

PENTAGRAM

SPECIAL ISSUE :

INDIA IN THE RHYTHM
OF INFINITY

'There are two cosmic truths:
sound and not-sound.

But now it is so that the inner sound
is only revealed by the outer.'

(Upanishads)



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WHY THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF PENTAGRAM?

The world is on the move. People are looking for backgrounds and new possibilities. They try to move the limits of their field of life, and while doing so, eagerly and easily fall back on magnificent cultures from a rich past, because these have after all left their marks on our consciousness. Oriental philosophies and religions in particular have become quite popular.

In the distant past – and the Indian chronology refers to tens of thousands of years – a spiritual impulse developed on the Indian continent, which left its marks on the cultures of East and West. That original spiritual impulse was intended to help humanity of that era a step further in its return to the Divine Kingdom. Thus there have always been impulses and there will always be new impulses, until humanity has reached its goal.

Such a spiritual impulse has three aspects: the idea, the explanation of the idea and the realisation of the idea. Those who understand this tri-unity discover that it is a ladder for climbing to their spiritual native soil. But for others such an impulse gradually turns into a cult and the cult into a culture. The idea is limited by their consciousness, the explanation is altered according to their own insights and the realisation is limited by lack of the necessary renewing universal energy. In this way, amongst other things, Hinduism, Brahmanism, Bud-

dhism and Christianity have emerged, have risen to magnificent heights and have ultimately become empty forms. That is why new impulses come over and again in order to raise humanity up to the highest good, one wave following the other. But after having reached the summit during the time that they were relevant, such waves always went over the top, broke and the highest turned into the lowest.

But time continues and conditions change. And human beings change together with those conditions. The biological properties of humanity of many thousands of years ago do perhaps differ only slightly from those of present-day humanity, but the spiritual properties have certainly changed. That is why also now a new spiritual impulse is necessary, which perhaps builds on previous impulses – that after all lose their power after they have done their work – but that are cornerstones in our consciousness. A new spiritual impulse, charged with new energy, encompasses humanity in order to give it a new chance. Lao Tzu propagated an enlightened philosophy, the Buddha came to break through the polytheism of Hinduism, Jesus presented teachings of salvation, and the new gnostic impulse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries confront humanity with a new possibility to finally liberate itself from all dogmas and false traditions. That process has been repeated in human history already many times.

Hence the original impulses of Divine intervention have never been meant to



ensnare people in rules and traditions. They brought renewal and intended renewal in human beings. Then it is tragic to see that the impulse of Christianity has become totally externalised and that humanity has lost its own mystery. The new possibilities that have been brought by all world religions, have become bogged down in cultivation of the ego and the higher self. Whenever human beings were taught how to find their true self, they have interpreted it as finding their ego, their personal powers. But that is a blind alley. Cultivation of the I no longer presents a way out.

In the gnostic-Christian teachings of

transfiguration, present-day humanity is again confronted with the task to propel its immortal inner soul to birth and full growth. Throughout all ages, the eternal wisdom invariably shows this true path, also in our time. We hope that this issue of Pentagram may clarify this for its readers.

The editors of Pentagram

Bridge between
present and past.
Gardens of
Mogul, India.
Photo Pentagram.

SEEKING THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Why are not all religions the same? Every culture has its thinkers who conclude that God is infinite, transcendental, omnipresent, all-encompassing and above all, like unto himself. So why are there so many types of religions?

Religions are created, coloured and determined by the interaction between people and the spiritual impulse that touches them. First, there is the impulse, which is followed by a cult and this turns into a culture. Hence every religion has a beginning, a prime and an end. The type of impulse and the development potential is linked with the state of crystallisation of the people or race in which this impulse is manifested. In this way, religions can evolve and develop to a certain extent. However, they can also crystallise and prevent new developments.

The wisdom of the Vedanta is thousands of years old. The Vedanta consists of the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras, three guides that gave the yogi his orientation. True yoga teaches that a human being will become God to the extent that he strengthens the image of the origin in himself. To help people in this respect, physical postures were developed in the distant past, which corresponded to the activity of certain forces in the universe. It was possible to achieve unity with the divine through concentration and meditation. The lower being became one with the higher being.

CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ASTRAL SPHERE

Generally speaking, people were not as individualised in the past as they are now. Their consciousness was much more subordinate to that of the group to which they belonged, as it is today with respect to fanatical members of political parties. In the past, everyday life was determined by ancestors, devas and other nature forces that were represented as gods. People lived more consciously in the astral spheres and even communicated with entities that existed there. By not creating karma, one life of self-sacrifice and self-control was enough to free themselves from the physical body, so that they could enter into the great divine, irrespective of whether this was called Brahma, Vishnu or any other deity.

Approximately six centuries before the Christian era, the Buddha appeared with his teachings of liberation. These presented a completely different orientation, in which sannyasin played the key role; it amounted to the rejection of three worlds:

- that of man himself;
- that of his ancestors;
- and that of the gods.

People suffered because of their instincts and experienced the impurities, which caused their suffering. That is why the Buddha taught purity and cleanliness in numerous aspects of life in order to be able to banish all impurity and to reach the divine.

A THINKING HUMAN BEING ACHIEVES
AUTONOMY

Six hundred years later, the scene had totally changed. We see the dawn of the Greco-Roman civilisation, of which, in particular in European cultures, we have preserved many ideas, insights and laws. Yet, what took place in the field of religion? Today, a thinking person stands more or less on his own two legs. He is responsible for his actions and, as far as the authorities permit, he can choose his own life and spiritual orientation. This is a new phase in the development of Aryan humanity: to seek God by negation of and liberation from the natural consciousness.

In the last years of the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus, Jesus propagated his teachings that were based on these new possibilities. It was no longer a matter of removing suffering but of accepting it as an aspect of nature. The divine principle that lies hidden in the human being has to be reborn, released, for without that living principle, the human soul cannot find eternity. Jesus says: *'No one comes to the Father but by me.'* (John 14:6) The Apostle Paul says: *'So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.'* (1 Cor. 15:42-44)

At the time, the consciousness had its seat in the head and hence in the physical body. This is still the case today. Esoteric authorities explain that the centres of the different vehicles meet in the head. That is why the Spirit, God, can no longer be directly perceived, attained, felt and experienced.

'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God,' Jesus says. (1 Cor. 15:50) That was and remains a pure Gnostic

statement! Let us not have any doubts here: the teachings of redemption of Jesus the Christ are purely Gnostic ones.

Now, two millennia later, we see what remains of the impulse that had to break down dogmas and regulations. New dogmas were created, new walls erected around the sparkling nucleus of love and freedom. What sadness has ensued! God has been placed in heaven, so that people can pray to him and theologians of all types and sorts appointed themselves as intermediaries to explain Him to the people. The Gnostics, whose starting point was the divine spark in the human heart, had to suffer for their audacity.

MAN IS A MICROCOSM

Time went by. Valentine was accused of heresy; Mani founded a world religion of the Light Soul and perished in his chains. The Paulicians and the Bogomils were persecuted and betrayed. The Cathars were burned by the thousands. The Rosicrucians, the Templars and the mystics were persecuted and, where possible, eliminated.

The concept of the 'microcosm' emerged during the Renaissance. Man is a microcosm! A small world as a reflection of the macrocosm. A small world in which everything can be found that humanity needs to manifest itself according to God's plan. This point of view caught on quickly and the Renaissance human being discovered that he was an autonomous being who had to and could control his own heaven and earth.

However, his consciousness had not yet fully developed. In the eighteenth century, the encyclopaedists believed that they knew everything and they wrote their knowledge down in bulky volumes. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, science has claimed its place, and human beings must now evolve from their state of

social isolation into social beings.

At present, humanity stands before a new phase, as it enters the twenty-first century. People are searching for new facets of the consciousness, even for a totally new consciousness! They talk of giving meaning to life and seek in all directions for something that ties in with their present consciousness. Life only begins to have meaning when someone finds his spiritual basis in his heart. That spiritual potential is the basis for true renewal of our whole life, not for just a short while, but continuing in an eternal current. All the wisdom that has been implanted in the microcosm throughout the ages, propels humanity to realisation. We have to do something with it! That is why a reaction must follow, a reaction that is stimulated by the stream of power that flows from the divine nucleus in the heart.

PROCESS OF REGENERATION MUST TAKE
PLACE NOW

The rose awakens! It changes the human being. It places him in a process of regeneration, from which a spiritual body can be born. What is important here are individual insight, pure longing, pure motives and sustained striving. *'It is sown natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.'* That spiritual body is the Spirit-Soul human being, who can overcome the limitations of nature.

No one can do this for someone else. Everyone has to work on his own salvation. Everyone needs to proceed from his own basis which is linked with the basis of the

whole of humanity. That is why all souls are linked and form a unity as to 'their being souls', while the carriers of these souls, the 'egos', are often at each other's throats. Nobody can free himself from humanity as everyone belongs to its body.

The Golden Rosycross teaches that earthly nature is fickle and that the human being can never find permanent happiness on earth. The purpose of life is to find the eternal wisdom that lies in the heart as a grain of seed. When this seed germinates, the spirit can grow, provided it surrenders to this process of growth.

'MY SELF IS MY INNERMOST HEART'

The macrocosm offers to every type of soul a planned, harmonious field of development, which is enveloped and penetrated by the Unknowable One. The microcosm of the earthly human being must also go its spiral path in this field. Hence, the divine is present in all living beings and will be manifested at the proper time.

The profound Gnostic texts of the Upanishads deal with atman in the heart which is one with the divine primordial substance. *'My self is my innermost heart, smaller than a grain of rice or a mustard seed, or the core of a grain of millet. My self in my innermost heart is greater than the earth, greater than space, greater than these worlds. It is active everywhere, fragrant everywhere, tasty everywhere, all-encompassing, wordless and unconcerned: so my self is in my innermost heart. This is Brahma.'*

(From the teachings of the Shandilya).

The fundamental unity of three teachings: LaoTzu (l), Confucius (r) and the Buddha as a baby. Painting on silk. 14th century.

RHYTHM OF INFINITY

Sound and silence in the Indian tradition

'There are basically two cosmic truths: sound and not-sound. But now it is so that the inner sound is only revealed by the outer.' (Upanishads)

It is not surprising that music plays a significant role in the Indian tradition. In its near boundless differentiation in melody and rhythm, it is a true picture of Indian cosmology, in which the factor of time assumes a special significance.

An Indian system dealing with the different states of time speaks of two modalities¹: the *Vaishnava* mode and the *Shaiva* mode. The first one is spatial, causal and ordered time. In this mode, ethics, morals and belief in progress are present. Experiences are processed and classified sequentially. The *Vaishnava* mode sustains the events in the world and in this sense is linked with the god Vishnu, the maintainer of the world, and his consort *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth.

In contrast, the *Shaiva* mode is non-transitory, non-causal and works spontaneously. The 'deep understanding', the consciousness that surpasses time and space can be found in it. *Shaiva's* essence is creativity, creative force, and hence is connected with the god *Shiva*, the creator (and destroyer!) of the world.

