

The Incense and the Lotus

A Study of Classical Vedanta Hinduism

An Overview

Alannah Robertson
*Chililabombwe, Zambia, Africa, and
Stewart, BC, Canada
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With grateful thanks to my Hindu friends,
Dr. Amirthalingam, his son, Dr. Prathalingam,
And Pratha's wife, Balasundara (Tanga),
For bringing the sacred literature of India to me,
For listening to my many questions,
And answering them so patiently

Especial thanks to dear Dr. Amir for his help
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Introduction

I was brought up as a Presbyterian, in the Church of Scotland. I look back and consider that this was a wonderful foundation on which to build a life. I feel a deep gratitude to my parents, my family, my community, my country, my schools and my church, for the grounding they gave me in a loving, compassionate, merciful, tolerant, and most of all, open-minded and free-thinking way of looking at life.

I feel a deep gratitude to the Hebrew people, who first developed the ideas found in the Christian church; to the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, who took a strong stand against the Law and the Pharisees, pointing out that it is in spiritual truth lies true wisdom, not unthinking conformation to the Law; to the Jewish early Church leaders, who carried the spiritual truths of the Jews to the Gentiles; to Paul of Tarsus, an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, who organized the early Christian Church as a democracy like that of the Jewish Synagogues, and set Jesus Christ as its cornerstone.

My theology is that of the Reformers — and the Presbyterian Church — who believe that the Bible, meaning the Old and New Testaments, is the Supreme Authority in matters of Christian Faith. They believe that the Holy Spirit will open the heart and mind of the seeker to an assurance of the truth contained in the Holy Book and expressed in Reform Theology. Therefore they call themselves “The People of the Book,” and the open Bible is on prominent display in churches.

The searcher is encouraged to read the Book and there find living waters to quench the thirst for wisdom, and food to feed the mind hungering for spiritual knowledge. The searcher is encouraged to research and develop an ever-open mind; this is a lifelong process of spiritual growth. Ideally, this produces a people who are tolerant of others, loving towards others, and who allow others to find their own way to God. It ought to produce people who love education and see the use of reason as a way to deepen their understanding of all aspects of life.

It was in this spirit that I embarked on my quest to understand Hinduism. I wanted the Holy Spirit to help me enter it empathetically, to feel in my spirit what was being said by the Infinite to the Hindus. I realized that it is not enough to know in the mind the ideas propounded by the Hindu sages. It is necessary to feel them in the emotions and the subconscious.

When in 1973, in Chililabombwe, Zambia, Africa, I embarked on my Quest to study Hinduism, I immediately met the Prathalingams, Tamils from Sri Lanka. These Hindus brought back for me from India copies of their sacred literature, and I began my studies.

One can never become a Hindu unless born into a Hindu family, for obvious reasons. I can strive to understand this approach to life; I can react to it emotionally; I can consider that in it lies great wisdom; I can desperately want to adopt it for my own; but my earlier conditioning by my original environment will make this difficult, at times impossible. However, realizing all this, what follows is a result of my searching for the truth of Hinduism, my groping for understanding.

This is my interpretation of the Hindu world view. Dr. Amir – my name for him – patiently corrected my Western Christian viewpoint whenever it got in the way. Eventually, he set his seal on my finished work as having achieved my goal of sounding as if it were written by a true-born Hindu. His pet name for me was Kali.

I found that my immersion into the lovely world of Hinduism was a process of liberation for me. Without relinquishing my earlier conditioning, I had added another dimension to the layers of my mind. Vast vistas of the imagination opened up as I understood the tolerant, yet disciplined, worldview of Hinduism. My mind welcomed the different perspective on spiritual truths, and enriched those I already held.

As I looked at Hindu art, the magnificent pictures and statuary enlarged my imagination and increased my appreciation of the world as I looked at it through the eyes of Hindus.

I feel a deep debt of personal gratitude to the Hindu sages who worked so hard at exploring their inner spirits and used their reason to develop the ideas they found there. That debt includes those who wrote down the sacred scriptures so that I could read them so many thousands of years later. I feel an affinity with these ancient peoples and share their continuing search for deeper understanding of this world in all its many depths, including those that lie beyond our few physical senses.

Chapter 1

The Dravidians

The fascinating worlds whose doors we are about to open are not totally Dream-worlds, although it will seem so at times. These are the worlds of real human beings and of events that happened: of wonderful flights of the human imagination. The stepping off point in time of our journey into the past, is approximately two thousand five hundred years before Christ was born, 2500 BCE, and the place is the hot, dusty plains that lie along the Indus River, under the sun of Northern India.

Here, at that time, had been built up, and was being maintained, a civilization created by people called Dravidians. It stretched from the Indus Valley across the continent to the valley of the Ganges River, a distance of one thousand miles. In type, the Dravidians were dark-white Caucasians, with the dark hair and eyes, and handsome features of the Western Mediterranean. It is thought that they originally came from Baluchistan.

There are signs among the modern population of India, of inter-marriage between the Dravidians and the even earlier settlers in India. Some were Australoids like the modern Australian aborigines, and some Negrito pygmies, who are still to be found in Malaysia and the Philippines. There are still traces of these earlier peoples to be found in India, as communities of people living simple lives, and speaking non-Indo-European languages.

The Dravidians were basically an agricultural people, with herds of cattle, and their rich farms supported the cities that had been built in what is now known as the Punjab. The best known of these cities are Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, in the Indus valley. From the interesting finds of archeologists who excavated the remains of the cities in the nineteenth century, taken together with the beliefs of the modern-day Dravidians, it is possible to surmise as to their approach to life and their world view.

These cities were built of baked brick, with straight streets laid out gridiron fashion, and with good drainage. From this it is possible to deduce that they had been planned by intelligent people. Their methods of agriculture must have been advanced: being designed to nourish and preserve the soil, instead of

depleting the ground, a process that forces people to move on. They could build permanent homes, instead of moving from what had been a fertile spot, to another.

A large bath was found, suggestive of the modern temple bath, situated close to buildings that could have been housing for priests. These early people were concerned with physical cleanliness as representing spiritual purity, as are present-day Hindus. This society must have been rich, as it could support a section devoted as priests to the pursuit of the Divine Ultimate.

Also unearthed were stone seals bearing the picture of a figure seated in the lotus position still adopted by yogis. The figure has three faces and is wearing a horned headdress and is surrounded by horned animals. This is highly suggestive of the modern Shiva, who is leader of the Yogis and has many aspects. He is closely associated with cattle and used the bull or cow as his steed. Yoga was practiced among the early Dravidians, and its followers were probably ascetics, as are those of the present day.

Clay representatives of the female figure were found, along with fertility stones that remind one of the stone representations of the lingam of the modern god, Shiva, that are much in evidence today among the modern descendants of the Dravidians. These people are conscious of the two main principles, the female and male, to be found in the creative process of life, and it would appear that this awareness was to be found in their ancestors.

Depictions of the swastika were found, not the swastika as used by the German Nazis, who turned the feet of the sign in the opposite direction, but the ancient symbol that signifies the wheel of life to the Hindus. This wheel is the circle of all existence, the ellipse of all time, the cycles of nature, the daily wheeling of the sun.

The idea of cycling and recycling was present with these earlier people, and it is a very important idea contained in Hinduism today. When we consider that these intelligent people probably used human and animal waste to fertilize their crops, it really is not surprising that the idea occurred to them of particles of one kind being used to give new life to another.

Remembering the picture of the figure wearing the horned headdress and surrounded by horned animals, we are justified in wondering if the Hindu

reverence for cattle has its roots in those far-off times.

There are legends which say that the cow is mother of the three worlds of earth, air, and sky, and these are used to encourage appreciation for the animal. Hindus revere the cow, giving it deep respect and acknowledging the indwelling presence of the Ultimate Force. This is appropriate considering how valuable the cow is to human beings. When we consider how much cattle give to a community, it is little wonder that they came to be revered and appreciated greatly.

These early Hindus were a farming community, so animals were not “loved” as pets, but valued for their function in society. The cow provides dairy produce, the bull provides transport by pulling the cart, labor by pulling the plow, turning the grindstone, and drawing water. Both animals provide manure from dung for the farms, and dung to be used as fuel. The belief system of these people was a controlling factor in the treatment of cattle.

In a country as bare of trees as is India nowadays, dung provides a valuable source of fuel. The women pat the dung cakes into shape by hand and leave them to dry in the sun. The cattle are considered holy animals, and their dung having been formed from grass passing through their digestive systems, it is not considered dirty. The piles of fuel are seen as being composed of golden treasure that is a necessity of life.

The Hindus abhor the idea of killing cattle for food as they consider it too valuable to the community. Their varied and delicious diet consisting of whole-grain cereals eaten with beans, gives them complete protein. Cooked with spices, and with the addition of fruit, vegetables, and dairy produce, it satisfies nutritive requirements without the addition of the flesh from their cattle.

On the practical plane, this deep reverence for the cattle that is so necessary to the well-being of the community ensures that it is well-cared for. The pressure of community opinion protects it from the less sensitive members, with the resultant benefit for the community.

There is still practiced to the present day, a custom whereby the cow that has been dedicated as the means of transport between this world and the next for someone who has died, is given to the temple. Here it feeds on the plantain

leaves people offer as gifts of food to the images, with the result that it is well-fed. The priests benefit from the dairy produce.

When the cow dies, and this applies to all cattle, the body is given to the Untouchables who dispose of all carcasses of dead animals. The Brahmin priests make no inquiry as to how the Untouchables dispose of the carcass: the priests are vegetarians, but the Untouchables are not. In this way, the fat cows probably end up as food for a section of the community. The other gifts of food made at the temples to the gods, are also given to anyone who happens to be at the temple doors when they are given out. In this way, in days of old, no one needs to starve.

The religious world view suggested by these few facts – a Creative Force revealed in the female and male principles of life, and all bound up in a great wheel – is that of a people deeply involved in, and sensitive to, the forces of nature. When one contemplates the many faces of nature it is difficult to remain unmoved by the splendor of the sunset, the glorious drama of a thunderstorm, the relief of the coming of lovely dawn after a dark, weary, night. Early in the sparkling morning or in a cool, peaceful evening, it is easy to feel at one with nature and experience the bliss of such union. And new life in all its forms is a miracle full of wonder.

But there are other aspects found in the form of natural disasters, famine, disease and death. These frighten us and make us feel impotent in the grip of a force, or forces, stronger than ourselves.

These conflicting aspects of life and the resultant emotions are what are given form and color by Hinduism. Already the ideas appear to be there among the early Dravidians. The cross-legged god has many faces: the mother goddess does not always smile. However, the wheel of life reminds us that dawn does follow every night no matter how dark, spring does follow every winter no matter how drear, new life does arise from the death of the old, and out of apparent disaster comes new and often improved growth. All Life is a circle.

The Infinite

Sea of All-Being

Great Father of All
Part of me, as I of you
Giver of Life
With respect I come before you
Offering my gratitude
For your great gifts to me
A measure of my devotion

Great Mother of All
Pervading me, filling me
Nourishing me
My heart worships you
Offering my love
For your loving service to me
A measure of my devotion

Great Force of Life
Springing up in me so exultantly
Gifting joy
With delight I revel in you
My happiness I offer you
My wonder in living
A measure of my devotion

Great Wheel of Life
Containing all, never ending
Gifting change
I exalt in your gift of growth
Understanding of myself
And of others
A measure of my devotion



Chapter 2

The Aryans - The Vedas

Acceptance of the play of nature brings peace of mind but can also result in a dull resignation to one's fate. However, other actors now come on the scene and save Hinduism from that mistake.

Approximately a thousand years after the beginning of our story, fifteen hundred years before Christ was born, 1500 BCE, it would appear from the traces they left behind them, that a Nordic, Caucasian people overflowed their homeland, and radiating out from somewhere in the interior of Europe, invaded the world around them in successive waves. They were nomadic horse-breeders, herders of cattle, and hunters. They produced a distinctive painted, gray pottery. They discovered iron around 800 BCE and had supplies of copper.

Obviously a strong, prolific people, related tribes of these Aryans as they called themselves, invaded Italy, Greece, Persia, Scandinavia, China, and India. There are different theories as to exactly where they originated. Some say from central Europe; others think that they came from southern Russia, some think from further into Asia. However, they did spread out into the continent, and similar ideas can be found among the earlier peoples where they settled, apparently taken with them.

The word "Aryan" means "noble" or "distinguished" and is the same word that is used for Persia in modern times. Iran was the name given to that country by the colonizing Nordics, who seem to have applied it to themselves as apart from the people who had moved into the area before them.

In India, the beliefs these Nordics carried with them were merged with the passing of time, with those of the earlier inhabitants, the Dravidians, to produce Hinduism, one of the great living religions of the world.

As Hinduism has no specific founder, to the Hindus it is a natural growth, as is all life. It is considered to have come with the human species, and having no definite beginnings, will have no end. To Hindus, all life is rooted in its profound framework.

The Aryans were a military people whose bronze weapons were more effective than those of the people they found in India. Their horse-drawn chariots with spoked wheels were lighter and swifter than the oxen-drawn carts of the Dravidians.

The language of the Aryans, Sanskrit, became the universal literary language of India under the Gupta Dynasty (300 - 650 CE) as was Latin in Europe not so long ago. Sanskrit is related to Latin and Greek and is of the family of Indo-European languages, probably all from the same root in the Aryan people.

These people took with them to India a collection of hymns to their gods which are still being chanted by the Brahmin priests, their descendants, in the temples today. At first, they were passed down by prodigious feats of memory, as they were considered too sacred to be written. They were eventually written down, but much later. They were considered to hold magic properties with tremendous effects on the material world, and as such had to be held secret. They were the property and responsibility of the priests, not the laymen.

There are four collections of the Vedas, as these hymns are called, the most important being the *Rig Veda, the Veda of Praise*. These are followed by the *Brahmanas* (800 – 600 BCE), which is a commentary on the Rig Veda hymns. Then came the *Aranyakas* (600 BCE) of which the *Upanishads* form the most important part.

The gods of the Aryans are male, with the exception of the Earth Mother and her daughter, Dawn. The Vedic cosmological myth begins with the union of the Sky Father, *Dyaus Pitar*, with the Earth Mother to produce the celestial deities, or *Devas* as they are called in India. There are echoes here of the Greek *Zeus Pater*, and the Roman Jupiter. In other words, natural forces produce life, not an external force producing a creation.

