in every being yet is not attached and is always with you. As the fragrance lives in the flower and the reflection lives in the mirror, in the same way the Divine permeates our whole being. To find it look within. God is both within and without and is everywhere. However, without knowing our true nature we cannot dissipate the filth of delusion obscuring our knowledge to recognize the Divine.

As long as we are so deluded with ignorance we are unable to have direct knowledge of the Divine. Through the senses we recognize the body, but we cannot recognize the soul through these same senses. We declare that our physical possessions are ours, but even as we claim this we realize they are not really part of us. The truth is we are not the possessions. We are different from these things. Similarly, when we say my hand, my eyes, my nose, etc. do we mean we are those bodily parts? Of course, we do not mean that. They all are ours and we are the owner. We then ask how can we recognize the Divine soul? The



answer lies in this illustration as given by various saints: During deep sleep we are unable to have any knowledge of this physical body; however, after waking up we recall this body, our relations and possessions. In same manner, until we are in the three states—awake, sleep, dreamless sleep—we are unable to directly perceive our inner self and the Divine. The Saints tell us that there is yet a fourth state, called the *Turiya* state, which is above the others. In this state we can directly perceive our own nature and know the Divine. Guru Nanak says:

“When there is union between the soul and the Divine all suffering is destroyed. This union occurs by the grace of God. Once the mind is in God then death (Kal) cannot harm a person.”

In order to have direct knowledge of the Divine, Guru Nanak teaches that it is necessary to have a path. Such a path is only found through association with a Saint or spiritual preceptor. Without his help it is not possible to have direct knowledge of the Divine. Concerning this knowledge Guru Nanak says,

Dear brothers, without the spiritual preceptor (guru) knowledge and the means for attaining this knowledge cannot be obtained.



The means of knowledge, such as devotion, grace, the removal of ego, peace and freedom, cannot be achieved without a Guru. Further;

Without the Guru there is no devotion, there is no purification of the dirt of ego, declares Nanak after much contemplation. Let no one be mistaken and stay in delusion in this world Therefore, I (Nanak) declare that without the grace and help of the Guru no one can go beyond this cycle of birth and death.

Guru Arjan Dev says;

The person who does not have initiation by a preceptor lives life as a dog, pig, ass, crow or snake.” A person must become a devotee of the Divine, leaving all illusions behind.

That preceptor is worthy who unites the aspirant with the Divine

says Guru Nanak. Guru Nanak taught the people of this dark age (*Kali Yuga*) that the Divine has abhorrence for none. God sees the ill behaved actions of humans and even then he does not despise people. Therefore, humans should offer worship to the Divine in their hearts. It is said in the Granth Sahib:

The Guru is Sat guru (enlightened Teacher). By meeting with him the heart is filled with joy and



bliss. The knot of ignorance is destroyed and the ultimate abode of God is obtained.

Those who find the true Guru and the true path, who perform benevolent actions, who perform righteous (dharma) deeds, who live a moral life, will naturally have a good name in this world, and when leaving this body they will experience happiness and bliss in the other world. The glory of the Guru is sung in the following verse;

Let there be luminosity of hundreds of moons, let there be brilliance of thousands of suns; in spite of such light but without the Guru (the divine light of knowledge), there is nothing but darkness (in the heart of humans)⁹⁰.

In this cave (deep cavity) of the body there are unlimited treasures. No matter how much you can take of these treasures they will not be depleted. Not only this, the Divine resides in this body. The question is how to obtain this treasure? It is obtained through the grace of the Guru. The ones who have attained the Divine within have fullness in their inner life as well as fullness in their outer life. Theirs lives are full of happiness and bliss.

By taking refuge in the preceptor all spiritual abundance can be achieved. Guru Nanak says,

⁹⁰ The word *Guru* literally means dispeller of darkness.



Without serving the preceptor one can not be successful in their spiritual efforts (yoga). And without taking a true preceptor one cannot achieve liberation (mukti). Without meeting the true preceptor (guru) one can not find the Path (True Name). Without meeting the true preceptor one will continue to suffer (in the fire of ego and duality). Without meeting the preceptor one is filled with egoism. Without meeting the preceptor one's life is a failure.

In this poem Guru Nanak talks about the path. But we must notice what he says is the true path (Yoga). Guru Nanak says concerning this,

*Yoga is not performed simply by wearing the robes and rags of a monk,
Neither by carrying a begging bowl and scepter.
Yoga is not performed by shaving the head,
Nor by being a recluse.
It is not performed by witty discourse.
Yoga is performed by focusing the attention
between the two eyebrows (one pointed focus;
drishti yoga)
and by journeying within*

Such aspirants focus their attention within and experience the inner light and inner Divine sound. These are the true Yogis. Guru Nanak says,



There is a rain of nectar in the heart; and the mind drinks the sweet nectar of the celestial sounds. The mind intoxicated by the sweet nectar day and night remains in joy.

In the inner realms of being, there is a shower of beautiful shimmering rays of light, and also a shimmering ray of divine sound. In these two forms is found the true divine nectar within. There has always been talk of this nectar, but no one has seen this nectar (in the myths and legends). What is this true nectar? Guru Nanak says: “Those who follow the true preceptor find the nectar in the form of Divine Sound.”

Guru Nanak tells us that one must seek this inner light, inner sound, and this nectar through the following technique:

*In each heart resides the Divine hidden; each heart is permeated with Divine Light;
By intense focus one is able to break the door open and reach the Realm of the Divine. By the grace of God the door shatters, and the mind gets immersed in the sweet drizzle of Divine Sound.
By focusing on the Divine sound (shabad) the consciousness goes beyond the realm of death and rebirth.*



While journeying within the seeker at first experiences the *anhat* (Divine Vibrating Sound), and then the *anāhat* sound (transcendental unstruck sound which reverberates in the depth of soul). This is also known as Omkar. Through Omkar the entire creation came into being. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh says: “Om is the sound of the beginning. Through this sound the whole world, the earth sky etc. came into existence.” It is said in the *Prana Sagali*,

*The sound is the essential essence of the world.
This (shabad) sound reverberates in the heart of
each person,*
proclaims Guru Nanak.

The seekers who can experience this sound find that it takes them to the Divine Realm. In this way of meeting God the inner self finds true peace. Therefore, the seekers should meditate on the words of the Guru and should abandon the ego—this is the path to liberation. This path is taught by the Gurus of the Sikh tradition.



Chapter Seven

Santmat



Santmat: An Introduction

Santmat, the Way of Sages, is also referred to as the path of saints, the teachings of saints, and as the conviction of saints and sages. It is neither a new religion nor a new sect of an existing religion. Santmat is not a new philosophical conviction, or even a new interpretation of a religious tradition. Santmat was not founded by any particular sage or saint, although it respects all equally. Further, it is eternal, ancient, and is in accordance with the ancient Vedas.¹

Santmat is a pure spiritual tradition. Santmat teaching combines devotion of God with inner knowledge and yoga disciplines. It has been spoken about by many of the saints. Sant Tulsidas Ji sings in praise of Santmat:

I don't mean any favoritism here as I praise Santmat as spoken by the Vedas and the Puranas.