THEN THE UNIVERSE PERISHES

Shiva is also honoured as the creator of music. His mystical dance symbolises the rhythmic movement of the universe.

Shiva represents the Logos from which everything originates. As *Nataraja*, lord of the dance, he creates with the help of the drum in his right hand. When negative elements in his creation begin to dominate, *Nataraja* stops dancing and drumming and seeks for a new and better rhythm. At that moment a universe perishes. As soon as Shiva begins to drum again, a new creative cycle, a new universe in the rhythm of infinity, is generated.

In the *Shiva Sutra*, a collection of aphorisms about the god Shiva, the four stages of creativity are described:

- the transcendent (*parai*)
- the perceiving (*pasyantii*)
- the transforming and processing (*madhyamai*)
- the expression (*vykharī*).

These four stages describe every creative process: the creation of a universe as well as the creation of a musical composition. This means that also lower creations go through this process. Yes, it applies in principle to every spoken word, for an act of creation lies at the basis of speech, on whatever level. Every word is a creation, sublime or of a very low quality. Every true artist passes through these four stages consciously and with a lofty goal in mind. But the artist whose soul is stained by lower desires finds himself on a lower level of vibration and lets himself be led by it, often unconsciously. As a result, his creations express the effects of these lower forces. Every artist must, as said

Vishnu resting with Lakshmi, Brahma is in the lotus. School of Pahari, ca. 1760.

before, pass through the four stages. Whoever listens with the ear of the living soul can differentiate between art and kitsch.

THE EAR IS THE WAY

A composer perceives a melody in the sphere of transcendental vibrations. He sees the sounds, so to speak, and translates them into symbols (notes) which make it possible to reproduce with instruments what was heard. The listener can perceive something of this in a performance by musicians in an orchestra, and can be touched and moved inwardly. This applies also to spoken words. And hence, in the *Upanishads* we can read: *'The ear is the way.'*² For the human being must first learn to listen in order to understand the Word!

FROM THE BOOK OF GOLDEN PRECEPTS:

*'Before thou settest thy foot
upon the ladder's upper rung,
the ladder of the mystic sounds,
thou hast to hear the voice of thy inner God
in seven manners.*

*The first is like the nightingale's sweet voice
chanting a song of parting to its mate.*

*The second comes as the sound of a silver cymbal
of the spirits of the firmament, awakening the
twinkling stars.*

*The next is the plaint melodious
of the ocean sprite imprisoned in its shell.*

And this is followed by the chant of Vina.

The fifth like sound of bamboo flute shrills in thine ear.

It changes next into a trumpet blast.

*The first vibrates like the dull rumbling of a thunder
cloud.*

The seventh swallows all the other sounds.

They die, and then are heard no more.³

CREATION IS ONE FLOWING LINE

Before the uninspired musician can enter the fourth stage of creativity, he has to do a lot of work in the first three stages in order to fathom and reproduce something of the 'deep understanding'. However, if he is inspired, which means that his soul is completely open to the source, then the creative process is one flowing line. The consciousness needed for such music resounds in classical Indian music, provided it is played well. This refers especially to the rhythm, which is rooted in structures dating back to Vedic times.

The verses of the unwritten hymns, like the *Rig Vedas*, were sung in three or four notes. All syllables were classified according to their length, because accents were absent. The texts have been transmitted in this manner for thousands of years and the sense for duration and rhythm was sharpened. This subtle structure in classical Indian music forms a texture of complex rhythms.

The specific experience of time in a civilisation is always directly reflected in the rhythm of its music. This is especially evident in the rhythm of playing the drums. In ancient India, a vast variety of types of drums was used and each type had to be played in a specific way⁴.

What appears incomprehensible to Westerners is the fact that such drums could be played with two hands, whereby

in the same time unit, for example, 16 beats were given with the left hand while the right hand plays 15 beats. Indian street musicians are able to drum the most complicated rhythmic patterns with their arms and legs on whatever percussion instruments, whereby there are often seven or eight different rhythms superimposed on each other.

THE 'TALA' AS CYCLICAL CREATION

The rhythmic pattern is called *tala*. Each *tala* has a characteristic structure that distinguishes it from every other *tala* and which is maintained throughout the whole piece of music (which can last several hours). The longest *talas* consist of about 80 to 100 beats per time unit and have a very complicated structure. Such pieces of music can also be followed by the audience from beat to beat, while a Western audience becomes unsure with everything that goes beyond a three or four beat rhythm. Most Western musicians hardly ever go beyond a five or seven beat rhythm.

Indian music is cyclical. A piece starts with the *sam* (beginning together). After a series of very diverse variations, the musicians meet in the *sam* again, and a new cycle starts from there. At that moment the audience breaks out in loud jubilation, ventilating all built-up tension by the constant question: will they make it? Will they meet? Such cycles are often repeated several hundred times, and are rarely identical.

The word *tala* is a combination of the syllables *ta* of *tandala*, Shiva's cosmic dance, and *la* from *Lasya*, a dancing partner of Shiva. This term implies cosmic as well as physical union.

This musical structure corresponds to the tradition of an ever-recurring cycle of manifestations, each of which differs from

FROM THE RIG VEDA:

*'Breath of the gods
and life germ of the world, freely he wanders.
Him we worship,
Him, whose voice one hears,
but whose form no one sees.'*

the previous one. This concerns a wisdom that is independent of time and that is expressed in many dimensions and in sheer inexhaustible variety. Thus, all creatures are revealed, concealed and healed in the stream of time.⁵

NADA BRAHMA, THE WORLD IS SOUND⁶

Thus Shiva controls the processes of creation and destruction in the universe. To this end he uses the divine fire that he carries in his left hand. The drum shows his power, because its sound sets the primal substance in motion. Macrocosms and microcosms, galaxies and creatures, planets, gods and life waves are formed by the rhythm of his drum. Thus sound causes manifestation. Creation originates from primal substance. The rest between two beats of the drum is a moment of recreation, in which the primal substance returns to the transcendental plane. And so, in all humility, we can perhaps imagine something of the activity of the Divine creative Word. The human being in his original Spirit-Soul form has to learn to use this power. The sound of this Divine Word manifests the love of God for His creatures. His true power, however, lies hidden in the silence.

'Behold the mellow light that floods the Eastern sky. In signs of praise both heaven and earth unite. And from the fourfold manifested powers a chant of love arises, both from the flaming fire and flowing water, and from sweet-smelling earth and rushing wind.'

Hark!... from the deep unfathomable vortex of the golden light, in which the victor bathes, All-Nature's wordless voice in thousand tones arises to proclaim:

Joy unto you, O men of this earth!

A pilgrim has returned back from the other shore.⁷

(The Voice of the Silence)

BHAGAVAD GITA, VERSES 8 AND 10:

'Our bodies are known to end, but the embodied self is enduring, indestructible, and immeasurable; therefore, fight the battle!

The Atman is not born, it does not die;

having been, it will never not be;

unborn, enduring, constant, and primordial,

*it is not killed when the body is killed.'*⁷

SOURCES:

- 1 Joachim-Ernst Berendt: *Das Dritte Ohr – Vom Hören der Welt* (The third Ear – On Hearing the World), Reinbek bei Hamburg 1992.
- 2 Prof. Dr. E. C. G. Sudarshan: *Time in the Indian tradition*, published on the Internet under www.here-now4u.de.
- 3 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: *The Voice of the Silence – Being Chosen Fragments from the 'Book of Golden Precepts'*, Theosophical Publishing House, 1992.
- 4 Leif Grondey: *Die indische Trommel* (The Indian Drum), Humboldt University, Berlin.
- 5 Joachim-Ernst Berendt: *Nada Brahma – Die Welt ist Klang* (Nada Brahma – The World is Sound), Reinbek bei Hamburg 1990.
- 6 Heinrich Zimmer: *Indische Mythen und Symbole* (Indian Myths and Symbols), Diederich's Gelbe Reihe, 7th edition 2000.
- 7 Barbara Stoler Miller (translator), *The Bhagavad Gita*, Mystical Classics of the World, Bantam Books 1986.

THE LEGEND OF THE PARADE OF ANTS

Indra was the belligerent ruler amongst the Vedic gods. With his thunderspear he had defeated the titanic cloud dragon and in this way released the water, the stream of life, from the dragon's belly. Immediately after that he began to rebuild the dilapidated city of the gods. He ordered Vishvakarman, the god of the arts and crafts, to build a palace worthy of a king. But Vishvakarman had hardly finished or Indra imposed additional requirements. He wanted more terraces, more ponds, towers, pavilions, dykes and caves. He drove Vishvakarman to despair and finally the latter complained to Brahma, the creator of this world, whose power far surpassed Indra's. Brahma promised help. He submitted the case to Vishnu, who listened to him.

The next day a radiant Brahman young man appeared before the gate of Indra's palace. Immediately Indra saw that it was a holy man and bowed for him. He invited him to enter the hall of his palace. 'Most sublime of the gods,' the young man said, 'no Indra preceding you has ever built such a palace.' The young man's remark that he knew the previous Indras, was well noted by Indra. He smiled and asked: 'Tell me, my child, is the number of Indras you have seen or of whom you have heard really that large?' 'Certainly,' the young man replied, 'I have seen many: your father, your grandfather and I also know Brahma. I have experienced the terrible destruction of the universe. At the end of each cycle I have seen how everything perished. The life and rule of an Indra lasts seventy-one aeons. After twenty-eight aeons, one day and one night of Brahma have passed. However, the life of a Brahma only lasts one hundred and eight of his years. Then follows Brahma after Brahma. Their number is infinite, let alone the number of Indras. And the universes that are created every moment... who could measure their time?'

While the young man was telling this, a four-yard wide column of ants marched

through the hall. The young man stopped his narrative for a moment and then made his clear laughter resound, after which he lapsed into a deep silence. 'Why do you laugh? Who are you?' Indra stammered. The young man answered: 'When I saw the ants pass by in a long column, I reflected that each of them has once been an Indra. Just like you, each of them has once achieved the status of god-king by praiseworthy and pious deeds. But due to their terrible deeds they degenerated and now they have incarnated as ants. All soldiers of this ant army have once been Indras.'

When Indra heard this, he felt himself and his building project become totally unimportant and be reduced to insignificance. He remunerated his master builder Vishvakarman, dismissed him and prepared to live the life of a hermit. However, with the help of a wise priest his loving spouse held him back from this step.

This beautiful story, in which Vishnu himself appears as a radiant young man, finishes with the remark that Indra humbled himself and that he was cured of his boundless pride and excessive ambition, after which he assumed the place in creation meant for him.