It is interesting that these aggressive men saw women in the role of Mother, the generous provider of life, and as Dawn, the bringer of hope with the new day. When we consider the feelings that Dawn produces in us, especially after a long night of agony or sorrow, did they feel these emotions when returning home after a dangerous chase, a trying battle, a difficult day? Was their home seen as a place of refuge from the world of men? Were their women the providers of food, warmth, and comfort, and did they need them in this role to help renew their strength for the next trial life might bring?

The myth goes on to say that at first there was no separation of sky and earth, only *Asuras*, Beings of two classes:

1. *Adityas* (representatives of freedom and growth) led by *Varuna*, the god of order
2. *Danavas* (representative of bondage and inertia) led by *Vritra*.

The *Adityas* arrange the birth of *Indra*, the god of Storm and War, from Mother Earth and Father Sky. He becomes their leader and slays *Vritra*.

The earth and the sky are now spread out, and as *Sat*, are separated from the nether world, *Asat*.

Order is established in *Sat* with *Varuna*, the god of order, establishing freedom and overseeing the cosmic pattern. The *Danavas* are banished to *Asat*, the world of chaos.

Human beings now spring from the world of the *Devas*: a world that is still very real in India, and that can be glimpsed fleetingly from the one we inhabit.

When we analyze it, what is being said is that the forces of order, freedom, and growth, must fight to obtain mastery of the forces of chaos, bondage, and inertia. *Indra* helps the Forces of Order to win.

This could be applied to the beginning of the Universe, the beginning of this world leading the first life thereon, the Aryans conquering the Dravidians, the individual gaining self-mastery, many personal situations in the individual's life, or in many similar situations. It can be used as a guiding principle in life and is found in Hinduism where it counteracts any tendency towards resignation. Self-mastery is its aim, and this is seen as being within a framework of world order.

The Nordics did not originally have temples or priests, but individually performed their ceremonies in the open air under the sky. They made offerings to their gods of food and drink, and animals, to ensure a place in the World of the Fathers after death, and also for material success in their affairs on Earth.

In this we are reminded of the offerings made by the heroes of Homer in his epic poems.

There arose a custom which is practiced to this day, whereby the sons of the Nordics were initiated at puberty into the secrets of their religious beliefs. Becoming twice born, they wear a sacred thread across their shoulder to their waist.

Indra is the greatest of the Vedic gods. He is gigantic, with a huge beard, and is a great drinker of the sacred *Soma*, an intoxicant that the Nordic warriors drank in vast quantities. He is a mighty fighter, and when one considers it, a rather larger than life image of the idealized Aryan warrior. As such, he reminds us of the Scandinavian heroes, and the heroes of Homer in his pages written about the earlier Greeks. He is also like the mighty Greek conqueror, Alexander, who is reputed to have wept because he had no further worlds to conquer.

Agni, the god of Fire, is the messenger of the gods, because he carries the essence of sacrifices to them, rather like Mercury of the Greeks.

Rudra was the Aryan god representative of the destructive power of nature.

Soma became a god in time, being representative of the reciprocal relationship between gods and men. As men drank this sacred gift of the gods, they became inflamed with what was seen as supernatural passion.

This is a religious system of a people who were sure of themselves and felt in control of their environment. Their gods were those of might and order, and with whose support they felt confident they could create order out of chaos. Their self-confidence could easily become arrogance and selfishness, and their wonderful striving carries the danger of discontent, and following the wrong path to an empty goal.

However, we shall see how the Dravidian acceptance of life acts as a counterbalance to this facet of their world view.

The Vedas end seeking unity in the conception of the supernatural. Who made the gods, they ask? They were to find the answer.

Indra

God of Power and Order

Indra! Indra!
Conceived of Earth and Sky
Mighty warrior
Fighting the spiritual fight
Of the twice born

Help us fight to gain control of ourselves
That we may fight to order our environment
That we may establish Order and Growth
Over Disorder and Decay
For the good of all
As did you in the beginning
And can help us do now



Chapter 3

The Meeting of Two Peoples

The stage is set for the meeting of these two vastly different peoples, the coming together of these two vastly different worlds. In the one wing are the Dravidians, dark and delicately fashioned like their cousins the Egyptians of ancient times: a sensitive, sensual people. They were very conscious of the cycling and recycling of nature, or the creative force, with the men and women seeing each other as poles of this force and very aware of the effect of each on the other. They had a strong awareness of the comfort to be found in the acceptance of life as it is, including the promise of renewal from apparent death and defeat.

In the other wing are the tall Nordics of blond hair, blue eyes, and rugged features: proud of their fierce strength, a rollicking, hard drinking, swaggering crowd. They were lovers of action and power, and eventful life, determined to make life follow their pattern.

The Dravidians take the center stage first, spreading out their farms and cities. They enjoy the civilization they have created, while hovering in the shadows are the Australoids and pygmies they have displaced.

We can wonder now if any of the Nordic people debated whether they were morally justified in usurping the land of the Dravidians and realize that this was very doubtful. Their need for survival was wrapped up in their drive to find new land, and their victories must have been hailed with joy as great achievement. Very little thought would have been given to the effect on the Dravidians.

When a situation rises as it does here, and has so often done throughout history, that out of necessity a group of people move into territory already occupied by another group, the problem arises as to what should be their relationship to each other. When the Nordics moved into India there would inevitably have been differences in the cultures of the separate groups. This would include the very great differences we have noted already in their religious systems and world views. These differences would have made it difficult, as it still is today, for unlike people to become intimate with each other. The

differences then, as they do now, must have caused misunderstanding and irritation.

Apart from the fact that the Aryans thought themselves superior to the people they had conquered, and the Sanskrit word for caste is Varna which means color, indicating that the Aryans were conscious of the physical differences between themselves and the other occupants of India, there would be economic factors that would bring about divisions of labor among the people.

The conquering Nordics remained the warriors and became the rulers of the territory they had gained; and in time a priestly system was set up too. In the north of India, the Nordics became the farmers and merchants. These three groups formed the three castes considered the superior ones. These are called:

1. The *Brahmins*: who are the priests
2. The *Kshatriyas* who are the warriors and rulers, and who were advised in spiritual matters by the Brahmins
3. The *Vaishyas* who were the merchants and farmers

These three castes initiate their sons at puberty, who then wear the sacred thread across the shoulder to the waist.

In the south, the Dravidians who had fled from the invaders, remained merchants and farmers, and they and all other Dravidians were called:

4. The *Shudras* who were also the artisans and servants

The *Untouchables* were those members of the community who performed the dirtier jobs, including the disposal of the carcasses of dead animals, and therefore became dirty themselves. In a hot country like India, it certainly would be wise to avoid contact with them for health reasons, apart from any other. This group would probably also contain the Australoids and negrito pygmies.

Inter-marriage between the castes followed the rule that a man could marry a woman of lower caste than himself, but not the other way round. This no doubt was a rationalization of the fact that the male invaders wanted to claim for themselves the right to marry the lovely Dravidian women but wanted to keep their own women to themselves – a very common facet to the relationship between different peoples. This meant that over the centuries there has been an intermingling of the genetic pools of the two groups, as there has been an

intermingling of their ideas.

All groups of people living in any community have these natural divisions, and in India the system became more rigid and complex with time. Each difference in employment and religious belief has brought into being a new caste within the broad framework, with the result that they are now innumerable. To the Hindus, the followers of the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are simply members of other castes, and we shall see how Hinduism provides a common background for all the inhabitants of India. In its depths they find a common ground and feel themselves the people of India, tolerant of each other's differences. This acceptance of the prevalent social system and the wonderful tolerance of the differences of others, has kept India united and her people harmonized within themselves and with each other over the many centuries they have shared the continent.

As a result, the modern descendants of the Nordics consider that their ancestors chose a policy of harmonization in their dealings with the Dravidians. They did not force them to become like the Nordics and adopt their world view, rather they allowed each group to remain independent of each other yet interact with each other in a recognized way that decreased the irritations that could be caused by their differences.

Over the more than three thousand years since the two groups began to live together, these differences have lessened so much that nowadays the caste system is often felt to be outmoded and is itself causing irritations because it keeps apart people who no longer want to remain apart. However, it has fulfilled its purpose of enabling such different people to share the same continent peacefully and gain from their contact with each other, rather than spending the time constantly pulling apart. It gave them time to grow together, and the fact that it is no longer always felt to be necessary, shows its strength rather than its weakness.

More than kisses had been exchanged by lovers under the warm, Indian moon.

The Sea of Love

Of a man and a woman

Your beauty is dark and delicate
I am bewitched
Your almond-shaped eyes smile from behind lowered, silky lashes
I am enchanted
Your laughter floats out like a fine web
I am ensnared

The night is warm and full of moonlight
Full of incense
Full of the beauty of the lotus flower asleep on yon pool
Full of you
Full of your fragrance and warmth
Of delights indescribable

What are these strange and wondrous thoughts
You murmur to me
A Great Force manifests itself as male and female too
In you and I
And death is not the end
Death is a new beginning

Somehow these thoughts are not so strange
Any more than your dark beauty
These ideas answer the searching of my heart, my longings
My striving for growth
I and my people had to come here
To find you, and enlightenment



Chapter 4

The Upanishads

When we come to consider the Upanishads, developed by the Aryan priests 600 BC-300 BC, we see the intermingling of the two sets of ideas at the end of approximately one thousand years.

The Upanishads tell us that the sages of ancient times tried to understand the deeper meaning of life from the external viewpoint, as seen objectively, and found there was no answer to their questions about the meaning of existence. Having given the forces of nature and human activity names and deep reverence as facets of life, they found that they could go no further towards understanding what life is about. They had analyzed and categorized the facts of life, and named the different facets, in itself no mean achievement, but this did not give them an understanding of its meaning. They had decided that matter consisted of earth, water, air, and fire, and speculated about the smallest particles of matter. They concluded that surely there is more to life than the material part we can see and experience with our physical senses.

They could observe the sky, the earth, the sun, and life in its many manifestations. They could give all these things names and revere them as a very important part of total existence; but what did it all mean? What is the purpose of life? It is one thing to dissect and probe into the material composition of the Universe, but to understand how it works does not answer the primary question, why does it exist at all. It did not then, any more than it does now.

Why is the Universe in existence at all? Why can humans even ask that question? Why were you born? Why do I have to die? What is the ultimate truth? Who made the gods?

When they turned inwards and searched for the Truth, they considered that here they found the reason behind existence. Their agonizing search was rewarded by the key to understanding the deeper purpose of life.

The systematic outline of their findings is given the name Hinduism, and in the

original, classical form that follows, is called Vedanta, meaning based on the Vedas, of which the Upanishads are considered a part. This is pure Hinduism in its unadulterated form.

There are other forms of Hinduism that have branched off the main stem, each considered another facet and important because necessary to some individuals in their search for the truth. However, an understanding of Vedanta helps us to understand all the other ideas and see where they fit into the original framework.

The early sages, or *Rishis* as they are called by the Hindus, reached out subjectively, out of their great desire for truth, out of their great longings, to find the Eternal Reason for existence, and they found their strivings answered by the Brahman. They realized that always there had been the Brahman; always there will be the Brahman; the Brahman is in everything; everything is in the Brahman. This is the first truth made plain by the Upanishads.

The Brahman cannot be described in human terms. All that can be said is that the Ultimate is Force, pervading everything, in everything. The Brahman could be said to the total Universe, seen and unseen, material and spiritual.

The material part, the seen, is Vishnu; the unseen, the spiritual is Brahma. Brahma is the soul, the Atman to use the Hindu term, of Vishnu. The Brahm contains both Vishnu and Brahma; as do we, if on a vastly smaller scale. The Universe is both matter and spirit, as are we.

There is a legend that makes very clear the relationship between Brahma and Vishnu. Vishnu, being the representative of space and material existence, is called the preserver and sustainer; Brahma, the representative of spirit and thought, is the creator. They have a wager as to who is the greatest.

First of all, Vishnu enters into Brahma. In other words, Matter enters into Spirit. He finds that all of his being is already contained in the mind of Brahma and is nothing above and beyond the thought of Brahma. Vishnu declares them equal.

As Vishnu sleeps on the coils of the Great Serpent, Ati Sessa, on whose coils legend has it, the world rests, Brahma enters him. In other words, Spirit now enters Matter. Brahma finds his thoughts immediately reflected by Vishnu in

his body. As soon as Brahma crystallizes his thoughts, they materialize in the form of Vishnu's body. Brahma says the word, and it is so. Brahma also declares them equal.

It is an interesting digression to remember that Indian philosophers, as they progress in their spiritual experience and deepen in their awareness of their true nature, expect to find the power of their spoken word to increase. The Vedas themselves, when spoken, were thought to contain immeasurable power. The words of any person who is habitually honest, are considered to be very potent.

Speaking generally, many humans seem to think that because they hold and express a certain opinion, it is so. In fact, the ideas of some humans have led others to construct a utopia around them in an effort to give them concrete form.

To return to the myth: Brahma now tries to leave the body of Vishnu but finds that Vishnu has closed all the gates of his body, not wanting to let Brahma go. The question now posed is, can Matter imprison Spirit?

Brahma drills a new opening in the body of Vishnu, giving him a navel, then takes the form of a baby, crowned, sitting on a lotus, a water lily, growing out of the new navel of Vishnu. This is symbolic of spiritual, as opposed to earthly, birth. This concrete illustration of the abstract idea makes it quite clear that the spirit escapes matter by spiritual rebirth, and death is seen as release into the rebirth of new life.

Life is seen as the breathing of Brahma. Existence is his breathing out, death is his breathing in. We live as we are filled with his breath; we die as he withdraws it with our spirit.

Brahma is the Creator, with his female principal, ***Saravati***, goddess of music and speech, wisdom and knowledge.

Vishnu is the Preserver, and his female counterpart, ***Lakshmi***, is the goddess of good fortune and bringer of wealth and prosperity.

Shiva is the Destroyer of Evil, the third aspect of the Brahman. In this, he is also the savior of the individual. His counterpart, ***Parvati***, is his wife, daughter of the King of the Himalayas, lovely Lady of the Mountains. Parvati is also

Kali, the Mother Goddess of Fertility, and the fierce Destroyer of Evil.

