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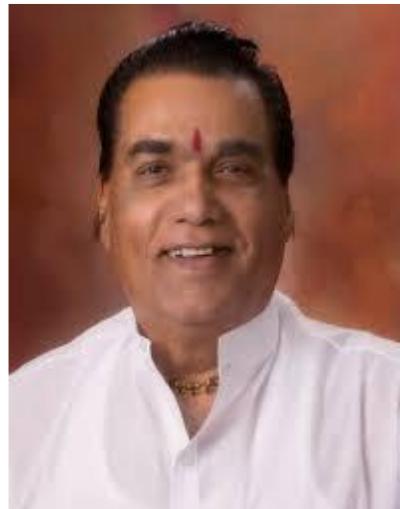
FACULTY OF PEACE STUDIES

Study Material UPS6004A(PG)

Philosophy of Science
and
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FACULTY OF PEACE STUDIES

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Prof. Dr. Vishwanath D. Karad

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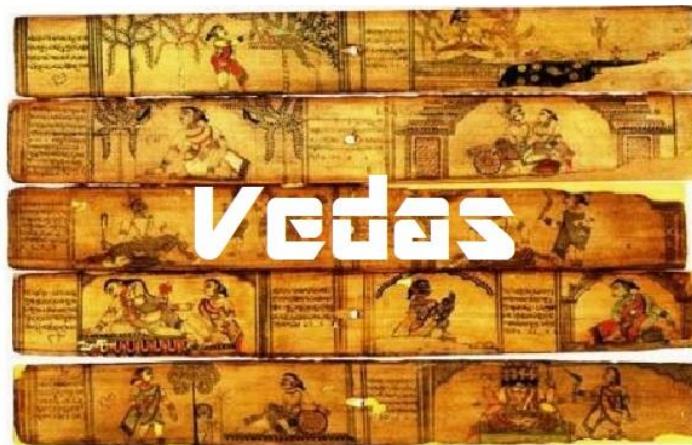
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VEDAS

PART A: History of Vedas

Introduction

The classical Indian tradition and Hinduism are rooted in the ancient scriptures called the Vedas. The Sāṅskrit root of the Veda is ‘vid’ which means knowledge. They are the earliest scriptural texts handed down to the generations of humankind containing the divine truths. The Vedas are said to be apocryphal (apaurusheya) अपौरुषेय for no human agency is involved in their creation. The Vedas are also known as Shruti (literally meaning hearing) for they belong to oral tradition. The great sages and seers preserved them in their memory and transmitted the Vedic knowledge only to those who deserved to receive them. Thus there were no written compilations in the beginning. But there arose a need to compile them in a written form. This task was undertaken by the sage named Krishna dwaipayana Vyasa. He codified the single Vedic compendium into four Vedas: - Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. This is the reason why he is also called Veda Vyasa. In memory of this great sage the Hindus celebrate Guru Purnima On his birth day, however, it is stated in the Vishnu Purana that Vyāsa was assisted by four of his disciples in the process of the compilation of the Vedas. Paila assisted him to compile Rigveda, Vaisampayana, the Yajurveda, Jaimini, the Samaveda, and Sumantu, the Atharvaveda.



The Structure of the Vedas

Each Veda is divided into two parts: karma kanda and jnyan kanda. The former deals with the Samhitas (collections of Mantras) and the Brahmans as and the latter with the Āranyakas and the Upanishadas. In other words, this classification is needed to show the distinction between action and knowledge. Those who are interested in material gains follow the former portion and those who are interested in acquiring knowledge follow the latter. Mantras are hymns addressed to eulogize gods or goddesses for some material favor. The collection of such Mantras is called Samhita. There are four **Samhitas**: Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva. These Samhitas are compiled for the smooth and unhindered performance of the Vedic rituals or sacrifices (yajnya).