The Indian concept of time – kala – points to an infinite and hence unlimited phenomenon. In Indian mythology often a wheel is depicted that revolves through various cycles – kalpa: from creation to destruction and from chaos to creation again. One kalpa consists of one life of Brahma the Creator. One hundred and eight Brahma years are the same as 311,040 billion human years. One kalpa begins with the birth of Brahma and ends with his death. This is followed by the birth of a new Brahma. A kalpa consists of a thousand aeons. Each aeon consists of four yuga or world eras. The first world era is the golden age of innocence and truth. This one lasts longest. But truth fades and then the second, shorter world era begins. In this period virtue and longevity gradually decrease. Then an even shorter third world era follows, in which during our aeon Krishna and Rama, the heroes of the Ramajana and Mahabharata lived. The closing era is formed by the so-called kali yuga, the dark era. That is the present era. Characteristics of the kali yuga are ignorance, vice, violence and desire. At the end of the kali yuga, Vishnu, the keeper of the world, descends into the world in the shape of the warrior Kalki. He destroys all evil and preserves the good for the next manifestation of creation. Between destruction and new creation – during a cosmic night – Vishnu rests on the coiled serpent of infinity.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN NACIKETAS AND YAMA, THE GOD OF DEATH (*Kathaka Upanishad*)

The Kathaka Upanishad is part of the Upanishads, the youngest shoot of Vedic literature. The word 'upanishad' means 'sitting close to something' and also 'approaching with respect.' and 'being seated across from the teacher'. The Upanishads are philosophical essays on subjects like 'the truth behind the world', 'the origin of truth' and 'the true nature of man'.

Yama, the God of death, teaches Naciketas, son of a Brahmin about yonder side and about liberation from death. At the moment that the sacrificial cattle is driven together, the story starts, and the descendant of the Vajashravas voluntarily donates all his possessions, his still young son Naciketas is filled with faith. He ponders: joyless are the worlds where he goes, who donates this cattle. And he asks his father: *'Father to whom will you give me away?'* After posing this question two more times, his father responds: *'I give you to Death.'*

These words remind us of the biblical story of Abraham, who sacrifices his son Isaac to God. Abraham too, was a priest, but he was tested by God, while the Brahmin was not. Besides, Naciketas offered himself to be sacrificed, while Isaac was sacrificed by his father. At that point, the tale of Naciketas goes a step further. When Naciketas comes to Yama, the latter says: *'O Brahmin, as you stayed*

in my house as my revered guest for three nights without food, three wishes of yours will be fulfilled.' The first wish causes Yama no trouble at all. As soon as Naciketas will leave the realm of death, he can return to his Father without any problem. The wish to show him, Naciketas, the way to Heaven can easily be fulfilled by Yama, too. At the third wish, however, he protests, because the young man wants to learn something about the hereafter. *'Please, rather choose possessions and a long life. Be lord of a large country and I will see to it that all pleasures will be yours. Demand, if you wish, all pleasures, which are hard to get in the world of mortals. I will take care of them, but don't ask me what will occur after death.'*

Yama's reaction to the first wish shows that he does not require Naciketas to give up his life, after all he knows his own laws and can wait patiently, because he knows that eventually every human being will end up before him. The way to heaven, too, he can show Naciketas without hesitation, by showing him how to kindle the holy fire. This is a way of worship and surrender, on which age and death can be overcome. The more surprising it is to learn that he does not want to grant the third wish and does not want to tell anything about life after death. Seemingly, this concerns more than just devotion, which according to traditional knowledge leads to heaven. Knowledge and insight also matter, as the result of renunciation and of striving for truth.



When Yama offers to give all worldly joys and pleasures, Naciketas reacts: *'Those are, o god of death, pleasures that will be no more tomorrow. They deprive the senses of all sharpness. Short is our life. You may keep your chariots, dances and singing. Possessions only will not suffice for a human being. As soon as we behold you, we no longer possess anything. We live as long as you allow us to. The wish I would like to be fulfilled, remains the same. For it would provide information concerning a world people have doubts about, about what happens on yonder side. This wish, this deeply rooted desire and none other, is the choice of Naciketas.'*

Yama knows the laws of the land on yonder side and he also knows how a human being will be liberated from

them. When Naciketas has expressed his third wish three times, the god of death has to give way. Eventually he instructs Naciketas as follows: *'Whoever by self-reflection, knows Him as God, Who hardly visible resides in secret, Who is in secret, Who resides in the depth, this sage leaves sorrow and joy behind. Smaller than small, greater than great is atman, residing in the heart of the creature. Whoever is free from desire, free from distress, beholds by the mercy of the Creator the glory of atman.'*

This process of self-denial that liberates the divine nucleus in the heart, is universal and belongs to the oldest teachings given to humanity.

Yama continues his instruction: *'Atman cannot be understood by teach-*

Ardjuna drives Surya's chariot. Miniature, 18th century. Bharat Kala Museum, Varanasi, India.

Hinduism knows two trinities:

- The 'horizontal' or mythological one with its three aspects of Ishvara (Being): Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the keeper, and Shiva, the destroyer or reformer. Also important is the difference between Brahma and Brahman. The first one represents the three aspects or faces of Ishvara. The second one is the highest principle.

- The 'vertical' trinity (Sachchidananda) reflects the three inner dimensions of the highest principle:

- Sat – being, object, ultimate reality, transcendence;
- Chit – consciousness, subject, the supreme self, immanence;
- Ananda — bliss, union.

René Guenon, scholar of Hinduism, says that the 'vertical' trinity (being-consciousness-bliss) has an analogous relationship to the trinity of Christianity (Father-Son-Holy Spirit). There are numerous correspondences between Hinduism and Christianity.

ings, sacrifices or erudition. Whoever liberates atman himself, can understand him. To him atman reveals himself. But whoever does not leave his wrong way of life and does not achieve inner peace and self-control, whose heart is restless, cannot find atman because he lacks knowledge.'

This concerns the aspect of mercy. The goal cannot be reached by means of an external sacrifice or by accumulation of worldly knowledge only. The point is rather a change of one's own being. The heart should become still. In other words, it should be free of invisible ties to the world. In this context, the Egyptians used an image: before a human being can reach Osiris, Anubis, the god of death, must weigh his heart. It should be as light and unburdened as a feather.

Now Yama uses a parable, which later also returns in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

'You know that atman drives a chariot. The body is the chariot, reason the driver and intelligence the reigns. The senses are the horses, the perceptible is the road. The self, bound to senses and intelli-

gence, the sages call "the sensualist". Whoever does not possess the right insight, does not use reason as the driver, has wild horses that cannot be checked. Whoever drives his horses well, checked by reason, reaches the final destination of his journey: Vishnu's highest throne.'

Vishnu is the keeper of creation. He incarnates in divine beings like Rama and Krishna, and in that way influences the journey of the world. His highest throne can be found behind creation, the source of liberating power poured out for the world and humanity. Hence Vishnu is an aspect of the divine Word, the Logos, to which eventually Yama has to submit too.

At last Yama summarises his message and he reveals to those, whom he deems worthy of his secret, how they can escape his rule:

'Whoever worships that which is without noise, without feeling, without form, without change, without taste, eternal, without smell, without beginning or end, that what is higher than the great self and indestructible, he will be liberated from the jaws of death.'

Also in the Upanishads, the Indian secret teachings, the image is used that everything should serve 'It', the supreme God. The god of death keeps souls bound to the wheel of birth and death, but to the developed soul he reveals how to overcome this cycle and to find and follow the road to the divine world.

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ATMAN HAS MANY MEANINGS

The Sanskrit word for Self is atman. In the Upanishads the relationship between atman and brahman, he who stands on his own, the divine Spirit, the divine essence and source from which the whole of creation originates, is explained.

The word *atman* is also a reciprocal pronoun, just like the word 'self' in English. Whoever says 'I myself', may mean different things, depending on his consciousness. A number of these mean-

ings and their scope have been explained extensively by the author of the Sanskrit poem of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He uses the word *atman* in all sorts of different contexts, and in this way indicates that on the path to the ultimate truth *atman* can be identified with our own body, our sensory organs, our mental and emotional life, so that in the end the Self can be reached. This is *atman* in the strict meaning of the word, the spiritual spark in the human heart.

Below follow a few quotes that illustrate those different meanings.

Verse 7

'He [...] whose atman is very pure, and who has overcome himself [...] whose Self has become equal to the Self of all creatures, will not be tainted by acting.' Here *atman* is used to indicate the human spirit, the self (the body) and the Self (the Soul).

Verse 11

'[...] They act in order to cleanse the self (atman).' Here *atman* means 'the human spirit'.

Verse 16

'But for those, whose ignorance is nullified by the wisdom of the Self (atman), wisdom enlightens this Exalted One.' Here *atman* is used in its true meaning.

Verse 21

'When the self (atman) has detached itself from outward things, it experiences the joy that is contained in the Self (atman).' Here *atman* is used to indicate the senses or the mental faculty. *Atman* is here the only true Self.

Verse 26

'For those who are devoted and who have recognised the Self (atman), the blessing of Brahma is everywhere.' Here, too, the word *atman* is used for the one true Self.

All these different meanings of the word *atman* point to stages of the process, in which the Self is increasingly experienced and is ultimately recognised and acknowledged.

THE JOURNEY HOME IS A VERY MIGHTY PROCESS*

The great journey upward to the Fatherland leads through all the realms of the nature of death in a process. In that universe there are countless systems from the most gross to the most refined.

There are myriads of beings and life waves whose nature, power and variation are astounding. It is one great fathomless and immense ocean of manifestations, all within the framework of ungodliness and the fundamental and structural fallen state. It is the experimental ocean of life. It is the gigantic workshop of the Sorcerer's apprentices who have been left to themselves. Some parts are in a state of torpidity; other regions show vigorous and dynamic construction. In other regions again we see the turmoil and confusion of folly. But everywhere we see finiteness and the feverish activity connected with rising, shining and fading. Everyone and everything is bowed down under the almost everlasting doom of having to make every possible effort and having to use every possible means to survive and to make the best of it. Compared with this ocean of highest activity and multiplicity, our own microcosmic reflection sphere and even that of our cosmos pale into insignificance.

If the nature of death were to consist only of our field of life with its two spheres, liberation from it would be relatively easy. But we exist in a universe of death, and for that reason the journey home is an extremely mighty process of immense grandeur, an outward-spiralling

development completely devoid of conflict as we know it in our world order, a development devoid of struggle in our own self. Instead it is a mighty concentration of forces without any personal aggression, in which the ungodly must make way for the divine. Do not regard this as a journey of the soul through a cesspool of the most abominable evil and terrible crimes, but as a journey through a multifaceted exercise in aimlessness, in illusory goodness, and in self-glorification: in universal seeking.

And just as in our field of life a sevenfold universal Brotherhood is active to make the light vesture possible for those who are liberated, so too we find, throughout the whole universe of death, the great saviours in their various fields of work. And all those who have been liberated strengthen the ranks, and by means of their light vesture, the powerful cloak around them, they contribute to the annihilation of all delusion.

Viewed by human criteria there is in many respects great glory in the visible universe, but the brothers and sisters of the fourth degree see through this glory and discover its delusion. For the third vesture that these brothers and sisters wear is a vesture of original divine majesty which no one in the spaces below the First Mystery knows. There is not a single entity in the universe of death, who is able to possess this vesture.

From: *De Gnostieke Mysterien van de Pistis Sophia* (The Gnostic Mysteries of the Pistis Sophia), Jan van Rijckenborgh, Haarlem, The Netherlands, 1991, pp.265-266.