Sant Tulsi Sahab of Hatharas stated: "I don't know any other saint, guru or path. Only the path of saints I consider gratifying." He further says: "Santmat is the quintessence. The rest is the net of illusion (*maya*)."



Maharishi Mehi says:

Without the teachings of saints there is no liberation. I ask that you listen to this carefully. If you desire ultimate freedom then become the children of saints.” By this is meant that freedom and liberation can only be attained by one who follows the path of saints with great devotion.

People who are ignorant of the knowledge of saints say that the teachings of saints are contrary to the Vedas. Also, those who do not know the teachings of the Vedas say the Vedas are devoid of the teachings of saints. However, Santmat refutes these erroneous claims, which are simply rooted in ignorance, and then brings understanding and harmony to these two incorrect perspectives. Santmat proclaims that the teachings of saints and the essential spirituality expounded by the Vedas are identical. As well, the sages and great saints of ancient times taught the same message about the Divine as the saints of today. These teachings of the saints are the same as the knowledge found in the Vedas. The present need is to examine these statements closely.



As Kabir Sahib says:

The only people who find this [wisdom or Truth] are those who delve deep into the waters [of knowledge]. Those who are afraid of drowning in the water [of knowledge] only sit by its banks [and talk about the waters of knowledge].

If one studies deeply the words of *rishis* and sages, then one will find a supreme harmony which is beyond description.

Saint Dadu says:

Those who have reached the supreme destiny [understanding of Truth] all speak a single language. The wise are of one thought and they all belong to one caste [one mind set].

The Importance of Santmat

People everywhere in the world desire happiness, and none want suffering or pain. Of all living beings, human life is the most advanced. Humans not only desire happiness, they also make many kinds of efforts to achieve peace and happiness on the basis of their knowledge. But the result is apparent: in the effort to find satisfaction people only find unhappiness; in an effort to find peace agitation often results. It is difficult to find a person



in this world who does not have concerns and worries. It is equally difficult to find one who has found peace and happiness and is free of suffering. Each human being is in the grip of physical, mental, or natural suffering. Even those who are wealthy, strong, gifted, beautiful, and bountiful, seem to be unhappy, and have to face some kind of suffering in their lives.

What is the cause of this unhappiness? Unless we are able to know the cause of a sickness, it will be impossible to find a cure for it.

Sant Kabir Sahib asks:

You have lost an object in one place and you are looking for it in an entirely different place. How could you possibly find it?

Let us consider this dilemma in view of the way people usually attempt to find peace, joy and happiness. People wander ceaselessly through life, always seeking to acquire material resources, thinking they will thus achieve their goal. However, as the saints tell us, even if we acquire all these physical possessions—status, fame, or wealth—we are still unable to attain true peace and joy. The peace we seek is not found in the outer material world but only in the inner world of the soul. The outer manifest world is merely sensory. It is transitory and ever perishing. But within us lives the Supreme Being whose true



form is peace and bliss. The Divine is unmanifest, [without physical form] eternal and beyond the senses. Only by turning inward and ceasing the outward wandering, will we be able to attain lasting joy and eternal peace.

We can understand this through this analogy: If we throw a rock towards the sky we find that the rock must return to the earth. And even though the rock is flying and tumbling through the air as though it is part of the air, it will nevertheless soon return to the earth, since it is part of the earth. It is as though the rock, which is a part of the earth, strains to come back to earth, and finds stillness in reuniting with the earth. In the same way, we can think of the human soul, as it wanders through multiple life forms: Hindu scriptures speak of 84 hundred thousand life forms.⁹¹ The soul will experience suffering in the cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*)—reincarnation after reincarnation—until it merges into the Supreme Soul (Divine), which is inseparable from the soul. The Divine exists in the *soundless state*, but the living soul has descended into this realm of darkness.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

You have descended into this darkness from the soundless state. You are now far from your home in

⁹¹ The various religions of India shed light on the cycle of death and rebirth.



the soundless Divine. You are caught here in this dark realm. Therefore, at this very moment, begin your journey homeward toward that soundless state.

Through inner meditation, the *jivatman* (individual soul) begins its ascent toward the soundless state where it will eventually merge with the Divine. When the soul thus experiences oneness with the Divine, it will attain ultimate peace and supreme joy. Santmat teaches a path to the attainment of this joy and peace. This is the significance of the way of saints and the importance of Santmat.

The Principles of Santmat

1. Ultimate Reality is beyond any beginning or end, infinite, beyond birth, beyond the senses, all-pervading yet beyond pervasiveness. It must therefore be understood as the Supreme Being. This Essential Element is known as the Lord of All and is the foundation of all things. This Being is beyond both the inanimate and animate aspects of nature. It is without qualities and beyond qualities. Its nature is infinite, imperishable, all- powerful. It is beyond time and space, beyond sound and beyond form. It is the One without a second. The Supreme Being is beyond the scope of



mind, the intellect and the senses. This entire universe is powered by the energy of this Being. This Being is not human. It is not manifested in physical form. It has existence beyond the illusion of maya, and there is nothing that exists outside of it. It is the Being which is eternal, existing from the beginning. Santmat considers this Being as the Divine Reality and this [knowing or merging with] Being is the goal of all spirituality.

2. The individual soul is an inseparable part of the Supreme Being.
3. The physical world of nature was created. It has an origin and an end.
4. The soul bound by illusion (*maya*) remains in the cycle of death and birth. This is the cause of all suffering. In order to escape from this cycle of death and birth we must experience realization of this Supreme Being.
5. By practicing devotion through these four techniques—*Manas Japa* (recitation of the divine name), *Manas Dhyana* (focus on the divine form), *Drishti Sadhana* (focus on the infinitesimal point), and *Nadanusandhana Yoga* (concentration on the inner divine sounds)—the practitioner consecutively transcends the realms of darkness, light, and sound which cloak the Truth—the



Divine. Only through a human body is a person able to achieve unity with the Divine.

6. Lying, stealing, intake of intoxicating substances, adultery, and violence (including harming other beings) are the five sins to be avoided. Eating meat or fish is also considered to be a form of violence and should be avoided. The aspirants of Santmat must abstain from these vices.⁹²
7. Consider the following as the requirements to attain liberation: Trust and belief in the Divine; commitment to seek the Divine within; devotion to a spiritual master; listening to the teaching of the spiritual discourse including study of the teaching of the saints and the scriptures ; and diligent meditation practice.

The Definition of Santmat

1. Stillness or steadiness is the essence of *Shanti*.⁹³
2. He who has attained *Shanti* is a saint.⁹⁴

⁹² In Buddhism these five abstinences are known as *Panch Shila* (Five Precepts)

⁹³ *Shanti* is a Sanskrit word which can be understood in English as peace, tranquility, and bliss. It is the peace which results from some degree of Divine communion.

⁹⁴ A saint in the Santmat tradition is one who experiences the mystical state; it is a title conferred because of yogic achievements. This is different from the way this word is



3. Santmat encompasses the thoughts and teachings of the saints and sages.

4. It is natural for human beings to desire *Shanti*. Inspired by this inherent desire, seers of ancient times searched for the inner peace and developed the path to attain this inner peace, and expounded this way in the ancient teachings of the *Upanishads*.⁹⁵ Similar views have been expressed by more recent saints such as Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahib. They expressed their teaching in the Punjabi and Hindi vernaculars, respectively,⁹⁶ for the inspiration and edification of people at large. The teachings of these later saints is what is referred to as Santmat.