But yajnya always means a sacrificial celebration. A Vedic sacrifice requires four chief priests. They are: Hota, one who recites hymns in praise of gods and goddesses to invoke their presence and participation in the yajnya, Udgātā, one who sings the hymns in sweet and appealing musical tones to please the gods and goddesses,

Adhvaryu, one who performs the yajnya in accordance with the strict ritualistic code and gives offerings to the gods, and Brahma, one who supervises the entire proceedings of the yajnya as he is well-versed in all the four Vedas. These Vedic sacrifices are intended to satisfy the needs of the above mentioned four priests who represent the four Samhitas respectively. Sometimes, we also come across the view that originally the Vedas were only three in number (Veda - trayi). But it is believed that the Atharvaveda was added to the list of three later on and it mainly deals with the secular aspects of human life. It is also held in traditional Hindu texts that Rig means verse, Sama means songs, and Yajuh means prose passage. Thus Samhita or Mantra portion of the Veda consists of hymnology addressed to the various gods and goddesses. Rishis Samhita is the oldest and the most important of all the Samhitas. The Vedic Rishis are not the authors of the Vedas, but only the seers of the Mantras. The Brahman, unlike Mantras, is in prose. They elaborate the complicated ritualism of the Vedas by emphasizing on the rules and regulations laid down for the performance of yajnya. The expression 'Brahman' is originally derived from the word 'Brahman' which means a prayer. There is very little philosophy in these portions. The appendages to these Brahmanas are called Aranyakas. They are called so because they are composed in the forests amidst calmness. These texts are mark of transition from ritualistic portion of the Vedas to their knowledge (philosophical) portion. Here in this portion we find mystic interpretation of the Vedic sacrifices. The concluding portion of the Vedas is called Upanishads. They are highly philosophical in their purport and regarded as the cream of the Vedic philosophy. This is the reason why Upanishad is called 'Vedanta'.

Philosophy in the Vedas

Hardly one finds any philosophical thought in the preUpanishadic thought. But one cannot ignore the seeds of the important philosophical truths found there. There is a gradual development of philosophical thought from the Mantras to the Brahman as to the Aranyakas to the Upanishad.

There is a natural transition from naturalistic and anthropomorphic polytheism through transcendent monotheism to immanent monism in the preUpanishadic thought. The personified natural forces changed into real gods and later on became mere forms of mere forms of one personal and transcendental God, who is the custodian of 'Cosmic and Moral order'. This personal and transcendental God Himself passed into immanent Purusha. Later on the Upanishads developed this immanent and transcendent Purusha into all-pervading Brahman/Atman. The Mantra portion represents the religion of 'Nature' of the poets, the Brahman a portion ritualism and the religion of 'Law' of the priests, the Upanishadic portion the religion of 'Spirit' of the philosophers. The western interpretation of the Vedas does not go well with the spirit of the Vedas. According to such interpretations, the Vedic seers were inspired by the primitive natural forces. But it is the other way round. The Vedas are authorless and eternal.

The Vedic seers with their intellect and spiritual powers came face to face with the Reality and this mystic experience or direct intuitive spiritual insight overflowed in the literature as the Vedic hymns. The important feature of the Vedic hymns is the same spiritual monism, the same immanent conception of the identity-in-difference that which ultimately transcends itself. Such a view is poetically explained in the Upanishad. All the gods are the manifestation of the same supreme God or principle. When gods are praised, in fact, it is the supreme God who is praised through His manifestations. However, one can only see monism throughout the Vedas.

Some of the descriptions reveal the true nature of the Real. For example, in the Rig-Veda it is mentioned “The One Real, the wise declare as many (ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti).” Further it is also said “Purusha is all this, all that was, and all that shall be (Purusha evedam sarvam yad bhutam yachcha bhavyam).” In fact, “The same ‘Real’ is worshipped as Uktha in the Rigveda, as Agni in the Yajuh and as Mahavrata in the Sama.” From the above references it is evident that the Vedas always referred to one single monistic principle as the supreme Reality. Although one cannot really distinguish between religion and philosophy in the Rigveda, the kind of questions that one confronts give an impression that both religious and philosophical concerns are embedded in the structuring of the Vedas. The following questions substantiate our view. What makes the wind blow? Why does the monsoon come? Who put the sun, giver of warmth and light, in the heavens? How is it that broad-bosomed earth brings forth these myriad life forms? These questions are highly philosophical although modern science may take credit to answer these questions. But, roughly 6000 years ago, these questions were the concern of philosophers. Further, there are also questions such as: What is beyond the gods? What, if any, is the relationship between actions and their consequences? What knowledge, if any, does man have of himself? Of course the questions How? Why? And With what? It may be appropriate with when applied to human creativity. But, when these questions are addressed to natural activity the natural forces (gods) in their personified form are brought into the picture. 3. Religion in the Vedas. Does one find religion in the Vedas? If at all there is one, it is none other than the Vedic dharma.