THE ILLUSION OF PAST,



In Indian mythology, most symbolic descriptions relate to the cosmos, in which opposites and appearances have developed. They show that this world is composed of different planes stretching from the subterranean world of the realm of hell up to the celestial realm on yonder side.

The world described here floats in the primordial ocean. From the highest spheres to the lowest, *Yama*, the god of death, rules and causes change and transience. Even the gods of the highest level are not infallible, and many legends relate how they were blinded and descended into the denser realms of the universe. In ancient India, the reality of past, present or future was denied. Time was represented as a theatrical scene of genesis and destruction, the world of transience and appearances. Just like space, time is made up of opposites (*dvanda*). Both are created from the actions of the three *guna*. The three strands of the cord which binds the human being to the wheel of birth and death¹ are:

- *Tamas*, inertia and ignorance, binds by negligence and indifference;
- *Rajas*, action and activity, which bind by pride and vanity and by the tendency to act;
- *Sattva*, harmony, peace and clarity, bind by striving for happiness and insight/knowledge.

PRESENT AND FUTURE

A Westerner will surely be astonished to see that the ancient Indians included harmony and peace in the ties that bind us to this world. That concept is totally foreign to present Western ethics. However, the image of the three strands of the cord corresponds to the gnostic vision that in the world of duality, good and evil are mixed and that human good maintains human evil, and vice-versa. 'To do good' is not truly liberating.

The idea of the world in ancient India was totally different from the idea we like to cherish. One did not speak of a utopia, but rather of a precise description of the states of consciousness and the forces that dominate the human being. In these ideas, there is always something that refers to a connection with the Absolute. Here the Absolute is the Axis Mundi, the axis of the world, Mount Meru, the top of which lies hidden in a realm inaccessible to ordinary mortals, because this mountain is in the heart of the earth.

Apart from all efforts to maintain oneself, apart from all deception and the resulting suffering, there is also an eternal principle. It is that which links the deepest depths and the highest heights with the original prana that encompasses all the worlds. As the Bible testifies: 'God does not forsake the work of His hands'.

A 'LIFE OF THE WORLD' CONSISTS OF FOUR PERIODS

According to ancient Indian wisdom, the world had fallen and became increas-

ingly bogged down in opposites (*dvanda*) and illusion (*maya*). Actually, it has reached the lowest point: gross matter, darkness. This nadir will be followed by a period of dematerialization, when matter will become less dense. One life of the world consists of four periods, the first of which is the longest, and the last one the shortest. The more the world recedes from its original, holy sphere, and the more it sinks into matter, the shorter the periods become. In addition, it becomes more and more difficult for the high initiates to descend into that world in order to help humanity.²

In the *Krita Yuga*, the universal power of the Gnosis, *dharma*, pervades the whole universe. All living beings devote themselves entirely to maintaining the holy order. The word 'Krita' refers to the beginning, to the first roll of the dice in the game of chance. The number four expresses completeness. The first period supports itself. It 'stands on four legs'.

In the *Treta Yuga*, the pace of the world accelerates. Three quarters of the holy *dharma* is still present. The holy laws are no longer spontaneously practised, but must be taught and learned. The divine order 'stands only on three legs'.

The *Dvapara Yuga* ('dva' = two) is the era of the equilibrium between perfection and imperfection. Direct knowledge of the divine order is less and less accessible.

In *Kali Yuga* ('kali' = black, dark), the holy transmitted standards are totally lost. In the game of dice, *kali* is the roll of the loser. According to the *Vishnu Purana*,

In the Indian chronology, the great periods were called after important figures that had left their spiritual mark on such periods. Doorpost in Sanchi, India. End of 2nd century AD.

The eight-branched Vishnu Sudarsana on the lotus throne. The circle symbolises the cosmos; the hexagon, the seal of Solomon, represents the divine trinity that touches and penetrates the human triplet of head, heart and hands. Copper. Vijanagar, around 1600.

the *Kali Yuga* begins ‘when in society wealth is power, possessions are the sole source of virtue, the only tie between man and woman is passion, deception is the basis of success in life, the only path to pleasure is sexual intercourse...’³ The loss of the divine, of *dharmā*, the teachings, is the reason that the *Kali Yuga* lasts a short time. This period, in which humanity now lives, will last 432,000 years and began with the death of the divine human being Krishna (around 3120 BC).

VEILS OF IGNORANCE TORN AWAY

The human being must liberate the divine substance within himself. The *Upanishads* tell, in splendid verse, of the process of reunification with the original divine *Brahman*. The goal is only attained when the five layers or ‘veils of ignorance’, as Shankara calls them, are torn away.⁴

The history of Indian spirituality is made up of a series of endeavours to accompany the human fall into matter and to show him the path of reunification with the divine. Or in other words, to liberate him from the cycle of births, from the jaws of *Maya*, from deception. Initially, liberation was still possible by simply tearing the veils of ignorance by understanding that the world of appearances is not reality. Later, the human being had consistently to enter into a process that was entirely outlined by Buddhism, amongst others. Following this line of reasoning, it appears that to the extent that the human being buries himself deeper in matter, it is necessary to create new possibilities for his return to the origin. Five hundred years after the Buddha, Jesus said: ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ Following Him meant entering a path on which the lower self must die and make room for the new soul.

In the ancient Indian teachings, death is considered as a natural phenomenon in a world of transience and not as a necessary sacrifice of the lower self. This means that the spiritual methods transmitted from the ancient Indian continent were intended for people of that era, for a type of human being with different possibilities from those of today’s Westerner. His consciousness was not quite as individualised, he was not yet quite as absorbed in gross matter as the Westerner with his consciousness that is directed only on his own well-being. In the era of which we speak – several thousands of years ago – people belonged to a community in

which the individual was an ‘unconsciously working instrument’ in the group. His thoughts, feelings and actions were determined by the group. The great illusion of individual freedom, as it is held in our modern consumer society, did not yet exist.

As the ancient Oriental systems apparently appeal to many individualised Westerners, it is good to ask to what extent this need for ‘oriental wisdom’ originates from yearning for a world that is ‘whole’, that unites East and West. But this period in human history is closed. The path of spiritual liberation always lies in the actual present – as the ancient Indian wisdom already taught.

*‘Whoever, lost into his inner being,
recognises as God the mysterious, deeply
hidden, original-eternal one, who dwells in
the heart, is raised above joy and grief.
The spirit is not born and does not die,
it comes from nowhere and strives for
nothing, it is unchanging and imperishable.
If the body is killed, yet it lives.
Insignificant and yet greater than the
greatest, God is hidden in the heart of the
creature.
The glory of the self recognises, in stillness,
him who, being without desire, is liberated
from sorrow and worry.’
(From the teachings to Naciketas by Yama,
the god of death.)⁵*

FOOTNOTES:

- 1, 2,3 Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophie und Religion Indiens* (Indian Philosophy and Religion), Baden-Baden, 1973; and *Mythen und Symbolen in indischer Kunst* (Myth and Symbol in Indian Art), Rascher, Zurich, 1951.
- 4 This corresponds to the subtle bodies described in the Western esoteric tradition:
- the veil of the physical body maintained by nourishment;
 - the vital body generated by the forces of vitality;
 - the layer formed by the sensory system and the Spirit-soul;
 - the layer formed by knowledge and understanding, the layer formed by bliss (*ananda*). Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophie und Religion Indiens* (Indian Philosophy and Religion), Baden-Baden, 1973.
- 5 Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Indische Geisteswelt* (The Indian Spiritual World), Wiesbaden, 1958.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Searching for the secret of time

The physical world in its varying grades of density is determined by space and time. All creatures in this world are therefore also subject to the laws of space and time. They appear, shine, and disappear. Their birth and death are predetermined.

The human being creates images of the concept of time for himself. These images determine his understanding of the world in which he lives, his experiences and his expectations for the future. And yet there is something that rebels against this seeming inevitability, something that makes the human being wonder why he is bound to time.

Ever since primordial times this paradox has captivated human beings. It is remarkable that, with all these billions of people living within the same time-spatial order, there are widely differing views and conclusions. According to modern western thinking, time is an irreversible line running from the present to the future. In this way time is measured in a linear fashion, down to fragments of seconds. Everything that happens is seen, experienced and understood from this defined matrix of time. It is supposed that this is an objective image. But according to other views – such as those originating from the great Asian and Chinese civilisations – time runs in circles or spirals.

The way we see and experience time depends on our consciousness. That is

why time is not objective but subjective, and why many variations are possible. It is therefore no surprise that chronology according to Indian philosophy can be highly unreliable from a western point of view. Most historical events are simply described as ‘a long time ago’. Time turns out not to be an objective matrix, but an essential part of the world.

PROFANE AND SACRED TIME

External events are controlled by time. Everything that happens is registered by time. Every cause has an effect which in turn becomes the cause of the next thought, emotion or act. In the Indian tradition these processes are seen as a flow of profane time leading from the present to the future. In addition, there is another flow of time leading from the present to the past, to the causes. In profane life, the present influences the future and has no effect on the past. This idea matches that of linear time. That time can only be influenced in the present – at this moment – and the results of this influence will become visible in the future.

In sacred time the flow is reversed. In that stream of time a deep understanding develops, removing ignorance. Suffering and ignorance have no beginning. According to the Buddha they have always been present in transient creation, but will disappear as soon as the dimension of time is removed.

‘The characteristic deep understanding clarifies the past, eradicates all ignor-

ance, reveals the harmony of limited experience and thus influences the past. In this context, enlightenment is instantaneous and effortless, but the glow of this enlightenment can be sustained for a long time, possibly a lifetime. The perception of such reversed moments originates in sacred time.'

When this 'deep understanding' has developed in the consciousness, the person concerned lives in two different modes of time. As to his personal chronology he is part of profane time; as to his growing consciousness he partakes of sacred time.

We could compare profane time to cinders on a stream of glowing lava. In profane life, the consciousness seems to move from one cinder to the next. In the flow of sacred time, the consciousness submerges in the stream and is able to move free of the cinders.

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

In the Indian tradition every state of consciousness has its own name. The waking consciousness is called *jagrat*; the dream consciousness, which corresponds to clairvoyance, is called *svapna*; the consciousness of deep sleep *susupta*. The fourth state is compared to that of dreamless sleep and is called *turiya*. This last state is related to experiencing sacred time. Entering this state is not automatic, but the result of a process of development of the consciousness.

To accomplish this process it is necessary that the human being becomes aware

of the three states of consciousness he lives in and which result from the three dimensions or spheres of his realm of life. Then, fourthly, the consciousness that totally liberates him and places him in the actual present can be awakened. The philosopher and cultural anthropologist Jean Gebser has studied this subject in depth in his book *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (Origin and the Present). He speaks of a new human consciousness, which he calls 'aperspective' or 'integral'. His description largely matches that of the Indian concept of deep understanding of sacred time.

Krishna plays the flute. 18th century relief. Collection M. Séverin, Brussels.

