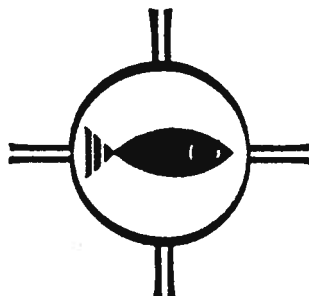


# LIBERAL CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF STUDIES



## Unit 11

SCRIPTURE: NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

## Paper 1

"OTHER SHEEP I HAVE"

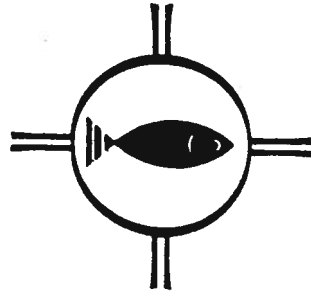
I. The Principal Eastern Religions  
by the Rev. Ian Hooker, B.A.



110.001-I

Printed in Australia





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## Non-Christian Religions

by the Rev. Ian Hooker, B. A.

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Prescribed Reading:                   Huston Smith: *The Religions of Man*

Suitable books for further study:

- Ninian Smart:           *The Religious Experience of Mankind*  
Trevor Ling:           *A History of Religion, East and West*  
W. de Bary:            *Sources of Indian Tradition, 2 Vols.*  
J. Hick:                *God and the Universe of Faiths*

Also see Bibliography at the end of this paper.



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"OTHER SHEEP I HAVE" - Non-Christian Religions  
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## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## 1. A LIBERAL CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

The Liberal Catholic Church advances the view that (statement of Principles, 1973, p. 7)

"...there is a body of doctrine and mystical experience common to all religions, which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any."

Thus, while the Liberal Catholic Church is distinctively Christian in its allegiance, its doctrine and its sacramentalism,

"...it nevertheless holds that other religions are divinely inspired and that all proceed from a common source. . ." (Statement of Principles, 1973, p.7).

Bishop Leadbeater's writings abound with references to this 'common source', as, for example, in *The Science of the Sacraments* (1929, p. 190)

"As the Christ is the Head of all religions vast hosts of them (referring to the holy angels) are ever around Him, waiting to leap forward along the line of His thought. . ."

and in *The Inner Side of Christian Festivals* (1973, p. 22)

"...all the great religions come from the same central source; . . .I do not say that He is responsible for the vagaries of the individual believer. Men have corrupted and distorted His teaching; that is true of every religion. That these faiths as originally founded are all statements of the same original truth, we can see for ourselves if we will take the trouble. . ."

Now, in commencing, or resuming the task of understanding some of the world's other great living faiths, it is as well to bear in mind this very useful distinction between the teachings as given, the fledgling institutions as planned and launched, and the doctrines, rituals, myths and social values as they have evolved through the centuries. Being steeped in our own Summary of Doctrine is especially an aid in thus distinguishing revelation from accretion. Nevertheless

the world faiths are important and real *as they stand*, and it is *as they stand* that they must be approached with respect, even reverence, and examined. The careful inquirer may approach the other man's faith with mind open to intuitive distinctions between given and realized truths on the one hand, and human error and invention on the other, but he must at the same time remain alertly critical of any tendency he may have to arrive at superficial generalizations. Often deep truths are heavily veiled; often sources of deep inspiration and blessing lie covered over with forms repugnant to the unfamiliar. Ramakrishna, a Hindu devotee and saint of the last century, has expressed this idea with the conviction of direct knowledge:

"Bow down and worship where others kneel, for where so many have been paying the tribute of adoration, the kind Lord must manifest himself, for he is all mercy." (quoted by Smith, 1965, p. 87).

## 2. *SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES*

This unit is principally a guide to the study of four major living religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam, with some attention to other significant non-Christian faiths. The four faiths emphasized, it is felt, are not only those which impinge more directly upon us, but also provide us with especially revealing contrasts in outlook and practice. Hinduism and Islam, each with some five to six hundred million adherents, follow Christianity as the most widely practised of all religions, and each invites us to explore its own remarkable scriptures, doctrines and rituals. Buddhism, the most influential and dynamic of the traditions branching off from Hinduism, offers us a philosophy and scriptural heritage alive with insight, compassion and gentle humour. Judaism as the inspired prophetic foundation from which sprang both Christianity and Islam, must also be understood by the student of religion.

The objectives of the unit are therefore:

1. To explore fully and open mindedly the lives and teachings of the founders and other outstanding exponents of the non-Christian religions.
2. To investigate the sacred writings of each of the major faiths studied.
3. To examine some of the key historical events in their development.
4. To consider the ways in which each of these religions is meeting the needs of its adherents in the present day and to review some of the major problems each is facing.

### 3. TEXT BOOK AND MAIN REFERENCES

The commentary which follows is closely geared to the text, Professor Huston Smith's widely acclaimed *The Religions of Man*. Students will appreciate the literary excellence, fairness and sympathetic insight of this work, but those whose minds seek full historical context would do well to obtain also an inexpensive history of religions, such as *The Religious Experience of Mankind* by Professor Ninian Smart, or *A History of Religion East and West*, by Professor Trevor Ling. In addition students should ensure access to good translations of the various key scriptures. Some of these, and other sources, are suggested in the brief annotated bibliography.

### 4. DEFINING RELIGION

In commencing a study of this kind it is essential that technical terms, however familiar, be defined with clarity. The term religion is peculiarly difficult to define because of its universal and greatly varying use. Definitions of religion are almost as numerous as writers on the subject. Having recourse to word origin is not especially helpful, as in this case there is no agreement as to whether the origin is 'religere' (Latin: to re-read, or reflect) or 'religare' (Latin: to bind fast, or to bind back). The latter meaning is doubtless preferable for the standpoint usually held within the Liberal Catholic Church, but is an insufficient basis for constructing an approach to a key aspect of the behaviour, beliefs and aspirations of thousands of millions of human beings. Again, terse definitions, however appealing and thought provoking, are often to be seen as statements of a viewpoint, or as epigrams, rather than as precise description of what religion is. Thus E. B. Tylor's ". . . a belief in Spiritual Beings" arises out of his anthropological perspective and conveys his own scepticism. Again, Michael Novak's statement (*Ascend of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove*, 1971, p. 32), "Religion is primarily a sense of conversion to a sense of the sacred" arises from the author's emphasis on the experiential component in religion rather than from observation, not that, to be fair, he is setting out to achieve a formal definition. Even in the celebrated work by William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the definition limits the scope of the term to the kind of approach pursued by the writer. James wrote (1902, p. 31):

"Religion therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."

In view of these difficulties the broad and inclusive statement offered by Professor John Hick is preferred as a basis for our use of the term 'religion'. Hick's essay "The New Map of the Universe of Faiths" (*God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1971, pp. 133 ff.)

opens with the words:

"Let me begin this chapter by proposing a working definition of religion as an understanding of the universe, together with an appropriate way of living within it, which involves reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute, or to a transcendent order or process."

It could be argued that this simple statement includes all six of the dimensions of religion as outlined by Smart (*The Religious Experience of Mankind*, 1971, Chapter 1) namely, the doctrinal, the mythical, the ritual, the social, the ethical and the experiential dimensions. Possibly the first is over-emphasized, the last under-emphasized, but all are present. This definition obviates problems as to which ways of life may be included as religious:

"Such a definition includes such theistic faiths as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism; the theistic Hinduism of the Bhagavad Gita; the semi-theistic faith of Mahayana Buddhism and the non-theistic faiths of Theravada Buddhism and non-theistic Hinduism. It does not however include purely naturalistic systems of belief, such as communism and humanism, immensely important though these are today as alternatives to religious faith."







## CHAPTER 2

## HINDUISM

1. *ORIGINS: FROM BRAHMANISM TO HINDUISM*

Paradoxically the ancient religion of the Indian people is now identified by a name having no Indian equivalent. Indians had no need for a name--their beliefs, rituals and social codes were so pervasive as to be simply parts of their life; there was no other faith from which it had to be distinguished. The invading Muslims of the eighth century, however, applied the term *Sindhu*, later Hindu, to the religion of the people they found in the Indus Valley, to distinguish it from their own. Now the term has general acceptance.

The term Hinduism, however, does not properly apply to the most ancient Indian religion. This, scholars prefer to designate as Brahmanism, locating the rise of more familiar and still present forms of Indian religion in the fifth and sixth centuries before the Christian era (B.C.E.). A few comments about Brahmanism are needed if the origins of Hinduism are to be set in even a very broad historical perspective.

Brahmanism came to India with the invading Aryan tribes, some of whom negotiated the north west passes and entered the northern river plains as late as the middle of the second millennium B.C. There is doubt regarding the beginning of the migration, but it probably commenced long before that time. The nomadic Aryan invaders worshipped an array of nature gods, including Indra, their protective warrior god, who also controlled the weather; Varuna, the austere maintainer of cosmic and moral order; and Agni, the God of Fire, who was believed to respond to fire rituals, and mediate between gods and humans.

As the migrating Aryans forced their way into the more fertile regions of northern India, they managed to achieve dominance over the indigenous peoples, the city dwelling, agricultural Dravidians. Two cultures, widely contrasting, in this way came into intimate contact, and despite the attempts of the taller, fairer Aryans to prevent any racial mingling with the Dravidians, this did, to a limited extent, take place. A social and cultural coalescing also occurred. The Aryans placed their three main social groups of priests, warriors and tribesmen at the head of an adapted social framework, the minutely differentiated Dravidian social groups following as a fourth broad class, thus giving rise to the four traditional classes, or varnas. There was, however, a measure of flexibility, with some Dravidian leaders being admitted to the second class, or varna, of warriors and rulers. The Aryan language, an early form of Sanscrit, was modified by the gradual adoption of some characteristic Dravidian sounds. And the religion of the Aryans changed, too, partly through a natural

evolution, but more substantially through the assimilation of elements of the faith of the now subject Dravidians.

Although long honoured in hymn and ritual, the Aryan gods began to lose their dominance. It was realized, as one of the hymns making up the Rg-Veda states, that, "what is but One, the wise call by manifold names". Moreover, the rituals conducted by the Aryan priests began to be interpreted differently, at least by some. As the centuries passed, the practice arose of reflective men moving apart from their communities and leading a meditative life. Characteristically, they ceased to think of the gods, or the Cosmos, responding obediently to ritual acts, but taught instead that the link between man and the Cosmos was ". . . a knowledge of the forces symbolically present in the ritual" (de Bary, 1958, p.25). From the teachings of these sages have come down to us the Upanishads (*upa*: near, *nishad*: seated) implying a teaching given orally to one close enough to hear as it was too sacred to be written down. At the human level, the Upanishadic sages were teaching their disciples to look within in order to realize the unity of all things, and in order to evoke and control the forces latent in man. At the cosmic level, Brahman, as the sacred power implicit in ritual acts, became Brahman, the all enveloping, all sustaining power upholding the universe. That is, the whole cosmos was seen as a sacrifice on the part of the Supreme Deity. So from a polytheistic view, Indians were moving towards their now characteristically monistic view--that is, a view in which reality is, in the final analysis, undivided.

By the time the Upanishads were being set down, that is from about the ninth or tenth centuries B.C.E., Indians of Aryan origin had thoroughly assimilated a number of originally Dravidian ideas, most notably the ideas of reincarnation--the periodic return into bodily form of the human spirit--and karma--the law of action and reaction, under which the consequences of one's actions return, precisely weighed, appropriately timed, in order to educate the reincarnating 'jiva', or individuality, and awaken all his powers. In addition the Dravidian mother goddess had been widely accepted under diverse names and in various cults, some benign and graciously devotional, others quite bizarre and violent. Gradually, too, a Dravidian fertility god had undergone a transformation, merged with the Aryan storm-god Rudra, giving rise to the widespread cult of Shiva, the Great Yogi, whose severe austerities and profound meditation were seen as sustaining the whole world. Simultaneously, there was growing up around Vishnu, a lesser solar deity of Vedic times, a great feeling of devotion. Insights into the loving, upholding power of the Supreme Deity were associated with Vishnu. Many local deities were explained by priests to the villagers as commendable attempts to reach up to Vishnu, and so their worship was assimilated to this growing cult.

In these and many other ways the simple polytheism of the nomadic Aryans and the complex beliefs of the civilized Dravidians combined in the Indian environment by about the sixth century B.C.E. to give rise to the incredible diversity known to the world as Hinduism.

This compressed historical outline may possibly have raised more questions than it has answered. It would be as well, therefore, to pause at this point, and using a dictionary of comparative religion, or a good glossary, consolidate the terms used, and with the help of a straightforward history of religions, ensure that the emergence of the Hindu faith is clear at least in outline. It will be observed that a number of terms and ideas introduced above are not listed for consolidation. These terms and ideas are those which will be gathered up later and explored more fully.

Aryan  
Dravidian  
Brahman  
Brahmanism  
Vedas  
Rg-Veda  
Indra  
Varuna  
Agni  
Rudra  
Upanishads  
Polytheism  
Pantheism  
Monotheism  
Monism

The above comments indicate some features of the transition from Brahmanism to Hinduism, without delineating the beliefs and practices of the former. While it is an understanding of traditional and modern Hinduism that is principally sought, the student would find it rewarding to consult de Bary's *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. 1, Chapters I and III, for a brief commentary on Brahmanism and well selected extracts from the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The same historical background is systematically presented by Ling (1968, pp.25-35 and 48-57) and by Smart (1971, pp. 81-97 and 121-129).

## 2. DIVERSITY IN HINDUISM

Hinduism is a religion of almost unlimited diversity. It is the faith of hundreds of millions of village people who, aware of

the teaching of 'One only, without a second', nevertheless generally address their devotions to local deities, bringing simple offerings of food or flowers to temple or shrine, giving homage and asking for the gifts and assurances needed by all human beings. They recognize the local deity--or some more widely acclaimed member of the Hindu pantheon--as merely a manifestation of the One, but as a manifestation they comprehend and can respond to. So a father may, for example, ask Ganesa for wisdom in a crisis or for help for a son sitting examinations, or the women may turn to Parvati, the consort or *shakti* of Shiva, as the Great Mother and source of strength in time of family troubles. By contrast, the learned philosopher, while approving every form of genuine devotion as valid and worthwhile, is likely to assert that the abstract reaching out to the One in all things is the highest form of worship. So while the philosopher or the yogi sees the personal self as a sacrifice to be offered in order that the One be realized, the village people may be making token offerings of grain to the beings they see as having seen them through the hazards of the seasons. "With this nourish ye the Shining Ones" is a traditional utterance, acknowledging the Devas (or angels) as unseen, cooperating forces in Nature, links between this world and the unseen worlds. Different levels of worship are not only tolerated but seen as necessary, as has been made clear by the distinguished scholar-statesman, Professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, perhaps the most effective exponent of modern Hinduism to the west. In a lecture delivered at Oxford in 1927, he stated (1927, p. 24):

"Hindu thought believes in the evolution of our knowledge of God. We have to vary continually our notions of God until we pass beyond all notions into the heart of the reality itself, which our ideas endeavour to report. Hinduism does not distinguish ideas of God as true and false, adopting one particular idea as the standard for the whole human race. It accepts the obvious fact that mankind seeks its goal of God at various levels and in various directions and feels sympathy with every stage of the search. The same God expresses itself at one stage as power, at another as personality, at a third as all-comprehensive spirit, just as the same forces which put forth the green leaves also cause the crimson flowers to grow. We do not say that the crimson flowers are all the truth and the green leaves are all false. Hinduism accepts all religious notions as facts and arranges them in the order of their more or less intrinsic significance. The bewildering polytheism of the masses and the uncompromising montheism of the classes are for the Hindu the expressions of one and the same force at different levels. Hinduism insists on our working steadily upwards and improving our knowledge of God. 'The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God; then come the

worshippers of the incarnations like Rama, Krsna, Buddha; below them are those who worship ancestors, deities and sages, and lowest of all are the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits.'"