Three gods in one, three aspects of the Brahman, each both male and female in essence!

Shiva is seen as the representative of the movement in all Matter. He is the god of the dance art form, Lord of the Dance, and all existence is seen as his greater dance. However, he cannot be thought of without his female side. In fact, Shiva and Parvati are often depicted as each being one half of the same body.

The other representations of the ultimate must not be thought of as purely male or female either. The Ultimate contains both the female and male principals of life, as does each individual human being. The female principal, or *Shakti*, can be seen as the dynamo, or power, or moving principal, of the male. The one cannot be considered without the other as both make up the whole. This whole is neuter in the realms of the spirit, as are human beings. Although we may be part of the female or male aspects of the creative force in this life, whenever we leave the body behind, we return to the non-sexual world of the spirit where all are the same, and all are contained in the Brahman. Our sex in this world is part of our physical inheritance, as is so much else, but the spiritual part of us is of a different realm. This is the unique core of everyone.

The male gods of the Aryans have been extended to include the male and female aspects of the Ultimate Force as understood by the Dravidians. In pure Hinduism, male and female are considered equals. In fact, the female element is more important than the male, as it is the desirer of new life, the incubator for new life, and nourishes and protects new life. The function of the male element is to protect the female and that new life.

The Brahman is everything, everything is the Brahman. This belief in Monism as it is called in India, Pantheism as it is called in English, is the correct doctrine of the Upanishads. In the 8th century A.D., the Indian philosopher, Shankara, developed the idea further in his commentaries on the Upanishads, but it is already implicit in the earlier writings.

The Brahman is in us, and we are in the Brahman; I am part of the Ultimate Force. This leads on to the realization that I am the Brahman. I am part of all existence; not a creature, but an integral part as is all else. This is the second

truth, and leads on from the first realization of the oneness of everything.

To fully understand Hinduism, we must be prepared to let ourselves feel in our emotions what it means. It is one thing to know the facts intellectually, but to understand the journey of the mind taken by the early sages we must follow their example and let our emotions and subconscious minds become involved as well as our rational minds. To do so does not lead us to become converted to this world view, as is the natural fear that makes us hesitate. What we must learn is to use our emotions and subconscious minds objectively, in the same way we must learn to use our intellects. For a full and accurate understanding of different world views, it is necessary to consider them empathetically, rather than from a purely intellectual angle set within the framework of our own personal worldview. We are after all, emotional creatures with active sub-conscious minds. To deny this seems rather foolish. Emotions can be misleading, but so can ideas of the intellect. It seems wiser to learn to use our emotions rather than to ignore them.

A viewpoint from our own world can give a distorted picture; often one that is too highly critical, the criticism being simply because we do not allow others to have an equally valid outlook on life, even if it is different from ours.

What follows is a picture of the emotional reaction that ideally ought to be the result of understanding the previous ideas we have been examining. We internalize the idea, to use an expression meaning accept as true, then according to the strength of our emotional reaction, so is our consequence behavior affected, and the depth of our acceptance or otherwise of the ideas.

When we realize our unity with and in the Brahman, and therefore with all existence, we are filled with absolute bliss: *Ananda*. We feel at one with the Universe and are conscious of our oneness with all Being. All manifestations of Life become part of us and we of them, and the world is a place of great beauty and sacredness as we look at it from this new viewpoint. We seem to stand apart from material existence and look at life anew. Ecstasy beyond description fills our being as we realize that we are one with the Brahman for eternity. We are absorbed in the Brahman and our being is filled with delight beyond compare. The world recedes and we are aware only of the brilliant light of the Brahman filling our consciousness. We are absorbed in the Ultimate and want to be so forever. We disappear, and only the bliss of absorption in the Source remains.

However, eventually the pull of Earth makes itself felt, and reluctantly we must return.

In the light of our new vision of the world and our place in it, we can see our actions from the viewpoint of the Brahman. We cannot bear to hurt others as to do so hurts us; nor can we bear to see anyone perform a hurtful action towards others, either verbally or physically. We feel their pain ourselves as the Brahman in us reacts to injury. We must treat others as we would like to be treated. We must not treat others as we would not like to be treated.

This moderates our actions towards others. We must control our tongue and not utter hateful words; we must control our actions and not use violence against anyone or anything. We must treat others as we would like them to treat us. To do otherwise is too painful.

Our new wisdom makes us realize clearly that all manifestations of life are contained in the Brahman. All human activity is contained in the Brahman, and this includes the different faces human beings have given to the ultimate; all gods are different facets of the Whole. The Brahman answers the searching of humans in the form they recognize.

The highest plane is that on which the individual reaches out to the Divine Force and does not have to clothe this Force in any Image. However, many people cannot think in such abstract terms, and all must follow their own path. No force must ever be applied to make people change their world view, but a search for wider knowledge must be answered with spiritual feeding, as one would answer the hunger for material food.

This idea gives Hinduism one of its greatest strengths in that it can assimilate all other religions and political philosophies as being simply additional facets of itself, without altering its own essential character. It also makes the Hindus tolerant of ideas of others and open to new thought, which instead of rejecting, they fit into the very wide framework of Hinduism.

Our new vision makes us realize clearly that all human beings contain the Brahman, but in some forms or individuals the Supreme Atman may be of a greater concentration. This belief is behind the apparent worship of plants, animals, and human beings. The worshiper is bowing before the aspect of the

Brahman being revealed in the object being given reverence, not actually the thing or being that contains it.

Hindus greet each other by placing their hands together in front of them with fingers extended upwards and outwards. This is representative of their acknowledging the presence of the Brahman in the person whom they are greeting. They will also dance and sing to the plants in their fields to encourage a good crop. In so doing they acknowledge the presence of the great Force of Life in the growing vegetation, which is also flowing through them.

Many Hindus have reached the place in their spiritual journey and mystical experience where their followers declare them to be a manifestation of the Brahman. A Hindu sitting at the feet of such a man or woman can feel the aura of divinity pervading the atmosphere, and gains blessing by just being in their presence. It is not necessary to understand what the person may teach, or even to listen; it is enough to bathe in the concentrated presence of the Brahm.

This knowledge brings with it a deep respect for the divinity of others, and in all forms of being. I am constantly aware of the fact that everyone is a god, and part of the Whole. This affects my actions in that I am hospitable to all and will protect all life in all its forms.

In India, a Hindu village can be easily picked out by the fact that around it birds sing, and wildlife abounds. The concern with their environment which led the early Dravidians to nourish and cherish their farmlands and cattle, and thus enabled them to build up a civilization, is still being reflected in their approach to life, and is contained in Hinduism.

The Brahman

Of the Universe

Black world of stars and moon
 Blue world of clouds and sun
 Realm of the changing, changeless sea
 Vast brown mountains
 Snow-capped

Lush plains of green and yellow
 Life-bearing rivers, blue and singing
 Givers of nourishment, bearers of sustenance
 Daughters of the Mountains
 Divine

Iridescent birds and butterflies
 Flowers and insects, jewels of nature
 Cattle and crops, cherished in a world of sunshine
 Predators, creatures of fur and fangs,
 Pouncing

Many-faceted human beings
 With me, fellow travelers through life
 Exploring, experiencing, dancing towards death
 I will share my facet of Truth with you
 Share yours with me

Together we seek the Truth
 Not my Truth or your Truth
 But Truth revealed by the Brahman when we truly seek
 All united in the bliss of Eternity
 The Brahman



Chapter 5

Maya - Samsara - Moksha

The great Wheel of Life began to move when Brahma stirred, Vishnu took form, and the Dance of Shiva sprang into action. This present manifestation took shape, and eventually self-conscious life appeared. The dance continues and must run its course. When it is over, all will return to the Source, and Brahma will become still, Vishnu will lose this present form. This era will end with the final gesture of Shiva, and the Wheel will be still. Once again all will sleep, until Brahma wakes again and the dance takes on a new form.

Within the greater Wheel of Life there are many lesser ones. All life is seen as a progression towards the Source; having come from the Brahman, we eventually return.

When we look out on our world, to us it seems the only concrete reality, and we can dissect and probe, label and categorize, analyze, and then theorize about its material aspects. However, the Upanishads explain that we see it thus only because of our ignorance due to our limited viewpoint, restricted by our senses.

Remembering our experience of awareness of the Brahman, when this world faded and we were lost in the bliss and light of the Brahman, life can never be the same again. We realize that what seemed so solid and appeared the only reality of existence, is not so any longer. The concrete is an illusion. Behind it lies reality, only hidden from us by our ignorance of the fuller depths of life. This world of apparently solid matter is *Maya*, illusion hiding truth, to the Hindus. What is of prime importance is the world of the spirit that lies behind it. We enter this material world, journey through it in our lifetime, and then die, leaving it to return to the Brahman from whence we came. The spiritual experience resulting from our journey is much more important than the physical side of life. The spiritual world is the Real, whereas the material world is the Unreal. The world of the spirit is Light, the world of matter is Darkness. We are striving to become creatures of the Light, leaving behind the world of Darkness.

Surely the world of the spirit becomes overcrowded, asks the Upanishads. The answer given is that instead of remaining in the spiritual world, we recycle

through this one. Our journey back to the Brahman consists of cycling and recycling through life in this Universe. We are born, we live, we die; we are reborn. Wheels, within wheels, within wheels!

On the physical plane, the particles that make up our bodies do this. At death, cremation is practiced among the Hindus to return the elements of the body to their original state and help them recycle. When the body has been laid on *earth*, exposed to *air*, and consumed by *fire*, the ashes are poured into a river and thus given to *water*, and borne off to the sea. Here they rise up to the clouds in drops of moisture, and falling on the earth with the rain, enter into new life as all nature drinks of the life-giving waters.

The Hindus also point out that particles of matter can move anywhere in the Universe, and those composing our present bodies may have been among the stars and may return there again.

Death is simply a release from the vessel that contains the *atman*, or spirit, and it is this spiritual part of us that is of prime importance. This is the important part of the individual, and as the physical container dies, yet lives again, so does the spirit.

At death, on the spiritual level, we leave our physical bodies behind, but our spirit goes on. By as inevitable a process as that which recycles the particles that make up the body and lets them enter new life, so our spirit is reborn into new life on this earth, and we continue our spiritual journey towards the Ultimate.

In the same way as time seems to pass more quickly as we become older, so our physical journey speeds up as we come closer to the Source, and the sooner our rebirth on this earth.

This process of spiritual rebirth is called *Samsara* by the Hindus, re-incarnation in English. As a result of this concept, life is now seen in the light of eternity. It becomes something to be savored and enjoyed, rather than a frenzied round of activity in which we try to fill every moment with action. Being matters more than action; communion with the Brahman becomes more important than material gain. Although we may be deeply involved in the joy of being alive, and the delight of living, we can never become completely lost in life. We are too conscious of the Real to become lost in the Unreal.

The world of Light, the world of the Real, the world of Immortality, is the true home of all life. The Brahman is like the sea, and we individual spirits form the rivers that run into the ocean. We are constantly reborn, as are the clouds, until we reach maturity and ripeness, at which time we step off the merry-go-round of *Samara* and reach the end of the masquerade. To find fulfillment in the successful completion of our part of the dance, is the goal of life, a goal beyond death. It is a goal that overcomes the apparent futility of life, a goal that overcomes the apparent finality of death. We attain *Moksha*, as the Hindus call it, and our individual drop of dew slips off the lotus leaf into the pool of peace, and finds indescribable bliss, united with the Brahman and finding rest. This can be experienced in this world, even before we pass through the doors of death.

Birth and death fall into a new perspective and can be seen as doors along the way from the Brahman back to reunion with Spirit on the attainment of *Moksha*. Every part of life can be seen as acts in this play: childhood; adolescence; adulthood; and the maturity of old age. Within these lie different scenes as a door opens, and action occurs before another door closes as we move on to new places or situations in life. Birth, death, and life, become part of the Whole and their significance merges into the pattern. We mourn the death of a loved fellow-human because we will miss the delight of their presence, but with our grief is always the realization that death is not the end, but a new beginning.

“Does the individual retain individuality on having attained *Moksha*?” To the mystic this is a question that springs from ignorance and a lack of experience in spiritual matters. “Does it matter?” is the reply given. To lose our smaller Self in the Greater Self, to lose our drop of moisture in the Greater Ocean, brings such total awareness of the Greater that the lesser fades from consciousness; such delight that all else disappears. “What a pointless question”, is the answer that floats back as the mystic finds ecstasy.

There are of course, other schools of thought, and in the 11th century A.D., Ramanuja declared that the Supreme Soul is a loving, personal God, from whence matter and individuals proceed, but which remains separate from them.

In the 13th century A.D., Madhva taught that Vishnu is distinct from the individual soul and matter.

The question remains, and each may answer it as they will.

Great Wheel of Life

Of Enlightenment, Ever-circling, and Bliss

The Ultimate and I, united as one
Divine bliss for Eternity
As we whirl and dance
Throughout time and space
Life's pattern unfolding

Now on the mountain tops, in the sun
Now in the shadows
Black with despair
Led on by the Source
We complete our part

Part of all Eternity
Wheeling through time and space
Through the celestial spheres
Caught up in the Dance of Joy
Come dance with me



Chapter 6

Dharma - Adharma - Karma

To Hindus, the Universe is basically a place of order emerging from the chaos of *Adharma*. *Varuna* established order in *Sat* and *Dharma* came into being. *Dharma* is the name given to the balanced play of forces that keeps the Universe in harmony. *Dharma* pervades the Universe and is followed by every part of it. It can be found in the motion of the planets and the atoms. It is found in the behavior of human beings. We always remember that *Varuna* established order in *Sat*, balancing *Adharma*.

This pattern as it applies to humans is revealed to us by *Avatars*, or in English, incarnations of *Vishnu*. Ten avatars are recognized. An account of the first six can be found in the *Puranas*, tales that are told of the gods and legendary heroes.

These avatars are as follows:

1. The fish
2. The tortoise
3. The boar
4. The man-lion
5. The Dwarf
6. Rama of the Ax

In each of these stories Vishnu is incarnate and acts on the side of *Dharma*, demonstrating correct behavior.