However, the *Upanishads* are considered to be the foundation of Santmat, because they uniquely and fully describe the means for attaining *Shanti*, and contain a comprehensive explanation of the

commonly used in Western traditions, where a saint is only morally correct or only canonized after death. The saint of the Santmat tradition is one who has achieved realization of the Divine, and subsequently his behavior is moral. Clearly, many Western saints would also be included in the Santmat definition of saint. The words sant and saint are used interchangeably.

⁹⁵ The *Upanishads* are ancient Vedic texts that define and categorize the philosophy of Yoga.

⁹⁶ The seers of the *Upanishads* spoke in the Sanskrit language. This was not a language of the common people. Guru Nanak and Kabir Sahab describe the same *Upanishadic* views in languages understood by the common man.



Divine Word-Sound which leads to the Highest Wisdom. The *Upanishads* explain the yogic techniques and present a systematic path for transcending thought in order to attain the Absolute through the use of sound (the Yoga of *Surat-Shabd*).⁹⁷ Santmat follows the yogic path prescribed in the *Upanishads* and specifically employs *Surat-Shabad Yoga* in its practices. [Therefore, it is to be understood that the teaching of the saints is a later expression and development of the teaching within the *Upanishads*.]

When viewed on the surface, the teachings of various saints have sometimes seemed to contradict one another [or even to contradict the principles of the *Upanishads*]. But upon deeper examination it becomes apparent that there is an unbreakable unity in the spiritual views of all saints. Saints have arisen in different times and in different places, and their followers name their tradition in respect to the particular saint. The apparent differences can be attributed to variations in time, place, language, and labels given to views which are in reality the same. It also happens that excessively zealous followers tend to accentuate these seeming differences. When sectarianism and

⁹⁷ *SuratShabad Yoga* is the practice of transcending the mind in order to entering the level beyond the mind. This is the level of ultimate unity. The vehicle for this inward journey is sound.



the forms of the particular time or place of the teachings of a saint are removed, the basic principles of Santmat are in unity.

Satsang

The word *satsang* is comprised of two words *sat* and *sang*. What is *sat*?

*Sat*⁹⁸ is that which can never be destroyed. It is the essential element which is indestructible and beyond the limitations of time. And it is Truth. *Sang* means association or contact. Thus association or coming in contact with *Sat* or Truth is *satsang*.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna says:

Whatever is Truth always exists and is never non-existent. That which is non Truth has no existence whatsoever (2:16)

The First Kind of Satsang (Association with the Divine):

What then is this element which is indestructible, has always been constant and will forever remain as such? That element is the Supreme Being of the universe. Association with this Being, in reality, is association with Truth (*satsang*). But, what is it

⁹⁸ The Sanskrit word *sat* has several meanings: Truth, Being, and Reality.



that would associate with this Supreme Being? Is it the body or the senses? The answer is that it is neither of these two. It is only apart from the body and senses that we will be able to associate with the Supreme Being. This is because it is only our soul that is an inseparable part of the Divine. It is only we (our soul) that is capable of merging with the Divine. Our individual soul is truth, and also, the Supreme is Truth. True *satsang* is the unity of the soul with the Supreme Truth. This is the highest kind of *satsang*. However, this highest kind of *satsang*, unity with the Divine, does not occur all of a sudden. This category of *satsang* requires many lifetimes of good actions and spiritual imprints (*samskaras*).

The Second Kind of Satsang (Association with the Saints):

Sant Tulsi Das says:

“The association of the saints brings association with the Divine, and alliance with people who are engrossed in the world leads the way back to this world again and again.”

To attain Ultimate Liberation it is essential to have association with the saints. Saints, having realized the true form of God, become that True Form. The accomplished great beings who have attained unity with the Divine, and who have experienced



the Supreme Being even while living in this body, have become the Supreme Being [They become one with their true Divine Form]. Association with these saints is this second category of *satsang*. However, finding such a saint is not an easy task. A true saint is rare and difficult to find.

Sant Tulsidas says:

“Without accumulation of many good deeds one will be unable to gain the association of a great saint.”

When our good *karmas* permit, we are able to come experience the association of these sentient beings. A more important point is that even if we have a direct encounter with such a saint, we often do not have the wisdom to be able to recognize a genuine sage.

A great Sant, Tulsi Sahab, says:

“If someone says ‘I have recognized a saint,’ then I put my hands on my ears in astonishment. [It is not an easy task.]”

If ordinary people could recognize saints, then why, since antiquity, have so many great saints, sages, and prophets been tortured, maimed and killed? Many saints have had to face



horrible atrocities. This simply would not have happened if we were able to recognize the genuine great saints.

The Third Kind of Satsang (Association with the Writings of Ancient Sages and Saints):

In daily life we need the guidance of a great sage or saint. Even though we might encounter many so called *mahatmas* or *sadhus*, the task of finding and identifying an accomplished guide is difficult. A truly great sage is a rare find. So, in consideration of this, how would *satsang* (association with a true saint) be possible? The answer is that we can study the teachings of the great saints of the past, because in their teaching we will find the elaboration of the Truth. This then is the third category of *satsang*. Generally, when we speak of *satsang*, it is this third category that is meant. This kind of *satsang* includes the study of scriptures and the words and writings of the saints and prophets of the past.

As we continue diligently in this third type of *satsang* we accumulate the meritorious *karmas* which will lead to the meeting with a true saint. Then we will be able to do the second category of *satsang*. As we continue in association with a great saint, and with the saint's blessings, we will gradually begin to



meditate and undertake the prescribed spiritual disciplines. By diligently practicing these disciplines, we will one day, experience the first category of *satsang*—the association with the Supreme. When we have thus accomplished the highest category of *satsang*, our life's purpose will be fulfilled.

We will now look at some of the scriptures and the sayings of saints in this regard:

In the *Yajur Veda*, *satsang* is known as the *Buddhi yoga*. This is the yoga of intellectually discerning the truth. In this Veda it says:

O Dear Aspirants! In order to realize the essential form of the Supreme Being, first practice the Buddhi yoga (satsang), then Manas yoga (practice mantra and focus on the Divine form), and the Yoga of Light (Drishti yoga). By these practices you will establish the ground for the realization of Divine Union.

In the *Maha Upanishad*, *satsang* is considered essential for Liberation:

On the gate of liberation are found four gate keepers endowed with wisdom. These four are: discipline, thoughtfulness (reflection), contentment and association with saints.

Sant Tulsidas Ji says:



Without the association of great saints, there is neither discourse of the Divine nor the understanding of the scriptures. Without these two, selfish attachment does not loosen its grip. And without dispelling attachment to the world one cannot attain the realm of the Divine and the true devotion that is essential to realize the Divine.

Further, he says,

Intelligence, fame, supreme salvation, attainment of all powers and kindness are all realized by the power of satsang. No other means are prescribed in the Vedas to attain these.

Sant Kabir Sahib says:

Discord and delusion can be removed by the power of the association of saints. For those who associate with saints, suffering dissolves and they will remain immersed in joy.