In personal and social usage, too, Hinduism encompasses great variation. How one passes a well, from whom one may accept water or to whom one may give it, with whom one may speak or eat, where one sits in relation to others at village gatherings--if one sits at all--these and a multiplicity of other social regulations control the lives of Indians today as in past centuries, but differing from village to village, region to region, and of course among classes (*varnas*) and castes (*jatis*) in the one district.

It has been claimed that there is only one element of Hinduism to which all subscribe. Even reincarnation, or karma, or the existence of the Supreme Deity, are rejected by some, yet all venerate the cow. This while true, gives a wrong perspective, for there are common threads, held with simple assurance by the vast majority, and with more comprehension by the educated. It is these common threads we now seek to understand, which brings us very much into line with the approach foreshadowed in Chapter I of the text. There Professor Smith indicates (1965, p. 10ff.) that he is concerned not with ". . .the strange, the bizarre and the fantastic", but with "religion alive", with religious answers to those questions about life which none of us can evade.

### 3. THE HINDU VIEW OF GOD

Although Smith approaches the subject in a different order, it seems necessary at this point to enquire into the Hindu view of God. A careful reading of pages 71 to 75 of the text ("*He Before Whom All Worlds Recoil*") is suggested, with particular attention to the description of the Absolute (Brahman), the Manifested Deity (Ishvara or Bhagavan) and the threefold expression of deity as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

A terse summary should be made, and extended by attempting a comparison between the Hindu Trinity and the Christian Trinity. How close are the correspondences? Were the scriptural writers of the two faiths groping towards the same truth, or are the insights basically different?

In practice, Hindus are drawn to, or more often, brought up in, the worship of one aspect of the Hindu Trinity. Few address themselves to Brahma, but Shiva has many millions of devotees, as has Vishnu. Devotion to the various incarnations of Vishnu is a theme that will be taken up in some detail later.

The attributes of Deity, *sat*, *chit*, *ananda*, should be noted, and the attempt made to relate them to the Hindu Trinity. Also, it may be helpful to ponder in advance how these attributes might be related by Hindus to human nature, in its depths, then compare the tentative conclusions reached with ideas drawn from the discussion which follows (section 2.4).

#### 4. THE HINDU VIEW OF MAN

At this stage it is advisable to study the early part of Smith's outline of Hinduism (pp. 14-25) and to reduce this to a bare summary. He has entered sympathetically into what are traditionally called "The Four Ends of Man", and has summed up their spirit while avoiding technical detail. The student who wishes to extend the concept will find de Bary's *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Vol. 1, Chapters IX to XII an ample source. This material can be used selectively, beginning with the succinct introduction to each chapter, and reading as many or as few of the extracts as are needed.

The ascending scale of human motivations is an interesting concept. The student may be prepared to look at this review of human response to pleasure, worldly success and duty, and the tolerant attitude to their pursuit, and reflect on, firstly, the validity of this approach (is this true of human nature?--is this true in my own case?), and secondly, the possible effects, beneficial and harmful, of this way of looking at things (e.g. is it likely to promote a wise tolerance? or an uncritical self-indulgence?) as seen from the Indian point of view.

Now it becomes necessary to look at *What Men Really Want* (Smith, 1965, pp. 25-32). This passage will immediately be seen to relate to earlier reflections on the attributes of Deity, *sat*, *chit*, *ananda*. The three-page introduction to de Bary's long chapter on *The Fourth End of Man* (1958, pp. 271-273) is useful, too, with, perhaps, a few of the appended extracts.

In order to round out a little the key idea of *Atman*, the innermost spirit in man, the following passage from the Katha Upanishad may be of assistance (Mascaro, trans, 1965, pp. 60, 61):

Know the Atman as Lord of a chariot; and the body as the chariot itself. Know that reason is the charioteer; and the mind indeed is the reins.

The horses, they say, are the senses, and their paths are the objects of sense. When the soul becomes one with the mind and the senses he is called 'one who has joys and sorrows'.

He who has not right understanding and whose mind is never steady is not the ruler of his life, like a bad driver with wild horses.

But he who has right understanding and whose mind is ever steady is the ruler of his life, like a good driver with well-trained horses.

He who has not right understanding, is careless and never pure, reaches not the End of the journey; but wanders on from death to death.

But he who has understanding, is careful and ever pure, reaches the End of the journey, from which he never returns.

The man whose chariot is driven by reason, who watches and holds the reins of his mind, reaches the End of the journey, the supreme everlasting Spirit.

Beyond the senses are their objects, and beyond the objects is the mind. Beyond the mind is pure reason, and beyond reason is the Spirit in man.

Beyond the Spirit in man is the Spirit of the universe, and beyond is Purusha, the Spirit Supreme. Nothing is beyond Purusha: He is the End of the path.

The light of the Atman, the Spirit, is invisible, concealed in all beings. It is seen by the seers of the subtle, when their vision is keen and is clear.

The wise should surrender speech in mind, mind in the knowing self, the knowing self in the Spirit of the universal and the Spirit of the universe in the Spirit of peace.

Awake, arise! Strive for the Highest, and be in the Light! Sages say the path is narrow and difficult to tread, narrow as the edge of a razor.

The Atman is beyond sound and form, without touch and taste and perfume. It is eternal, unchangeable, and without beginning or end: indeed above reasoning. When consciousness of the Atman manifests itself, man becomes free from the jaws of death.

The term 'Purusha' may here be equated with Brahman, the underlying Absolute Self, which is believed to animate the universe, and exist beyond it, within itself.

The Hindu thus sees the nature of Atman as partaking of the nature of Brahman. By learning to identify himself with the deepest element in his nature, the Atman, he believes he is at the same time preparing to enter the consciousness of the Supreme Self. Lest such a belief lead to the equating of Atman and Brahman, however, the sage Shankara wrote:

"Though difference be none, I am of Thee,  
Not Thou, O Lord of me,

For of the Sea is verily the wave,  
Not of the wave the Sea."

##### 5. REINCARNATION AND KARMA

Earlier the Katha Upanishad was quoted: "When consciousness of the Atman manifests itself, man becomes free from the jaws of death." When the Supreme Spirit in man controls all other aspects of his nature, reasons the Hindu, no further births are needed, the person has achieved *moksha*, liberation; he has become the *jivanmukta*, the liberated soul. But before this change has begun in the individual, the *jiva*, or soul, has trodden the path of desire through many lives. He has been submerged in the life of the world, intent upon pleasure, personal achievement, then gradually adding elements of duty, showing a growing sense of responsibility, of community. In the process his emotional nature has grown strong and definite, his mind sharp and combative, but the Atman, the deep spirit-self, has appeared chiefly as desire, not in its true nature. The process by which the Atman grasps, transforms and irradiates the outer personal self, is the strenuous but exhilarating theme of the smaller number of struggle-filled lives, making up, for the Hindu, the path of return.

Turning to Smith's account of reincarnation and karma (pp. 75-80) the concept of karma from a Christian standpoint he may find the notion harsh--especially if considering it against a background of traditional Christianity which tends to confuse absolution with suspension of consequences. Some comments by Radhakrishnan are germane to this theme (1927, p. 53):

"Karma is not a mechanical principle but a spiritual necessity. It is the embodiment of the mind and will of God.---Every act, every thought is weighed in the invisible but universal balance-scales of justice. The day of judgment is not in some remote future, but here and now, and none can escape it. Divine laws cannot be evaded. They are not so much imposed from without as wrought into our natures. Sin is not so much a violation of law as a betrayal of self. We carry with us the whole of our past. It is an ineffaceable record which time cannot



blur nor death erase."

But what of the forgiveness of sins? Radhakrishnan insists that (1927, p. 53-54):

"There is room for repentance and consequent forgiveness on this scheme. The critic who urges that belief in Karma makes religious life, prayer and worship impossible has not a right understanding of it....Of course the Hindu does not look upon prayer as a sort of Aladdin's lamp to produce anything we want. God is not a magician stopping the sun in its course and staying the bullet in its march. But his truth and constancy, his mercy and justice find their embodiment in the implacable working of the moral law. Forgiveness is not a mitigation of God's justice, but only an expression of it. We can insist with unflinching rigour on the inexorability of the moral law and yet believe in the forgiveness of sins. Spiritual growth and experience are governed by laws similar to those which rule the rest of the universe. If we sow to the flesh we shall of the flesh reap corruption. The punishment for a desecrated body is an enfeebled understanding and a darkened soul. If we deliberately fall into sin, shutting our eyes to moral and spiritual light, we may be sure that in God's world sin will find us out and our wilful blindness will land us in the ditch. A just God cannot refuse to any man that which he has earned. The past guilt cannot be wiped away by the atoning suffering of an outward substitute. Guilt cannot be transferred. It must be atoned for through the sorrow entailed by self-conquest. God cannot be bought over and sin cannot be glossed over."

#### 6. *THE FOUR PRINCIPAL YOGAS*

Once an individual has consciously rejected what the world offers as having prior claim over his life, and has firmly turned his face in the direction of his ultimate destiny--in terms of the foregoing discussion he has abandoned the path of desire and turned to the path of renunciation, or path of return--he is faced with the question "How?" Within Hinduism the technique of the spiritual life is designated 'yoga', which may be regarded as the science of union. Yoga, it must be stressed, is not for all, it is for those who are very seriously taking themselves in hand. This is reflected in the moral prerequisites, (Smith, pp. 35-36) which should be quite sufficient to deter those whose motivation is selfish or superficial. The prerequisites are not hard to justify. Hindu teachers of yoga are quite

definite that even the preliminary forms of yoga, conscientiously followed through, increase the powers of the aspirant--powers of concentration, understanding, and will--leading enhanced capacities to achieve selected goals, and to influence others. As is to be expected, the Hindu tradition reasons, bestowal of such opportunities on the morally unfit will lead to great suffering and probably to considerable harm done to themselves and often also to others. As was quoted earlier from the Katha Upanishad, "Sages say the path is narrow and difficult to tread, narrow as the edge of a razor".

Unfortunately there have long existed within Indian tradition schools of yoga in which the goal is a purely personal development. Teachers with some mastery of the ancient disciplines offer instruction intended to develop in the pupil personal magnetism, psychic powers and the capacity to influence others. Some of these schools are quite explicit in discounting the moral preliminaries. Naturally they attract adherents, unaware or heedless of the dangers to which they are exposing themselves.

The four approaches to yoga outlined by Huston Smith are plainly not of this kind. They are the time honoured pathways to self-realization trodden by the few during a hundred and more generations in the life of the Indian people. The existence in India, over thousands of years of wise teachers, of rishis and yogis, the authors of the Upanishads and other sacred texts and of searching commentaries upon them, is testimony to the effectiveness of the yogic tradition.

In the account of *Four Paths to the Goal*, Smith (pp. 32-61) offers us a more lucid and perceptive short account of the four principal yogas than is to be found in comparable books or even in most specialized works on Hinduism. Nevertheless to master all four as fully as they are presented in the text, may place rather too much of a burden on the student--unless time permits and inclination or natural interest is a sufficient prompt in this direction. Probably for most it is sufficient to grasp, and, desirably, record very briefly the rationale of all four, and to attempt a thorough summary of one or two.

It is worth noting at this point that Raja Yoga, aptly described by Huston Smith as "The Way to God through Psychological Exercises", is more traditionally referred to as the Kingly Path to Union, and is thought of as the Yoga of Will. Indeed, the pre-eminence of the will in this discipline has probably already become apparent.

Many questions will have arisen in the mind of the thoughtful student. Are these techniques to be studied simply as "what my brother does"? Or are they to be considered as possibly valid approaches to God from which the Christian may learn? May Hindu yogic techniques be employed in Christian meditation by candidates

for Holy Orders? Perusal of the papers prepared for Unit 2, Meditation, indicates that the authors answer this question very firmly in the affirmative. Perhaps we should take into account at this stage, that over a very long period of time, with some notable exceptions, Christian worship and discipline have generally been marked by ardent praise and aspiration, exhortation and reasoned argument and an almost complete absence of technique. Thus, whether one's approach is chiefly devotional, or more philosophical or expressed mainly through good works, or whether it hinges around the disciplined and meditative life, it is very likely that one has things to learn from the ancient and diverse yogic pathways of our Hindu brethren.

Students wishing to pursue and extend this aspect of our enquiry into Hinduism may of course branch off into the study of yoga, as for example through *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, but they might be better advised to follow it up, in the first instance at least, via the carefully charted directions in the above-mentioned papers on meditation.

#### 7. DHARMA

Dharma is one of the crucial concepts in Hinduism. The word itself is almost untranslatable, requiring an array of English equivalents to encompass the many facets of its meaning. It derives from the Sanscrit root 'dhr', to hold or sustain, and in the words of Radhakrishnan (1927, p. 56), means "...that which holds a thing and maintains it in being". Radhakrishnan continues:

"Every form of life, every group of men has its dharma, which is the law of its being. Dharma or virtue is conformity with the truth of things; adharma or vice is opposition to it. Moral evil is disharmony with the truth which encompasses and controls the world."

Duty, righteousness, virtue, destiny, one's intended role in the scheme of things, one's appointed place in life--all of these are aspects of the idea of dharma. Thus in an Indian scripture a personification of deity warns his devotee (quoted, de Bary, Vol. 1, 1958, p. 284):

"Better one's own dharma which one may be able to fulfil but imperfectly, than the dharma of others which is more easily accomplished. Better is death in the fulfilment of one's own dharma. To adopt the dharma of others is perilous..."

At a social level, Hinduism applies the pervasive idea of dharma through the form of social organization known in the west as the caste system. The assumption underlying this system is that individuals naturally fall into types according to their accumulated experience and achievement in other lives, and are guided into incarnation within families and social groups appropriate to their level of development and karmic needs. Thus, the circumstances of a person's birth are seen by the Hindu as the reflection of his or her dharma for that lifetime. This justification, it will be realized, leaving aside whether it may be true in all, some, few, or no cases, will itself be a force contributing to a high level of social conservatism and even social rigidity.