There are two particularly great epics in the literature of the Hindus. The first is called the *Ramayana*, and in it we find an avatar of Vishnu in the form of Prince Rama. The second is the *Maha-Bharata*, and here we find Vishnu incarnate as *Krishna*. Krishna is also to be found in the Puranas as a cowherd.

As the *Bhagavad Gita* (which is a section of the Maha-Bharata) explains, when wrong behavior, or *Adharma*, threatens to overwhelm the inhabitants of life and prevent their progress, Vishnu appears to point out the correct path. In this role, Vishnu is the Savior of the world.

All teachers of wisdom are seen as being products of this aspect of Vishnu.

Another avatar, **Kalki**, has still to come. The legend here is very interesting. It says that when the world is in a very unsettled state due to having strayed from Dharma, Vishnu will appear riding on a white horse, with flaming sword in hand, in the form of a human, to bring a return to righteousness. Adharma, wrong behavior, although it may appear to be destroying the human race, will be overcome and Dharma will always triumph. There is always Hope.

The fascinating epics of the Ramayana and the Maha-Bharata, open up for us a wonderland of color and beauty, and great drama. These mythological tales bring their era alive, and we can for a moment enter into the world of long ago, of once upon a time.

Here we find a people devoted to the unseen and to obeying Dharma. Here we find the world of Hinduism in action in the ideal, as it was conceived of in the days when these stories were developed. These stories have been used as a guide to living successfully by ordinary Hindus since time immemorial. To this present day, the incidents will be quoted as an example of how to behave in particular circumstances, and they make the concept of Dharma very clear.

Dharma is expounded as following the duties of the position of life one finds oneself occupying. It is the acceptance of the responsibilities of our position in life and the fulfilling of them in accordance with Dharma.

Dharma does not contain a rigid ethical system. The individual's actions ought to be already governed by the attitude to life we have been discussing. The god in us is concerned for the well-being in the god in all else. However, the epics make clearer how this ought to affect human behavior in the ideal.

In the Ramayana we find Vishnu incarnate in Prince Rama. Seeta, his faithful and beautiful wife, is stolen from him by trickery. By great efforts he finally wins her back, but when he has done so, he is careful to explain that his actions are motivated by devotion to Dharma, apart from any human feelings he may have for her as an individual. Seeta has remained constant to him, and it is also implied that she has been motivated in the same way. In other words, regardless of their personal relationship, a husband's first duty is to care for his wife, as hers is to be loyal to him.

In the **Maha-Bharata**, in the section called the **Gita**, Vishnu in the form of

Krishna, gives similar advice, and explains that the duty of a warrior in battle overrides any other duty and any personal feelings, even that duty due to a kinsman and the feelings aroused by him. Krishna also makes it quite clear that one may even have to kill in the performance of Dharma. However, he is also careful to explain that physical death is only a release into the next life. Even if one does kill a kinsman, he does not die spiritually but continues his journey through eternity. Often this release can be the best thing possible for the individual concerned, an idea which is developed in the Puranas and the Epics.

Dharma is doing one's duty in whatever circumstances one finds oneself. As circumstances change, so does Dharma. In times of peace, warrior kinsmen act in one way towards each other. In times of war, they may have to kill the other.

Two illustrations will make this way of thinking clearer. Imagine oneself the commander of a garrison defending a town from attack. You are responsible for many lives and a great deal of property. It is a heavy responsibility.

The enemy surprises you by asking for a consultation to discuss peace. You know the enemy commander personally, and rather like him. A meeting is arranged, and the time and place are set.

This is an opportunity too good to be missed, and you arrange an ambush. On their way to the rendezvous, the enemy leader and his officers are waylaid and killed. Their followers scatter in the disorder, and the dreadful threat presented by their presence outside the town has gone.

You feel a fleeting regret for the passing of your old enemy, but you have followed Dharma and fulfilled your duty as defender of the town. As a result, the town is saved, and there is great rejoicing among those you have delivered from the hands of the enemy. You have looked at the larger picture and saved your people.

In the place of the besieger, you must beware of the possibility of chicanery, and rather than blindly walk into a trap, set one of your own. To walk unsuspectingly into a trap is Adharma, and reaps its own rewards, as we have seen. You must look at the larger picture from the point of view of the other side and try to think as they do.

Secondly, imagine oneself as a shopkeeper in the Indian market. You have a

large family to care for, and it is one's duty to make as large a profit as possible. This one does by skillful bargaining.

One day you buy an article for a very low price. You know it has a flaw which is rather difficult to detect, which is why you have managed to have it for such a figure. You noticed the flaw.

Along comes a customer who does not notice the flaw. He buys the article for a very good price from your point of view and goes off happily with his bargain thinking he has beaten you down to his price very cleverly. He is happy, and so are you.

This is *Dharma*.

As a buyer, one must be knowledgeable about the articles for sale and aware of their true value; thus, being able to bargain skillfully. If possible, one wants to acquire the article desired at a very low price. This is Dharma. To simply give the price first asked is foolish, and Adharma.

Any situation must be seen in its wider context, and behavior must be enacted out in this context. Behavior must not be affected by emotions which belong to any smaller vision, such as personal relationships.

Dharma is being a fair master; being a dutiful servant. Contained in it is *Dhana*, which is the name given to the duty of the richer members to provide work for the less fortunate sections of the community.

Daana is the name for the action whereby the richer households give food to those with less. This is usually done at a fixed time every week, generally on a Friday evening. It is also done on the anniversary of births and deaths of members of the household. This food is distributed at the house of the giver, and any who want may take it. It is given as to the Ultimate and accepted as being from that source.

Dharma is being a considerate husband, as was Prince Rama; being a chaste wife whose life is centered around her husband, as was Seeta; being a dutiful child; a willing, appreciative pupil. In fact, fulfilling one's role in life correctly regardless of all other circumstances, including the behavior of the people with whom we interact and our personal feelings towards them. We act in the

prescribed manner towards others, whether willingly because we feel a warmth of emotion for them, or unwillingly because we actively dislike them. Emotions are changeable, but Dharma is not. If individuals continue to interact within the pattern of Dharma, in time their relationship must develop into one of warm emotion. Their every action encourages this instead of adding to any negative feeling possibly felt at first.

If an individual is hurting me by their attitude of actions towards me, I may point out this instance of Adharma, but with non-violence. If I see a fault in society that is contrary to Dharma as it is hurting a section of the community, I may point it out with non-violence. To use violence would be a violation of Dharma. The self does not hurt the Self. In fact, for the spiritually mature individual it would be almost an impossibility, and only possible under extreme circumstances.

We have an example of this in the behavior of Mahatma Gandhi. He saw that the attitude of the English towards his people was deeply hurtful to them, and this is what he was pointing out. All other previous incomers to India had eventually settled down with the earlier arrivals and become part of India. In contrast, the English still called England 'home'. Many considered the other inhabitants of India as inferior to themselves, speaking condescendingly of the 'White Man's Burden'. This naturally was hurtful to the pride of the Indians and did psychological damage to their attitudes towards themselves and their country.

Gandhi was fully representative of the Hindus in his tolerance, and his advocacy of non-violence. Not for him the terrible agony which results from terrorism or outright war. His was the more mature way of vocal protest and supplication, the appeal of the mind to mind, spirit to spirit, god to god.

If the English had been attacking India with violence, then the situation would have been different, and force would have been called for in return. However, their domination was of a much more subtle kind, and required more subtle methods of retaliation.

Gandhi was also hurt by the effect of the caste system on the Untouchables. Here the same principle applied. It is contrary to the spirit of Hinduism that one section of the community should be considered inferior. No member of the body is inferior to another. Each part fulfills a very necessary function. To

Gandhi, all humans are equally part of the Whole. He found it painful when they were not treated as such.

The caste system had grown to be very extreme in that the members of certain castes felt themselves polluted if they touched members of other castes. Gandhi found this attitude distasteful. He was not suggesting that the Untouchables change their lifestyle or occupations, but that the attitude of society towards them was Adharma. His revolution was intended as one of the mind, designed to change attitudes, not one of force designed to destroy his society.

Violence against society in any form from stealing to murder to revolution, is also a contravention of Dharma. As such, it cannot go unpunished.

Contravention of Dharma brings into play the operation of *Karma*. This is the natural law that declares that for each action is set up an equal and opposite reaction. The individual who hurts society sets up an opposite reaction and finds that society naturally must deal with the wound that has been inflicted. This reaction will be painful for the offender. If, on the other hand, the individual behaves wisely in their relationship to society, following Dharma, the result will be pleasant for them.

Karma states that for every harmonious action I perform within Dharma, I set in motion an equally harmonious reaction towards myself. The reaction may be immediately apparent, but not necessarily so. Inevitably, at some time, the effect of the cause I have triggered will appear.

This may even be in a future life. Dharma and Karma apply on a wide perspective, and apart from their operation in this world, are interwoven with *Samsara*. If the balance of my actions is those fulfilling Dharma, Karma makes me progress in my future life to a higher position spiritually. If the balance is against Dharma, I regress spiritually. However, even when the balance is in my favor there may be certain actions that balance against me from a past life. A spiritually mature person may suffer from some misfortune in the completion of Karma to balance the past.

When we reach the stage of our spiritual journey where we are performing deeds mainly within Dharma, we continue to lay up positive Karma. We are still bound to the Wheel of Rebirth as a result.

Although we may regress a little, basically all are moving forward. In a stream of atoms which is moving onwards, some particles will be moving backwards and sideways. The result is still the progression of all. In the same manner the movement of humans is towards the Source and the End.

Karma is applied on the spiritual plane. Although sometimes it is thought of on the physical plane, this is inaccurate. An Untouchable may be very mature spiritually, although of what is considered by many an inferior social status, whereas a Brahmin may be very immature on the spiritual plane.

There is no moral judgment involved in Karma and its application. The Brahman is totally impartial towards all, and the Law of Karma acts inexorably with no emotional involvement on the part of the Brahman.

Moral judgment of other people and their actions, and of the events of life, generally spring from our own narrow viewpoint. If we like another person's personality and the effect of their actions on our life, we call them good; if not, we call them evil. From the viewpoint of two different individuals a third individual may be both good and evil. If an event causes us pleasure, in our opinion it is good. Again, if it causes us pain and sorrow, we call it bad. We are subjective in our judgments, and the same action can be called good or bad depending on how it affects us. A gun pointed at us is bad; a gun pointed at our enemy is good. An army on our side is good; the army of the enemy is bad, even although it is composed of ordinary men with similar foibles to our own. A murder committed for our cause is good and perfectly justified, even if it leaves bereavement and suffering in its wake. A murder committed for the cause of others is simply wicked slaughter. Terrorists directing their activities against us are murderers. Terrorists directing their activities against those we consider enemies, are freedom fighters, and the anguish and torment they inflict is venial. Our judgment can be based on our own very personal viewpoint.

This subjective judgment can be applied within the framework of humans. What is considered pleasant for human beings generally, can be called good, for instance the chopping down of trees for fuel without replanting them, although others would call this bad. What is considered unpleasant is called bad; for instance, the magnificence of an electric storm whilst in an airplane flying through it could be considered bad, whereas an observer on the ground may think it good. Nothing is called good or evil except as related to human beings

and their view of it.

However, when life is looked at from the larger viewpoint of the Brahman, which is how we should learn to look at it, events take on a different significance. All action in the life of the individual is part of the whole, experienced through many cycles. As such, nothing is either good or bad, simply the working out of Karma. Everything brings us closer to the goal of life. We all must live in many forms, through many lives, to experience life to the full, and play out our little part in the great Dance of Shiva. Human beings are also seen relative to the Whole and are merely part of the total and one facet of the Underlying Force.

In this wider context, we do not pass moral judgment on the actions of others. Their behavior is influenced by their own Karma and that of those around them, as is ours. All humans are students of life, and some are more advanced than others. We can consider their behavior and decide what is wise or unwise, but the unwise, instead of being criticized, ought to be looked on with understanding and compassion, and tolerant acceptance. We are all learning the ways of Dharma.

In this wider context, we dare not interfere with the actions of others by the application of violence. They must be given the right to work out their own Karma. However, if Dharma demands that we use force in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, then we must use it to the best of our ability, as did the commander of the garrison defending the town, in the example used earlier. But we must be very sure Dharma does require the use of force, because if our judgment is incorrect, Karma comes into operation against us. Force can only be used in defense of ourselves and others from oppression.

If I am the popular leader of a people and subversive forces threaten to undermine my rule and plunge the country into chaos, I would be failing my duty to Dharma if I did not stamp out such forces ruthlessly. If I am using force within Dharma, I will be successful in what I consider the defense of my people; if I am not, and I am using force rather to retain my position in opposition to the will of the people, I will find Karma operating against me and I will be ousted.

If I am a mother and my children are threatened by danger, I would be failing Dharma if I were not prepared to kill in their defense.

If I am a husband and my wife is threatened in any way, I would be failing in my duty if I did not defend her to the utmost of my ability.

Does this conception of Dharma and Karma leave me with free will? This question opens the door into the world of “if”. If I had behaved in such a way, the events that followed might have been different. However, when I think more deeply, I can see that it is inevitable that I did act in the way I chose, because of the makeup of my personality and the pressure of the forces around me. We think we have freewill, but many influences bind us so that the course our actions follow appears an inevitable path. Do I have freewill? Do you?

What emotional security results from the acceptance of these ideas! I am conscious of oneness with all existence, material and spiritual, inanimate, and animate, past present, and future. I am part of life and an integral part of the whole; I have been and will be for all eternity.

Life has two facets: the apparently solid and real that is the material aspect, and the true Reality of the Spiritual that contains the Material. As I am part of the Material, with physical particles making up my body that will always exist if in another form, so am I part of the Spiritual. This truth makes my spirit sing with joy. Life is much more than it appears on the surface. What wonderful vistas of the imagination are opened as I realize that I have, and will, experience life in all its many manifestations. This life which I am presently experiencing is simply part of a much greater whole. I live again, and again, as do we all, in many forms. All life goes onwards towards the Source, and according to the greater purpose underlying it. I can relax into the peace of Eternity. Life follows its inevitable course and I play out my little part, with acceptance of the role given me.

I have become sufficiently mature spiritually to understand the law of Dharma, I want to obey it in my life by fulfilling my responsibilities to my family and society. I know that although I may still reap the consequences of past actions, I am laying up a more pleasant future for myself by my present behavior. When misfortune strikes, I must not wallow in self-pity, because I know that whatever happens does so as a result of my previous violations of Dharma. I am responsible for my life, and what happens to me.