Joy arises from noble company and pain arises from association with the wicked, says Kabir, go to a place where saints dwell and their association is possible.

A great woman saint, Sahjo Bai, has also said:

Whoever comes to satsang is released from the confinements of individual caste, status and color. Even the flow of dirty water, upon reaching the holy river Ganga, becomes Ganga (loses its impurity and comes to be known as the holy river).

Sant Sundar Das Ji says:



All people have a mother and father as well as relatives and friends. It is easy to obtain sons and wives, but it is very difficult to find true satsang (association of true saints).

Sant Tulsi Sahib says:

O Aspirant! Perform satsang by subduing the mind and taking refuge in saints. Keep in your heart a ceaseless burning desire to be at the feet (tutelage) of saints.

Maharishi Mehi Paramahans Ji says:

Dear Aspirants! Each day strive to do both kinds of satsang: inner and outer. Outer satsang is listening to the teachings of great saints and studying the sacred texts. Inner satsang is the practice of one-pointed meditation.

Yogi Panchanan Bhattacharya Ji says:

*By association with a pure soul the mind becomes pure and the darkness of attachment is dispelled.”
In attending to these quotes from different saints it becomes clear that satsang is vital and very necessary for any serious spiritual seeker.*

Guru: The Qualified Teacher

A guru is the one who gives Knowledge. In this world there are many types of knowledge. There are also many types of teachers, each proficient in their own field. For our purposes we



are discussing spiritual knowledge, and our concern is with the relation to a spiritual teacher. The worldly teachers possess knowledge concerning the physical and material world. The spiritual teacher however, is proficient in spiritual knowledge. The spiritual teacher gives knowledge of the Self, reveals the true form of the Divine, and thus brings blessing into our lives. Therefore, the seeker of spiritual knowledge should be involved in *satsang* and should seek a true spiritual master.

Maharishi Mehi says:

Do satsang, search for a teacher, and choose an accomplished spiritual teacher. Without finding a true teacher one can not tread the path of knowledge.

The teacher is not merely a human body. He/she is knowledge incarnate. Therefore, only the one who is able to give the knowledge of God should be considered as the spiritual teacher.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

The Guru is a manifestation of wisdom, and an aspirant should acquire this knowledge. Without the understanding of true knowledge and moral principles, there is neither a guru nor the true seeker.

Sant Tulsi Das says:

The true teacher is the one who gives knowledge without ignorance, who speaks about light without



darkness, and about the formless God without the God with forms. That teacher I deem as true.

Who is worthy to be called a true or accomplished teacher? The one who has transcended the realm of ignorance and darkness and is established in the realm of knowledge and Light, is the true teacher. The true teacher goes beyond the material realm of forms and is established in the formless State of the Infinite (the Divine). The accomplished spiritual teacher gives the message about Reality only after testing this knowledge on the touchstone of his own personal experience. The knowledge of a true spiritual teacher is not simply based on intellectual knowledge, but also in personal experience.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

You speak what is written down [intellectual knowledge], and I speak from what I have seen [inner experience].

Therefore, we need a spiritual teacher who will not only be a knowledgeable teacher but will also be morally sound and active, practicing what he preaches.

Sant Tulsi Das warns against those gurus who only serve their own selfish purposes:



The teacher who takes the wealth of a student and not the suffering of the student will go to a deep hell.

The praise of the teacher is based on the fact that one can not attain knowledge without the grace of the teacher. Here are some references from the scriptures and the writings of different saints elaborating on the importance and qualifications of true spiritual teacher: and:

Goswami Tulsi Das Ji says:

Without the grace of a true Guru one cannot attain knowledge, and without knowledge it is not possible to practice detachment. All the Vedas proclaim that we cannot attain true contentment without deep devotion to God.

He further says,

No one can go beyond this ocean of the world without the help of Guru.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Without the Guru people are lost. They wander here and there in the world and cannot find the path.

xxx

Without the help of the Guru you can not attain knowledge in this human birth, which will be wasted

[xxx]



*My spiritual preceptor and God both stand before me.
Whose feet shall I touch first? I am indebted to my
Guru and will touch his feet first, since he has taught
me the way to God.*

Guru Nanak says:

*Without meeting a true teacher man is filled with ego.
Without the guru, we miss the purpose of this life,
which is to realize the Divine.*

[xxx]

*Guru is my mother, guru is my father, guru is my
Lord.”*

Guru Nanak says:

*Without finding a true teacher one cannot attain
liberation.*

Tulsi Das Sahab said:

*Without the blessings of an accomplished murshid
(Guru) it is impossible to see beyond this world, and
the path to our destination is unreachable.*

And also:

*I am suffering in the absence of my Beloved, and life
in this world is empty without a Sat Guru.*

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

*The Guru is greater than God’ is a famous saying.
One can not attain the Divine without the help of the
teacher, even though the Divine lives within our very
heart.*



and he said:

Without having the grace of a Guru one cannot attain liberation.

Saint Dadu Dayal Ji says:

A true Guru by his/her grace transforms an animal-like being into a real human being. Then the man is transformed from human to siddha (perfected being), and from siddha to God, and from God to the Formless Infinite Reality.

Saint Charan Das says:

A mother is a hundred times greater than a father. A mother always keeps her son in her loving care. Even when she chides the child, in her heart she is only concerned with the well-being of her child. God is a hundred times greater than a mother, and the spiritual teacher is a hundred times greater than God. The Guru loves his disciple and also takes away his weaknesses.

A great mystic and devoted woman, Sahjo Bai, has said:

I may abandon Ram (God) but I can not leave my Guru. I do not see the Lord and Guru as equals." [In other words, she deems Guru higher than God since Guru holds the key to liberation.]

she said as well:

Whatever happens by the grace of God, or whatever does not happen, I am not concerned. But without the



grace and mercy of Guru, the insight and wisdom wash away.

Saint Sundar Das says:

By the grace of the Guru our intelligence is refined and purified, and by the grace of the Guru the sorrows of this world are removed.

By the acts of God the soul descends [into this world]; however, by the teachings of the Guru the same soul is liberated from the net of illusion and death (Yama).

Lord Mahavira says:

Service to the true Guru and to experienced elders, and avoidance of association with ignorant people, is the path to the Highest.

When we glance at the life of the Buddha we see that his life was devoted to finding the maker of this house (body). To that end he studied at the feet of many great sages and scholars. The Buddha has clearly stated that our duty is to our teacher who gives us Knowledge.

The Buddha said:



The person from whom you learn the path [as taught by the Buddha,] must be served [and worshipped] in the same way that a Brahmin worships the sacrificial fire.

Now we will consider some references from various texts of the Hindu tradition.

The *Maha Upanishads* say:

It is difficult to abandon the sensory pleasures; it is difficult to see the true reality; and it is even more difficult to attain the state of equanimity [and tranquility] without the grace of a true preceptor.

The *Yogshikhopanishad* says:

The Guru is [equal to] the Creator (Brahma), the Sustainer (Vishnu) and the Destroyer (Siva). No one is greater than the preceptor in all the three worlds.

Gynasancalani Tantra says:

In this body all Knowledge resides; in this body all the gods dwell; and in this body are located all pilgrimages. Only by the teaching of the Guru can all this be found.