The earliest record of the four broad classes of Indian society occurs in a passage in the Rg Veda. There the Supreme Deity, referred to as 'Purusha', is seen to have gathered the characteristics of earlier Vedic deities. This passage is highly significant in that it conveys the idea of ritual sacrifice as the origin of both the universe, and the four classes. Ascribed such a lofty source, it is scarcely to be wondered that the hierarchy of classes was accepted so totally. The passage referred to states in part (quoted by de Bary, Vol. 1, 1958, pp. 14-15):

"Thousand-headed Purusha, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed--he, having pervaded the earth on all sides, still extends ten fingers beyond it.

Purusha alone is all this--whatever has been and whatever is going to be. Further, he is the lord of immortality and also of what grows on account of food.

Such is his greatness; greater, indeed, than this is Purusha. All creatures constitute but one quarter of him, his three quarters are the immortal in the heaven.

When they divided Purusha, in how many different portions did they arrange him? What became of his mouth, what of his two arms? What were his two thighs and his two feet called?

His mouth became the brahman; his two arms were made into the rajanya; his two thighs the vaishyas; from his two feet the shudra was born.

The moon was born from the mind, from the eye the sun was born; from the mouth Indra and Agni, from the breath (prana) the wind (vayu) was born.

From the navel was the atmosphere created,  
from the head the heaven issued forth;  
from the two feet was born the earth and  
the quarters (the cardinal directions)  
from the ear. Thus did they fashion the  
worlds.

Seven were the enclosing sticks in this  
sacrifice, thrice seven were the fire-  
sticks made, when the gods, performing  
the sacrifice, bound down Purusha, the  
sacrificial victim."

Historically the Indian system of social organization is now seen to have arisen from the accommodation to one another of the Aryan and Dravidian peoples. The priestly class among the dominant Aryans, the Brahmins (or Brahmanas, or Brahmans), the ruling, administrative and warrior class, the Kshatriyas, and the organizers of production and superior craftsmen, the Vaishyas, became the three leading classes of India under the Aryans. As was pointed out earlier, some of the leading members of the vanquished Dravidian community were admitted to the second, the Kshatriya social class, but the vast majority formed a fourth class, the Shudras, the followers or menials. As Dravidian society was already highly stratified as regards rank, and specialized as regards productive functions, the Shudras consisted of a great diversity of groups who kept very much to themselves. These groups, or 'jatis' (jati means birth), became more differentiated and self contained as time went on, so that status, livelihood and all forms of social interaction came to be determined by a person's jati. Most of all, marriage had to be arranged within the jati, and one took one's food only with members of this group.

Gradually the formation of such in-turned endogamous groups gathered momentum also within the higher social classes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. As a consequence the jati, or caste, became the characteristic form of social organization throughout India, while the varnas, or classes, remained a group of broad reference points by which the jatis were ranked. The term varna means literally colour. Some writers see the distinction between the fair-skinned Aryans and the dark Dravidians as the origin of the term--that is, the varnas were primarily socially determined. Others (e. g. Karve, 1968, pp. 50 ff) argue that in Vedic times it meant "a class", and acquired "colour" as a secondary meaning because of the colour differences among the four major classes.

By the twentieth century caste (jati) differentiation had reached the point where there were some 3000 separate endogamous groups in India. In some places, however, the system became simpler, with only the highest groups, the various Brahmin jatis, and the

lowest, the so-called untouchables, retaining unchanged status (Hinnells and Sharpe, 1972, p. 129). In between, while distinctions remained, they were less crucial and there was some individual and especially caste mobility within the social hierarchy.

The group referred to above as untouchables numbered some 50 millions at independence (1947). They were the least prestigious members of the Hindu community and, in theory, outside the varna system altogether. Sometimes they were called 'panchamas', meaning 'fifth estate'. Officially they were known as 'scheduled castes'. Today, however, they are known as 'Harijans', a term meaning 'children of God' bestowed on them by M. K. Gandhi, who deplored their ostracism by Hindu society. Untouchability has now been abolished by law but not surprisingly the Harijans have copied those above them on the social scale and have become divided into a variety of jatis, separating themselves off from one another and imposing rankings as between higher rated and lower rated Harijans. So the reforms attempted by the government of modern India encounter, there, as in the wider society, the entrenched resistance of inbuilt habit among the very people it is most concerned to help. The caste system as a whole has no legal basis under the constitution of the Republic of India. It is weakening perceptively in the cities but remains very strong in village India.

Two lines of enquiry which might be of interest to the student are the origins of untouchability (which groups of people were re-fused varna standing by Indian society? What occupations are associated with untouchability?. . .) and the way in which Harijans in enormous numbers have recently sought escape from their plight through embracing Buddhism.

Against the outline traced in above, the account of caste given by Smith (pp. 66-71) may profitably be explored. This account will be found especially strong in its attempt to give a reasoned justification for the idea of social differentiation as originally applied, and for its concise statement of the perversions which grew up over the centuries.

Caste, however, is not the only form of social organization deriving from the all important idea of dharma. Dharma, in the sense of one's role or duty in life, also influences the pattern of each life from birth, through childhood and maturity to extreme old age. This is the pattern of the *ashramas*, the stages of life.

The four stages of life are very well outlined by Smith (pp. 61-66) but it should be noted that not all Indians follow this traditional pattern. It applies only to those whose jati places them within one of the three higher varnas. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are known as 'the twice born', because the boys or young

men of these classes are entitled to pass through the ceremony of receiving the sacred thread, the mark of the student, or brahmacharya. The ritual bestowal of the thread is the second birth, or initiation, by which the young enter formally into the first of the four stages. But even among the young of the three upper varnas, many do not pass through the thread ceremony because of parental disinclination, often, in the cities, arising from the adoption of a westernized, non-religious outlook.

It is worth reflecting on these Indian ideals and whether they have anything to offer western society. In particular how does the ethos of studentship differ between the Indian and western social systems? And how does the final stage compare with prevailing western ideas of retirement?

#### 8. SACRED WRITINGS OF THE HINDUS

The most revered of the Hindu scriptures are the Vedas and the Upanishads. Together they are described as 'sruti', that which is heard, implying direct revelation. 'Veda', meaning knowledge or wisdom, is the name given to each of four collections of hymns and other expressions of worship brought to India by the Aryans. Best known is the *Rg Veda* (Rg=praise), a huge compilation of hymns to the Aryan gods. The *Rg Veda* is about equal in length to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. The other three Vedas contain hymns, liturgical directions and formulae, invocations, and a variety of other utterances perhaps more appropriately described as charms or incantations. The Vedas are the most venerated of all scriptures but are less read and probably less understood than many of the other writings. It may be advisable at this stage to refer back to the introduction to Brahmanism (2.1 above) and to re-read, and perhaps extend the selections from the Vedas in the works recommended.

Ranking with the Vedas as sruti are the Upanishads, also discussed earlier. Again and again the Upanishadic teachers reiterated what came to be their principal themes, as, for example, in the Mandukya Upanishad:

"There is nothing that is not Spirit. The personal self is the impersonal Spirit."

"The only proof of His existence is union with Him. The world disappears in Him. He is the peaceful, the good, the one without a second."

And in the Svetasvatara Upanishad:

"When a man knows God, he is free: his sorrows have an end, and birth and death are no more."

When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where the power of the All is, and man has all: for he is one with the ONE."

Altogether there are 108 Upanishads, 12 of which are classed as the major Upanishads. They are not systematic treatises, but intermingled accounts of mystical experience, philosophic comment and lively didactic dialogue.

The remaining scriptures, those regarded as less directly inspired, are designated 'smriti', that which is remembered. They include two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. The former title, meaning 'Great India', is understood to mean 'The Great War of India', and tells in overwhelming detail the story of rival branches of a noble family contesting the throne of a kingdom encompassing much of the north of the subcontinent. Interpolated into the *Mahabharata* hundreds of years after the gathering together of the many episodes of that narrative, is *The Bhagavad Gita* or *The Song of the Lord*. The Bhagavad Gita is written in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, the third of five brothers, the Pandavas, the eldest of whom, Yudhisthira, was the rightful claimant for the throne, and Krishna, Arjuna's friend and kinsman. The conversations between Arjuna and Krishna are depicted as taking place just prior to the crucial battle between the Pandavas and their enemies, the Kurus. It tells of the distress of this greatest of warriors, Arjuna, on confronting the opposing army and beholding within its ranks friends, relatives and even revered teachers. The theme of the dialogue is Krishna's exposition to Arjuna of his dharma as a Kshatriya, which is to fight in a just cause, and of the understanding of life which supports such a notion of duty. This scripture, although technically smriti, as a part of the Mahabharata, is a consummately skilful summing up of Hindu wisdom to that time, and has become the most beloved, and the most known and quoted of Indian scriptures, at least among educated Indians and interested Westerners. Indeed it has been claimed that if there is time to make a close study of only one scriptural source, it is the indispensable Gita that will most reward the student.

The Bhagavad Gita is thus a great classic, which should be read at least in part. No brief summary can be a substitute for direct acquaintance, but one of the themes is of such immense importance that before rounding off this brief outline of Indian scriptures, it is necessary to draw attention to it. This is the doctrine of avatars expounded to Arjuna in the fourth of the 18 discourses making up the Bhagavad Gita. An *avatar*, sometimes *avatara*, is an incarnation of deity (the word means, literally, descent) and refers to the teaching that the God Vishnu takes earthly form from time to time when the needs of the world become grave.



In the Gita, after proclaiming the Yoga of Knowledge and the Yoga of Action, Krishna is depicted as declaring to Arjuna that he had taught this Yoga to the first of the line of great teachers, the Rishis, and that, after being passed on over many generations, it became lost, so that now, he, Krishna, was that day proclaiming it to Arjuna, and so restoring it to the world. Arjuna's bewilderment at this staggering claim drew from Krishna a forthright statement of what is now known as the doctrine of avatars:

The Blessed Lord said:

"Many births have been left behind by Me and by thee, O Arjuna. I know them all, but thou knowest not thine, O Parantapa.

Though unborn, the imperishable SELF, and also the Lord of all beings, brooding over nature, which is Mine own, yet I am born through My own Power.

Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, and there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then I Myself come forth;

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness, I am born from age to age.

He who thus knoweth My divine birth and action, in its essence, having abandoned the body, cometh not to birth again, but cometh unto Me, O Arjuna.

Freed from passion, fear and anger, filled with Me, taking refuge in Me, purified in the fire of wisdom, many have entered into My Being.

However men approach Me, even so do I welcome them, for the path men take from every side is Mine, O Partha." (Fourth Discourse, verses 5-11; A. Besant translation)

The student with limited time who wishes to pursue the Bhagavad Gita a little further is advised to read Discourse 11 in which Krishna is presented as revealing his divine form to Arjuna. Discourse 18 portrays Arjuna, no longer rebellious, but reconciled to his dharma, receptive to the teacher's final message: (Prabhavananda and Isherwood trans., p. 129):

"Lay down all duties  
In me, your refuge,  
Fear no longer,

For I will save you  
From sin and bondage."

Arjuna responds:

"By your grace, O Lord, my delusions  
have been dispelled. My mind stands  
firm. Its doubts are ended. I will  
do your bidding."

The Mahabharata resumes with the Battle of Kurukshetra (Field of Kuru), in which the Kurus were all killed. The five Pandavas survived the carnage, and Yudhisthira, the eldest, ascended the throne. Interestingly the term Kurukshetra has come to be applied to the battle of the soul, as the wavering mind (Arjuna) seeks to grasp and know the Inner Ruler (Krishna) in order to be resolute and bring into submission the errant emotions (the sons of Dritarashtra, the Kurus) and thus achieve integration, or self-realization (the rule of the true King).

The other great Indian epic is *The Ramayana*. Although not as long or complicated as *The Mahabharata*, it is nevertheless an intricate and discursive narrative which raises a number of crucial moral and ethical issues. It deals with the turbulent lives of King Rama, also acclaimed and adored as an avatar of Vishnu, and his queen, Sita, Rama and Sita are India's models of royal conduct, the archetypal husband and wife.

The Code of Manu, written down in the first or second centuries of the Christian era is the most important of the Hindu books of law. It is traditionally attributed to Manu, the first man, appointed by Brahma to regulate the affairs of humanity. The Code of Manu sets out the duties of the various groups within Indian society, and specifies the penalties for transgressors. This formulation of the law, and subsequent restatements of it have been profoundly influential in shaping Indian society over the centuries.

Among the masses of less educated people the ardent worship of Vishnu as Krishna or as Rama is widespread, as is the re-telling of the exploits of the other heroes of the great epics, many of the incidents being re-enacted in drama and sacred dance. Supplementing these traditions for the masses are not the mystical-philosophic insights of the Upanishads but the huge collection of folk stories known as the Puranas. These stories pass on from generation to generation and are well known and valued. Many of them appear to be deeply symbolical, although this may not always be appreciated by narrator or listener. Indeed it has been suggested that the more strange and even bizarre the reader finds the story, the more determined he should be in seeking its hidden depths.

## 9. *THE HINDU RENAISSANCE*

Indian religious and cultural life may well have reached its lowest ebb in the 18th century. Politically the power of the Muslim rulers, the Mughals, was waning and in some regions Hindu leaders were becoming assertive, but in other places the rivalry between the French and English East India Companies dominated Indian public affairs. British overlordship of vast areas of the sub-continent was to follow, and to be succeeded in turn by Britain's absorption of India into the Empire (1858). Thus 18th and early 19th century Indians had abundant evidence of the superiority of European military and political prowess, and of, especially, British commercial and industrial power. Coupled with these all-too-obvious advantages of the Europeans came an aggressive missionary religion proclaimed by sincere and ardent, if somewhat narrow and abrasive emissaries, insistent men whose basic premise was the Christian monopoly over truth and salvation. Nor were the British in India noteworthy for humility, or even tact. Hindus, long the subjects of Muslim rulers, had next to acknowledge the colour-conscious British as their lords and masters. The result was an accelerating loss of confidence on the part of large numbers of Indians in their own people, culture and religion. Indeed, there was much to be ashamed of. A long decline in cultural vigour and social cohesiveness had left a debilitated people--practising but rarely understanding their religion, out of touch with their great books, minutely divided off from one another socially, and governed by complex rules and customs which the Europeans saw as absurd and even grotesque. Once Indians began to see with European eyes some distortions of caste--as in one region requiring untouchables to trail branches behind them to cleanse the dust of the imprint of their casteless feet, or as in another place, allowing untouchables to pass through village centres only between mid-morning and mid-afternoon when the danger of contamination from their unclean shadows would be diminished--many swung right around and became as fully westernized as they could manage. Other social customs, now also seen in a new light, strengthened this reaction. Child marriage, victimization of widows, including child-widows, and even, in Bengal, widow-burning, and the depressed condition of Indian women as a whole, aroused western criticism and, by association, criticism and repudiation by many western educated Hindus.