Although I may sympathize with the misfortune of others, I must not pity them

or encourage them in the self-pity of the victim. They are working out their Karma, as I am mine. Misfortune must be accepted as a facet of life, along with the joy and good fortune. It is all part of the greater whole, and both facets must be accepted with equal tranquility. However, I know that life is always moving towards a happier plane as I and my fellow inhabitants of life grow spiritually. I have this assurance and the security it gives, in the face of the apparent insecurities of life.

When life has followed its course and I have achieved completion of my part, both in this present life and into the greater pattern of my existence, I know that the goal is the bliss of union with the Ultimate. Life for me has no end, and on the spiritual plane as on the physical, my being is part of the Whole. I know that the constantly changing pattern of the Dance of Life is played out to an unchanging Tune.

Birth, joy and sorrow, life and death, are all part of the progression of the Wheel of Existence. Seen from the viewpoint of Eternity, they fall into perspective and can be accepted with equanimity.

As I meditate on the Real and open my spirit to the Greater Spirit, this apparently solid world fades into darkness and I am enveloped in Light. Self-awareness recedes, and Other awareness transports me to a delight beyond description. This is the beginning of Life and the End.

Bliss

Of the Dance of Life

Force Divine
May I feel the pulsing of your music
Throughout the Dance of Life
May I dance in step with you
Through time eternal

Birth, life, death; what are they?
Joy and sorrow; pleasure and pain
Happiness; what are they?
Steps along the road
To Bliss

Lover, you call
I come!



Chapter 7

Sacrifice - Caste - Knowledge

Moksha, union with the ultimate, bringing bliss beyond belief: how can we attain this happy state? How can we bring our own personal life to its natural fruition? The Brahman in me is yearning to unite with the Greater Brahman and find rest.

I begin my prayer as do all Hindus, with the mystic invocation of the Ultimate contained in the word, *Om!*, meaning, “Hail!”

Om!

Let me find Light amidst the surrounding darkness
 Let me find Life amidst a dying world
 Let me drop as water into the Ocean
 Let me find Rest in Eternity
 Let me see Reality
 Amidst this world of mist and dreams
 And so find what I seek



Jnana Yoga - Sacrifice

The Aryans had a system of sacrifice, now generally referred to as the Vedic sacrificial system, designed to win the favor of the gods and their help in time of need. It was also hoped that the correct sacrifice would ensure a better place in the World of the Fathers that lies beyond death. Can sacrifice help me find Moksha?

Still My Fears Of Fear and Sacrifice

I am afraid of the Darkness
Oh! Power of Light
I am afraid of the evils I suspect
Lie in wait there

I am afraid of the Unknown
Oh! God with any Name
I am afraid of the changes I suspect
Lie in wait there

I am afraid of sickness
Oh! Goddess of Mercy
I am afraid of the afflictions I suspect
Lie in wait there

I am afraid of the coming battle
Oh! Lord of War
I am afraid of the wounds and defeat I suspect
Lie in wait there

I am afraid of Death
Oh! God of Life
I am afraid of the stillness I suspect
Lies in wait there

Listen to the clamor of my fears
Listen to the wild beating of my heart
Listen to the shuddering of my breath
Observe my trembling

Oh! Powers Divine
I offer you sweet perfumes
I offer you libations
I offer you food for the gods



The Upanishads make it quite clear that although the sacrificial system may add to the positive development of Karma, it can never be used to attain Moksha. Although many individuals who have not come quite so far along the road of life, still need the comfort and assurance of ceremony and sacrifice, of a priesthood who claim to invoke the gods and who give them substance and reality, the sacrificial system never did, nor does it now, free us from the Wheel of Life. We cannot bribe the Ultimate.

High Caste

If I am born a Brahmin, or member of either of the other twice-born castes, can I rely on my high position in society to help me attain Moksha? Surely the state of my Karma must be very favorably developed to have allowed me to be born into such a status. Surely Moksha is closer as a result?

The Brahmin Of Empty Pride

I am a Brahmin
Born of the priestly caste
Twice born am I, tall and stately
Sacred thread across my shoulder
Clad in white

I am different from other men
I keep myself separate
Pure and free from pollution
Proud am I, clad in righteousness
I invoke the gods

I chant their praises
I give them sweet sacrifices
See them listen to me, to my cries
See how majestic I am, how splendid
I communicate with the Divine

I stretch out my hand
For the final prize that is mine
Moksha, given by the gods to their beloved

The ancient sages revolt against me
The gods are impervious to my cries



The Upanishads make it quite clear that pride in caste must be dispensed with as one of the steps towards attaining Moksha. In fact, they go so far as to declare that all signs of caste such as the sacred thread, must be laid aside as unnecessary.

In the perspective of the Absolute, the individual is seen in a different light from that of human beings. The Ultimate sees, and basically is interested in, the inner atman, not the outward image. Social status in this world counts for nothing in the World of the Spirit.

Jnana Yoga - The Way of Knowledge

If I have spent my life studying the sacred books and deeply understanding the truths therein, my profound knowledge has been acquired by following the Way of Knowledge, *Jnana Yoga*. Surely my great labor will help me attain Moksha?

The Way of Knowledge Of Searching

Ancient wisdom
So recently written
Inspired by Divinity
Teach me wisdom
Teach me Truth
Let me find Knowledge
In your depths



Again, the Upanishads say that Moksha is not to be found in pride of learning. In fact, such pride must be quenched as another step toward the goal. All

knowledge must be put behind me. The more I study the sacred literature, the more deeply I become enmeshed in the knowledge of the truths found therein, the more I come to realize that this is not enough. I have the very necessary skeleton, I have the bare bones, but now I want the bones filled out with flesh. I need the flesh of personal experience, the flesh of emotional involvement, the flesh of mystic realization. The pursuit of Jnana Yoga brings favorable development of Karma, but it does not bring Moksha. We cannot gain Moksha by our intellect alone.

These were the wrong turns that could lead astray the members of the twice-born castes. They were the ones who performed the sacrifices and pursued learning. They had a superior position in society. This does not prevent many taking the incorrect turn. Our Karma has to be in the proper state of development before we understand the truth.

Individuals have their own private roads that they must follow for their own spiritual development. It is often necessary that a certain road be explored thoroughly before we can progress. As with every other subject, it is one thing to know the truth in theory; often it has to be experienced personally before it can be fully understood. To read a cookbook does not make us a cook; to understand the theory of flying does not make us a pilot capable of captaining the crew of a sophisticated airplane; to have studied the physical construction of the body and symptoms of many diseases that afflicts it, does not make us a doctor. The specialized knowledge is a necessary foundation, but it is the years of experience that produce the cook, the pilot, the doctor. So with the development of a spiritually mature human being!

The Empty Way Of False Pride

I was proud of being a Brahmin
Until I saw clearly
How slight is the difference

Between me and other men

I was proud of being a priest
Until I saw clearly
How shallow is sacrifice
Compared with devotion

I was proud of being a scholar
Until I saw clearly
How dead is knowledge
Compared with experience



Chapter 8

Karma Yoga - Bhakti Yoga

The Upanishads state clearly that we are tied to the Wheel of Life by our passions as expressed by desire and the opposite, aversion. We desire, and the resultant act provokes a reaction. We hate, and strike out, and this action arouses another reaction. Karma comes into play in both cases, and also in those in between along the full spectrum of our emotions.

To stop this interplay of forces, we must learn to live in harmony with our environment. We must live in Dharma, acting correctly towards all others regardless of their treatment of us, or our personal feelings towards them. We must see life in the broader perspective of moral order, rather than from our own small, very personal, point of view, and our actions must be in accordance with the wider vision. Remembering that all life is Maya, illusion clothed in apparent reality, makes it easier to practice non-attachment, as it is called by the Hindus.

It is seeing the small events of individual life set in the framework of the whole. We must develop the objectivity and impartiality of the Brahman, towards life in general, and towards our fellow human beings. This includes our own small life, and those individuals with whom we are most intimate.

This does not mean that we cease to feel the human emotion of love towards individuals, but that we love all human beings because of the Greater Atman we see behind their smaller one. This is over and above the personal liking or otherwise we feel for their personalities. Nor does it mean that we cease to judge our own and others' behavior in relation to Dharma. Such judgment is always tempered by the realization that the individuals have to play out their part in relation to their Karma.

This attitude towards life is called the way of *Karma Yoga*.

The Way of Karma Yoga Of Correct Action

Life is but a swirling mist
We are motes
Dancing in the blackness of Light
Forming patterns
Always of splendor
All part of the
Great Drama

Why so bound to life
You who are motes
Dancing, and deceived by Illusion
Desire not the dust
But desire the Whole
Not one jewel
But the Crown



In a much-loved section of the *Mahabharata*, called the *Gita*, we find Vishnu an avatar in the form of *Krishna*. Vishnu has appeared in the flesh to give divine authority to these inspired teachings of the ancient sages, the *Rishis*.

This extract from the epic is sometimes called the “New Testament” of the Hindus, because here, as in the New Testament of the Christians, we find the Divine incarnate, and demonstrating spiritual truths.

Arjuna, a Prince of the *Pandavas*, is deeply troubled by the fact that drawn up against him in battle array, are men of the *Kauravas*, who are closely related to him. How can he kill a kinsman? This has always been considered a serious offense against Dharma, over and above the personal feelings he has about the situation.

Vishnu, in the shape of Krishna, comes to Arjuna and points out that the first duty is to the position in life in which one finds oneself. He is a warrior,

therefore in this situation in which many *Kshatriyas* must have found themselves, and in which many soldiers find themselves even to this day. He must fulfill his duty as a warrior and fight on the side of right against wrong. If this means he has to kill a brother or friend, then this he must do, and do well.

Krishna goes on to declare that we must live dispassionately. We must act out our life as a minute part of the Whole, seeing our little life in this perspective and not being swamped by the course of events. We seek neither pleasure nor pain but accept life as it is played out around us. We are attached to life, yet non-attached. We live, but on a different level. We enact our part yet are more deeply aware of the other world of the Unseen that lies all around us. Non-attachment is not a negation of life, but a deepened understanding of it.

We increase our understanding of this attitude to life, and so our actions are more and more affected by it, as a natural growth on the spiritual level. This is not a rigid code imposed from outside, either by us or others. If we offend against this understanding, we feel pained by our failure to achieve the ideal. Once again reminding ourselves of the eternal truths, we quieten the pricks of conscience by turning our spirit in the way it ought to go.

Krishna goes on to say that we must adopt this attitude to life out of devotion to the Ultimate, not with the motive of gaining an improvement of our Karma for our future benefit. We must live non-attachment, and our motive for doing so must be non-attached.

We accept the Eternal; we accept the master plan of existence; we accept our little part in it. We accept our physical heritage, knowing it is a temporary thing; we accept events as they occur, knowing that they have a meaning that is woven into the final tapestry. We accept life as part of death; we accept death as a part of life.

Out of this acceptance, action is born. This was the case with Mahatma Gandhi. He accepted the presence of the English in India, as was shown by his non-violent reaction to them. But out of this acceptance sprang action in non-action, rooted in non-violence, and rooted in non-attachment. He was given a part to play, therefore he enacted it. He considered that the attitude of the English to his people was on the wrong side of Dharma, and he had to tell them so.

Out of acceptance, out of non-attachment, everyone must take up the responsibilities they have been given in life and fulfill them within the spirit of Dharma. This is Karma Yoga, the Way of Correct Action.

The word “*yoga*” means “yoked” in Sanskrit. If we are yoked to the way of *Karma Yoga*, this brings favorable development of Karma, but not Moksha.

Krishna Of Devotion

Krishna! Krishna!
Divine Power clothed in divine form
Crown of Dharma

Krishna! Krishna!
Divine Guide to divine life
Divine example

Krishna! Krishna!
At your feet we drop a blossom
Divine Revelation

Worlds, within worlds, within worlds
Krishna! Krishna!
You we seek, beyond death



Bhakti Yoga

The devotion that Krishna arouses is called an example of *Bhakti Yoga*. This is the name given to devotion centered on any aspect of the Absolute. In the Gita we find a vision, granted to Prince Arjuna, of the supernatural magnificence of Krishna. This wonderful picture, coupled to the fact that in him we find the Diving Teacher, the Divine Guru, making his message plain for all to understand, for all to follow, for all to apply to their lives, has made him the object of worship of many Hindus.

Most people find it easier to give the Abstract a form that they can understand and worship. Krishna exercises an intense attraction.

Krishna states that at death we find the aspect of the Ultimate we had worshiped in this life. This of course, applies to the intermediary world where we await rebirth into this one. What a vast vista this conjures up! The followers of Krishna will find him; and the Aryans found their World of the Fathers. Perhaps the Greeks were ferried across the River Styx by that dreaded ferryman, Charon. Maybe the medieval Christians did find their sexless world of the long, flowing, white robes. Possibly the followers of Allah do rest in their Perfumed Garden.

As the images of these worlds fade in this one, so individuals must cease to be added to them. The rebirth of their inhabitants into this world would cause their eventual demise.

Could it be that the Anarchist does find his world without a Supreme Authority, in which each is his own authority? It would be fascinating to examine such a world. Does each individual live a separate life without the interaction, which is the cause of so much pleasure, but also friction, in this world? If they do interact, how do they decide the correct course of action if they happen to disagree? Does it simply become a question of who can apply the greatest force on the other? Do the most forceful personalities fight for leadership? Or do they each give way to the other, insisting that the other must have their way? In that situation, who breaks the impasse? In the light of human nature as it is, it is difficult not to see that scene also ending in the application of force.

Do we like the world we find? Will we seek it again and again through the many passages to and from this world? Will we change direction and try a different world? From the fact that, after all, these many different worlds of the imagination do die, their inhabitants did not find them as satisfactory as they had hoped.

Bhakti Yoga, in the shape of devotion to a particular form of the Abstract, brings its own reward, but not Moksha. To break this greater circle of birth and rebirth, death within death, to find Moksha, we must let our devotion to the Part lead us to devotion of the Whole. We must let our devotion to the Concrete lead us to devotion to the Abstract.