In this state of integral consciousness the human being observes the principles of his world without being bound to his experiences and images of his world. Whoever consciously sees the foundations is no longer confused by the multitude, transience and interdependence of the shapes in which they manifest themselves. Whoever becomes aware of the three fundamental forms of time can take the step to the fourth dimension.

Gebser states: *'The origin is always topical, in the present. It is not a beginning, for all beginning is bound to time. And the present is not only now, today or this moment. It is not a part of time, but a complete achievement and hence always origi-*

nal. Whoever is able to process and realise the origin and the present in its totality and make it concrete, will overcome the beginning and the end and the solely present moment.'

I AM THE TIME THAT DISSOLVES THE EARTH

In the *Bhagavad Gita* we can read a conversation between prince *Arjuna* and the god *Krishna*, his counsellor. It takes place before the armies commence battle.

Krishna says: *'I am the inner self of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the end.'* (X, 20) After having cast a look on the all-encompassing body of *Krishna*, *Arjuna* says: *'I see you everywhere, unlimited in your shapes, with many arms, bodies, mouths, eyes: endless figures. Neither beginning, middle, end nor origin I can tell apart. Lord of the Universe, I see your universal figure.'* (XI, 16) To this *Krishna* answers: *'I am indeed the time that dissolves the earth.'* (XI, 32)

'Awakening in the Spirit-Soul field and entering the pure astral sphere of the magnetic Living Body requires an absolutely new vision, namely seeing and entering what we call the fourth dimension, the fourth measurement of space. We know three dimensions: height, length and width. We experience our living space through these three dimensions. No matter how wide we make or imagine this three-dimensional space, it always has limits, it always has restrictions and it always means imprisonment. This imprisonment is experienced unconsciously in our time, as we can see in the scientific attempts to reach other planets, our earth being known completely from a three-dimensional point of view. In the indomitable pressure which evolution exerts on humanity, the three dimensions are becoming too restrictive, too oppressive. Science reacts to this oppression in a three-dimensional way, by trying to make the three-dimensional space as spacious and as wide as possible. It is clear that the difficulties connected with this would cease immediately if there were a fourth dimension and this were to be experienced as a reality by science. That fourth dimension does exist! It is the dimension that could be called the absolutely passable.'

(From: *The Living Word*, Catharose de Petri, Rozekruis Pers, Haarlem, 2000)

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HUMANITY CONTROLLED BY ILLUSIONS

'What is this world? Maya. What is the cause of this? Our ignorance. What is this ignorance? Again maya.' Maya is the delusion caused by narrow-mindedness (avarana), hatred and desire (vikshepa), but Maya is also the cause of this delusion.

The original human being was a powerful being manifested sevenfold, the highest aspect of which the Indians call *'atman'*. *Atman* is immortal but cannot be manifested, because it is veiled by mortal earthly phenomena. In many ancient Indian writings, the phenomena of subtle or dense matter – hence also the physical body – are called *maya*. To release *atman* from the grip of *maya*, we must turn to the divine nucleus in the heart, the *'jewel in the lotus'*

Maya is the cosmic power that creates illusions and enables us to perceive them. In Hindu wisdom, only something immovable and unchangeable is considered real. Everything that changes, perishes and breaks up, and hence has a beginning and an end, is considered *maya*. With this force, humanity created temporary phenomena with which to identify. Thus the human being also became *maya*, illusion and unreality.

HE WHO IS ONE WITH BRAHMA

All elements, substances and forces are potentially present in primordial matter, just as the potential of eternity is

present in all mortal phenomena. The heart still contains that 'potential of eternity', but it has gradually lost its divine consciousness. Thus there are two diametrically opposed states of consciousness: the consciousness of the human being imprisoned in *maya*, and that of the human being in whom *atman* speaks in its purest form, of him who is one with Brahma.

Everything mortal does not belong to the one reality about which ancient Hindu wisdom speaks. That which is imprisoned in the lower consciousness is not reality and is called *maya*. The world of illusion opposes the world of the Creator, outside of Whom nothing exists. What is still mortal is the unliberated or unmanifested divine life. These unreal creations appear and disappear by the power of *maya*, whereas *atman*, which always is, remains.

UNTOUCHED BY BIRTH, GROWTH AND DEATH

Now we may wonder to what extent the personality is reality or illusion? For the earthly human being, daily life with its pains and joys is the only reality. He doesn't know anything else. He continually fights to protect his fleeting happiness, his imaginary ideals, his ageing body, his fragile health, his mental confusion, his diminishing power, and his increasing or decreasing possessions. But he fails, and in the end he will have to give up the struggle and lose everything because it is *maya*. His flawed conscious-

ness makes him incapable of fathoming the divine and that is why he cannot see it as the one reality. He denies it exists and fights it, because it affects and removes the few certainties he believes he possesses.

THE VEILS OF MAYA PUSHED ASIDE

In the spiritual tradition of India, death has a different meaning than for today's materialistic humanity. Since life in matter is nothing but illusion, *maya*, a human being cannot lose anything essential in death. Death only pushes aside one of the numerous veils of *maya*. We can only gain divine consciousness by seeking and finding *atman* in the depths of our own being. *Atman* must be awakened within ourselves.

The world of illusion, the world of *maya* can be compared with a mirage. The wanderer in the desert of life believes that he sees an oasis in the distance. Sparkling water, a shady palm grove are beckoning human beings and animals alike, whole cities are looming up. But as he approaches, it all disappears. The imagined reality was only a mirage. That is *maya*! A deception of the senses, a deception of the limited consciousness. Sometimes life can be compared to a dream. The consciousness cannot distinguish between the dream state and the waking state. Hence ancient Indian wisdom says that the waking world is no more real than the world of sleep. Only he, who is caught in his earthly consciousness, believes that his world is the real world. But whoever can break through this limitation and in whom the spirit nucleus has been awakened, whoever is capable of unmasking the reality veiled by *maya*, discovers that his daily world has nothing to do with the world of divine reality.

'WOULD YOU FETCH A LITTLE WATER FOR ME?'

Thousands of years ago, the sages of India longed to leave this world of dreams and deception and become one with *atman*. Between these two states of consciousness is the veil of *maya*. As there is nothing outside of *Brahman*, the origins of *maya* must also lie in him. Therefore, the nature of illusion must be recognised in order to find our way through the veils. There is a tale of how Vishnu taught the ascetic Narada the secret of his *mayai*

'Show me the magical power of your *maya*,' Narada says. And the god answers: 'That is good, come with me!' Vishnu leads Narada out of the shadow of his hermitage and leads him to a place that glows like a piece of metal under the scorching sun. Soon they are both thirsty. In the fierce light, they see the straw roofs of a hamlet in the distance and Vishnu asks Narada: 'Would you fetch a little water for me?' 'Of course, my Lord,' the holy man replies and walks to the huts, while the god sits down to wait in the shade of a rock.

Narada arrives at the village and knocks on the first door. A beautiful girl opens it and looks at him with beguiling eyes. The holy man has a feeling of happiness because these marvellous eyes look like those of his divine Lord and friend Vishnu. Surprised, he stands there and forgets why he came. The girl invites him in and her soft voice embraces him like a golden serpent around his neck. Caught in a dream, he enters the house. The inhabitants are very polite and certainly not shy. They show him respect as a holy man, but not as a stranger. To them he is rather like a well-known, venerable old man, who has now come back.

Narada is touched by their cheerful-

ness and hospitality and he feels at home. No one asks him why he came.

After some time, he asks the girl's father for his daughter's hand, and all this happens as if no one expected it to be otherwise. Narada becomes part of the family and shares in the hard work and joys of farming life.

'DO YOU NOW UNDERSTAND THE SECRET OF MY MAYA?'

Twelve years go by and Narada is now the father of three children. When his father-in-law dies, he becomes the head of the family, inherits the land and looks after it. He breeds livestock and cultivates the soil. In that twelfth year, however, it rains more than usual. The rivers overflow and the small village is flooded. The straw huts and cattle are dragged away and everybody flees.

While he supports his wife with one hand, he holds two children with the other and carries the smallest one on his shoulders. Narada walks as quickly as possible. He hurries through the black night, soaked by the hard rain. He splashes about in torrents of mud that make him stagger. Whirlpools drag at him and he can hardly carry his burden. Then he stumbles and his child slips away into the darkness. He utters a cry of despair and lets go of the two children that he held by the hand to catch the smallest one, but it is already too late. Meanwhile, the water drags away the other two, and before he knows what is happening, his wife is also dragged away and taken by the swirling water. Ultimately, Narada gets hold of a rock and there he loses consciousness. When he comes to, he only sees a mud field with trails of filthy water. He cries. *'My child,'* says a familiar voice that almost makes his heart stop, *'where is that water you went*

to fetch for me? I waited for almost a half hour!' Narada turns around, and instead of water he sees the desert shimmering under the midday sun. Next to him is Vishnu: *'Do you now understand the secret of my maya?'*

Vishnu's *maya* can appear in different forms. These brought Narada under their spell and he identified with their names and forms. He forgot the question that was asked. He forgot that Vishnu was waiting for him, and his imaginary 'life' became his reality. He lost himself for a half hour in the world of illusions, but it felt like twelve years – just as a story spanning hours or years can take place in a dream lasting a few seconds. Time, space and form depend on the consciousness.

The dragon of darkness envelops the globe. Gardens of Appeltern, The Netherlands. Photo Pentagram.



Shiva's dance expresses the cosmic cycles of creation, destruction, birth and death. Temple of Menakshi, Madras, India.

For Vishnu, Narada had only gone to stretch his legs.

Narada wanted to learn the secret of *maya*. He encountered it in the form of a beautiful girl. Here *maya* is the power that seduced Narada to surrender to the world of illusion. He left paradise and its

gates closed behind him. Thus the fall, we might say, of Narada has become a fact. He participated in the hard work and joy of the peasants. He worked the land and became part of the cycle of birth and death. He found joy and grief, and discovered that he could not hold onto that

which is mortal. So he lost his possessions, his wife, his children, himself and his whole *maya* world.

Narada is the image of a human being who lets himself be tempted by ignorance and desires. For that reason everything he acquires is also taken from him. His ignorance of the vital processes keeps him prisoner, incarnation after incarnation, within the dimensions of space and time. He has plunged into matter and has become a natural phenomenon, entirely controlled by the forces of nature.

After many centuries, the consciousness of the materialistic and intellectually educated human being proves to be unable to simply push aside 'the veils of *maya*'. In our time, a new path is shown to such a human being. This path begins with the remaining seed atom in the heart, which contains instructions to avoid or overcome obstacles that did not yet or hardly exist during the ancient Indian era. The original divine nucleus in the heart waits for liberation, and modern humanity receives all the necessary help to break up its state of crystallisation in order to free that principle and to awaken it to new life. Just as the eternal once 'died' in the perishable, the perishable must now die in the eternal. Whoever wants to lose his I, shall find the divine 'I am'. In this process of death and rebirth, the nucleus of the immortal human being is liberated from the phenomena, the patterns of thinking and the fears that – as with Narada – hold it prisoner.