This response to European power, efficiency and social criticism, was not, however the only one. There were some, who, falling back on India's ancient heritage, rejected equally the dilute culture of 19th century India and the culture of the European invader. Others chose a more moderate course, seeking the reform and restatement of Indian tradition, and the incorporation of helpful elements of western culture, notably science, mathematics and technology and, of course, the English language.

Both groups, the conservative Hindus and the moderate reformers, found gifted spokesmen. From the second quarter of the 19th century there appeared a succession of outstanding leaders, all intent upon the uplift of India and Indians, albeit contrasting dramatically in their ideals and programs. Considerations of space preclude a comprehensive presentation of this development here, but as the text does not take up the question of the Hindu Renaissance, a brief outline and some suggested lines of further enquiry are included.

Books referred to earlier by Smart (1971), Ling (1968), and Hinnells and Sharpe (1972), will be found especially helpful. The second volume of de Bary's *Sources* is devoted to India in the modern period and contains some excellent illustrative extracts. Perhaps best of all is the hard to obtain study by Sarma (1944). Comparable, but a little harder to read is a more recent (1964) study of modern Indian thinkers by Naravane.

Foremost among the revivalists, the advocates of "back-to-our-cultural roots", was Swami Dyananda Saraswati (1824-83), scholar, author, yogi, orator, political organizer and puritanical reformer. Dyananda saw all that came after the Vedas as accretion and distortion, rejecting alike recent and medieval Indian writings, western influence and even the epics, the Gita, and the Upanishads. A towering and forceful figure, he gathered his following into a movement known as the Arya Samaj (1875), which grew to several millions in strength after his death. Trumpeting forth his call of 'Back to the Vedas', Dyananda insisted upon their entire veracity, even their infallibility, and denounced ideas and practices which had arisen since Vedic times. Idol worship, animal sacrifice and ancestor worship were prime targets of his onslaught--also pilgrimages, priestcraft, temple offerings, and especially child marriages and the entire practice of caste distinction. His oratorical power and reforming zeal accomplished much, but he had to engage in extraordinary feats of mental gymnastics in order to 'find' the germs of modern science in the Vedas, so that the more sophisticated of modern Indians remained unconvinced.

The student interested to follow up links between Swami Dyananda and the Theosophical Movement will be intrigued by some brief references in H. S. Olcott's *Old Diary Leaves* and those also, perhaps, in *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*. Also important as a major protagonist of extreme conservative Hinduism was the Bombay political leader B. I. Tilak.

Among the moderate reformers, the first, often described as the initiator of the Renaissance, was Ram Mohun Roy (1774-1833). Ram Mohun was a versatile scholar who achieved competence in Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Greek and Latin as well as his native Bengali, his driving motivation being to study the great scriptures of the world in their original form in order to see whether, in fact, they did

all proclaim the same fundamental message. He concluded that they did. He founded the Brahma Samaj (1828) based chiefly on the Upanishads but drawing heavily on other scriptures, and surprisingly, resembling Protestant Christian liturgical patterns in its form of service, or meeting. Ram Mohun also exerted influence as a newspaper editor and as the most dedicated and successful of the Indian opponents of 'sati', the practice of 'voluntary' self-immolation expected of high caste Bengali widows.

The tone of the Brahma Samaj was too intellectual and eclectic for it ever to become a mass movement, although at one point its membership approached half a million. It was later led by a remarkable man from a remarkable family--Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), one of whose younger sons, Rabindranath (1861-1941) took up an independent stance and contributed to India's deepening cultural life through his poetry (Nobel Prize 1913), his novels, plays, operas and songs, as well as through his religious and political writings and his 40 years as India's best known modern educational pioneer and reformer.

In introducing his comments on Tagore, Naravane (1964, p. 111) states:

"Gandhi and Tagore are the two eyes of modern India's soul. They are the two banks that have determined the course and current of Indian thought in our age."

Certainly M. K. Gandhi (1862-1948) also exerted a formative influence on the course of modern Indian history. From his earliest intervention in the struggle for independence during World War I to his assassination while pleading for Hindu-Muslim cooperation a year after partition, Gandhi's simple insistence on the justice of India's cause and the right of the masses passively to obstruct foreign rule, kept him constantly in the forefront of the political struggle and left him at the end a martyr and symbol of India's aspirations for nationhood. All this time Gandhi sought to find and express an essentially Indian quality of life, scripturally through the Bhagavad Gita, socially through his opposition to caste divisions and his compassionate concern for the untouchables whom he renamed Harijans (Children of God), and economically through his enthusiastic, if uncritical, espousal of handcrafts as the means of keeping India a nation of villages.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society and close friend and co-worker with Bishop Leadbeater, was the tenacious opponent of the methods employed by Gandhi in his campaign for freedom for India. By the time Gandhi had appeared on the Indian scene (1915), Mrs. Besant (1847-1933) had already applied her immense talents to the cause of Indian

cultural and religious revival and reform. She had lectured extensively on the glories of India's past, and especially of Indian wisdom-literature, had mastered Sanscrit and translated the Bhagavad Gita into compelling and dramatic English. Again and again, during the last decade of the 19th century and the years leading to the Great War, Mrs. Besant had expounded what she saw to be the occult meaning of the ancient classics, in this way bringing to light works important in their own right, and also using them as a means of restoring the confidence of Indians in their own cultural roots. Turning her oratorical and literary gifts to politics in pursuit of independence for India within a framework of continuing Anglo-Indian association and accord, Mrs. Besant drew an eager response from Indians. The war-harrassed British Government, however, responded with impatience and anger. In 1917, on being released from a period of internment, Mrs. Besant was elected President of the Indian National Congress. This, however, was the pinnacle of her political influence. In her opposition to Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns, Mrs. Besant was resolute, declaring that independence achieved by non-lawful means boded ill for the future. As a consequence, her support and standing among Indians fell away as Gandhi's grew.

In contrast to all of these contributors to India's revival stand two Hindu saints, similar in that they remained quietly in their own surroundings, pursued their own yogic paths, taught their immediate disciples and conversed quietly with visitors.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86) sought God by the path of Bhakti, especially through the Divine Mother, whose priest he was in a temple near Calcutta. Entering, finally, he believed, into her immediate presence in a transport of religious ecstasy, Ramakrishna went on to explore what lay at the heart of other faiths. God, he concluded, from his attempts at Muslim and Christian worship, was accessible to the devotee by any of these approaches. Ramakrishna's telling anecdotes and parables have been collected and published. A few have been included by Smith (1965, pp. 86-88). Ramakrishna's principal disciple, Vivekananda (1863-1902), travelled extensively, popularising Indian philosophy and yoga in Europe and the U. S. Back in India, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission to promote religious and social reform.

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), although less well known than Ramakrishna, has also been claimed as one of India's modern saints. Beginning his life as a renunciate at 17, evidently transformed by a deep religious experience, he entered into a meditative life. His constant theme was the realization of the Atman, and his singleness of mind, silent dignity and total dedication deeply impressed those who met him. Many claimed great benefits in coping with life simply through having sat for a while in his presence. Ramana's influence, demonstrating as it did the continuing potency of Indian

tradition, spread far beyond his ashram and reinforced the resurgent confidence of the Indian people.

Other contributions might be noted, those for example of Mahadev Govind Ranade, a gentle and scholarly advocate of moderation in reform and nation-building, or Sri Aurobindo Ghose, a one-time revolutionary who became a yogi, recluse and prolific writer on yoga, Indian culture and modern science; or again, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a fiery nationalist author and poet. Sufficient has been said, however, to indicate that the ancient tradition of Hinduism has experienced, or perhaps more correctly, is still in the process of undergoing, a many sided restatement and renewal, rendering accessible to modern Indians the essence of a great and potent tradition.





## CHAPTER 3

## BUDDHISM

In the following commentary it will not be necessary to supplement the text as fully as was the case with Hinduism. Some additional historical and expository matter will be included, especially in relation to Buddhism outside India, but for the most part Smith's thoughtful commentary on basic Buddhist ideas serves our purposes very well.

1. *SIDDARTHA GAUTAMA, THE BUDDHA*

Of the time of Buddha (563-483 B.C.E.) and the preceding hundred years or so, a historian of religion has commented (Hutchison, 1969, pp. 85-86):

"It was an age whose importance to the history of religions can hardly be overstated--out of the Axis age emerged new men, new ideas, and new directions for humanity."

In Judaea, Jeremiah (c. 650-580 B.C.E.), Deutero-Isaiah (mid C6 B.C.E.), and Ezekiel (625-570 B.C.E.); in Greece, Pythagoras (2nd half C6 B.C.E.) in Iran, Zarathushtra (c. 628-551 B.C.E.); in China, Lao Tzu (1st half C6 B.C.E.) and K'ung Fu-tzu (i.e. Confucius, c. 551-479 B.C.E.); and in India, Buddha, Mahavira (540-468 B.C.E.- the founder of Jainism), and possibly Krishna (late C6 B.C.E.- not the Krishna of the 'Gita') proclaimed the way of holiness in different languages and images, each according to the needs and urgencies of his cultural context.

Certainly in India there were new men, new ideas and new directions--and at a time when they were desperately needed. A recent description by a modern Buddhist delineates the background to the life of Buddha so well that he is here quoted at some length (Jinarajadasa, 1948, pp. 31-34):

"Every village and hamlet had its lecture hall, where travelling philosophers were made welcome and entertained, and much all revelled in the keen disputations. All who had any new theory to propound, men and women, old or young, were equally honoured, for on this platform they were equal as seekers of the Truth.

Many of the philosophical schools had nicknames that have come down to us; there were "the hair-splitters", "the eel-wrigglers", "the eternalists



semi-eternalists, extensionists, fortuitous-originationists", "the wanderers", "the Friends", and so on without number. There is hardly a phase of modern philosophic thought- whether of Bruno, Kant, Nietzsche, or any other philosopher you like to mention--hardly a phase of scepticism and agnosticism, which does not find its prototype in those far off days in India.

Yet all was not well in India at this time, the sixth century B.C. A restlessness was everywhere manifest in the world of thought. Orthodoxy held rigidly bound in incredibly wearisome ritual alike priest, warrior and merchant. Slowly the priestly Brahman was asserting his right, as the intermediary between Gods and men, to be higher than the other two "twice-born" castes; and many a Brahman, having little sanctity but much caste, exercised ruthlessly his priestly power to oppress those beneath him. A rigid ecclesiasticism held men bound in caste duties and ceremonial, and originality and individual initiative had little chance under the all-powerful routine. It seemed, too, as though the sages of old had canvassed all mysteries, human and divine, and nothing more remained to be said; and yet there was still something lacking. Philosophy after philosophy was studied, and yet there was felt the need for something, though none knew what. It was the period of travail of the soul of the nation, and the general conditions were not unlike what is found in Western lands in the twentieth century now.

Restless as were men's minds, there was something that was almost more noticeable still. Pitiably in many ways was the condition of the non-Aryan members of the nation, the millions who were not "twice-born" like the priest, warrior and merchant. Philosophy and the higher aspects of religion were not for the low-caste millions of men and women. The Veda could not be heard by them, nor were they taught "the Secret", that the human soul was the Divine Soul of the Universe. They could come merely to the outskirts of the sacred knowledge, the priceless possession of the Aryan Hindus. The Vedas would be polluted were they to be known by a low-caste man, a Shudra; and as to those without any caste at all, the Pariahs, they were thought of as no part of the Hindu community at all. Hence terrible threats of reprisal against any low-caste

man who should dare to put himself on an equality with the twice-born."

Smith (pp. 90-101) gives an excellent brief biography of the Buddha ('The Man Who Woke Up'), and ponders sympathetically the Buddha's transforming impact upon people ('The Silent Sage'). Biographies and analytical studies of this astounding teacher abound, so that in seeking to extend the picture given in the text the problem is one of selection. Two easily obtained accounts are especially recommended. *The Light of Asia*, written by Sir Edwin Arnold in 1879, and translated into almost every European and many Asian languages, is an elaborate poetic biography skilfully presenting a Buddha of great nobility and tenderness. According to Mr. C. Jinarajadasa, fourth world president of the Theosophical Society and himself a Buddhist and a writer on Buddhism, Arnold's long poem was the only work he had found in a western tongue to convey the reality of Buddhism as he understood it (Jinarajadasa, 1948, pp. 20-23). Some passages from Arnold's monumental poem might profitably be contrasted with the cool level of exposition in Marie Byles's portrait, *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha* (1957). Chapters XII ('Miracles and Healing') and XVIII ('Conversion of a Robber') may be sufficient to convey the reverent but dispassionate tone of the latter work. The main reason for such a marked contrast will become more fully apparent later when the approaches of the northern and southern schools of Buddhism are considered. Each book is thoroughly grounded in Buddhist scriptures, but in different selections from among the many available.

## 2. THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Here again Smith (pp. 109-123) has entered admirably into the spirit of Buddhism. His biographical narrative has sufficient power, that on being told that the Buddha saw life as characterized by sorrow, or suffering, the reader is less inclined to experience an initial withdrawal from the apparent pessimism of this position. Nor, on being confronted with Buddha's drastic solution to the problem of desire-caused suffering, namely, the extinction of desire, is the reader so likely to regard this as advocacy of the extinction of life itself. Manifestly, the Buddha was intensely, vividly alive. So the power of one of humanity's great spiritual teachers, after 25 centuries, calls us to careful reflection on the rationale of his teaching, the 'dhamma', and especially of its core, the Four Noble Truths, noting particularly the technique offered in the fourth of these, namely the Eightfold Path.

The student with a particular interest in yoga, or in the experiential side of religion as a whole, may find it a fruitful exercise to compare the eight steps of Buddha's path with the older technique of Raja Yoga (Smith pp. 51-61) on which the Eightfold Path is said to be based. The comparison could well yield useful

insights into the Buddha's characteristic approach to religious reform.

Before proceeding to comment on basic Buddhist doctrines, it may be as well to clarify the source of the characteristic terms in which Buddhist ideas are expressed. *Pali* is the name given to the language in which the earliest scriptural writings, still extant, were recorded. It was one of several dialects making up what may be termed 'Middle Indo-Aryan'., the spoken language of Indians in the time of Buddha, which derived from the original Sanscrit. Interestingly, it was the dialect of Western India, not of the north east, the home of the Buddha, where 'Magadhi' was spoken. Pali was the language into which the scriptures were transcribed as Buddhism spread across northern India. The connection of Pali with Sanscrit is very plain in some of the key terms. Thus we have the Sanscrit 'karma', and the Pali 'kamma', the Sanscrit 'dharma' and the Pali 'dhamma', the Sanscrit 'Nirvana' and the Pali 'Nibbana'. It will be found that most writers on Buddhism employ the Pali, but a substantial number prefer the Sanscrit terms. There is some historical justification for this as some very early translations into Sanscrit took place, but it has to be borne in mind that not all corresponding terms are identical in meaning. For instance, 'dhamma' is not identical with the Sanscrit 'dharma', the meaning having shifted in the direction of 'the Truth', 'the Doctrine', and even 'the body of Buddhist teaching'.