Reliance on sacrifice, pride in social position, and pride in learning, each has to be cast off. We have to cast out any tendency to acquire merit by the practice of *Karma Yoga*, so *Bhakti Yoga* must be cast off before we can experience the peace of reunion with the Source, *Moksha*.

If we cannot cast off our much-loved image of the Whole, this may be because we have to experience life with that image as part of our spiritual development. The attainment of *Moksha* will be for us at the end of some future life.

These different threads run through the maze of life, all leading us to the same point. We may hold any one of them, or all of them, as a guide, but we must be careful not to become lost. A thread may snap, leaving us stranded, as when we lose faith in a smaller revelation of the Whole. We may tangle two or more into a knot that we cannot unravel, as when we direct our efforts to acquiring merit by great learning and the practice of correct action and non-attachment, *Karma Yoga*.

If we follow carefully to the end, following the advice of the ancient sages written into the sacred texts, we will drop the threads of our own accord when finished with them, and we will see the blinding light of the goal.

Chapter 9

Raja Yoga - Samadhi

Moksha, realization of the Self by the smaller self, bringing with it cessation of the round of birth and rebirth, is the goal of Hinduism. But how to attain it is the question?

Another thread we may follow is called *Raja Yoga*. This consists of a discipline containing five principles. Basically, these are as follows:

1. Correct diet
2. Correct breathing
3. Correct exercise
4. Correct relaxation
5. Correct meditation

This is the moderate yoga suggested by the Upanishads and the Gita.

Correct diet is looked at in the broadest sense and seen as everything that is put into the body. It encourages a simple, balanced diet. It excludes alcohol, drugs, and the use of tobacco. It is also vegetarian. The Hindu diet consists of a healthy balance of beans and grains, which together make a complete protein.

Correct breathing and stretching exercises are designed to gently tone the body without unnatural strain. Obviously, anyone who follows this regime must benefit from the physical well-being that is the result.

Correct meditation is performed in a safe place, where there will be no interruptions. It begins by adopting a comfortable position. The adept yogi can slip into the classical lotus position. This provides a firm base for the body and allows the person to forget the body and relax completely, in a position conducive to thought, but not to sleep. However, any position that allows the individual to completely forget the body is suitable.

Breathing is gently brought under control and quietened. The world is shut out and concentration is turned inwards. The inner third eye is opened on spiritual vistas.

With a body purified and physically fit, the world of the unreal is shut out. The inner eye focuses on the Infinite. The seeker concentrates his whole being on

the world of the Real. Here, and only here, can we hope to find the Great Force behind all Being. Here, in this safe world of peace and silence, can we hope to crown our journey with the goal of our striving. Along the path of *Raja Yoga*, the way of the mystic, the way of personal experience, we find the object of our devotion.

The devotee of Kali finds the Great Mother. The devotee of Shiva finds their part in the Great Dance. The lover of Krishna finds him. We each find our very own personal god. The artist, whether composer of lovely music, singer of moving songs, painter of beautiful pictures, teller of wondrous fables, draws from the same Source. The craftsperson creating fine-looking buildings, handsome pieces of furniture or gorgeous clothing, all gain inspiration from the Divine Craftsperson. The mathematician or scientist seeking inspiration, finds the light in the Great Light.

Here too can we find the Ultimate, the Absolute, the Abstract Beginning. Great has been our striving to control our emotions, our bodies, and our minds. Great have been our spiritual sufferings as we have had to develop enough humility to discard first one idea, and then another. Desperate has been our fight for the Light of Truth. Desperate has been our search to find the Great Force which fills all.

As an aid to meditation leading to deeper spiritual experience, it is often suggested that the individual uses either an actual physical representation of the favorite aspect of the Absolute in the form of an icon or statue, or a mental picture. Attention is focused on this, and all other brain activity closed down.

Another method is to use a Mantra. This is a sacred phrase or word, handed down by the ancient sages of the Vedas, and which they found from experience helped them to gain a deeper spiritual awareness. The mantra is repeated over and over, and acts as a focal point for brain activity, focusing all such activity on the sacred. In fact, any sound repeated in such a way will have the same effect, but it is more effective if the sound is a reminder of the things of the spirit.

With the body limbered up by gentle, stretching exercises, relaxed we sit wrapped in the utter silence of concentration. We focus the attention of our mind either on the statue or the mantra. Our regular breathing soothes us, but instead of drifting off into sleep, suddenly we find all awareness of this world has disappeared and we are transported into another world of light and bliss.

When this present world intrudes into our consciousness again, we are aware of having been in a world beyond this one. We are left with a feeling of loss at having been called away.

The modern student of hypnotism would consider that this a self-induced trance, but to the individual concerned it has been very much more than that.

Often the individual cannot attain such an experience by himself and therefore seeks a *guru*, or teacher, to lead the way. To many Hindus, seeking for spiritual experience, the Guru is important beyond measure. The Guru can give spiritual treasures beyond price, and the relationship between guru and disciple is extremely close.

The Guru is sought by the disciple, and the relationship is initiated by the disciple, who acknowledges the authority of the guru. The pupil's desire for knowledge spurs him on. This is a relationship of joy between the teacher and student, as together they walk the Way of Learning.

The Guru is most likely to be a *Yogi*, meaning in this case, an ascetic who has devoted his life to the things of the spirit, following the path of Raja Yoga. It is important to find an individual who himself has experienced a spiritual life of great depth, because only out of his great experience can he help anyone else.

Reference: "Autobiography of a Yogi"; Paramhansa Yogananda This book is the source of my commentary that follows.

Divine Teacher Of Teaching and Learning

Gurudeva!
Teacher Divine
You are here
Out of the dark, tear-drenched nights
Out of the agony of my longing

Gurudeva!
Teacher Divine
Lamp to my footsteps

Quencher of thirst for spiritual experience
I drink in your teachings

Gurudeva!
Teacher Divine
Beloved Master
Hand in hand we tread the Way
The Way of spiritual experience



Our Guru cultivates his disciple as does a careful gardener his plants and adjusts his methods to the special individual he is guiding. Under his guidance, we pass on to this next stage in our spiritual adventure and life becomes enriched beyond measure. No price can be given to our relationship with our Guru, nor is one ever given. It is in the great tradition of India that spiritual knowledge is passed on for no material gain. There is in any case, no way of gauging the material price of such treasure. It is beyond price. The relationship of disciple to Guru is unusually close because the master has chosen to impart knowledge of inestimable value for no material gain.

When the master appears, and we look back over our life, we can understand so much about our search that we did not understand at the time. We see clearly our early footsteps along the way of *Jnana Yoga*. We see our growing understanding of spiritual things, our development in the way of *Karma Yoga*. As our emotional life grew with our bodily development, we welcomed *Bhakti Yoga* as a natural step forward in the things of the spirit. This had all been bound together into a whole, so that when the wonderful day dawned that brought our Guru into our life, we had been ready.

Gently he guides us to the state of spiritual readiness where at his touch and word of release, we enter a different state of consciousness, a world in which we are aware of our oneness with the All. After having attained *Samadhi* which is the name given to this experience, we progress to the place where we can have this awareness of our union, as a part of our daily life. Such a state ought not to interfere with the execution of our daily tasks but may do so in the beginning before we become used to the bliss of constant union with our Beginning and End.

A state of meditation that is too light can be disturbed at any time by outside interference. The techniques of *Raja Yoga* help the initiate attain *Samadhi*, a much deeper level of immersion in the Divine Sea that cannot be interrupted by the mundane world. The skeptical may say that this is a hypnotic trance, but of course, the initiates concerned have the reality of their experience to tell them that it is much more than that.

Here we find the Ultimate, the Absolute, the Abstract Beginning. Great have been our strivings to control our emotions, our bodies, and our minds. Great have been our spiritual sufferings as we have had to develop enough humility to discard first one idea, and then another. Desperate has been our internal fight for the Light of Truth. Desperate has been our search to find the Great Power that fills all. Here we find *Samadhi*.

The final goal of *Raja Yoga* is *Mahasamadhi*, the Great Samadhi. Through it the individual finds what the world calls death. The initiate knows it is the opening of the Door of Life. At the moment which we decide is the most propitious for our departure from this world of darkness into that of glorious light, we, the individual, bow out of this world with a final grand gesture. Instead of being dragged willy-nilly out of life, inelegantly protesting inevitable fate, death becomes a thing of dignity, faced with courage.

The skeptic may say that *Mahasamadhi* is self-induced death by the use of hypnosis, but to the individual involved, it is a step into eternity and bliss. It is a willing going out into the greater adventure that lies beyond the one we are experiencing in the present.

The individual, who practices any of the many forms of yoga that lead to Samadhi and even on to the grand gesture of Mahasamadhi, greatly accelerates his spiritual development and the working out of his Karma.

But this does not mean that one has attained *Moksha*. The final step needed is a very short one, yet one that is impossible for all except the few who are sufficiently advanced spiritually.

The Way Of Striving and Longing

Five strands have I followed
Woven through life
Leading ever onward

Social position have I accepted
Part of my physical heritage
A development of Karma

Joyously I took up my duties in life
With a song, I offered willingly
Service to the Ultimate

Knowledge and wisdom
With hunger unceasing, gnawing
Have I sought

All these I placed
In the perspective of Eternity
Non-attachment

Now I follow the way of the mystic
Led by my beloved Guru
Led by my longing for the Divine

How I long to find completion
How I long to find fulfillment
How I long to find rest

Source of my being
I see only You
I long to be One



Chapter 10

Moksha - Ananda

We adopt the yogic lotus position, shutting out the world, becoming locked in a yogic trance. The world fades from our consciousness and we rest on the shores of the Eternal Sea. We seek *Moksha*, union with the Brahmin. We seek *Ananda*, bliss absolute.

From out of the depths of our wearisome toiling we cry to the Absolute. Many have been the wrong paths down which we have wandered. Strange have been the sights we have seen and the experiences we have undergone. We started out young and confident, sure of our own strength. Now near the end of our journey we know ourselves as old and battle-scarred. Tired and weak, still drawn on by our intense desire for unity with our Beginnings, we must complete the cycle of our existence.

The world fades from our consciousness and we are cast on to the shore of the Eternal Sea. Our smaller atman reaches out to find the *Greater Atman*, and suddenly, we find that which we have been so desperately seeking. Deep in a yogic trance, stretching out our arms, we find Truth.

In this world of bliss, we realize our unity with the One. Duality has dropped away like a veil between us and the Beloved. There is no duality. I am Self, of the Greater Self. The Greater Self and I are the One. We are no longer united only in emotion and intellect; we are merged into the inseparable unity of the Inner Sea.

The *Maya* of this world has dropped away, and the illusion of the material has been penetrated. I am Self and have found in this realization Myself and myself. I am part of the Whole, and I am the Whole. I am part of Eternity, and I am Eternity.

Self-realization is a tremendous, a traumatic, experience. Life cannot remain the same after the stupendous Truth is understood and accepted. Now that we know we are a Master, there is no rebirth. We have finally, after long and often desperate searching, attained *Moksha*. We are freed from the Wheel of Life, and now inhabit a world with the deeper dimensions of the Otherworld. Gone is our restless strivings; gone is our preoccupation with the things of this

world; gone is all worry and strain. Leaving behind the Unreal, Darkness, and Death, we find new strength in the Real, the Light, and Immortality.

Our great age becomes youth in the vista of Eternity; our ghastly scars turn into great beauty as they demonstrate the intensity of our battles along the way of our search for Truth. We know that to complete our journey will make us complete also.

Time for us has almost completed its great cycle, and brings *Ananda*, bliss absolute. We rest on the bosom of the Beloved and there find peace. We are almost at the End, but now know that this is but the Beginning. We know the answer to “Why?”

The Way Of Striving and Longing

Beloved, desire of my heart
You come to me from beyond the stars
You come to me from my ceaseless longings
You come to me from Eternity's depths
From the Eternal Sea

I sing to the blackness of Space
Bliss is mine
I whisper to the pallid moon
Wonder is mine
I shout to the golden sun
You are mine

Beloved, desire of my heart
I come to you from Earth's stirrings
I come to you from spiritual pathways
I come to you from the Beginning
And the End



Gone is the possibility of discontent in the strivings of the Aryans for order. This striving found fulfillment in the truth told so long ago. We are all one, in the One. We learn to live in the dance of the Force that pervades everything and accept that our place is to learn the steps of the dance. We learn to go with the flow of events, and act within the larger picture.

Life becomes a place of peace, of action in non-action. We set goals but accept that these may change with time as events unfold and our understanding becomes deeper. We act, accepting that our movements are part of the greater action all around us, and let events work out as they must. We practice non-attachment in our dealings with others, letting them live out their lives as they want to do. The Brahman in us lets the Brahman in life work out the plot. We have mastered the art of living, playing our part correctly.

Life becomes a place of peace, set into Eternity; an opal set in gold.

The End and the Beginning Of Death and New Life

Tranquility beyond telling
Bliss beyond belief
I walk on the mountain tops
Wrapped in rosy clouds
Of sunset, and new dawn
Knowing that all life ends
And begins
In Joy



Chapter 11

Shiva - Kali - Parvati

To add to our understanding of Hinduism, we must become further acquainted with Shiva and his Shakti or female principle, Kali who also contains Parvati.

Shiva is seen as the embodiment of the male aspect of the creative force in life. He is the great Lord of the Dance, and his is the movement of all existence. His is the power that sets the creative force into motion. He it is who opens the doors of life.

The phallus is used in symbolic form to represent this aspect of the creative force. Stone lingams are set up in temples, particularly in the south of India where there are more descendants of the original Dravidians.

However, he has another aspect. It is he who also opens the Gates of Death. He is the Destroyer when life is at an end. Naturally we fear this side of life, and of Shiva. His destructive force has to be seen in the correct perspective to be properly understood. Without death there can be no life. Plants die and provide humus for the new growth, thereby themselves entering new life. Animals die and their physical bodies dissolve into their original elements, feeding the soil and gaining new life in plants. These plants are eaten by animals, thus gaining another form of life. In fact, it was thought by the early Dravidians that a newly conceived baby received its atman when its mother ate a plant containing an atman awaiting rebirth as a human.

Humans die, and gain rebirth. We cannot have life without death, and in his function of Destroyer, Shiva is called Savior to emphasize this understanding of his being. His destructive power is employed for our good.