This has been the goal of all human beings, yesterday, today and tomorrow:

But since the wisdom of ancient India is so close to modern Gnosticism, what then is the difference? And why does not a majority of the more than six and a quarter billion inhabitants of the earth stick to these ancient teachings? Why must there be something new? It is difficult enough as it is!

The seven great impulses of Divine intervention, beginning in the distant past, offered a path of complete liberation to every human being. But time passes, conditions of life alter, and the structure of the various spheres from which humanity lives, changes. This presents new possibilities while old paths are closed. Hence, new impulses are always needed to open up new paths. For example, today the air is very different from what it was thousands of years ago. The etheric and astral conditions are different in each country. In some regions, after centuries of incomprehension, lack of love and power struggles, there is more pollution than in others and spiritual growth follows different lines.

There is either progression or regression. Stagnation does not exist in dialectical life. There is progression when new possibilities appear and new paths for perfection open up. There is regression when those who have reached a certain point in their development, make a step backward, because the following step forward seems to be too difficult for them. Everyone must make his own choices in this respect.

reaching the divine field of life, the return to the Father's house. But the teachings and the path must always be adapted to changes in consciousness, so that there is always a possibility of recognising those teachings and of following this path.

SOURCES:

Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, The teachings of the Buddha and Shankara.

THE EIGHTFOLD PATH OF CHRISTIANITY*

In Ephesians 6 Paul says: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the day of evil, and having done all, to stand.'

1. GIRD YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH;
2. PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS;
3. SHOE YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPAREDNESS OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;
4. TAKE UP THE SHIELD OF FAITH, WITH WHICH YOU WILL BE ABLE TO QUENCH ALL THE FIERY DARTS OF EVIL;
5. PUT ON THE HELMET OF SALVATION;
6. AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD;
7. PRAYING ALWAYS IN THE SPIRIT, WITH ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION;
8. AND TAKING CARE TO REMAIN PRAYING, WITH GREAT PERSEVERANCE, FOR ALL THE HOLY ONES.'

So this is an eightfold armour, an eightfold path. It calls to mind the eightfold path of Buddhism. In the Buddhist Catechism, question and answer 125 and 126, it says:

'How can we win victory? By walking the noble, eightfold path. What do you mean by these words? What is the noble, eightfold path? The eight parts of this path are: right insight – right thought – right

speech – right action – right mode of life – right memory – right self-discipline – and right meditation.'

Paul's classification differs slightly from the Buddha's, but in essence the contents are the same. The classification has to vary from time to time, because the racial body and the soul nature of mortal souls are continually subject to change and crystallisation due to the contamination spread by evil. So the way in which the eightfold path is divided must always change in order to adapt to changing times.

For both Paul and the Buddha the path begins with insight. But then Paul goes on to list righteousness, while the Buddha mentions right thought. This is understandable. When, having attained a certain measure of insight, a Westerner proceeds to think with the crystallised cognitive faculty, countless mental convolutions arise, and the result is one confusing mass of contradictions. That is why Paul confronts us directly with action on the basis of insight, for in this way we bring about the purification of the blood. The thick, sluggish, materialised blood, whose sole aim lies in matter, is immediately assailed by such action and only much later can the helmet of salvation, the new cognitive faculty, become a fact.

From: *The Mystery of Life and Death*, J van Rijckenborgh, Rozekruis Pers, Haarlem, The Netherlands, 1993, pp. 27-29.

The 3 metre high sandstone wheel of Surya's chariot shows the cycle of reincarnation and the eightfold Path of the Buddha. Konarak, 13th century AD.

THE BUDDHA POINTED THE WAY TO NIRVANA

The teachings and the activity of the Buddha brought about a decisive change in the relationship between God and man, which gradually began to develop in India during the first century BC.

In that period the Brahmans (priests) were still regarded as representatives of the Gods. Since the appearance of the Buddha this changed: The Brahmans were no longer acknowledged as holy, and kings and warriors (Kshatrijas) now also had access to the holy books. The magical formulas and the sacrificial rituals of the Brahmans dated back to the distant past. For centuries they had been passed on orally, until the time arrived when the Vedas, the Hindu teachings of wisdom, were written down, and later also the formulas and rituals. However, the text of the *Upanishads* already pointed to another change. According to these texts, everyone could be liberated from the wheel of birth and death. By inner change human beings could discover their inner God. This message formed the basis for the work of the Buddha.

Hinduism in its present-day form developed from former Brahmanism, whereas Buddhism originated directly from the teachings of the Buddha, just as the New Testament did from Jesus' words. The Buddha is 'the Awakened One', who achieved illumination in 49 days and entered into Nirvana. In order to reach

this state he had detached himself from the customary extreme forms of asceticism and the temptations of *Mara*, the powers of the world. He taught his disciples the eightfold path of liberation leading to the state of Nirvana. Buddha's message was diametrically opposed to established traditions. The divine worlds and heavenly spheres of Hinduism did not play any part in the way he pointed out. He instructed the people that they had to detach themselves from the outward Gods and search for the way of liberation within themselves. The teachings of the Buddha have much in common with those of the *Upanishads*. A comparison of the *Upanishads* with the words of the Buddha shows, in which manner an old stream of wisdom can develop into a renewing impulse.

The *Upanishads* are said to have been written down around the year 800 BC. They deal with the quest for the inner self, the divine self. Superficial understanding cannot lead to the true self. The necessary insight cannot be attained by sensory perception or by the intellect. What must be recognised cannot be found in the visible and tangible world. It is at the same time very small and infinitely large. For the earthly human being it can merely be described as follows: *'In the abode of Brahma (the body) is a small lotus flower. Inside is a small room. Whatever can be found in this room, must be examined, must be tested in order to recognise it. If you were to say: "In the abode of Brahma is a little lotus flower. Inside is a small room. What is in this room, which*



*must be examined, must be recognised?" Then he could say: "As large as this room is, equally large is the space inside the heart. Heaven and earth can be found in it, both Agni and Vayu, both sun and moon, lightning and stars, whatever is in it (of men) and whatever is not, all of that is contained in it... This is the true city of Brahma. It contains all desires. This is the self. It has thrown off all evil, is free from ageing, death, sorrow, hunger and thirst; genuine is its desire, genuine is its decision."*¹

But where is the bridge that leads to the city of Brahma? *'The self is the bridge that separates the worlds, so that they cannot collapse. Day and night, age, death, sorrow, good and evil deeds do not cross that bridge.'*²

The *Upanishads* describe how the human being is imprisoned in an undivine, mortal state and how he can liberate himself. The Buddha showed in his everyday life that it is possible to go that path of salvation. In that way he prepared a free passage for all who wanted to follow him as serious seekers.

VICTORY OVER THE INTELLECT

'I tell you, my friend, where one will not be born, not age, not die, not leave a former life, not reach a new life, such an end of the world, where this applies, cannot be recognised, seen or achieved by any pilgrimage. But I also say, my friend, that we cannot find the end of suffering

Resurrection of the Buddha as the personification of wisdom. Woodcut, China. Twelve World Teachers, Manly P Hall.



without having reached the end of the world.’³

These teachings of the Buddha already appear in more or less the same form in the *Upanishads*. To be able to reach the end of the world, the seeker has to find the limits of his thinking. That is why he is first of all led into a salutary confusion, and if he does not cling to rigid images, inner sight can be accomplished.

Once the Buddha met the wandering ascetic Vacha, and the following conversation developed:

Vacha: *‘A monk whose soul is redeemed, my good Gautama, what Being will he achieve?’*

Gautama: *‘It is not relevant, Vacha, that he achieves Being.’*

Vacha: *‘So he does not achieve Being, Gautama?’*

Gautama: *‘It is not relevant, Vacha, that he does not achieve Being.’*

Vacha: *‘So he achieves Being or he does not achieve Being, Gautama?’*

Gautama: *‘It is not relevant, Vacha, whether he achieves or does not achieve Being.’*

Vacha: *‘So he neither achieves nor does not achieve Being?’*

Gautama: *‘It is not relevant, Vacha, that he neither achieves Being nor does not achieve Being.’*

Vacha: *‘So, Gautama, you answer my question what Being a monk will achieve, whose soul has been liberated: “that it is not relevant, Vacha, that he achieves Being.”’*

Subsequently the other three questions and answers are repeated.

Vacha: *‘Here my understanding ends, my good Gautama, here I become confused.’*

Gautama: *‘Your understanding may well end, Vacha, you may well become confused. Profound, Vacha, are these teachings, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful, glorious, not comprehensible by*

*reflecting only, subtle, understandable for the wise only...*²⁴

The Buddha draws the attention of the seeker of his time directly to the necessity to concentrate entirely on the eightfold path that leads to Nirvana.

NIRVANA BEGINS WHERE THE WORLD ENDS

Nirvana is a pure Buddhist concept that means 'breathing', 'blowing out' or 'extinguishing'. Nirvana begins where the world ends. From this point of view we can consider Nirvana as 'another world', another state, as being on yonder side of the bridge. Nirvana is the state in which the transient, the earthly is reduced to utter silence and eternity can be manifested to the renewed consciousness. This state was reached by uninterrupted concentration on the lotus flower in the heart. By renouncing the world, the truth can be revealed.

However, the path of the Buddha is not a path of asceticism nor a life in luxury and comfort.

*'This path is discovered by the Perfect One, the path that is in the middle, that sharpens the eye, gives insight and enlightenment and leads to Nirvana. It is the noble eightfold path which is called: right views, right decision, right speech, right action, right living, right struggling, right thoughts, and right meditation.'*⁵

Buddha's path to Nirvana was not a new idea, but a concrete instruction for his contemporaries. The way never changes, but the conditions and stipulations are adapted to the current circumstances to enable people of a following period, living in a different phase of development, to reach that goal. In the *Upanishads* we read: *'There is a narrow, safe, continuous, ancient path...'*⁶ This is the way which is pointed out and described to humanity over and again, so that one

day all will recognise and walk it.

The Buddha himself achieved the illumination after a period of fourfold repentance. But he did not leave the world yet and did not enter Nirvana. To be able to serve humanity of his time he erected a threefold building consisting of

- the Buddha, that is the concrete way;
- the stream of power, that means the teachings
- and the instructions on the path for his followers.

When the number of his followers had reached five hundred, the Buddha spoke:

'O monks, you may now well understand all the things I have recognised and taught you, act according to them, realise and propagate them, so that this holy way of life may last long: for the well-being of many, the joy of many, compassion with the world, for the best, for the well-being and the joy of gods and men...'

*Well, monks, I say to you: all forms are subjected to transience. Do not refrain from your efforts. In a short while the Exalted One will reach Nirvana. Three months from now the Exalted One will enter Nirvana.'*⁷

And when that moment had come, the Buddha sunk in meditation. Then he rose up and entered Nirvana.