### 3. BASIC BUDDHIST CONCEPTS

Huston Smith opens his discussion of basic Buddhist concepts (pp. 123-132) with an examination of the idea of Nirvana. Fortunately he dismisses the idea once held by many western scholars that Nirvana (or Nibbana), the state of consciousness of the totally liberated being according to both Hindu and Buddhist thought, is to be regarded as the mere extinction of desire and pain. "Negatively" he continues (p. 125), "Nirvana is the state in which the faggots of private desire have been completely consumed and everything that restricts the boundless life has died. Affirmatively it is that boundless life itself." And of course it cannot be encompassed by thought or expressed in mere words. As succinctly summed up by Smith (p. 126), "Our final ignorance is to suppose that our final destiny is presently conceivable." The same point is made in Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, where the Buddha himself is represented as saying (Book the Eighth):

"If any teach NIRVANA is to cease,  
Say unto such, they lie.

If any teach NIRVANA is to live,  
Say unto such, they err; not knowing this,

Nor what light shines beyond their broken lamps,  
Nor lifeless, timeless bliss."

The goal of Nirvana is thus pervasively present in Buddhism, but the emphasis in the Buddha's teachings is, as Smith puts it (p. 124), ". . .therapeutic and pragmatic rather than metaphysical." This is superbly illustrated in the parable of the arrow. Malunkyaputta, a disciple, evidently grew impatient with his teacher's silence with regard to whether or not the world is eternal, and whether or not the saint exists after death. The Buddha's response is recorded in condensed form by Smith (p. 106). Concluding, he is recorded as having said to the now chastened disciple (Burt, 1955, p. 36):

"And what, Malunkyaputta, have I explained? Misery, Malunkyaputta, have I explained; the origin of misery have I explained; the cessation of misery have I explained; and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I explained; and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I explained. And why, Malunkyaputta, have I explained this? Because, Malunkyaputta, this does profit, has to do with the fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I explained it. Accordingly, Malunkyaputta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not explained, and what it is that I have explained. . ."

Focusing upon the painful world from which deliverance is to be sought, Buddha delineated what he described as the Three Signs of Being. These are, in the Pali, *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*.

"Impermanence, sorrowfulness and non-selfness-- these are the Three Marks of the individual. The same features are, of course, also found in all inanimate things." (Schumann, 1974, p. 44)

The Buddha saw all things, the entire Universe as 'anicca', that is, transitory, impermanent. All was in a state of flux. (See Smith, p. 128-130). Jinarajadasa (1948, p. 90) suggests that the verse:

"Impermanent are all conditioned things;  
Their nature 'tis to rise and pass away;  
They come to pass, they cease,  
Happy the mastery of them and the peace."

is perhaps the most famous verse in Buddhism, as "It is chanted at every Buddhist funeral, as the supreme consolation. It strikes that keynote of Impermanence which is so characteristic of all Buddhist thought." It will be appreciated that a person growing up in a thought atmosphere steeped in this view of reality will experience less impediment than we in the west often experience in turning away

from the things of the world.

The second of the Three Signs of Being, 'dukkha', has been examined already (Smith, pp. 110-113) as the First Noble Truth. This idea reinforces the other-worldliness of Buddhism, but from the Buddhist point of view can only be regarded melancholy or pessimistic if the observer has refused to see and acknowledge the quality of ordinary life around him, or if he disregards the sublime nature of the goal, ahead, ultimately, for all.

The third of the Three Signs, or Marks, of Being, 'anatta', literally, 'no-soul', is possibly the most bewildering of basic Buddhist ideas to the western inquirer. If the Buddhist holds to the idea of successive incarnations, and to the idea of *khamma* (karma) as governing those incarnations, what passes from life to life? Nothing permanent, is the usual Buddhist response -only the 'skandas', or 'skeins', or 'bundles of attributes' as they were at the time of death, with material tendencies, feelings, awarenesses, mental generalizations and intuitions all more or less loosely bound together and thirsting for expression. The great illusion, it is claimed, is that these fleeting tendencies, temporarily in juxtaposition because of chains of causation from the past, constitute a permanent entity, individuality or soul. They will trigger off another existence only in the way that a flame passes from candle to candle. The new existence is thus related to the old not as in Hindu thought by the transmigration of a permanent soul, a reincarnating ego, but by having been set in motion by a temporarily associated composite of attributes left unexpended at the death of a physical form. Both of these successive existences, however - indeed all human existences- suffer from the great delusion of centring upon the ". . .idea that there is a permanent ego whose interests must be served and protected, and whose power must be magnified," and it is this delusion, the Buddhist argument continues, "which ensures that suffering will continue to characterize existence" (Ling, 1973, p. 111).

In order to come a little more closely to grips with the baffling idea of rebirth, as distinct from reincarnation, study of the commentary in the text (p. 127-132) could with benefit be followed by a careful reading of a short essay by Jinarajadasa entitled "The Great Soul Heresy" (1948, pp. 90-102). After outlining some of the ways in which a man is 'compounded' of ideas and sentiments (p. 94) and especially how his vision is affected by those traditions deriving from his racial and religious heritage, this writer goes on to emphasize the role of suffering in stripping away the personal self:

"Only when a man has been utterly humiliated by his ambitions, or stripped of all that he holds

dear, does he begin to know what it is really to think clearly, feel dispassionately, and gain a vision of things as they are. . . . As one lives and suffers, toils and creates, and in all ways purifies the character, till shred after shred of personal longing disappears, a realization grows that the self, that thing to which one clings, is no longer necessary for living. . . . The sole thing which those, who know this experience, can testify to is that not only is life possible without *skandhas* or aggregates, but that it is the only life which is *inevitable* as a man finds out the truth about himself. To act, and yet not be the doer; to love, and yet not be the lover; to create with brain and imagination, and yet not be the creator; these and other unrealities are facts to him who knows. . . . To all others they are but words. . . . But there is an existence, when the aggregated soul vanishes, whose joy is indescribable."

The observant reader will have noted that in this last commentary there is denial of the necessity for, the permanence of, that personal self which arises from the circumstances of birth and upbringing, but no disavowal of a deep, truly spiritual Self. The same position is claimed by some writers for the Buddha himself. Scriptural passages may be quoted in support of this interpretation as, for example, from *The Dhammapada* (trans. Mascara, 1973, p. 59 and p. 88).

"By oneself the evil is done, and it is oneself who suffers: by oneself the evil is not done, and by one's Self one becomes pure. The pure and the impure come from oneself: no man can purify another.

"Arise! Rouse thyself by thy Self; train thyself by thy Self. Under the shelter of thy Self, and ever watchful, thou shalt live in supreme joy.

For thy Self is the master of thyself, and thy Self is thy refuge. Train therefore thyself well, even as a merchant trains a fine horse."

Similarly, from the Mahavagga (quoted by Besant, 1970, p. 120), following a passage in which the Buddha examines the five attributes of ordinary consciousness and declares of each that it "is not mine, is not me, is not my Self", he is represented as concluding that:

"Considering this, O Bhikkhus, a learned, noble bearer of the word becomes weary of body, weary of sensation, weary of perception, weary of the samkharas, weary of consciousness. Becoming weary of all that, he divests himself of passion; by absence of passion he is made free; when he is free, he becomes aware that he is free; and he realizes that rebirth is exhausted; that holiness is completed; that duty is fulfilled; that there is no further return to this world."

Implicit in this is the presence of a continuing spiritual Self-- and the same may be claimed also of the many accounts of the earlier lives of the great teacher.

Notwithstanding the above there is no concession by many, perhaps most scholars that the Buddha did in fact assume the existence of a deep, presently incomprehensible spiritual individuality. Schumann, for example, states categorically that (1974, p. 47):

"Gotama's axiom that the empirical person neither is nor contains a Self has made some Western Buddhists assume that he advocated a Self or Soul outside the Five Groups: If the Soul is not within the Groups then it must be somewhere else, that is transcendent. This view is the result of speculations which would not meet with Gotama's approval. He inculcated on his followers that the Five Groups possess no selfhood; he did not say more on this subject."

#### 4. THE CONSOLIDATION OF BUDDHISM

It is sometimes asserted that from time to time a man of uncommon wisdom inspires friends, who after his death, gather his teachings into the rigid mould of holy writ, and compress his life giving example into institutions bristling with rules, roles and statuses to be clung to by the faithful. Thus, it is asserted, the spontaneous outflow of life from a gifted individual is institutionalized to become the imprisoning pattern for the millions of succeeding generations. While there would be some merit in this argument, less cynically stated, it cannot readily be applied to Buddhism, for it is evident from the use of mnemonics and repetitive patterns in the Buddha's utterances that he intended his teaching to be remembered, and from his untiring attention to the order of monks, that he intended his followers to hold together in an organized band. In gathering, memorizing, and finally recording his teachings, and in ensuring the continuity and good order of the *Sangha*, the brotherhood of monks founded by the Buddha, his followers were adhering to his clear and explicit intentions.

"I take my refuge in the Buddha,  
I take my refuge in the Dhamma,  
I take my refuge in the Sangha."

runs the "Triple Gem" formula, recited by all Buddhists.

The basic scriptures were gathered into three collections, or 'baskets', the *Tripitaka* (Pali: *Tipitaka*). Together making up the 'Pali Canon', they are firstly, the *Sutta Pitaka*, discourses and incidents from the life of Buddha; secondly, the *Vinaya Pitaka*, rules for the discipline of the Sangha; and thirdly, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, the analysis and exposition of doctrines. These were collected and committed to memory shortly after the death of the Buddha but probably not set down in writing until the first century B.C.E. (Smart, 1971, p. 148). Perhaps best known and most loved of all Buddhist scriptures is *The Dhammapada*, The Way of Truth, 26 short poetic reflections on aspects of life, which are found within the *Sutta Pitaka*.

Of immense importance in securing the foundations of the new faith was the Sangha, the order of Buddhist monks. These were men bound together by their vows, their ordination and their life pattern into a new kind of society, the clan of Buddha. Living to serve others and pursue liberation, the 'homeless ones' were a vital transforming influence in exemplifying and spreading the Dhamma. Even so, by the third century B. C. the Buddhist way was still confined to the north east of India, principally in the region then known as Magadha. The decisive initiative in establishing Buddhism as the principal religion of India, and as an expanding missionary faith, came from one extraordinary Magadhan King, a monarch of enormous personal stature, and bearing a name to match. Fortunately for us this kingly devotee of the Buddha is referred to by historians simply as Ashoka (reigned 272 - 232 B.C.E.). The grandson of the military and administrative genius, Chandragupta Maurya, who had broken up the Alexandrian Greek Empire in north eastern India, then extended his power over many other regions, Ashoka also demonstrated considerable military capacity--but only for a short time. He is perhaps the only King-General in history to have ordered a retreat on the eve of certain complete victory. Having overwhelmed a people known as the Kalingas on what is now the Orissa coast of the Bay of Bengal, and needing only to march on the tip of the Peninsula to have all of India under his rule, Ashoka could think only of the slaughter, injury and anguish he had witnessed. Already drawn to Buddhism and now driven more fully into it by remorse, Ashoka led his astonished army back to his capital on the Ganges. Reigning with an all-enveloping compassion, he devoted the rest of his life to spreading the Dhamma, to assisting and, at times, supervising and even reforming the Sangha, and to implementing a far-reaching social welfare program which he found to be implicit in the Dhamma.



Ashoka's missionaries carried the sayings and discipline of the Buddha all over India, to Sri Lanka, to Malaya and Sumatra, and through the mountain passes into Afghanistan and Persia. In these places the teachings took root and flourished. In Egypt and Greece, on the other hand, the preaching of the Dhamma by Ashoka's far-ranging emissaries seems to have fallen upon unreceptive ears.

The extraordinary personality of Ashoka is to some degree accessible to the present day enquirer through the piecing together by historians of scattered references in ancient sources to "the Beloved of the Gods" and through the numerous rock inscriptions prepared on his instructions in widely separated parts of India. In one of the inscriptions the King publicly lamented the suffering of the Kalingas and exhorted his sons and grandsons to seek only the conquest of the Dhamma, which endures in the next world as well as this. He also had carved edicts forbidding animal sacrifice and commemorating the end of slaughter for the royal kitchens. Other pillars proclaimed to his own and successive generations instructions to his provincial officials that they should be diligent, fair and considerate to his subjects.

A representative selection of the rock edicts are recorded by de Bary (Vol. 1, 1958, pp. 142 ff). Factual background to the life of Ashoka--in a sense the Paul and the Constantine of Buddhism-- will be found in any good history of India.

##### 5. *NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN BUDDHISM*

According to Smith, ". . . Buddhism divided over the questions people have always divided over" (p. 133). He proceeds to a lucid analysis of the main differences between the two schools, and sums up his conclusions with a most useful table (p. 138), and a succinct paragraph on the importance of Ashoka's support for the Northern School and the spread of the two versions of Buddhism into different parts of Asia. Students keen to extend their grasp of the steps by which such strikingly divergent approaches developed from the same source will find useful accounts in the books by Smart (pp. 129 - 144) and Ling (pp. 125 - 141 and 195 - 200). Yet even those who thus explore this complex historical development and the tenets of the philosophical schools formed as Buddhism expanded will not have come to the resolution of the Mahayana (Northern Buddhist) claim that it represents an esoteric tradition, transmitted from the Buddha to his immediate disciples, and preserved, usually in secret, since that time.

Western writers on Buddhism are mostly little impressed by the idea of a secret teaching passed on from teacher to pupil for centuries and finally emerging into view in one or more of the Mahayana Schools. Mostly this hypothesis is passed by as commentators proceed to their several reconstructions of the ways in which human need and interaction with other traditions have transformed the original Buddhism into its later Mahayana forms. That these processes were undoubtedly

at work does not, however, preclude the possibility that Mahayana expressions of Buddhism are in part the outcomes of a continuing esoteric tradition. This is the position of a noted British Buddhist, who comments (Humphreys, 1955, p. 48):

"The two extreme suggestions as to the origin of the Mahayana are, on the one hand, that it was the esoteric doctrine of the Buddha as taught to his Elect, and on the other, that it was a collection of deplorable heresies by which the pure teaching of the Master was all too soon defiled. There is truth in both. The Mahayana Canon contains a larger proportion of the esoteric Wisdom than any other religion, and has always adhered more closely to the 'Heart' as distinct from the 'Eye' doctrine, the eternal life rather than the changing form of the Message. On the other hand, much of the teaching to be found today in the Mahayana schools is, on the face of it, the exact antithesis of the Message as recorded in the Pali Canon."