Lord Krishna does not use the word *guru*, but he alludes to the giver of knowledge when he says:

Learn this through humble submission, through inquiry, and through service, then the knowing ones,



the perceivers of truth will teach you the true knowledge.

In studying the above accounts, we see that there isn't enough that can be written concerning the praise of the true *Guru*.

Moral Integrity

Whether we call it our true nature [form], or the nature of God, or the nature of the soul, all are the same. In order to realize one's true form [nature], it is essential to practice the path of Ultimate Reality. To do this, it is necessary to follow a righteous lifestyle. As well, in order to realize the sacrosanct form of the Supreme Being, it is imperative to live a moral and pure life.

Guru Nanak says:

*It is only in a pure, clean vessel that truth can stay.
Those who lead a pure (moral) life are rare. I seek
refuge in God: Lord, merge my essence into your
Supreme Essence!*

If we put cow dung, dirt or waste on our fingers and then place a sweet fragrance on those fingers, we will not be able to smell the



sweet fragrance. In the same way, if our hearts (and actions) are impure, then we can not realize the sweet form of the Supreme Lord.

In the *Katha Upanishad* it is said:

The one who has not abstained from sinful acts, whose senses are not in control, and whose mind is not serene, can not attain the Supreme Reality by the practice of self-realization.

With these views in mind, the saints have given instructions to abstain from the five sins. Abstention from lying, stealing, intoxication, violence and adultery will help the seeker to effortlessly avoid unrighteous acts.

Maharishi Mehi says:

If we are able to rid ourselves of these five sins, then how could other sins trouble us? And if we are united with truthful and pure conduct, then how could any curse harm us?

The saints have addressed the sin of violence with particular attention to the foods which are eaten. Foods which are produced by killing living beings, as well as foods which are not pure and fresh, are considered *tamasic*. Consumption of these is prohibited by the teachings of the saints. This includes animal products such as meat, fish, and eggs. These foods inhibit the clarity of the mind and the health of the body. There is an old



saying: “Whatever kind of food we take in, its properties will also fill our mind.” A parallel saying is “Whatever we eat, just so will our breath smell. [indicates the visible effect of food]”

Further, Kabir Sahab says:

The kind of food and drink which we consume directly influences how our mind will become. Even the quality of water which we drink will influence our speech.

These words of Kabir Sahib are not merely rhetorical conjecture, but represent direct experience. Drink one glass of milk and observe how your mind is affected. Next, drink a glass of wine and observe how the mind is affected. Or, observe the effect of eating a sweet in comparison to the effect of taking a very small dose of opium. In this way you can see for yourself how our mind is affected by what we ingest. These are extreme examples, with noticeable effects. But even when the effect is subtle and barely noticeable, we are nevertheless affected by the food we consume.

A great yogi named Bhupendranath Ji Sanyal has said:

It is preferable to always avoid the consumption of flesh and fish. This is because in the very cells of these animals there might be bad diseases. But even more significantly, the natural vibration of these creatures is absorbed into the blood. This can create agitation and even sickness, and will destroy the natural calmness of



the mind. Also, one must not take intoxicants, as this is a great breach of the spiritual path and natural duty (dharma). [Under the influence of intoxicants people are unable to discern the right path of action]

Therefore, we must be disciplined in what we eat and drink, and by being disciplined, our wealth and spiritual path are protected. This world becomes agreeable, and so does the next world, since we won't be incurring the karmas from killing other living beings. When a person leaves an immoral lifestyle and then practices a moral life, he will not only better his own life, but as well, his family and community will be favorably influenced.

Lord Buddha said:

A person who practices a moral life will benefit in five ways:

- 1. Enhanced social standing;*
- 2. Increased wealth;*
- 3. Greater influence in the community;*
- 4. A peaceful death;*
- 5. And after death, the person will go to a blissful realm.*

Praise and Prayer

There are three important requirements to be met in the practice of a person who pursues devotion to the Divine and seeks to attain liberation. First is praise; second is prayer; and third is



meditation. We know that when we are indebted to someone, we should express our gratitude and appreciation. God has blessed us bountifully.

Although we are unable to repay God for his generous blessings, we can acknowledge this goodness by chanting praises about the Divine Being. When we exalt God through song, we declare the glories of the Divine. In doing this, we remember the grandeur of God. As a natural result, our faith in God increases. Unless we acknowledge someone's qualities, it is impossible to be faithful to that person.

Tulsi Das Sahab says:

Without having the knowledge of the nature of God it is impossible to know him. And without understanding his qualities we can not have love for God. Without love we cannot have devotion and true faith. This is as unattainable as the mixing of water and oil [which is impossible].

Therefore, in order to have devotion and faith in God it is necessary to know the grandeur of God. Once the glory of God is known, our heart is attracted to God. This is a great way to keep your heart in devotion to God. Thus, it is through praise that we extol the divine powers of God and draw our mind toward God.



After singing praises to God we then pray. Prayer is supplication with deep humility. In general, people have desires and make demands. Only the great sages do not have wants.

Kabir Sahab said:

*My desires are gone, as are my worries. My mind is filled with detachment.
One who does not want anything is the king of kings.*

Tulsi Das Sahab says:

*People desire sons, wealth and fame in this world.
Why do people desire that which taints the mind?*

Why do we desire these things?

Tulsi Das Sahab ponders this:

[Fleeting] pleasures come to us without asking, whether we are in heaven, hell, house, or forest. Why then do people work so hard to get these pleasures while they ignore the advice of the sages [to seek permanent joy]?

Why do we invest so much effort in acquiring these worldly pleasures which come to us naturally? And let us consider as well that there is always pain involved in acquiring worldly objects, and that an even greater exertion is required to sustain



them. And further, when these very same insidious sensory pleasures leave us, the distress is even more intense. This is why the wise do not ask for things which are transitory. The truth is that our desires should only be for something which would eliminate the desire [for worldly pleasures] itself. In reality, the only thing we should be asking God for is to achieve union with the divine. After realizing the Divine, there is nothing left to be achieved. This is the end of all wants.

Prayer and invocation are not merely concerned with the mindless muttering of requests, but rather, prayer should be the voice of our heart. God always listens to the one who calls out with a pure heart.

In the *Yajur Veda* (chapter 20) it is said:

Oh God, even as we unknowingly commit various sins, day and night, please forgive these offenses and ill desires. You are omnipresent, like the pervasive wind.

We have previously spoken about prayer in both Christianity and Islam. Christians refer to this practice as prayer, and Muslims call it *ibadat*. We see that in all theistic religions there is a great emphasis on prayer.

Communion or Mediation Practice



The practices of praise and prayer—glorification and invocation—are followed by communion through the practices of contemplation and meditation. The Sanskrit word *upasana* literally means sitting near God. The saints distinguish four categories of *upasana*. The four basic practices are *manas japa*, *manas dhyana*, *drishti sadhana* and *nadanusandhana*.

Manas Japa:

The first practice, *manas japa*, is the repetition of a Divine name, preferably the *mantra* given to the aspirant by the teacher. This *mantra* is considered to be both sacred, and vibrant with divine energy. It purifies the heart of the practitioner.