SOURCES:

- 1 *Upanishads*, p.122. Alfred Hildebrand, Hugendubel (Diederichs), München 2001.
- 2 *Ibid*, p.125
- 3 *Die Reden des Buddha* (Addresses of the Buddha), p.171. Hermann Oldenberg, Herder Verlag, Freiburg 2002.
- 4 *Ibid*, p.296
- 5 *Ibid*, p.95
- 6 *Upanishads*, p.85. Alfred Hildebrand, Hugendubel (Diederichs), München 2001.
- 7 *Die Reden des Buddha*, p.147. Hermann Oldenberg, Herder Verlag, Freiburg 2002.

Buddha sculpture from the Gupta period, the Indian Golden Age (320 – 420 AD). Sandstone, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Buddha lived and taught in India about 500 BC towards the end of the era of the Vedas and Upanishads. Amidst this 'jungle of mythological systems', the Buddha propagated his teachings about the four noble truths which culminate in the eightfold path.

It is a very sober analysis of human existence and its victory over it, which is completely free of reflections about a world on yonder side and which does not give rise to engage in speculations about a divine entity.

His teachings provide many timeless leads and hence are very important for seekers even today, also far beyond the borders of India.

The Buddha communicated his teachings in speech, not in writing. Like many great teachers of humanity, he fully relied upon his authentic power of speech, which lent permanent value to his words and touched a string in the hearts of his audience. Only later, his disciples used the written form to prevent his words from being forgotten.

The essence of Buddha's teachings can be found in a small fragment titled 'The Elephant's Footprint' which is attributed to Sariputta, 'the noblest of His disciples'²:

Sariputta says, 'Dear friends, just as the footprints of all walking creatures can be placed within the footprint of an elephant, and the elephant's footprint is regarded as the highest because of its size, so all beneficial realities are summarised in the four

noble truths. In which four truths? In the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the cause of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

These four short sentences reflect the great possibilities for humanity in a concise form. They contain the essence of the path of salvation as taught by Gautama the Buddha.

THE NOBLE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

First of all it is suffering that makes us ask questions about our existence. Suffering pulls us out of our conceitedness, it shocks us and at the same time awakens our compassion with the suffering of our fellow humans.

After he had attained the state of being Buddha, the spiritual awakening under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha disclosed his teachings of the noble truths to his first disciples in a 'night watch':

*'This, o monks, is the noble truth of suffering. Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, sadness, misery, pain, sorrow and despair are suffering; being bound to something or someone you do not love or being separated from something or someone you love is suffering; not getting what you desire is suffering, in a word: the five groups of attachment are suffering.'*³⁻⁴

Imprisoned in the sensorial world, human beings cling to what causes suffering, we could say that they create their own suffering.



THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING

The Buddha does not raise the question of guilt. To him, suffering is a natural law in the world of phenomena. In this connection, a text titled: *'The first events after having achieved the state of being Buddha'*⁵⁻⁶ reads:

'During the first nightwatch the Exalted One saw the genesis (of the beings of the world) from causes going forward and backward: "From ignorance come the formations; from the formations comes consciousness; from consciousness come mind and matter; from mind and matter come the five senses: sight, taste, hearing, smell, touch, and the consciousness as the sixth one; from this sixfold basis arises

contact; from contact arises sensation; from sensation arises desire; from desire arises attachment (to existence); from attachment arises the process of genesis; from the process of genesis arise birth, ageing and death, pain, lamentation, sorrow, grief and despair. This is the genesis of the world of suffering.'

Can we escape the law of suffering? The Buddha has himself experienced the liberation from suffering, from the cycle of birth and death. For him this liberation is a matter of insight.

THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING

The same text continues:

'If, however, ignorance ends by the

Stones with carved texts. Summer palace of Konarak. Photo Pentagram.

Summer palace of Konarak. Photo Pentagram.



*complete destruction of desire, this causes the formations to cease; the cessation of the formations makes the consciousness cease; by the cessation of consciousness mind and matter cease – and so on according to the order described above; finally, by the cessation of birth cease ageing and death, pain and lamentation, sorrow, grief and despair. This is the cessation of the whole world of suffering.*⁶

‘Through the complete cessation of ignorance the strong-willed formations cease; through the cessation of the strong-willed formations the consciousness ceases, and so on. Consequently, all aspects of suffering cease. This is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.’

Hence, the cessation of suffering is possible. The Buddha’s starting point is ignorance. But the Buddha gives his advice to a certain type of human being, namely to those who have attained a certain quality of experience. And the text goes on:

Understanding this, the Enlightened One exclaimed: “When the eternal order is revealed to the Brahman, to him who

struggles hard, to him who has sunk down, any doubt must cease when he fathoms the conditional nature of all events.”

And so the Buddha feels an inner urge to show the seeker, who has reached the limits of his earthly possibilities, a practical way to overcome these restrictions and to attain liberation from the ties to this world.

THE NOBLE TRUTH OF THE PATH TO THE CESSATION OF SUFFERING

The way that a liberated human being shows to those who are struggling for liberation always starts from their possibilities as time-bound entities. Even though these possibilities lie within themselves, they depend on their limitations and efforts, as well as on the co-operation of the personality conditioned by culture and time.

Hence the Buddha showed his contemporaries an eightfold path that he placed right between sensual lust on the one hand and asceticism on the other, which

were the usual paths to liberation in India at the time.

*'There are two ways, disciples, that he who leads a spiritual life must avoid: the way of indulging in sensual desires, which are low, mean, unworthy of noble ones and useless, and which does not lead to the holy life, to self-surrender, to insight, to awakening, to Nirvana; and the way of self-torment which is painful and useless and which leaves in its wake suffering in this visible and also in future lives. Avoiding these two paths, the Tathagata has found the middle path, which means: right views, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right living, right struggling, right awareness and right concentration.'*⁷

'O monks, these two extremes should not be developed by a hermit, who has renounced family life. Which two? Sensual pleasure and self-castigation, both of which are of no use. The middle way discovered by the Tathagata, the Perfect One, avoids these extremes, gives insight and knowledge and leads to serenity, realisation, enlightenment, Nirvana. This is the noble eightfold path.'⁶

The four truths tie in with the experience of suffering due to selfishness, self-centredness, natural birth and its karmic ties. This basis is universal and has been chosen by all the great teachers of humanity.

NIRVANA THE GOAL OF THE PATH

The direction towards the goal of the path of victory is the same everywhere. The Buddha calls that goal entering Nirvana, 'nothingness' as it is usually translated. However, in this way the Buddha is often misinterpreted as an atheist.⁸ But also Christianity states that the Highest – what we call 'God' – surpasses our imagination, that He cannot be grasped, and that we should not try to make an image of Him. The Buddha does

not speak about this at all in order to avoid any speculation among his disciples.

Hence also Nirvana, the goal of the liberation from the painful, karmic cycle of birth and death, is 'nothing' for the unenlightened, but 'everything' for the awakened. Also Christ promises his disciples the Kingdom of Heaven, the House of the Father where a place is prepared for them. This has given rise to many speculative ideas that mostly refer to the 'land on yonder side' and which are based on earthly joys.

However, for those to whom the sensual world no longer means anything after a path of rich experience, the highest goal is to be liberated from the cycle of life in the world of opposites and from the continual alternation between the joys and sorrows of life. Following this path, he does not try to make an image of the situation thereafter which surpasses the understanding of the personality.

SOURCES:

- 8 Heinrich Zimmer: *Philosophie und Religion Indiens* (Philosophy and religion of India). Suhrkamp Verlag, TB 26, 1973, p.417.
- 9 Hermann Oldenberg: *Die Reden des Buddha* (Addresses of the Buddha), Herder Verlag, Freiburg i.B., 2000, p.162.
- 10 ib. p.95
- 11 Hans Wolfgang Schumann, *Boeddhisme, stichter, scholen en systemen* (Buddhism, founder, schools and systems), Asoka, Nieuwerkerk a/d IJssel, 1997
- 12 Hermann Oldenberg: *Die Reden des Buddha*, Herder Verlag, Freiburg i.B., 2000, p.162.
- 13 Thera Piyadassi: *Het aloude pad van de Boeddha* (The ancient path of the Buddha). Boeddhayana Uitgeverij, Den Haag, 1989.
- 14 Beck, Hermann: *Buddha und seine Lehre* (The Buddha and his teachings), Verlag Freies Geistesleben, Stuttgart, 1980, p.71 fol.
- 15 ib. p.117 fol.

THE JEWEL OF DISCERNMENT

The philosopher Shankara was one of the most important teachers of religion of the Indian continent. His teachings have strongly influenced our thinking. Some sources assume his date of birth around 686 AD in South India. Amongst other things, Shankara taught the Vedanta, the last part of the six systems of Indian wisdom. His best-known work is 'The jewel of discernment.'

The name Shankara, or rather Adi Shankaracharya, means 'He who brings blessing.' In all his works, Shankara testifies of a clear, unflinching, universal spirit, and teaches his fellow human beings to differentiate between the divine and the undivine. We have selected seven of his statements and compared them with statements by J van Rijckenborgh. For example, he says of external ceremonies: *'We can quote texts and sacrifice to holy spirits, we can perform rituals and worship deities, but as long as we have no awareness of Atman, we can never find liberation, not even after many hundreds of eras'*

The Bodhisatva Temiya – the quiet prince – tries his strength by lifting up his war chariot. Mural in the temple of Wat Yai Intharam, Chonburi, Thailand.

EXTERNAL CEREMONIES

'He who sees all this clearly and realises it; he who, from within, possesses this knowledge of nature regarding the human state, has self-knowledge. He does not allow his books to speak anymore and stops his furious attempts to keep his head above water in the academic sea. There is in him only one resolution, only one hankering: the resolution to terminate his atomic, unholy state and the longing of the heart after salvation by the Breath of Life.'

(The Coming New Man, p.140)

Hence Shankara rejects any type of external ceremonies, because they offer no liberation from the senses. Whoever tries to win eternity by being solely concerned with form, ultimately only worships his own apparent certainties, in the shape of his own I. He rather prefers that his own 'will be done' than God's will. The forms worshipped in many religions are worn paths of the past, petrified expressions of old thoughts and feelings. They are without value in the process of inner renewal. Hence, whoever aspires to the highest, to atman, whoever wants to penetrate to the divine essence, must turn away from every form of self-interest and I-culture, however refined.

Of the liberating deed, Shankara says: *'Correct action helps to purify the heart.'*

Details of the date of birth of Shankara vary. The Indian government takes it to be the year 788 and in 1988 the 1200th birthday was officially celebrated. Others place the date within the reign of the king of Thanesar (606–647 AD), again others maintain the year 700. These differences are partly due to tradition, and partly to the mysterious appearance and disappearance of the great teacher.

THE LIBERATING DEED

'If the heart remains in its ordinary state of natural impurity (and that is the case when you remain attuned, with your entire being, to the nature of death), you cannot listen correctly, either, and so you can never understand properly. The essence of the nature of death is always chaos. So, in the head-heart system of the nature-directed one great tensions break out which lead him into wrong actions. [...] When you make your heart still and pure, you also free your head for the functions to which it is called. Then the sensory organs function quite differently. Only then will you be able to listen.'