The reasons Humphreys advances for preferring the Northern School may be placed alongside those offered by Smith (p. 139). Humphreys continues, enlisting a quotation from Radhakrishnan's huge work on Indian philosophy (Humphreys, 1955, p. 48):

"The Indian mind, already heir to some of the noblest achievements of mystical reasoning, could never be long content with the moral philosophy of the Southern School. Low-lighted as it is with the Puritan lamp of self-suppression, and largely arid of the poetry, spiritual excitement and the sense of humour of many of the Mahayana schools, such 'a cold, passionless metaphysics devoid of religious teaching could not long inspire enthusiasm and joy. The Hinayana ignored the groping of the spirit of man after something higher, and wronged the spiritual side of man.'"

It should not escape the student that here we have, intertwined, arguments quite different in character. On the one hand there is the question of historicity. For example, is the Pali Canon the earliest and purest record of the Buddha's discourses, or are some of the early Chinese scriptures older, or more accurate? Are the Mahayana philosophies entirely later developments, or did they exist, at least in embryo, in teachings given to the Buddha's closest disciples? By contrast there is a broader historical question standing behind the consideration of a possible Buddhist esotericism, namely, has there been an esoteric tradition at the heart of each great faith? This

almost ceases to be an historical question when we answer yes or no on the basis of our preferences and then proceed to look for the presence or absence of the tradition in the light of that preference. A further theoretical issue underlying the earlier brief discussion relates to the validity, the truth--value, of a religious doctrine: Are only those doctrines which derive from the original presentation to be regarded as true? Or can later restatements or extrapolations also acquire that standing for the faithful? This could be carried a step further to the more subjective question: Can the later formulations actually *be* true? That is, is there such phenomenon as a continuing revelation? At that point we have left behind historical judgment and phenomenological description and become involved in a question of personal valuation.

Having carried the enquiry into Buddhism thus far the student may find it helpful to use Smith's passage "The Rebel Saint" (pp. 101-109) for purposes of consolidation. It may be instructive to see whether that passage, placed in his chapter ahead of the discussion of the Northern and Southern Schools, represents Buddhism in terms more of one than the other--and in what ways.

#### 6. *THE DECLINE OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA*

Elaborating a little on Smith's comments on "The Conflux of Buddhism and Hinduism in India", it appears that the earliest evidence of the decline of Buddhism derives from the 4th Century A.D. At this time India was experiencing its first period of strong and unified rule since the days of Ashoka, but it was rule by a dynasty, the Guptas, whose most able and successful heads were active patrons of the Hindu faith. Moreover Hinduism's extraordinary breadth and adaptability had already come into play. The distinctive teaching of ahimsa, non-hurting or harmlessness, compassion for all animate beings, which derived from the Dhamma and from the contemporary teachings of Mahavira, founder of Jainism (see 4.1 below), was assimilated into Hinduism. Similarly the devotion evoked by the Sage of the Sakyas was echoed in Hinduism by the rise of Vaishnavism, the cult of devotion to Vishnu, and by Shaivism, the cult of devotion to Shiva. Devotional Hinduism, beginning in the Tamil-speaking South, caught on in Maharashtra when the new spirit was expressed in the native Kannada, and finally to the Hindi-speaking lands of the North--altogether a remarkable efflorescence of the spirit of Bhakti Yoga which yielded poetry and songs of great purity and beauty. And, significantly, the Bhakti movement arose largely among non-Brahmins and was finally endorsed and made their own by High-caste Indians. It will be seen that the appearance of religious enthusiasm within Hinduism removed another element of Buddhism's distinctiveness. By about the 12th Century the Hindu devotional movement had yielded the rounded doctrine of Avataras, with adoration directed to Rama, or to Krishna, or even in some regions to Buddha, as incarnations of the High God Vishnu.

It might be construed from the foregoing that calculating Brahmins pondering the opposition of Buddhism decided on a policy of incorporation and accommodation. This of course would be a gross over-simplification, as the changes referred to took place over several centuries. Rather the two faiths co-existed more or less peacefully, with the ordinary Indians generally regarding Buddha as one of the many gods to whom groups of people addressed their devotions. Further, it was not just the revitalizing of Hinduism, partly inspired by Buddhist examples, but also the devitalizing of Buddhism itself that led to its decline in India. Standards lapsed within the Sangha, as the homeless ones became dwellers in monasteries, many of which were previously endowed by grateful patrons.

Buddhism was further weakened by the emergence within it of age-old beliefs and practices hinging around the female deities of eastern and southern India. As the strength of monastic life diminished local beliefs and rituals regained popularity and in the minds of some Buddhists were accommodated to their formalized beliefs by linking the female deities as consorts to the various figures in the Mahayana pantheon. Thus with the major Hindu deities, each major deity was seen as associated with his "shakti", or power. Mystical union, the loss of duality in unity, was naturally symbolized by the physical union of the male and female divinities, and often the language and artistic representations were explicitly erotic. There were other kinds of union too, as for example, the union of consonants and vowels in sacred mantras. This broad movement in Buddhism, and later in Hinduism, is known as Tantra, after the books or manuals of spells, incantations and mantras employed by its adherents. Sometimes the western style terms Tantrism or Tantricism are used.

In its extreme form Tantra gave rise to secret rites for the "initiated" in which it was held that once a person had achieved a certain level of spiritual development the usual moral restrictions no longer applied and that in fact their deliberate breach, as a religious ritual, could be liberating. Although authorities differ as to the strength of the evidence, it appears very likely that the secret Tantra rituals employed intoxicants, meat and sexual intercourse as means of seeking liberation from desire by catharsis. Alternatively, in some groups, deliberate submission to forbidden practices in an attitude of detachment was advocated as a means of achieving total dispassion.

It is not hard to see how Tantra, however sincerely undertaken, could readily descend into mere gratification and even black magic. Certainly western writers, and especially missionaries, have been horrified by it. Nevertheless recent scholars take a balanced view, as, for example, Ling (1969, pp. 243-247), Smart (pp. 146-7) and de Bary (pp. 187-194). Smart (p. 147) sums up by stating that:

". . . on the whole it was a sincere, though

unorthodox, potentially dangerous, and perhaps even misguided way of trying to gain detachment."

Smith's comments (p. 158) are similarly forbearing, but the overall effect of the rise of Tantra within Buddhism to the point where it became a distinct school, the Vajrayana, or Thunderbolt Vehicle, seems to have been to accelerate the decline of this great faith in the land of its origin.

The final blow to Indian Buddhism was the occupation of northern India by the Muslim Turks, which was completed by the end of the 12th Century (1192 A.D.). Although Muslims had been increasing their grip on Indian territory over several centuries, this invasion brought to the remaining Buddhist strongholds of the north-east a determined and ruthless proselytising dynasty whose army slaughtered the "shaven headed Brahmins" and destroyed their monasteries. While Hinduism, having priestly organization integrated within family life, was able to survive the period of persecution, Indian Buddhism, dependent on the monasteries and the Sangha, virtually disintegrated under the swords of the servants of Allah.

#### 7. *BUDDHISM IN CHINA AND JAPAN.*

As Buddhism was carried from India's north-west into the lands now known as Afghanistan, Iran and Soviet Central Asia it found an environment singularly adapted to its rapid consolidation and further spread. In this region linking the cultures and economics of India, China and the Roman Empire missionaries moved with relative ease, so that Buddhism was fairly well established, on a small scale in China, by the 1st Century A.D. On the whole Buddhism was well received and for a while even enjoyed imperial patronage, which ensured its swift expansion while the supportive regime lasted. By the 2nd Century Buddhism was already making a contribution to Chinese culture, and this despite its dependence upon monasticism, which cut sharply across the deeply entrenched Chinese insistence on the primacy of family life. The other distinctive features of Indian Buddhism were also preserved intact--the rites of worship, the sacred writings and the contemplative exercises. Thus Buddhism generally retained its essential character, while assuming a Chinese garb and producing some variants that were rather less Indian in outlook.

In other ways too the religious and cultural environment proved hospitable to Buddhism. Apart from its greater emphasis on family responsibilities, the ethical teachings of Confucius (see 5.2) broadly coincided with those of the Buddha. Further, the nature-oriented Taoists (see 5.1) with their insistence on gentleness, non-resistance and the pursuit of the ultimate reality, Tao, through mystical experience, were readily able to tune in to the Dhamma. Of the two broad approaches within Buddhism, however, one was better suited to the new environment. Theravada probably reached China

earlier, but it was Mahayana which flourished there. The austere teachings of the Southern School, with the daunting prospect of prolonged rebirth stretching into the future were not so well adapted to a this-worldly people who did not have a tradition of reincarnation. Rather it was the Mahayana, with its exuberance of Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be, overshadowing suffering humans and bestowing upon them salvation by grace, which evoked response and commitment. The Buddhas-to-be, or Bodhisattvas, it should be mentioned in passing, were seen as perfected beings who had renounced final entry into Nirvana out of deep pity for all living things. They therefore were approached as objects of worship, intercessors, mediators, the divine helpers of humanity.

Above all, of course, the Chinese Buddhists turned to the Buddha, but increasingly it was not to the historic Gautama, but to Amitabha, the universal Buddha-nature, of whom, it was claimed, the Sage of the Sakyas was one manifestation. As this variant of Buddhism took shape and became the dominant Chinese form, Amitabha, or Ami-to (Japanese, Amida) was pictured as dwelling in a far Western Paradise, the Pure Land, and gathering unto himself, as they died, his devotees, those who turned to him, and in utter sincerity, invoked his grace. Pure Land Buddhism, present in China in the 2nd Century A.D. had become by the 7th Century the dominant form, complete with salvation by grace through the agency of a universal saving Buddha of Compassion who would not leave his Western Paradise and enter Nirvana until he could bring all animate beings with him.

Pure Land Buddhism, as happened with so many other aspects of Chinese culture, eventually appeared in Japan where also it achieved great popularity among the ordinary people and became, as Shin Buddhism, the dominant form in that country. Second only to the Pure Land School in both China and Japan, was the support accorded to *Ch'an* or Meditation Buddhism (from the Sanscrit, *Dhyana*: Japanese, *Zen*). *Ch'an* Buddhism has been ably dealt with by Professor Smith, who has himself undergone Zen training in Japan (Smith, pp. 139-153). The Zen technique of sudden enlightenment is one which has baffled and fascinated westerners in recent decades, and is probably the form of Buddhism which has most followers in western countries. An extensive literature on Zen Buddhism is available in English. The student wishing to extend his understanding of Zen could not do better than to explore some of the writings of Professor D. T. Suzuki, who is generally acknowledged as its foremost exponent. In particular, his *Zen and Japanese Culture* is recommended. The brief introductory chapter of this major work is on its own a valuable extension of the coverage in our text.

With Zen the intriguing question presents itself as to whether the content of the mystical illumination apparently experienced by successful practitioners is of the same character as, or even identical

with the mystical insights which devotees of other faiths or systems have endeavoured to convey. Students interested in a comparative study of mysticism will find Dr. F. C. Happold's *Mysticism* full of fascinating material.

### 8. *BUDDHISM IN TIBET*

Although Buddhism spread rapidly through many parts of Asia from the time of Ashoka it did not reach Tibet, the most elevated and inaccessible plateau in the world, until the 7th Century A. D.- and even then it was by invitation from within. The early 7th Century saw the accession to power in Tibet of a strong expansionist ruler, who was also an enthusiastic social reformer. Treaties with the neighbouring Chinese and Indians were linked with royal marriages, with the result that the Tibetan King found himself with two Buddhist queens. He saw the great advantages Buddhism held for his people and sought expert assistance in establishing the Dhamma in Tibet. The form he selected as most likely to win acceptance by a people steeped in an animistic religion relying heavily on spells and incantations, was the Tantric Buddhism of north-eastern India, the Vajrayana. There followed a brief period in which Buddhism flourished in Tibet, then a longer period when, under later rulers, it was suppressed in favour of the indigenous Bon religion.

In the 11th Century Tantric Buddhism was reintroduced to Tibet from India by an outstanding missionary monk named Atisha. This, however, was not the degenerate form of Tantra practised in some places, but ". . . a purified version, purged of its overt eroticism, and reinfused with spiritual meaning" (Hutchison, 1969, p. 140). Not only had the Vajrayana of Atisha been purified and reinterpreted, it had been effectively stabilized and grounded by this wise monk's incorporation of the basic Theravada scriptures.

The Gelugpa, the order of monks promulgating Atisha's reformed Vajrayana, were identified by their characteristic headgear, and are still known as the "Yellow Hats". Those who resisted the reforms and clung to the magical spells and incantations of pre-Buddhist times, were the Kargyupa, who are known as the "Old School", or as the "Red Hats". By and large the Gelugpa have been the dominant influence in Tibet since the time of Atisha. Nevertheless even this group has experienced periods of deterioration, each fortunately followed by reform and restatement. Most revered of the reformers was Tsong Khapa in the 14th Century. Evidently his depth of character, grasp of essentials and sense of purpose were apparent from an early age, for the familiar story of the confounding of the wise men is told of him as a sixteen year old prodigy. Tsong Khapa later reformulated Tibetan Buddhism, insisting on a purely spiritual interpretation of Tantric symbolism, and the most scrupulous observance of monastic standards in thought, feeling and action.

It is directly from Tsong Khapa's reformed Vajrayana that modern Tibetan Buddhism derives. At its head is the Dalai Lama, exiled with thousands of his people in India since the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959. To what extent Buddhism endures in Tibet it is not yet possible to say, but it is quite clear that the flight into India of many thousands of highly literate and dedicated Tibetan Buddhists has been a major factor in reviving interest in Buddhism in the land of its origin--and in other countries too.

It is widely known that Tibetans believe each Dalai Lama to be the reincarnation of his predecessor. This belief dates back to the 14th Century when Gedundrub, one of the revered successors of Tsong Khapa, was said to have returned as the child Gedun Gyatso. A senior monk acted as regent, holding the recently reformed Gelugpa together firmly, until Gedun Gyatso was of age. Then, shortly after the death of this leader, a child was born bearing certain physical marks of greatness, which attracted attention to him. At an early age he claimed to be Gedun Gyatso, and was able, Tibetans declare, to recall readily events from his previous life, and recognize people and objects significant to Gedun Gyatso. "Without hesitation", reports the elder brother of the present Dalai Lama, "he was officially established as Gedun Gyatso's incarnation, and given the name Sonam Gyatso (Norbu, 1968, p. 217). Sonam Gyatso personally carried the Dhamma to Mongolia, a country then in dire need of a cleansing reforming religion. He was accorded the title Dalai Lama by the Mongolian ruler. Dalai was a translation of the Tibetan Gyatso, meaning ocean, and Lama means one who is superior, so that the title in full may be translated "Ocean of Wisdom". The title, and the practice of seeking and identifying the supposed reincarnation of the one who had borne it, have remained operative into the 20th Century.