Krishna describes this practice of *japa* as the greatest of all sacrifices:

*In the sacrifices I am the japa yajna. In the
immoveable things I am the Himalaya*

By *japa* one attains supernatural powers. This is said in the *Yoga Shastras*:

By japa one attains divine powers.

Tulsi Das Sahab also says:



People who recite the name of God find that their suffering vanishes.

If a person practices *manas japa* with diligence he will acquire eight kinds of supernatural powers. The *Bramanand Purana* says that *japa* is equal to millions of prayers. The *Jabal Darshna Upanishad* includes *japa* as one of the essential vows. Saint Maharishi Mehi says that *guru japa* is the best of all *japas*. It is incomparable. He says it is peace-giving by its nature, and bestows wealth, right action (*dharma*), desires and liberation, all four ends of life. The student can think of the teacher as a wish-fulfilling tree, and recitation of the *guru mantra* as a great austerity. Through the practice of *japa* all desires are easily fulfilled.

The *Vishnu Purana*, the *Shiva Purana*, and the *Agni Purana* speak of three types of *japa*: *Vachika japa*, *Upanshu japa*, and *Manas japa*. According to all these scriptures *Manas japa* is the highest form. *Vachika japa* is performed by speaking or reciting the holy name so that others can hear, and includes chanting and reading of scripture. In *Upanshu japa* the holy name is uttered in such a way that the lips move, but the sound can only be heard by the one who is reciting. In *Manas japa* the *mantra* or holy name is recited only internally by the mind, not with the mouth,



and not by using any external expressions. Each method is beneficial, but the effects bestowed are of different orders: *Vachika japa* is ten times more spiritually powerful than ritual practices such as sacrifices; *Upanshu japa* is a hundred times more powerful than *Vachika japa*; and *Manas japa* is a thousand times more powerful even than *Upanshu japa*.

For recitation purposes a short *mantra* is best. The smaller *mantra* serves as a device or a prod to help the practitioner control the mind which is as restless as an elephant in rut. Not only this, but in addition, the *mantra* puts all the great deities (including Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) within the control of the practitioner [the practitioner obtains spiritual powers through *mantra*].

Goswami Tulsi Das Ji says:

The mantra that is small has such a great power that even Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and other gods come under the control of the practitioner. The short mantra is a device to control the mind which is like a mad elephant.

When reciting the *mantra* you should have a focused mind. If the mind is not focused then *japa* is not beneficial. Pay attention: Do not let the mind wander off to various thoughts during *japa*. The constant arising of thoughts obstructs the mind



from achieving the powers of the *mantra*. However, you should not become disappointed or impatient while trying to focus. Be diligent in this practice and success in concentration is bound to come.

Manas Dhyana

It is necessary to restrain the activities of the mind for the purpose of uniting the inner soul with the Divine. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* say that *Yoga* is cessation of the mental fluctuations. Ordinarily the mind is continually attending to input from the five senses as they perceive this world of name and form. In order to withdraw the attention of our mind from these sensations, we have to utilize an additional means that also seems concrete. This is done in the practice of *japa* by invoking a form of the deity through repetition of a holy name. It is also accomplished in *manas dhyana* through mental visualization of the sacred form associated with the name of the *Guru* or deity. We have already explained the details of *japa*. In *manas dhyana* as the practitioner invokes a holy name (as in *japa*) he also visualizes the sacred form of the being represented by the *mantra* that is recited. In the saint tradition, the physical form of the *Guru* is the most revered form. Kabir Sahab, Guru Nanak,



and other saints have given instructions to recite the holy word *Guru* and visualize the sacred form of the *Guru*.

Kabir Sahab says:

The essential meditation is meditation on the form of the Guru; the indispensable prayer is the worship of the holy feet of the Guru; the cardinal truth is given in the words spoken by the Guru; and the foundation is the pure intention of the devotee.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji says:

Meditate on the Guru within; with your tongue recite the Guru's holy name; behold the Guru with your eyes; and listen to his words with your ears.

Sant Charan Das says:

O Aspirant! Meditate on the Guru and recite his/her name; surrender yourself (your ego) as an offering; and worship only the Guru.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

The mantra that the guru gives is most pure and holy. Recite that mantra in your heart. Meditate on the auspicious form of the guru who is the most benevolent”



By this practice of reciting the *mantra* and focusing on the form of the spiritual teacher, the mind begins to become concentrated. Progress in meditation is gradual but steady. The significant effects of this teaching occur when the aspirant becomes established in the focus on the form. This is when the aspirant will have all desires fulfilled.

As Guru Nanak Dev says:

Establish the form of the Guru in your heart, and all your wishes will be fulfilled.

A wonderful example of this is given in a story of the *Mahabharata*. Eklavya, a young boy from the tribal class, desired to learn the art of archery. He approached the great Guru Drona, a master of archery. However, Drona would not accept Eklavya as his disciple because he belonged to a lower caste. But Eklavya was determined and he already considered Drona to be his *guru* in his heart. The boy installed a statue of Guru Drona near his house and began to meditate on the form of the *Guru*. He practiced archery with only the desire to become fully proficient in the art of archery. As a result of Eklavya's focus and his faith in the auspices of his *Guru*, he became skilled in the art of archery. This example illustrates the significance of the practice of *Manas dhyana*.



The concepts of *zikar* (Sufi chanting) and *fikar* (constant remembrance and focus) in Islam can be compared to *Manas japa* and *Manas dhyana*. In Sufism the meditation on the form of the *Guru* is known as *Fanahfil murshid*.

Drihsti Yoga

By the practice of *Manas japa* and *Manas dhyana* the mind begins to become focused, but complete control of the mental fluctuations is not yet accomplished. For this purpose the method of *Drishti yoga* is utilized.

Lord Rama instructed Hanuman Ji on this method when he said: “There are two seeds of the tree of the mind. The first is *prana spandana* (breathing; movement of energy) and the second is *vasana* (desire; subconscious inclinations; tendencies and impulses). Indeed with the destruction of one of these two, the other is also destroyed.”

Some spiritual aspirants try to destroy the fruit of the seeds through exercises that control the movement of the breath. These breathing exercises are called *pranayama*, and they are part of *Hatha Yoga*. Other aspirants seek to eliminate the desires (*vasnas*) using the techniques and practices of *Raja Yoga* (the



path of meditation), which is also known as *Drishti Yoga*, the *Yoga of Vision*. *Drishti Yoga* is deemed superior to *Hatha Yoga* because it can be practiced by householders as well as by ascetics.

For this reason Lord Ram instructed Hanuman to practice *Drishti Yoga*:

Oh Hanuman, until the mind is controlled, one must meditate on single element.

And what is this one element? In the practice of *Japa*, the *mantra* by itself is not simply one element because there can be more than one syllable in a *mantra*. Neither is this one element found in *Manas Dhyana* because the physical form of the deity or *Guru* is comprised of many elements. This one element is that which is indivisible and uni-dimensional. It is *bindu*, a singular infinitesimal point. When an aspirant undertakes the practice of the *Yoga of Vision (Drishti Yoga)* then he/she will behold the singular *bindu* of light within. This is the “one element” that Lord Rama was referring to.