There is a legend told about him which further illustrates this point. In a village long ago, under the hot Indian sun, a dreadful demon was tormenting the people. He was a bully, and a dictator forcing everyone to do his will. He was creating havoc and causing untold suffering. Shiva appears and destroys the demon, setting the people free from oppression.

Shiva is also seen as the destroyer of ignorance. It is he who leads us to Truth.

The Lord Shiva Of Destruction and New Growth

Father Divine
Teach me Truth
Lead me to light
Banishing fear
Bringing understanding

Father Divine
Bring me life
Bring me death
Leading me from death
To Immortality



Shiva is the Lord of the Dance, and this art form, as all others in old India, was directed towards the Ultimate, and used to enact religious themes. Hinduism was the very concrete framework within which the Hindus viewed life, so naturally they expressed their innermost thoughts and emotions in this context.

The Dance Of Creation, the Beginning, and the End

Mother Earth
Salutations!
Forgive when we tread heavily
As we dance
On your wide and generous bosom

With a shout, Shiva takes the stage
Shiva, crowned with the moon
The Ganges flowing through his hair

Power and strength in every limb
Such a wonder he arouses
Such beauty he encompasses

He dances, and the swirling mists
Deepen
The galaxies take shape
Stars are born

He dances, and the swirling mists
Awaken
Life takes shape
A baby is born

He dances, and the swirling mists
Change
New life takes shape
Death is born

He dances, and the swirling mists
Understand
Knowledge takes shape
Joy is born

He dances, and the swirling mists
Wane
The end takes shape
Hope is born

The rhythm falters, the music quietens
The dancer slows
Slowly he sinks down
Down into the arms of Mother Earth
On to her lovely breast
Home, Peace, Rest



Kali, the female principle of Shiva, is seen as the embodiment of the female

aspect of the creative force. This is seen as being the greater part. Shiva has the power to set life in motion, but it is the beauty of Kali that motivates him into taking action.

It is Kali who desires children, who nurtures and protects them, and it is she who gives birth. It is she who guides the child's early footsteps and sets the child's course through life. Hers is the supreme function, and it is the place of Shiva to revere and protect her. Kali is the Great Mother Goddess. As such she contains all aspects of the Brahman. She is spirit and matter, life and death.

A devoted mother has two facets. On the one hand she concerns herself with the material needs of her child and answers these with thoughtful care and the warmth of love. On the other hand, she finds she must show another side at times. Firmly, sometimes sternly, she must direct the child from certain forms of behavior that are unacceptable to society towards others that are more desirable. If the child persists in the behavior, the rebuke has sometimes to be accompanied by punishment to reinforce the message. If the parent does not discipline the child, society will certainly do so later in the child's life. This will be done in a manner much more painful than a mother's lovingly administered chastisement.

A child quickly learns that devoted parents do not represent a threat to the child's life or well-being. Their disciplinary system is designed to guide behavior, rather than to wreak vengeance. It is consistent, and springs from love of the child, not anger at actions that may have irritated the parent momentarily.

So Mother Kali has two facets. On the one hand she is generous with her gifts to us, but on the other hand she is ruthless if Dharma is not followed. Dharma must be obeyed, and if we disobey, we are disciplined impartially by Kali.

This side of Kali is represented by *Durga*, of hideous aspect. The frightening side of the goddess is not directed at us, but rather at the forces in opposition to Dharma. Durga is to be deeply respected rather than feared. Kali kills the demons that beset us. Even at her most fearsome she is lovely, as she draws us to the Source of All Being.

Kali Of Mother Earth

Mother Immortal
Your gift is Birth
Your gift is Life
Let us use them
To find Truth



When we examine nature in action, we find these truths. Mother Nature is so generous, in fact, lavish, with her gift of life. For every plant that takes root and flourishes, millions of seeds have been scattered on the earth. For every mammal that sees the lovely light of the sun, millions of sperm have been sacrificed.

But we also find that animals eat plants, one animal preys on another. However, when we look more closely, we find that even here Mother nature is only apparently cruel. Seen from her perspective, the old, the crippled, and the excess, are being weeded out instead of being allowed to suffer, and this keeps the species constantly in a healthy state.

This aspect of the Being of Shiva and Kali can also be seen in the revolutions in human affairs. If a ruler is unwise in his handling of his people, Karma will come into play against him. Durga, in the shape of his people, will throw him off. However, any individual concerned in such an affair must be very sure of their grounds against such a ruler. Often karma can swing into opposition and the revolutionaries can find that they have brought into being a greater monster than the one they have thrown off. One must be very careful in the use of force.

Shiva and Kali are seen as two facets of the same force. It is part of the belief in Samsara that although we may be of one sex in this life, we probably have been, and certainly will be again, another in a different life. We must experience all facets of life in our journey towards our goal. Underneath our physical covering, our essential atman is basically as is that of everyone else and is neither male nor female but contains both. Our physical inheritance gives our atman temporary material form.

Chapter 12

Shiva - Parvati

In the *Kumarasambhavam* we find Shiva and Kali in another guise. Kali is revealed as Parvati, the lovely Lady of the Mountains, daughter of the King of the Himalayas, the bride of Shiva. In this story it is made clear that the love between a man and a woman is seen as the coming together of the two poles of the creative force. They are each part of this Force, and therefore their coming together on the physical plane is a union of the Ultimate. It is a foretaste of the bliss of eternal union in *Moksha*.

Earthly Love Of a Man and a Woman

Lover!

Lover!

Do you hear the echo of my whispered call?

Do you follow? To the Land of Delights

The Land of Love

My Love!

Lover!

Lover!

I see the beauty of your smile, your form

I follow to the Valley of Delights

The Land of Love

My Love!

Lover!

Lover!

Together we share the fragrant moon, the singing sun

Warm and sweet, in the fragrant Field of Delights

The Land of Love

My Love!

Lover!
 Lover!
 We two become One, losing ourselves in each other
 As do all true loves in the Sea of Delight
 The Land of Love
 My Love!



We also find this metaphor in the story of the love of Krishna for Radha, his childhood sweetheart, and Rukmini, his wife. It is seen as perfectly natural that we use the erotic metaphor to describe the greater union. On the physical plane we find a bliss in which we lose ourselves. This is seen as a paler version of the bliss in which we lose ourselves in union with the Divine.

The lovely carvings in certain Hindu temples make this attitude very plain. The beautiful, stylized statues of Shiva and Parvati demonstrating their love for each other, reveal a refreshing lack of prudishness, without offending natural modesty. They demonstrate an acceptance of, and a delight in, the physical union of men and women, which is always conscious of the deeper spiritual meaning which is underlying the physical.

The individual is taught to see sexual intercourse as spiritually fulfilling. Shiva and Parvati are eternally lovers.

Parents take a great interest in the marriages of their children and go to great trouble to arrange them. The ideal is held to be that of loving parents who arrange marriage for their child to someone to whom that child is already attracted. Because of the many possible dangers, girls from high caste homes are not allowed to frequent public places alone, and the ways of meeting young men are limited. Arranged marriage has much to recommend it, because the choice would be made from among the sons of friends, or the friends of friends, which certainly add to the chances of success for the marriage.

Marriage is difficult to make successful, but if the difficulties are lessened instead of added to by differences between the couple, it helps. When the families concerned like and respect each other, and are pleased by the union of their children, this too helps. When the couple are from similar environments so that there are not the irritations that can be caused by different attitudes to

situations, these factors are a positive asset to the proposed marriage.

When a marriage is being proposed, the astrologists are often consulted to ensure that the Karma of the couple is correctly suited to each other. The idea is that the attraction between them is explained by the affinity of their respective Karma. If the astrologist declares that the stars agree that they are indeed ideally suited to each other, the date of the wedding is set for an auspicious time.

An astrologer taking his or her duties seriously, and with an understanding of human nature, would certainly be able to assess the chances for the marriage. Their intuitive reaction inspired by the supernatural, would generally be accurate.

The marriage ceremony begins with the bridegroom entering the home of the bride with the appropriate sacrifices for the favor of the gods for the couple. When completed, the bridegroom takes his bride to live with his parents. However, the houses are built to accommodate the extended family. The couple would have separate rooms for their own use, eating with the family but able to be apart when they desired privacy.

When we remember that the couple were generally young teenagers, this seems a very sensible arrangement. The young husband would not be in a financial position to set up a separate home, yet his awakening sexual impulses needed an outlet if society was not to be plagued with sexually frustrated youngsters and illegitimate babies.

Hindus are not physically demonstrative in public, and couples are not encouraged to make emotional or physical overtures towards each other in public, out of deference to the feelings of others. What is considered of more importance is that love and devotion be demonstrated by proper behavior towards each other, rather than in caresses embarrassing to others that ought to be kept for the bedroom. Although not prudish, Hindus are very modest.

It is expected that the married couple will be celibate, and therefore will be virgins when they marry. They are still very young and have been taught to control their physical desires which will be fulfilled in marriage. Marriages, as we have already mentioned, were arranged as soon as the individuals concerned were physically ready, so they did not have to wait too long before the

tremendous sexual instinct found release.

The couple would not be ignorant of the facts of life. In the *Kama Sutra* we find great wisdom. This book is an objective sex manual, such as today can be found in most book shops. A few simple techniques are defined, but what is of most value is that the physical union is seen as being an art. Like any art, it has to be learned first in theory before being put into practice. This ensures that the couple may be innocent but will not be ignorant. They will both know what lovemaking is about, and will have already been able to rehearse its performance in imagination, as does any artist before a performance.

The bridegroom is advised to approach his bride very carefully. It is stated quite categorically that the man who forces himself on his bride, will turn her against not only himself, but all other men. He is advised to be very considerate on the first night. The husband ought to await the consent of his bride as she responds to his gentle lovemaking. The man who follows this advice will not have to wait long. Shiva will find once again that Parvati shares with him bliss beyond description. The experience, which is part of all the universe of love yet is uniquely their own, helps cement the pair bond. It will continue to do so throughout their relationship provided both partners play their part.

Lover Of the Magic of Sex

Lover Supreme
Part of all loving
Come to me
Let us lose ourselves
In total giving



The young wife is also given advice. It is recommended that the woman who wants to keep the love of her husband, ought to run their home well and center it on him. The detailed list of house-keeping duties is fascinating. She ought to cook meals he enjoys, and always be waiting for him with loving greetings when he arrives home.

Young people brought up in the higher caste Hindu homes are taught to be modest. Their parents set an example of never undressing in the presence of their children, and women dress becomingly without flaunting their sexual attractions. Children are allowed to run naked under the sun and are never made to feel that their bodies are anything other than perfectly acceptable. This allows them to gain a pretty good idea of the physical differences between males and females. However, beyond a certain age the children naturally want to follow the example of their elders and dress in a modest fashion.

The loving wife is advised to dress modestly during the day, but when they are alone, she should dress alluringly for her husband.

Make a man happy by giving him a comfortable, well-run home, which is planned to please him, always welcome him with warmth, give him delicious food, make love-making a private world of surprises and delights, and the male author of the Kama Sutra assures that he will not stray. To her husband, she is the loveliest woman in the world, and if she follows the advice so freely given, she will remain so to him. Parvati is forever young and beautiful to the eyes of love. Shiva is always her own true love if he continues to be as considerate of her needs as he was when they first married.

Young people given these ideals had every chance of making a happy marriage, and this was more often the case among Hindus than not. However, of course there were some failures. These may arise when force has been used to arrange the marriage or consummate it. It could be that their Karma did not allow it. Although the couple concerned were fated to come into contact, because at that time their Karma was jointly in conjunction, situations arise and actions are indulged in which drive them apart. A couple who are true lovers go onwards together through life because their Karma stays united, and may wait for each other beyond death to continue the journey through rebirth.

In the case of couples who are in this happy state, the death of the husband can be a separation too intolerable for his wife to bear. This is the origin of *Sutteeism*. Life has become an arid desert, and death is the door to rebirth with her only true love.

Dead Lover!
Of bereavement

My husband is dead
My beloved has gone
My heart writhes in anguish
My eyes are blind with tears
My life is over

I remember well the day we first met
You came to my father's house
So tall, so straight, so proud
How well he had chosen
How well the gods had chosen
My beloved

You did not tremble, as I did
You were not afraid, as I was
My mother told me she also loved you
So darkly handsome
With flashing smile
Kindly and warm like her Love

Later, married and alone together
How gently, how patiently
You led me on to drown in Bliss
You loved me as Shiva loves Parvati
As Rama loves Seeta, Krishna loves Radha
As god has always loved goddess

My beloved! Oh! My Beloved!
The flames leap up on your funeral pyre
Agni, Agni, god of Fire
I beseech you, I implore you
Bear me to him



The Kama Sutra mentions many other forms of sexual activity and makes it clear that it is accepted that Kama, the god of sexual attraction, has many faces.

Obviously, although the ideal is sought after, it is not always attained. This is accepted in the world of Hinduism, and allowances made for this fact.

We find an interesting excursion into the world of the harem and find it rather different from the glamorous pictures usually painted. The author of the Kama Sutra gives sound advice as to how to smuggle men into the presence of the ladies to help them solve their sexual frustrations. Surely it is obvious that if one man often cannot satisfy one woman sexually, no man is capable of satisfying any number. The ladies of the Harem were condemned to a life of sexual frustration. The writer gives them practical sympathy. However, it is a brave man who would accept the invitation for such a visit.

We also find a section on women who make a career of being mistresses instead of wives. Their daughters begin their careers by marrying for the first year. The man given the pleasure of being their first husband no doubt paid well for the honor. At the end of the year, the situation would be reassessed, but the woman was given her freedom whether she decided to continue to live with the man concerned or not. Many women do not like being trapped in marriage, and this social set-up allowed her to have relationships with men without marriage. These women were often well-educated by standards then prevalent. The Kama Sutra gives them advice that would enable them to become very rich at the expense of their lovers.

In a society where divorce was impossible due to religious, family, and property ties created by the marriage, the accepted presence of these women in a society would relieve the sexual frustrations of any unhappily married man, without breaking the marriage and bringing the unhappiness the breakdown of a home gives to everyone concerned, especially the children.

The women were not tied to their lovers and could have casual liaisons at the same time. Obviously, the lover who wanted to keep the exclusive favors of his mistress would have to pay more and be very attentive.