#### 9. *BUDDHISM IN SRI LANKA AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA*

In Sri Lanka there exists the oldest of all continuous Buddhist traditions. Buddhism was brought to the island by Mahinda, thought to have been the son of Ashoka, in the 3rd Century B.C.E., and owes its rapid establishment there to the success of its royal expositor in converting the Sri Lankan King. Mahinda appears to have been vigorous, persuasive and imaginative, for he not only secured the adherence of the King, but established the all-important monastic communities, and planted near the capital a most evocative symbol, a shoot from the original Bodhi tree. Notwithstanding this auspicious beginning Sri Lankan Buddhism experienced numerous upheavals and rivalries, chiefly because of the powerful reverberations through the island of Indian political and religious movements. Invasions and counter invasions and the arrival of representatives of conflicting Buddhist schools left a wake of distress and contention. In the 5th Century A. D., however, there appeared a monk sometimes referred to as the Shankara, or sometimes as the St. Thomas Aquinas, of Buddhism. By



this it is meant that Buddhaghosa was the great systematizer of Buddhism. From this time the Theravada remained dominant in Sri Lanka. Standards of Pali scholarship, having been renewed by Buddhaghosa, tended to remain high, and Sri Lanka became the great bastion of Theravada Buddhism for South East Asia.

Historians think Burma may have received the Dhamma from Ashoka's missionaries--but if the "Land of Gold" referred to in Ashokan records was elsewhere, certainly the Dhamma came to Burma soon after that time. As in Sri Lanka, events in India, and rivalries among Indian Buddhist sects, were reflected in developments in Burma. The consequence was that Burma acquired most major variants of Buddhism--Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana--while enjoying the overall civilizing effects of the Dhamma.

In the regions now known as Thailand and Kampuchea, the evidence points to strong Buddhist influence as early as the 1st and 2nd Centuries A.D. A further wave of Mahayana missionary activity was experienced through much of South East Asia during the 4th Century. From the 7th Century Java and Sumatra enjoyed a flowering of Theravada learning and Buddhist culture, of which the magnificent Borobudur in Java is a dramatic reminder. But it was from the 11th Century, with Sri Lanka and to a lesser extent Burma established as strongholds of Theravada discipline and learning, and trading vessels from north-eastern India venturing further abroad, that Buddhism became a great civilizing influence in the lives of the majority of the people of Indo China, and of very large numbers in other parts of South-East Asia. During this time, especially, there arose kings who appreciated the centrality to Buddhism of its social ethic. The Buddhist kings of South East Asia saw themselves as participating in an unwritten social contract with the people, and generally ruled in that spirit, showing deep concern for the welfare of all of their subjects. Even more important were the monks, who, working from the security of their monastic communities, exerted a profoundly educative influence by re-interpreting and re-expressing local beliefs in terms of the Buddhist world view, and by teaching the young. Mainland South East Asia, which has remained largely Buddhist, has as a consequence levels of literacy much higher than those of most other parts of Asia. Distinctive architecture, sculptures depicting Buddha and incidents from his life, and the ubiquitous saffron-robed bhikkus are among the outward signs of the Buddhist heritage of the region.

Buddhism has survived European colonization and withdrawal in Sri Lanka. After being disrupted by the Portugese colonial administrations, Buddhist institutions began to revive under the more tolerant Dutch. This revival accelerated under British rule as the commercial and administrative interests were bound by treaty to protect ". . .the religion of the Buddhoo professed by the chiefs and inhabitants of these provinces. . ." (Ling, 1968, p. 396). However once missionaries

arrived and began to agitate against toleration through their co-religionists in the British Parliament, the situation of Sri Lankan Buddhism deteriorated rapidly. That it survived in the face of the fanatical clamour of the missionaries who even claimed it to be the religion of the devil, was due in part to energetic Sri Lankans who built up Buddhist schools and institutes of higher learning, and in part to assistance from sympathetic Europeans. Colonel H. S. Olcott, President-Founder of the Theosophical Society, himself an avowed Buddhist, conducted a rigorous campaign to revitalize Sri Lankan Buddhism. T. W. Rhys-Davids, the great Pali scholar, rendered the Pali canon accessible to an appreciative English speaking world, while a number of perceptive officials and administrators lent their interest and even sometimes their personal standing to the cause of Buddhist renewal. By the time political independence came to Sri Lanka Buddhism was sufficiently strong among the educated middle class to offset its weakness among the highly Europeanized upper classes. The outcome was a steady strengthening of the ancient faith, a further reform of the Sangha, some fascinating and apparently successful attempts to demonstrate the consistency of modern science with Buddhist metaphysics, and determined efforts to spread the faith throughout and beyond the island.

In Burma, too, Buddhism has survived colonization and decolonization. It was difficult to see the Burmese Royal Palace as the centre of the universe once the British had incorporated Burma into the Empire (1885), but the adaptable Burmese were able to relinquish this long standing tenet and focus instead upon the impermanence of all forms (Ling, 1928, p. 401). In the troubled climate of the post-war period Buddhists and Marxists alike found their attitudes to be anti-western, anti-Christian and anti-capitalist, with the result that independent Burma is today charting its own course, with Buddhism evidently still a major component in its rather withdrawn national life.

Theravada Buddhism has remained so much the pervasive faith of the Thai people that increasing numbers of western visitors are enabled to grasp something of its atmosphere and life pattern in modern Thailand, visiting temples and talking with scholars and monks. Neighbouring Kampuchea, also for many centuries steeped in the Dhamma, has fared tragically less well. Unstable since the withdrawal of the colonizing French, Kampuchea has undergone an agonizing period of civil war, in the midst of which it was for a time governed by a regime determined to eliminate Buddhism along with other facets of the former way of life. In the process, a mounting weight of evidence indicates, those identifiable as Buddhists have been systematically put to death. It remains to be seen, as Kampuchea emerges from this trauma, how firmly the roots of Buddhism have held in the lives of the survivors.

By contrast Buddhism appears to remain strong in Vietnam, where,

interestingly, the Theravada school spreading from the south and west, has encountered Mahayana schools spreading from China. In Indonesia Buddhism was early displaced by reinvigorated Hinduism and this in turn by Islam. Some overseas Chinese living in Indonesian cities maintain their Buddhist faith, as they do in Malaysia and other parts of South East Asia, but for the most part Buddhism has gone from the Archipelago.





## CHAPTER 4

## OTHER INDIAN RELIGIONS

1. *JAINISM*

Jainism is an exclusively Indian religion of great antiquity. It has just over two million adherents, but an influence far greater than this number might suggest, for Jains are generally highly educated, devout, disciplined, prosperous and socially concerned. The term Jain means a follower of the Jinas, the Victorious Ones, liberated men who achieved omniscience and became the teachers of humanity. Jain tradition claims 24 Jinas, of whom the last two, Parshva and Mahavira, are identified as historical figures in, respectively, the 8th and 6th Centuries B.C.E.

Mahavira, the last of the Jinas, is the principal focus of devotion. A contemporary of the Buddha, living also in north-eastern India, he was born Vardhamana, the second son of devout Jains. At 30, following the death of both parents, Vardhamana turned with great intensity to the life of the ascetic. He discarded clothing altogether, ceased to wash, exposed his body to extremes of heat and cold, minimized sleep and denied himself human company. By these practices of extreme asceticism, by refusing to injure the least of living creatures, and by yoga pursued unswervingly for twelve years, he is said to have achieved omniscience. The following 30 years he spent expounding his message, and died, probably by the approved Jain method of self-starvation, greatly revered by his disciples as Mahavira, the Great Hero.

According to Jain tradition Mahavira, as his 23 predecessors, rose at death to the summit of the world, into a changeless state where he could look down on humanity and grant any favour or blessing that seemed appropriate to his all-seeing gaze. Worship is thus offered to Mahavira, to Parshva, and to the other Jinas, rather than to the gods. Jains do not deny the gods--though they venerate the great saints, the liberated men or "ford-finders", in preference--but they do deny the existence of a Supreme Deity.

The goal of the Jain, taught by Mahavira 25 centuries ago, and pursued by the devout ever since, is to achieve liberation from the round of births and deaths and enter individually, as a permanently separate soul, into the changeless bliss of the summit of the universe. This will be seen as at variance with the transpersonal consummation of Nirvana anticipated by the Hindu, and stands in total contrast to Buddhist expressions of ultimate human destiny. Moreover the envisaging of an infinite number of souls eternally separate in a universe in which there is no Supreme Being, transmigrating endlessly through

aeonian cycle after cycle with only a very small number ever winning liberation, reveals Jainism as the most pessimistic of faiths. Even in their most vehement world-negating expressions Hinduism and Buddhism are lit up by the glory of the final destiny they proclaim.

The pursuit of liberation pervades the whole of life for the earnest Jain, who gives great attention to the spirit as well as the letter of his faith, engaging only in those occupations which permit the practice of ahimsa, or harmlessness. Thus a Jain cannot farm, as this involves the taking of life, even if it is only the lives of the little creatures injured in ploughing. Similarly, he may not be a carpenter, as sawing is thought to cause pain to timber. All actions he recognizes as accumulating karma, thought of as a subtle substance clouding and weighing down the soul, but the obscuring of the soul is held to be most serious when it arises from the causing of pain and death to any living being--especially when deliberate. Even a layman must be scrupulously careful to avoid inadvertently injuring the smallest insect, but the lengths to which a monk must go seem strange indeed to the western mind--for the Jain monk must not walk about in the dark lest he step on unseen creatures, nor bath, for fear of harming organisms on his body, nor light a lamp because of the discomfort of fire-beings and of suffering by moths that might be drawn to the flame. All of our western impatience with such restrictiveness, however, cannot be permitted to blind us to the rigour, probity and social responsibility of the Jain communities of India. Chiefly engaged in trade and industry, Jains are singularly well educated, and often wealthy. They are keenly interested in questions of human welfare, and are noted for their generosity in the endowment of hospitals and schools.

The student wishing to widen his knowledge of Jainism will find useful concise accounts in the books already referred to by Ling, Smart and Hutchison, and an excellent short chapter by Professor A. L. Basham in R. C. Zaehner's *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths* (1971, pp. 255-262).

## 2. SIKHISM

The Sikh faith has about seven million members, most of them in India, with substantial numbers in other countries, such as Malaysia. It is a religion which has a definite starting point in the piety and teaching of a saintly Indian, Nanak (1469-1533), who sought to draw Hindus and Muslims together by setting down truths from both sources in a consistent and appealing whole. As well as being of interest from its eclectic origins and approach, Sikhism presents the inquirer with an intriguing study of transformation. Originally a peacefully devotional faith seeking to gather in two hostile groups, Sikhism became in time a fighting theocracy, constantly struggling to survive.

Nanak was born near Lahore in the Punjab and grew up in an atmosphere heavily charged with devotion. Islam, the religion of the rulers of India at that time, is a faith of fiery devotion, and North Indian Hinduism, partly in reaction to the faith of the conquerors and partly in response to the stimulus of the Bhakti poets of the South, was producing its own flowering of the Bhakti spirit. Hymns and poems expressed worship of the Supreme Being and protested the barriers of caste. The Muslim hymnodist Kabir (1440-1518) had even worshipped with Hindus, describing himself as "a child of Rama and Allah" (Hutchison, 1969, p. 186), and seeking deliberately to reconcile Hindus and Muslims, endeavours which struck deep resonances in his younger contemporary, Nanak.

Nanak appears to have been too devotional and meditative to succeed in the ordinary life of the householder. Leaving his wife and two sons with his parents he embarked on a quest which reached its climax when, according to Sikh belief, God spoke to him, commanding him to teach mankind how to pray, and later, declaring "Thou art the Guru, the Supreme Guru of God". Thus the apparent recipient of a commission more akin to those of the Hebrew prophets, or even Mohammed, than the less personal, more mystical realizations characteristic of the great spiritual innovators of India, Nanak commenced a teaching mission proclaiming a single personal God. In other ways, however, Nanak drew on his own Hindu background, teaching the crucial doctrines of karma and samsara (reincarnation). On these foundations he sought to form a religious community in which all might participate.

Prior to his death Nanak named a successor as Guru, and he in turn named his successor. Under the early Gurus the new faith flourished, as the Muslim ruler who came to power at this time was the remarkable Akbar, (1543-1605) who, while remaining a devout Muslim, sought to understand and appreciate other faiths, especially Hinduism. Unfortunately Akbar's tact did not always match his breadth of mind and his humanity, so that the return to orthodoxy after his reign was reinforced by the resentment of the offended. The ascendancy of Islam, therefore, was soon being promoted with vigour and even ferocity.

The pressure on the Sikhs to mobilize was already considerable when the fifth Guru, Arjan (1563-1606) was summoned to Lahore on suspicion of plotting against the Mughal Emperor Jehangir. Once in custody he was put to death by torture. At once Sikh leadership passed to his eleven year old son Har Govind, who quickly matured into a determined and inventive commander. Under Har Govind, Sikh hostility to the Muslim overlords was channelled into imaginative guerrilla type campaigns and energetic missionary activity. Sikh outrage at the savage treatment of Arjan, and the strength of their reaction, will be better appreciated if it is noted that as well as being a capable soldier, Arjan was a poet of high ability, had carried through the building of the Golden Temple at Amritsar commenced by

his father and was the compiler of the Adi Granth, the principal Sikh scripture.

A half century later, Muslim conservatism and persecution having reached its peak under Akbar's great-grandson Auranzeb, the tenth Sikh Guru responded by founding the Khalsa, a militant order of Sikhs joined by a symbolic Baptism of the Sword by those willing to pledge themselves to its standards of fearlessness and purity of life. Men who joined dropped their Hindu surnames and took the common surname Singh, meaning lion. They also adopted a distinctive mode of dress involving breeches to the knee, uncut hair and beard, a steel bracelet and a dagger. The tenth Guru, Govind Singh, who instituted the Khalsa, was also the last, as he substituted allegiance to the most sacred scripture, the Adi Granth, for allegiance to the Guru. Tragically the energies of the Sikhs were thereafter largely spent in fighting the Muslims, until, with the spread of British power, the Sikhs allied themselves with the new rulers and in large numbers joined the British armed forces and police. Later, certain features of British colonial rule alienated the Sikhs, ending 70 years of amicable cooperation.

Generally the Sikhs have been less sophisticated in occupation and worship than the Jains. They have been in the main farmers, mechanics and soldiers, or workers in the transport industry. In worship, the central act is reading from Adi Granth, the original of which is still housed in the Golden Temple at Amritsar. The Sikh community is widely respected for its industry, integrity and high moral standards. With their beards, turbans, and characteristic dress they are a highly visible minority. They remain devout, closely knit, active and clean living, and, with some exceptions, are determined to maintain their faith and identity in the face of secular and western influences.