The *Yoga of Vision* is known by different names in different scriptures. Some of these names are *Bindu dhyana*, *Shushumna dhyana*, *Shunya* (emptiness) *dhyana*, *Nassagra* (front of the nose) *dhyana*, *Preksha* (seeing) *dhyana*, and *Vipashyan* (insight)



dhyana. The followers of the Sufi tradition call it *Sagle Naseerah*.

Drishti Yoga can be explained through translation of the words *Drishti*, which is the faculty of sight, and *Yoga*, which means union. Thus *Drishti Yoga* refers to the concentration of the dispersed vision into a focus on a single point which is beheld with the mind's eye. The aspirant of *Drishti Yoga* is instructed by the preceptor to bring both beams of vision to a unity by focusing on a single point.

Through this practice the aspirant pierces the realm of darkness within and enters the realm of divine light. The aspirant thus moves from the microcosm (body) to the macrocosm (divine realm), and from the gross material world to the subtle spiritual realm where the aspirant is able to perceive the subtle divine sounds. With this new perception of the subtle sounds the practitioner of *Drishti Yoga* is enabled to proceed further on the path. The various realms which are then experienced have been described in many sacred texts as well as in the teachings of saints. These are some of the references to *Drishti Yoga* that can be found in the sacred literature:

The Shivasamhita says:



When the aspirant brings his attention from all directions and concentrates it at the ajna chakra (in the middle of the two eyebrows) then all the karmas from the past life are destroyed with no difficulty.

The Yogashikhopahnishad says:

The ida nadi is on the left and the pingala is on the right. In the middle is shushumna.⁹⁹ The one who knows this (realizes it) is the true knower of the [essence of] the Vedas.

Shri Krishna says in the Gita:

While holding the body, head and neck in a straight line, motionless and steady, one should gaze in front of his nose and not look in any other direction. (one should meditate).

Sant Dharni Das instructs:

Focus right in front of your nose and gaze with your inner vision. Behold! Hundreds of moons will emerge and then your whole body will fill with light.

Sant Sundar Das says:

In front of the eyes and nose [at the ajna chakra, in between the eyebrows] there lives Brahman (the Divine Being) whose nature is imperishable. At this juncture [with concentrated vision] light emerges naturally.

⁹⁹The *Ida*, *Pinagla*, and *Sushumna* are the subtle channels or energies.



Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Keep your mind focused while invoking the Divine name without even opening your mouth. Close the gate of your eyes and open the gate within.

Swami Shiv Narayana describes the technique this way:

Sit in Padma asana (crosslegged) and restrain your consciousness current (your attention) from going outward, while focusing your eyes in front of the nose, and then you will ascend to Trikuti (the Triple worlds of mind and matter).

Saint Gulal says:

Turn inward. See in your heart that the light pervades within.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Unite the vision of both eyes by focusing on one point. Looking within, hear the divine sound. Search within in this way.

The *Yoga* of Vision and the experience of the divine light which follows from this practice are not only found in the Vedic scriptures. The transition from the darkness to the light is described in both the Koran and Bible.

In the Koran it is written:



The people who keep faith in Allah find God to be their helper. Allah takes them out from the darkness and brings them to the light.

The Bible says:

The light of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light.

The Yoga of Sound (Nadanusandhana)

The *Yoga* of Sound is the highest and final practice of Sant Mat. In Sufism this is known as *sultanulajakar*. By practicing this form of meditation the practitioner realizes the Supreme Lord and becomes united with the Divine.

When the aspirant practices the *Yoga* of Light he/she leaves the darkness and enters the realm of light. There the soul begins to hear the numerous divine sounds.

There are five inner realms: gross, subtle, causal, supra-causal and *Kevalya*. There is a specific sound at the center of each realm. These constitute the five central sounds.

With reference to these sounds Kabir Sahab says:



The five different kinds of sounds reverberate within, and thirty six kinds of divine melodies are also found within.

Guru Nanak says:

There resound five kinds of sound.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans Ji says:

Five celestial melodies resound within. Listen to each of these.

In fact the sound possesses a quality that attracts the attention of the listener. Every central sound flows from the highest realm downward to the lower realm and then directly connects to the center of that realm. The aspirant enters the process by attending to the sound of the gross realm, centering, and then following that sound as it leads to the realm above, which is the subtle realm. Upon reaching the subtle realm, the sound of the causal realm is experienced. This sound will eventually draw the practitioner from the Subtle to the Causal realm. And so the aspirant proceeds until reaching the highest realm, progressively catching increasingly subtle and powerful inner sounds in order to proceed to the realm immediately higher.

In the final stages of this practice, the aspirant goes beyond the veil of material creation and reaches the realm of *Kevalya*. This



is where the soul comes to experience the Divine. But even in this realm there is a thin veil, and complete union with the Divine is not yet possible. Upon acquiring the final essential sound in *Kevalya*, the soul ascends upward to the Absolute Soundless State. There the soul becomes one with the Divine.

Goswami Tulsi Das describes this state as follows:

Just as the flowing water of a river enters the ocean and becomes one with it, in the same way the individual soul merges with the Divine and becomes one with it. This is the end of the cycle of death and birth.

The sacred texts of the Indian traditions refer to the eternal sound by various names: *Anahat nad*, *Adi Shabad*, *Adi Nad* (sound of the beginning), *RamNnam* (pervasive sound), *Sat nam* (true name), *Pranwadhvani* (primal sound), *Omkar* (sound before the beginning), *Udgitha*, and others.

The sacred texts of other religious traditions also have names for this eternal sound. The ancient Greeks referred to this eternal sound as the *logos*. In Judaism it is known as *maimara*. In the Armenian language it is called *emar*. Christians speak of the eternal sound as the Word, and call it the Holy Spirit.



Maulana Rumi, a Muslim, called it *isme azam*. Sant Shums Tabarejz calls it *saut-e*.¹⁰⁰

In Chinese Taoism the sound is known as Tao. The Theosophical Society calls this the voice of the silence. [The references to the divine sounds are also found in the Tibetan Buddhism. For example, the Tibetan BuddhistYogi Milarepa speaks about the experience of the stillness of sound.]¹⁰¹

Muhammad Dara Shikoh said:

This whole world is permeated with the sound and the light of God. Even so, people are blind and they ask, 'Where is God?' You must take the cotton of deceit

¹⁰⁰ “Man is not only formed by vibrations, but he lives and moves in them. They surround him as the fish is surrounded by water, and he contains them within him as the fish tank contains water.”

(Hazrat Inayat Khan)

¹⁰¹ There is a well-known image of the Tibetan poet and mystic Milarepa, sitting in his familiar listening posture, with his right hand cupped over his right ear. In this passage the mystic beckons:

*Enter the garden of sacred sounds with a concentrated mind.
Sit still in a comfortable position.
Let the sounds float around and into the body, effortlessly.
Join in and chant the sound Om or Hum, whichever is more
pleasing.
Listen to the resonance of the sound.
Close the ears with index fingers, chant hum and experience
the resonance within.
In moments of silence stretch the ears to hear the farthest star.
Experience the stillness of sound.
When leaving the space retain the inner resonance to
experience the world anew.*



and egoism out of your ears. Then you can hear the sound of God.

In many places the sacred texts celebrate the glory of this essential sound:

Without the divine sound there is no knowledge, and without the divine sound there is no well being. Sound is the highest form of light, and sound is the highest form of the Divine.