The acceptance of these women in society would also enable excess women to have children and be fulfilled biologically. This was preferable to them

becoming embittered, old spinsters.

Concubinage is not mentioned in the Kama Sutra, but we must touch on it and this is a good place to discuss it. If a marriage remained childless, many problems would arise, one being that there was no son to make the customary offerings to the ancestors. This is the place for the second wife, not a concubine.

A system of remembrance of parents after death had been handed down from the early Aryans. This takes the form of offerings of food placed in front of the memorial shrine to the parents, which has been erected in the home. The food is then given to those in need, the beggars. This ceremony is performed by the eldest son on every new moon for his father, and on every full moon by the youngest son for his mother. Parents are deeply respected among the Hindus as the givers of physical life, and after their death are venerated in the hope of making them happy in the next world. Once a year, on an auspicious new moon all the eldest sons of the community will gather to make a collective remembrance offering, as on a full moon will the youngest sons. These are very festive occasions, and relatives, neighbors, and priests from all around will arrive for the ceremony, and the feast that follows.

A widow practices a similar custom of offering food at the shrine she has erected in memory of her husband, on the anniversary of his death. There is no collective ceremony.

It was very important that a couple have children to keep their memory alive after death, apart from the natural desire to have children for their own sake. One alternative available to the couple was to persuade a close relative to let them have a child from their family. However, this was not always possible, in which case the wife was encouraged to choose a second wife for her husband, to give them children.

Obviously, this would take great love for him, and in the ideal his appreciation of this love would ensure that she remained his first love. Her action would also give her children, because if she chose wisely, the second wife would be her friend. The second wife, knowing that after all the children were hers physically, would no doubt be only too happy to share the hard work involved in their upbringing. In the ideal, this is considered a better arrangement than that the marriage remain childless, or that the first wife is cast out to make room for the

second.

Second Wife
Of children

Second wife of my husband
Love him wisely and well
Give us children
To be our own
Treasure
All of us part of the
Greater Love



Chapter 13

Rama - Seeta

In the epic, the *Ramayana*, we find the relationship between a man and a woman being given the face of duty. Here is laid down the way of *Dharma*.

Rama, the Prince, is an avatar of Vishnu. He displays constant devotion to Seeta, his wife. She is also of divine birth, and in her turn, is constantly chaste, and totally faithful to Rama, both in mind and in body.

It is rather an interesting point that Seeta was discovered as a baby lying where she had been deposited by the gods and adopted into the family who found her and brought her up. This would seem to indicate the fate of unwanted female babies during those times. Not all would be as fortunate as Seeta.

After their marriage, Seeta is stolen from Rama, and he turns all his attention to rescuing her. However, when he recovers her, he insists that he did so in the pursuit of Dharma, apart from any personal feelings he may have for her.

Although deep devotion between couples is hoped for, here as in all else, they must practice non-attachment. Their relationship must be seen in the wider perspective of all attractions between the male and female aspects of the Great Creative Force. Their personal relationship is one tiny fragment of the Whole, destined to come about, but also destined to reach its natural conclusion. They come together, they find joy, they break apart at death. They love deeply, but always within the framework of Dharma and non-attachment, knowing that they may never be possessive about each other. They must let the other go.

Although many lovers would declare it impossible, the ideal is to reach the stage of spiritual development where, although love is given freely and totally, it is without possessiveness and jealousy. At death it grants release!

**Beyond the Light
Of Death and Parting**

You have passed beyond the light
My beloved
You have taken the light
Beloved
Leaving me dark tears

Part of me you will always be
My beloved
Those years we shared together
Beloved
Leave perfumed memories

But head onwards, ever onwards
My beloved
I must let you go, nor try to stop you
Beloved
Despite my longings

I too must move onwards
My beloved
I must close the jeweled door
Beloved
Despite my glances backwards

One day I will follow into the new day
My beloved
Will we again dance like twin moons
Beloved
Around a sun



The advice to be found in the *Kama Sutra* and *Kumarasambavan* is given the added seal of duty, *Dharma*.

The result is that the Hindu home is generally a very happy one. Wives are dutiful with the warmth of love, and husbands are considerate, respectful and protective. The ideal molds the behavior of those who adopt it as their own.

The wife is considered queen in the realms of the home, and there her word is law. In any situation that arises, after discussion, she has the final word and her husband will abide by her decision. Of course, if the matter is very serious, the couple will consult parents and elder brothers and sisters to obtain their opinions. They will only take a decision after careful consideration is given to all aspects of the problem.

Parenthood is seen as the result of the union of Shiva and Parvati. Spiritual love ought to be present and fully realized to ensure that the resultant child is beautiful in every way. The child is the flower and fruit of the union, and as such is treasured.

Sons are desired to carry on the religious rites, but daughters are also desired to carry on the race. As generally more girls survive early childhood than boys, the religious requirements would ensure that the society propagated itself.

As we are all part of the creative force, the child is also part of everyone, and children are loved by everyone and made a great deal of by everyone.

In the ideal, what a lovely world for a child to enter! The child is wanted by the parents before birth. The infant is conceived as a result of the union of the parents in bliss. The arrival of the baby is a time of great rejoicing.

The baby's physical needs are answered from a deep sense of devotion to the Ultimate, and a great warmth of love.

The parents are devoted to each other, and together share the great responsibility of feeding the physical, emotional, and spiritual appetites of their offspring. However, following the example laid down in the sacred literature, they must always put each other first, and together put the child first in their joint life.

**Flower of Rapture
Of Birth and Nurture**

Wondrous Babe
From whence have you come?
You live, you breathe
Tiny hands clutching our love
Lovely smile bewitching us

Beautiful Babe
Flower of rapture
Fruit of ecstasy
We touched the stars, sang on the moon
And found you there, glittering

Lovely Babe
Pearl set in the gold
Of our love
We will feed you nectar and dewdrops
Fill your soul with music



Chapter 14

The Way of Life

Hindus consider that ideally life should follow a certain pattern. There are four stages.

The first stage of life begins at birth and continues until the individual marries. During this first stage the child is being trained for adult life. Deep reverence for parents is encouraged as they are seen as gods passing on life. Teachers are also to be revered as they are passing on knowledge from the Brahman; this knowledge being the key to successful living in the society of that time.

The child is taught the *Puranas* and the *Epics* and is given an understanding of *Dharma*. The state of a child's own Karma determines how much is understood, accepted and applied. Some will accept more, some less. This is seen as being determined, not by parental or scholarly training, but by the individual concerned. The parents and teachers are not held responsible for the child's behavior, especially if they have tried to teach the child the things that should be known and the child has rejected them. The individual soul inherits a physical make-up, Karma determines the environment, but the individual is the one who makes the choices as to what is going to be done.

The concrete teachings had begun with the example set by the parents and other adults in the society. It is constantly being reinforced by the actions of these adults as the child grows to physical maturity.

The second stage of life begins when the individual takes up the responsibilities of marriage and bringing up a family. It is strongly stressed that a man must have a son to make the necessary offerings for his father on his father's death, and that a second son is necessary to make the offerings for the mother. These beliefs help counter any tendencies to escape from the responsibilities towards the community expressed in carrying on the species. As more girls are usually reared than boys, in acquiring the sons many daughters would usually be gained also.

A man is not considered fully mature until he has married and had at least one

son. Only then is a Brahmin allowed to officiate at ceremonies and act as a priest. This ensures the continuity of the society. This stage of life is occupied in developing *Karma Yoga*, the Way of Duty.

The third stage of life begins as the parents settle their children in marriages and homes of their own. They loosen the social bonds, often going into solitude together. They may live in an *Ashram*, a forest retreat. Here they have the leisure to develop *Jnana Yoga* in study of the sacred writings, and *Raja Yoga*, the way of meditation.

The fourth and final stage of life begins as the individual gives away all worldly possessions and becomes a *Yogi*, or *Yogini* if a woman. Only with the permission of their marriage partner, if still alive, and family, can the individual now go off and become a wandering ascetic. Rejecting the entanglements of the things of this world on the physical plane, they are demonstrating and fulfilling what they have already done on the spiritual plane.

Life has reached its climax, and having fulfilled duty to society, the individual can devote all time to the things of the spirit. Material goods and position in society have brought with them a great and heavy responsibility. It is a great joy to discard it all and find that the end of life becomes a new beginning full of deep meaning. Life has been lived to the full, accepting each phase of it as it comes and making the most of it. Now that all the physical fires have died down, all attention can be given to the preparations for the future life that begins with the opening of the Curtains on the stage we call Death.

This renunciation of the world on the physical plane echoes that which on the spiritual plane is the prelude to attaining *Moksha*. Moksha brings unity with the All and absorption into the Greater, so this physical turning away from the smaller world of the individual brings a physical unity with the greater world of All. Hindu society loves the yogis and yoginis and gives them great respect.

A loving marriage partner and family will let the individual go onwards. The yogi takes very little; a piece of clothing for covering, a staff, and a bowl. The bowl is for food given by passersby or householders as a gift to the Brahman in the form of the yogi. The yogi eats whatever is given without question, simply for the purpose of keeping his physical body alive.

The Way leads onwards to the Door of Death, Moksha and Ananda. Now

when life seems over, begins the greatest adventure of all.

The Brahman
Of New Life and Bliss

I leave life
To find Life

I leave myself
To find Myself

I leave tumult
To find Bliss



Chapter 15

Visiting the Brahman

It is Friday evening, and the family is busily preparing to visit the temple, on this the holy day.

They bathe in the river beside the village, along with their friends and neighbors. Later, dressed in clean clothes, they wend their way to the temple together.

Every day at 6:00 am, 12:00 noon, 6:00 pm, and 9:00 pm, the same offerings are made to the form of the Brahman which is being celebrated in each particular temple. However, the offerings made at 6:00 pm on Friday evenings have attained a particular popularity and this is the time when families usually attend together.

As the worshippers near the temple, they can hear the music of the temple musicians. They know that the dancers are enacting the themes of the holy literature in this form that can be understood by all.

In days of old, these dancers would be servants of the temple and be prepared to relieve any sexual frustrations of the men among the community. In this way, these frustrations could be relieved instead of festering and causing problems. This would also give another outlet to those women who did not want to be tied to one man.

The music and dances are indispensable to the service. They were designed to teach spiritual ideas to the people in an easily understood form. Most people would have been illiterate and unable to read the sacred literature for themselves.

At the entrance to the temple is a great bath. In it the worshippers wash their feet to clean off the dust of their journey.

As they enter the temple they can admire, and are encouraged to touch, the lovely statues that give form to the artist's inspired conception of the gods. The temple itself is built in the form of a body. The main altar is in the place of

the head, the congregation stands in the body, and the two doors take the place of the feet.

Men stand to the left, women to the right. Between them is the representation of the aspect of the Brahman being worshiped, whether a statue of the god or a stone representation of the lingam of Shiva.

The Brahmin priest enters on the hour, and chants in Sanskrit the significant stanzas of the Vedas that apply to the Avatar of the Ultimate being worshiped. Each temple is dedicated to a different god, but it really makes little difference in which temple one worships. They all depict only one facet of the Brahman, and ultimately it is the Brahman that is being worshiped.

The priest offers firstly flowers. These can be of any kind but must have a lovely perfume. It is the perfume that is important in the offering. The sweet smell is the true offering to the gods.

Next the priest offers holy water or milk.

Then the priest offers food, generally in the form of cooked rice.

He now takes the holy lamps which are a reminder of Agni, the god of Fire, the messenger between humans and the Ultimate. He first shows one lamp, as a reminder in the basic belief in the One Brahman. Then he shows three lamps, reminding that the Brahmin has three basic manifestations in *Brahma the Creator*, with his female principal, *Saravati*, *Vishnu the Preserver*, and his female counterpart, *Lakshmi*, and *Shiva the Destroyer of Evil*, and his wife *Parvati*, and other half *Kali*.

Finally, the priest shows multiple lamps as a reminder that there are also multiple manifestations of the Brahmin, each equally valid. He then reverses the order, showing three again, then one.

He turns around and the people of the congregation are given the opportunity of having him anoint their foreheads. This is done first with holy ash, as a reminder that death comes to us all impartially. Secondly sandalwood is used as a reminder of our third eye of spiritual knowledge. Lastly is used kum kum which leaves a red spot of saffron on all. This is a reminder of the spiritual truths to be found in Hinduism.

The worshiper can eat a little of the cooked rice and drink a little holy water or milk. This is an indication of their oneness with the Brahman and each other. There is no restriction as to who can eat and drink, as to Hindus we are all of the body of the Brahman, and as such of equal importance.

There is no formality about the offerings and service. We can arrive and leave as we wish. We can even move around the temple at will as the service takes place. What is important is the assimilation of the atmosphere and the interplay between the atman of the individual and the Greater Atman of the Brahman.

Some may find it necessary to stay still; others may prefer to move around. Each person can do as they feel is best for them. This setting for the offerings is so indicative of the feelings of Hinduism. No one person may inflict his or her will on another. Everyone must be given the freedom to follow their own path and develop in their own way. Of course, all the early conditioning of the individual makes sure that they act within the framework of Hinduism, and thus within the will of society.

The rice left over is offered to the poorer members of the community. The plantain leaves on which the offerings have been placed are given to the holy cows of the temple.

As the priest retires to his own quarters in the temple and rejoins his family, the congregation drifts out of the temple in its own time. The people feel spiritually elevated and at peace with themselves and Themselves, and with the world.

Moksha **Of Life and Rest**

The Brahman is in all, is with all, and is All
Life manifests itself within the Brahman
It goes its own self-appointed Way
All is as it should be
There we rest



Gods of India
Of Loving Spiritually

Gods of India
Alive and vibrant
Glowing with color
Encrusted in gold and rubies
We bow before you

Gods of India
Wise beyond measure
Full of ancient wisdom
Loving, tolerant, understanding
We bow before you

Gods of India
Part of us
And we of you
Brahman in all, with all, and All
We bow before you



The Mystery and the Wonder

In the beginning
Mysteries of mysteries
All was still; silent
The Brahman stirred
Vishnu/Lakshmi sprang into Being
The material Universe appeared
Brahma/Saraswati awakened
Spirit pervaded all
Shiva/Parvati began to Dance
The Dance of Creation
Life begins
Joyous; Wondrous; full of Mystery