## CHAPTER 5

## CHINESE RELIGIONS

Those of us who readily identify with a distinct religious tradition and are able to see it with some clarity in relation to the affiliations of our neighbours, must be careful not to project such clear cut distinctions on to the Chinese religious scene. In that country educated Buddhists, Taoists and Confucianists could doubtless have explained their respective systems, but over many centuries the vast majority of Chinese have drawn from all of these sources in arriving at an accommodation with the unseen aspects of Reality. Confucianist in their feelings of deference toward Heaven, in their manners and family relations, they turned to Buddhist funeral rites for solace and reassurance when bereaved, and when threatened by evil or mischievous spirits, or needing the assistance of benign spirits, they looked to the spells and incantations of Taoist priests. Some writers go so far as to claim that it is incorrect to speak of the religions of China, so interwoven have the major threads become.

A further qualification needs to be made before perusal of Taoism and Confucianism is commenced. Many of the key ideas we find in these contrasting but complementary faiths were already ancient when Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching in the second half of the 6th Century B.C.E. T'ien, or Heaven, was the vault of the sky. With Earth, it made up the universe of the ancient Chinese. But Heaven was no mere astronomical concept, but also the mysterious source and arbiter of human destiny. Earlier generations had spoken of Shang-ti, the Lord on High, but by the 6th Century, it was to the impersonal and rather low-key deity, Heaven, that men related their destinies. Similarly, Tao, the way of life, or the cosmic way, equally the way of self-realization, was already permeating the Chinese world-view. Firmly established also were the concepts of yin and yang, the dual energy modes, negative and positive, female and male, dark and light, which were seen in varying combinations in every natural force, human personality and activity. Beyond these basic recurring themes were others almost equally as important--the Mandate of Heaven bestowed upon successful rulers and withdrawn from the unsuccessful, the need for close family ties and reverence for elders and ancestors, and the presence in every living thing and natural feature of an animating spirit--all of which are concisely summed up in Hutchison's introduction to Chinese religion (1969, pp. 207-210).

For reasons outlined earlier (1.2), it is not proposed to add substantially to the text's coverage of Taoism and Confucianism. In both cases the exposition is sound and lively, so only a few additional comments, and some illustrative quotations will be included. Some further references to each will be made, however, in summing up



religious change in China under the People's Republic.

1. *TAOISM*

Taoism, the following of the Way, is, or has been, a path to Reality for millions upon millions of Chinese, and, despite the efforts of the People's Republic (5.3) to extinguish it totally, it may well be still potent in the lives of many of the people, especially among those who are older. To the westerner who has travelled in South East Asia and encountered the practice of Taoism at first hand among overseas Chinese, this may be perplexing. Magical spells, incantations, apparently bizarre rituals and anxiety in relation to multitudes of non-physical beings are repugnant to the western mind. It is therefore particularly pleasing to find that Professor Smith has gone beneath the beliefs and practices of popular Taoism to seek and explain the rationale of philosophical Taoism, and, even more notably, of that subtle and elusive essence of this ancient faith, which he terms esoteric Taoism (pp. 200-204). Throughout, quotations from the Tao Te Ching are well used and must tantalize the student who has not time to follow them back to the intriguing little volume from which they have been drawn.

Taoism has made a major contribution to Chinese culture and, it would not be exaggerating to add, has exerted a profoundly formative influence on the Chinese temperament. Taking and elaborating ancient themes, Taoist teachers have stressed gentleness, non-resistance, affinity with nature, harmony and the interior search. Over many generations this approach has nourished the inner lives of millions and has balanced the "yang" of Confucianism (see esp. Smith pp. 207-214). For example, in Verse 24 of the Tao Te Ching (trans. Blakney, 1955) we read:

"On tiptoe your stance is unsteady;  
Long strides make your progress unsure;  
Show off and you get no attention;  
Your boasting will mean you have failed;  
Asserting yourself brings no credit;  
Be proud and you never will lead."

Verse 20 appears to be directly anti-Confucian, so much so that some scholars believe such passages to have been interpolated long after the time of Lao Tzu for reasons of polemics:

"Be done with rote learning  
And its attendant vexations;  
For is there distinction  
Of a "yes" from a "yea"  
Comparable now to the gulf  
Between evil and good?"

"What all men fear, I too must fear" -  
How barren and pointless a thought!"

For the most part, however, the poetry of this tiny classic is concentrated on nature, non-resistance and the mystic way, as, for instance, in Verse 56:

"Those who know do not talk  
And talkers do not know.  
Stop your senses,  
Close the doors;  
Let sharp things be blunted,  
Tangles resolved,  
The light tempered  
And turmoil subdued;  
For this is mystic unity  
In which the Wise Man is moved  
Neither by affection  
Nor yet by estrangement  
Or profit or loss  
Or honor or shame.  
Accordingly, by all the world,  
He is held highest."

As was indicated in introducing Chinese forms of Buddhism (3.7), Taoist influences established an understanding of life that enabled people to grasp the Dhamma, and paved the way for the emergence of Ch'an Buddhism. Taoism is thus seen to have deeply affected Japan also, through the spreading into Japanese art, literature and even gardening, of the Zen spirit. This broad cultural transmission is summed up succinctly by Smith in his observation that (p. 212), ". . . Indian Buddhism processed through Chinese Taoism becomes Japanese Zen".

## 2. *CONFUCIANISM*

It has been claimed by many that Confucianism is a social ethic rather than a religion, and it is true that the teachings of the master Kung, or Kung Fu-tzu (Latinized by early Christian missionaries), are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the details of social intercourse among people of differing ranks and relationships. Further, Confucianism has never had a distinctly religious organization, nor a specialized priesthood--heads of clans or the head of state officiated--nor even credal statements, nor authoritative doctrines, nor revealed scriptures. Asceticism, found in one form or another in so many religions, was accorded no place in the Confucian system, and monasticism, therefore, was also rejected. Nevertheless Kung himself, and his informed followers, were motivated by a deep sense of man's dependence upon Heaven, and Kung's sayings reveal his awareness of

the relationship of the world of men and a transcendent or spiritual world. As is pointed out by a scholarly biographer (Howard Smith, 1973, p. 61):

"The assurance that his own power of virtue (Te) was born of Heaven and that he had a Heaven sent task to perform gave him strength to triumph over his disappointments and face with equanimity both hostility and neglect."

The same conclusion is reached by Huston Smith. After pondering the question "Ethics or Religion?" (pp. 187-191), he concludes:

"If, therefore we are to condense Confucianism into a single sentence, we must describe it as a social order in collaboration and communion with a cosmic order."

Of prime importance, and admirably brought out by Smith against a lucidly delineated historical background, was Kung's explicit policy of inculcating an edited version of the ancient culture -deliberate tradition, as Smith expresses it (pp. 173-187). That one scholar could assimilate, edit and re-express the key elements of an already ancient and elaborate culture, and do so in the midst of constant teaching, consulting and advising--and periods of extensive travels-- is an indication of that man's greatness.

Kung's policy stands, of course, in sharp contrast to that of the Taoists. It was his conviction that correctness of bearing, gesture and utterance made it possible to experience and express correct feelings, and clearly there is much to be said for this view. Indeed, two and a half thousand years of social patterning largely grounded in this assumption bear witness to Kung's genius. That from time to time ceremonial and observance became dry and empty, no more invalidates the Confucian yang, than excesses of divining and propitiation invalidate the basic premises of the Taoist yin.

### 3. *RELIGION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC*

It has been possible for historians and other commentators to build up a fairly detailed picture of changes in the religious life of the people of China since 1949. Some few have been permitted to travel, observe and interpret--and in the immediate past this number has increased significantly. In the 1950's missionaries left China, each with his or her story to tell. Chinese leaving permanently have contributed information, and the Government of the People's Republic has also added to our knowledge through radio announcements and through the statements of officially approved newspapers and journals.

Marx and his orthodox followers expected the achievement of a classless society in which every man would govern himself and bourgeois institutions would wither away. Foremost among the institutions thus rendered redundant by the arrival of the millennium, would be the family and the church. In China the communist authorities have in some cases followed the policy of allowing religious institutions to wither, usually with a little judiciously applied assistance. In other cases intervention has been more deliberate and thorough. Confucianism, it was felt, had to be eliminated rapidly, as it directed loyalty to the discredited feudal regime -and the new Government could afford no pockets of disaffection, especially among the intellectuals, where Confucianism had been particularly strong. The intense family loyalties cultivated in Confucian homes had also to be overcome, as the first loyalty of every Chinese must be to the state. Accordingly Confucianism was vigorously suppressed, and those in whom it appeared likely to survive were very often gathered up for "re-education".

Taoism was also severely dealt with. It was seen as mere superstition and therefore a source of weakness for the masses -an infection, as it were, in the lives of the sacred people. Taoist rituals and ceremonies were forbidden and priests and astrologers were labelled as counter-revolutionaries and set to 'productive' labour. How far it has been possible to eliminate Taoist habits of thought and feeling from the minds and hearts of the ordinary people remains for the future to reveal. Perhaps Confucianism may have been more vulnerable, having been the faith of the highly educated, many of whom appear to have been sceptical about their own traditions and to have assumed an attitude of condescending tolerance towards the beliefs of the masses.

Buddhists have been left free to practise their faith in China, but have suffered a great many privations in doing so. Their lands and some temples have been confiscated, and monks and nuns compelled to engage in productive labour--communal support of those in religious orders cuts directly across the communist work ethic. Buddhist schools have been closed, as they intrude upon the duty of the state to provide appropriate education for the young. Buddhist religious observance is tolerated rather than approved. The authorities take the attitude that this rather less harmful superstition will die out without further action being necessary, and such estimates as can be made indicate that numbers have indeed dwindled. Probably less than 50 million are still practising Buddhists, mostly in the south, with perhaps three to four million remaining who might be described as devout.

Christians have certainly not been granted freedom to worship without interference. Catholics in particular drew the attention of the Government, as might have been anticipated in view of the strong anti-Communist stance of the Vatican, and of the association of Catholicism with European imperialism, and its heavy dependence on

European missionaries. By expelling foreign clergy and restricting access to such Chinese bishops as there were, the authorities have virtually put an end to Catholicism in China. Protestant missions, on the other hand, had largely passed into the hands of Chinese clergy, nor were they associated with a single monolithic anti-communist church. They have therefore suffered less acutely. Christianity as a whole, however, is definitely seen as tainted by association with western imperialism and colonialism. All Christian orphanages, schools and hospitals were closed and the Christians were told to purge themselves of foreign loyalties and achieve total self-reliance. In the aftermath of these changes various strange blends of communist and Christian thought appeared. One visitor reported hearing the faithful exhorted to pray for Marx and Mao and to venerate Christ, the son of a carpenter, and a great proletarian reformer.

Another group left to die out naturally are the ten million or so Chinese Muslims who live in the far north-west. They may practise their faith and bring up their children within it but it is illegal for a person from a non-Muslim family to convert to Islam. Probably the extreme Chinese suspicion of foreigners who established schools or orphanages arose from the belated recognition that Islam had gained a stronghold in China through the gathering of unwanted orphans into Islamic orphanages where they were brought up as faithful Muslims. Chinese Muslim women may not appear veiled in public, and education in Arabic has been forbidden, but otherwise the Muslims are left to their own devices.

With such measured but all-enveloping disapproval of any expression of religious feelings one might expect the Chinese to become, in time, totally secularized. Instead we are confronted with the amazing phenomenon of the secular ideology itself taking on distinctly religious overtones, and providing outlets for the kinds of devotion, enthusiasm and even self-sacrifice more often associated with an ardent religious faith. Westerners generally are aware of the extreme devotion to Mao Tse-tung demonstrated during the 1950's and 1960's, and apparently orchestrated through the schools, and, in fact, through the whole apparatus of the State. Here, it would appear, a saviour figure was offered to unify the people. This comes out very plainly in many of the newspaper and radio outpourings of the sixties, as, for example, on Peking Radio on December 6, 1967:

"All rivers flow into the sea and every Red heart turns towards the sun. O Chairman Mao, Chairman Mao, the mountains are tall, but not as tall as the blue sky. Rivers are deep, but not as deep as the ocean. Lamps are bright, but not as bright as the sun and moon. Your kindness is taller than the sky, deeper than the ocean, and brighter than the sun and moon.

It is possible to count the stars in the highest heavens, but it is impossible to count your contributions to mankind."

The religious overtones of Chinese communism under Mao are not confined to the building up of a gigantic saviour figure. An analogy between Chinese communism and the Christian Church has been skilfully elaborated by C. P. Fitzgerald in his *The Birth of Communist China*. In place of God, he suggests (1964, p. 148) ". . .the Communist doctrine makes the people sacred and sovereign", and to serve them with kindness . . ."is almost a religious rite". The party member is seen as the priest of the New Order, one who (p. 149) ". . .lives a life apart, at the disposal of the party, maintained by them in austere poverty, at their orders to depart to some distant place at once, making no contacts beyond the party, entertaining no friends, renouncing all mundane ties. . .beyond the party. Within that select order he may marry and relax. . .". And before the party member is his constant ideal and inspiration, not of personal salvation, but of collective improvement--the millennium of the classless society. Supporting this attitude and life pattern is the great heroic tradition, the Long March, from the survivors of which the post-revolutionary leadership was drawn. Nor did these features exhaust the parallels, for of course Maoism had its orthodoxy, its doctrine fully accepted by party functionaries and to be acceded to by all. Where resistance was encountered there was even an ingenious technique of "thought reform", or "ideological remoulding" which an eminent American psychologist (Lifton, in Schurmann and Schell, Vol III, 1967, pp. 133-145) has shown to be a form of group psychotherapy in which the subject's deep sense of identity is re-oriented so that his functional image of himself is changed and his strongest loyalties are detached from his father and re-directed to the party and the state. In other words there has been employed a potent method of forced conversion. Lifton's absorbing account of Chinese thought reform will repay enquiry and may even prompt exploration of the same author's full length study, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*.

This brief survey of the religious aspects of Chinese communism leads to the question, is communism China's new religion? Fitzgerald concludes that it is, but reaching this conclusion necessitates omitting from one's understanding of religion the ". . .reference beyond the natural world to God or gods or to the Absolute, or to the Absolute, or to a transcendent order or process" (Hick, 1971, p. 133, quoted 1.4 above) which was our starting point in this survey. This distinction, however, does not alter what is happening. The phenomenological question is whether, 15 or 20 or 25 years from the time of the observations producing this analysis the Chinese nation is still activated up by the sacred people as deity, a human saviour, a this-worldly millennium and a political priesthood within the background,

the fear of forced conversion. And the indication, after 15 years, is that their saviour-figure has been deflated and their enthusiasm somewhat diminished. Whether a continued decline in commitment to the ideology of Marx and Mao will be accompanied by a return to the ideals of Buddha, Lao-tzu and Kung Fu-tzu is one of the most fascinating questions before us in the remaining years of this century.



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