This is a foundational teaching of the Vedas:

From sound (the Sound Current) the world came into existence. Sound is the nectar, and it is birth and death; it is the beginning and the end.

Sant Kabir Sahib uses an analogy based on a classical Indian myth about a magical stone, the *Paras*, that with its touch transforms anything into gold. With this image he shows that those who grasp this essential, eternal sound are liberated from the cycle of birth and death. “The sound of the beginning is like the *Paras* , and the mind is impure, like an iron tablet. When the mind comes into contact with the celestial sound, it is purified [transformed into its Pure Essential Nature just as the iron tablet in the myth] and is freed from the bondage of attachment.”

In the Vedas it is said:

In God the will (vibration) arose, ‘I am one, let me be many’.



From the divine will (vibration) the primordial sound manifested and the cosmos was created, unfolding from subtle to gross.

In a parallel telling, the Koran Sharif says:

God said Kun (be) and so it [the creation] happened.

The Bible speaks about this as well, in both the Hebrew and Christian testaments:

The Gospel of John refers to this primeval sound;

In the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and the word was God.

This verse derives from the creation story in the Hebrew Book of Genesis where it is written: “God **said** (sound vibrated), ‘Let there be light.’” And the days [realms] of creation unfolded in the familiar story.

Many of the saints and various sacred texts praise the *Yoga* of Divine Sound:

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

O Seekers! Practice the Sound Yoga. From this Sound everything has become manifest. Pursue that Sound and grasp it.



Shankaracharya praises the essential practice of the *Yoga* of Divine Sound when he says:

Oh Yoga of Sound I bow to you. You establish us in the Supreme Abode. Due to your blessings and grace my prana (breath) and mind merge in the highest abode of God (Vishnu).

These are a few additional passages from the sacred texts that speak of the Divine Sound and the *Yoga* of Sound:

Nadavindu Upanishad:

Mind, like an elephant in rut, runs after the pleasures of the world. Nada (Sound) Yoga serves as the sharp prod to curb that wandering mind.

Dhyanvindu Upanishads:

Beyond the anahat sound (the unstruck mystical sound) the realm of soundlessness (the State of Supreme Silence also known as Brahman) exists. Yogis consider this realm to be the highest. In this realm, all doubts perish.

Brahmavindupanishad:

There are two kinds of knowledge. One is Shabad Brahman (Primordial Sound, [Saguna Brahman]), and the other is Para Brahman (Supreme Being [Nirguna Brahman]). The practitioner who becomes proficient in Shabad Brahman reaches Para Brahman.

Shivanarayana Swami says:



O mind keep focusing! The mystical sounds are reverberating within.

Sant Kabir Sahab says:

Search for that essential sound and control the mind. This is a very effortless path (Yoga). The primordial sound is our true essence; this body is transitory.

Guru Nanak Dev says:

The one who shows you your home (eternal abode, God) within your home (your body, in which this soul resides), is the truly benevolent sat guru (true guide). The melodious sound of the five divine instruments and the essential sound are reverberating in the depth of your being.

Maharishi Mehi Paramhans says:

Focus your consciousness current current in the sushumna [in the middle of two eyebrows]. By doing so you will know the original sound and your cycle of birth and death will end.

Conclusion



When we study the different religions of the world, we find that at the root and dissemination of each there was some true saint, prophet or sage who undertook intense meditation and profound spiritual effort. The great beings—saints, prophets, sages—first realize within themselves the true nature of the Divine through meditation in solitude. Then they bring forth this knowledge and teach other people the path of peace and well being. When their followers increase, these teachings often take the form of a new religion or sect. Due to geographical, cultural and temporal variations it is predictable that these religions will appear to differ considerably. These contextual differences are the reason that each religion has its distinct deities, rituals and practices. People encounter the outward symbols and convictions of a religion at first and are attracted to a religion according to their own personal preferences. This is a natural human response. However, a true seeker of Truth will go to the deepest core of these religions, and there, the seeker will find that the essence of all religions is the same. Every one of these religions is erected upon the foundation of the Infinite Supreme Being [Reality, Truth] whose nature is Truth and Peace. [Even though Buddha didn't speak of God he sought inner peace, a state of transcendence]. Generally speaking, all religions contain prayers, invocations, meditations, and moral injunctions. They



each elaborate on the nature of the Divine, the soul, liberation, heaven and hell, and other basics.

The Rig Veda, the ancient text of Hindu *dharma*, says:

The truth is one but the Wise [sages] speak of it in various ways.

God is One, but the Divine Reality is known by many names. Vedic people call God *Brahman* or *Ishvara*; Christians call the Divine, Lord or God; Muslims, *Allah*; Buddhists, Buddha; the Jewish people call God *Yahweh*. The Chinese call God *Tao*. The Parsees call It *Ahurmazd*. The unity of the divine is proclaimed by various religions. One of the major pillars of the Islamic faith is contained in the call to faith where it is said that there is none worthy of worship except *Allah*. Christians also proclaim that God is one. The prayer at the heart of Judaism states: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One.”

In each tradition the key religious words are expressed in the core language of its origins. The Vedic followers call prayer *prarthana* in the Sanskrit language. Muslims call prayer *ibadat*. The Vedic word for meditation is *dhyan*. Muslims call this *merkaba*. Hindus refer to heaven as *svarga*, hell is called *narak*, and liberation is called *moksha*. Muslims call these *bhahisht*, *dozak*, and *nazat* in their language.



Many of the ideas that are common to different religions are expressed in words that derive from the root languages of the traditions. An example of this can be seen in the stories about the origin of human beings. In the Vedic tradition the first human ancestors are Shatrupa and Manu. Since we are children of Manu we are called man. In Islam, as well as in the other monotheistic religions, human beings are considered to all be descended from Eve and Adam. The word for man in the Arabic language is derived from the Arabic word *Admi*. In ancient Hebrew the word for man is *adam*.

There are many other common ideas found in the different religious systems. For example, in the Vedic tradition the water from the River Ganga is considered holy. In Islam *Abe Zumzum's* water is considered holy. And in Christianity the River Jordan (where John the Baptist conducted much of his ministry and where Jesus Christ was baptized) still retains the mystique of a holy river.

All of the religions we have been considering, including Vedic, Islamic and Christian, require a life of moral rectitude and ask people to abstain from lying, stealing, intoxicants, killing and adultery.



By looking at the commonalities in these religions, we can see the impact of the differences in cultural origins, languages, time and place. As each religion comes to expression through different groups of people using different languages in different countries, diversity emerges in the outer structure of the religious systems. The different languages give rise to different terminology. However, it is still evident that the underlying essence (Truth) of each religion is the same. Although the particular Saints and sages of each religion teach within their respective religions, all of their essential teachings are the same.

As a concluding summary I once again offer these words of Maharishi Mehi:

In different times and different places saints appear and their followers name their religion according to the sage or saint who propounded that tradition. The appearance of differences can be attributed to time, place, and language. This gives rise to various labels for the common views held by all religions. Likewise, due to excessively zealous followers, these seeming differences are often amplified. When all sectarianism and the temporal and linguistic aspects are removed, the basic principles of all the saints are in accord the voices of the saints are in harmony.