(The Egyptian Arch-Gnosis, Part 1, p.210)

Yet, it does not result in direct knowledge of reality. This is achieved through discernment, and not, even not in the least, by a million actions.'

Without insight, all attempts at liberation turn into nothing but a straitjacket. The necessary, fundamental change cannot be reached. Hence correct action is not a form of training, but the result of an inner state of being. When we reach that state, we cannot but 'act correctly'. The human being is brought to that point, after he has felt his limitations

LIFTING OF IGNORANCE

'But if you follow the transfiguristic path of self-surrender, you will need to become ignorant with respect to that knowledge, and you will develop a new cognitive faculty of wisdom. Then the seven new candles will be lit. You will walk amid the seven golden candlesticks, holding the seven stars of the new intelligence organs in your right hand'

(The Chinese Gnosis, p.109)

many times. To begin with, he has to undergo many experiences. He needs to live through the full range of joy and sorrow, before his I is prepared to surrender to a goal, his self cannot reach. Only when the divine will can be carried out, without the I defending itself in existential fear, only then will Creation be revealed to the human being who yearns for the liberating light.

'Correct discernment shows us the true being of a piece of rope and delivers us from the agonising fear, arising when we erroneously believe it to be a snake.'

The way in which our senses process, and pass on to our consciousness, the impressions they receive, determines our

DELUSION AND REALITY

'Stop and become sober: see again with the eyes of your heart! And if not all of you can do so, let those at least who can. The malignity of ignorance floods over the whole earth, ruins the soul which is penned up in the body and prevents it from reaching the harbours of salvation.'

(The Egyptian Arch-Gnosis, Part 2, p.1)

reality. Our consciousness creates its own image of the world. World teachers of old have shown this world to be a sham world, to be maya. That means: a dream state, in which the human being creates his own fears, worries and needs. Through this subjective view of the world, the I wants to confirm itself in a state of self-glorification, in the world of Maya. The I has created for itself a homely little world of goals and desires, which, anyway, is continuously threatened. Shankara points out that the only thing required is to see through this game of willing and imagin-

LIVING EXPERIENCE INSTEAD OF BOOK
WISDOM

'So the basis for virtue is present within you. But there is more, for knowledge, too, is present within you, and it is there for you to use. Please understand this as it is meant. We do not mean the knowledge you learned at school, the kind of knowledge you need to get through life in the world of antitheses. We mean knowledge of the one true life, the Universal Doctrine. This doctrine is engraved in the primordial atom, and the Gnosis reveals it to you in order to stimulate and hence to set free, in your own inner being, the path to true knowledge. So if only you can combine that knowledge with virtue – with your inner urge to be good, and to do good – it can and will set you free.'

(The Chinese Gnosis, p.320-321)

ing, in order ultimately to return to the divine unity and reality.

Of ignorance Shankara says: *'The human being who has been bitten by the snake of ignorance, cannot be healed as long as he has not experienced Brahman. The Vedas and other texts as well as magic or herbs, are useless.'*

Hence, Shankara is not interested in absorbing knowledge from sacred texts, but rather in inner knowledge stemming from faith and experience. The same picture emerges with the Gnostics. They direct themselves to divine powers that do not serve to feed the I, but to release the son of god, atman. This possessing the jewel Atman, can lead the human being to Brahman, the divine insight.

'Studying the sacred texts is fruitless, as long as Brahman is not experienced. On the contrary, experiencing Brahman makes reading sacred text superfluous.'

Reading sacred texts, like the Vedas or the Bible, is not liberating in itself. As long as the divine powers are not yet active in the human being, because the I does not



want it, the wisdom of the scriptures cannot be fathomed. Whoever finally begins to understand how they must be understood, is already connected with the liberating force, stands already in the resulting change and is on his way to find the highest form of Being.

Of the inner guide, Shankara says: *'Longing for liberation is the will to free oneself from the chains forged by ignorance, with the help of insight in one's own inner nucleus.'*

The seeker, longing for salvation, can at the borders of his earthly existence be brought to enter a process of entirely new experiences, leading him to insight in his existence. That is on the condition that he

The shell horn of Vishnu symbolises the first sound of creation. 16th century.

THE INNER GUIDE

'To the old sages, "prayer and fasting" meant focusing one's whole state of life on the Other Realm, the Land of the Father. It meant setting free the Kingdom within you and bringing every action of your will into harmony with that aim. It meant no longer listening with your ears to the cacophony of the antitheses, but opening yourself, with your whole mind, your whole head sanctuary, to the influx of the Seven-Spirit.'

(The Chinese Gnosis, p.323)

LOOSENING THE CHAINS

'Every nature-born human being leaves its traces in the auric self, the results of his unholy life. This karma, these traces, accumulate. Every nature-born being who begins to walk the great path of liberation is therefore faced, alas, with a dual task. Before he can set foot on the path of transfiguration, he must first liquidate the karma, the karmic self. [...] It is the microcosmic adversary, which must be recognised and overcome.'

(The Egyptian Arch-Gnosis, Part 3, p.171)

accepts these experiences and insights, because the I is conservative enough to block off the road to renewal time and again. His fears and worries prevent him to lift the anchors that bind him to his dream world and to entrust himself to atman, his inner guide.

'Only we, ourselves, can loosen the chains of our ignorance, the fetters of our lust and desire, and the fruits of our karma. Even when we need countless lives to do so.'

Here Shankara points out that people prefer to leave the responsibility for their progress on their path of life to the guidance and judgement of authorities. They do not trust the power that lies hidden within themselves, waiting for them to open themselves up to it. In fact, they would prefer to stay as they are. Please no change that could threaten their cosy little life. Yet, a human being must change fundamentally, if he is ever to follow his inner guide. Most people though, worship passively their personally interpreted image of a master, a historical figure, and dedicate their suffering to him.

Often people want to have their cake and eat it, to be liberated without letting go of their trusted habits. Shankara expresses that as follows: *'He who nurtures physical desires and tries to find Atman, resembles someone who tries to cross a river on the back of a crocodile,*

which he takes for a piece of wood.i

Shankara compares the corporeal to a crocodile. The body is a product of time and binds the human being to Maya. Thus, whoever on his spiritual path gives in to his bodily needs and wants to use them to break his link with the wheel of birth and death, will not reach the safe riverbank, but will be eaten by the crocodile. He falls victim to the desires of his body.

UNION OF ATMAN AND BRAHMAN

'The first step on the road to liberation is described as letting go completely of all non-eternal things. Then comes the practice of equanimity, self-control and tolerance. After that follows the relinquishing of all acts resulting from personal, selfish desires.'

The jewel of discernment is the spiritual source in the human heart. When atman awakens and speaks, an ideal of eternity, of Brahman, comes into existence. The human being is meant to try to achieve that ideal, to organise his life in such a way that nothing stands in his way. That requires much patience, because the forces he wants to destroy, repeatedly manage to recapture him.

DANGERS OF PHYSICALITY

'The sage will avoid any superfluous activity here in the nature of death, and he will not bind himself to this nature by conceding to it anything to which it is not entitled. He will dispel the delusion that it is possible to glorify this vale of tears.[...] You cannot serve both God and your astral self. That is why the Gospel of Jesus Christ is only for those who are strong in the true, inner sense of the word.'

(The Chinese Gnosis, p.373)

Symbols of royal dignity of the 24 predecessors of the Buddha. Ceiling painting in Ananda Okkyuang, Pagan, Burma.

UNION OF ATMAN AND BRAHMAN

'For this reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.' These are the conditions to the sevenfold Path.

(The Coming New Man, p.186)

Maya throws her net time and again over anyone trying to escape. That is why he needs to empty himself of all self-interest. He has to learn to unmask it and to confront it with the power from his inner source. This power leads him to the straightforward way of life that directs itself exclusively to the liberating requirements and that no longer leaves any desires in the world.

On this path atman and Brahman can be seen as one again, or, as we would say: another child of God has come home.

SOURCES:

- 1 Quotes from: Shankara, *Das Kleinod der Unterscheidung*, (The Jewel of Discernment) O.W. Barth Verlag, Munich, 1981.
- 2 J van Rijckenborgh, *The Coming New Man*, Rozekruis Pers, Haarlem, 1957.
- 3 J van Rijckenborgh, *The Egyptian Arch-Gnosis*, 1, 2 and 3. Rozekruis Pers, Haarlem, 1982, 1987, 1994.
- 4 J van Rijckenborgh, *The Chinese Gnosis*, Rozekruis Pers, Haarlem, 1996.



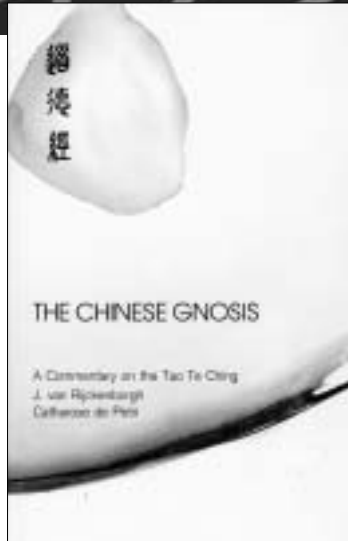
HE WHO BRINGS BLESSING

'The Brahmins, of old the protectors of the Vedas and the Upanishads and so also of divine wisdom, were furious and they fought the growing Buddhism with all means. The pupils of the Buddha and their descendants acquitted themselves as well and so there was a very great suffering in the heart of the Elevated One. He who wanted to serve mankind and save all in unlimited love, saw the battle which was fought concerning His Name.

He then decided to return. He came back into the shadows of the nature of death, fifty years after his passing away as the Buddha, but now as Shankara, the Elevated One. [...] Shankara taught the synthesis of all divine wisdom. He proved that the Vedas and the Upanishads and the teachings of the Buddha were identical and pursued the same aim. He showed the universality of all doctrines of wisdom.'

(The Gnosis in Present-day Manifestation, p.128)

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THE CHINESE GNOSIS

*A commentary
on part I of Lao Tzu's*

TAO TE CHING

J. VAN RIJCKENBORGH
CATHAROSE DE PETRI

Never has there been a commentary on the TAO TE CHING like this one, in which the Tao Te Ching is seen as a gnostic text and interpreted on the basis of gnostic insight.

As the authors explain, Gnosis – the original divine Knowledge which gives access to the path of liberation – is not limited to one particular country or nation. Gnosis is universal and intended for the whole human race, and wherever in the world the Messengers of the Light may work, it will always be revealed. That is why it was manifested not only in the Middle East, but also in ancient China, in the form of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching.

Written down some 2600 years ago, the Tao Te Ching is a brief text consisting of only 81 short chapters, yet it is so charged with meaning that it contains everything the seeker of liberation needs to know.

Take this verse from chapter 33 for instance: *'He who overcomes others is strong, but he who overcomes himself is omnipotent'*. The authors' interpretation of this verse is as follows: *'being omnipotent means unlocking and participating in the core essence of the Godhead'*. In a few words, this summarises the whole magnificent task underlying human existence. THE CHINESE GNOSIS not only explains this task, but also shows how it can be accomplished.

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