The personification of natural forces (gods) to a great extent answers the questions without entering into the world of mystery. The god of fire (Agni) has certain natural powers. Similar is the case with the god of wind (Vayu). Thus gods as natural forces are responsible for any natural activity. Thus vital questions of how and why are answered in terms of who. Then the people sought to control nature by offering prayers, sacrifices, and rituals for their benefit. Therefore, it is not a wonder why one finds so many hymns in the Vedas to propitiate gods and goddesses. Sometimes, it is viewed that not all the seers of the Rigveda intended religion as the way of understanding and controlling nature and humans. This is evident from the following passage from the Rigveda.

Who knows for certain? Who shall here declare it? Whence was it born? And whence came this creation? The gods were born after this world’s creation: Then who can know from whence it has arisen? None know when his creation has arisen; and whether He has or has not produced

it: He who surveys it in the highest heaven, He only knows, or perhaps even he may know not. The great seers were the seekers of wisdom not just knowledge. They went beyond the gods to the ultimate

Principle that rules even the gods. They came to know through their extraordinary powers that there is an immutable and eternal moral order that regulates the natural phenomena. It is popularly known as R̄ta. This is the moral principle that provides order and purpose to the cosmic reality. Nothing takes place in the reality unless otherwise directed by the eternal moral order Rita. Perhaps religion came into the picture only when rituals and sacrifices are performed by humans in order to eulogize the gods for their mundane favors. But the questions how the gods controlled nature and how the humans could influence the gods resulted in a serious theological interpretation. But majority of these explanations are from the Brahmana portion of the Veda which highlight the details of religious worship, although occasionally they crossed the limits of the given answers in order to seek the efficacy of a ritual or sacrifice in terms of the primordial principles.

The following passage from the Satapatha Brahmana reveals it: Verily, in the beginning this (universe) was the Brahman. It created the gods; and, having created the gods, it made them ascend these worlds: Agni (this terrestrial world), Vayu the air, and Surya the sky....Then the Brahman itself went up to the sphere beyond. Having gone up to the sphere beyond, it considered, "How can I descend again into these worlds?" It then descended again by means of these two, Form and Name....These (Name and Form) indeed are the two great forces of Brahman; and verily, he who knows these two great forces of Brahman becomes himself a great force. The above passage indicates that there is an attempt to explain the religions in terms of the philosophical. However, both these aspects are promiscuously mixed up with each other. Later on in the Aranyakas one finds a shift from ritualism to free intellectual inquiry into the nature of reality. Although the Aranyakas do not oppose the religious way they brought in meditation in the place of sacrifice. The meditation gradually led to free speculation and contemplation that permeated the Upanishads. One should remember that it is not all that easy to distinguish religion and philosophy in the Vedas. Coming to the hymns of the Rigveda, they are all in praise of the gods.

As stated earlier all these gods are personalities presiding over the diverse forces of nature or their very essence. Therefore one cannot attribute any special characteristics to them like the Greek gods or the gods found in the Puranic literature. These Vedic gods may be different from those listed in the Purana as for they are the expressions of the powers of nature. Take for instance, the god of fire (Agni). He "lies concealed in the softer wood, as in a chamber, until, called forth by the rubbing in the early morning, he suddenly springs forth in gleaming brightness. The sacrifice takes and puts him on the wood. When the priests pour melted butter upon him, he leaps up crackling and neighing like a horse, he whom men love to see increasing like their own prosperity. Since these natural forces are treated as gods, the view that the Vedic people were polytheistic gained popularity. There is, in fact, neither polytheism nor monotheism

rather it is a simple stage of belief. Unlike in the polytheistic faith, the Vedic gods do not preserve their proper places. They do shrink into insignificance or shine as supreme. On a definite occasion a particular god is eulogized as supreme in order to satisfy one's need. However, it is not to be interpreted that all other gods are less important or insignificant for the Vedic gods are not independent of all the rest. In other words, each god is standing out as highest when he comes to the mind of the suppliant. Of the Vedic gods six of them are most important. They are: Varuna, Indra, Agni, Soma, Rudra and Vishnu. The latter two are important because they are developed into full-fledged Gods by their respective sects as supreme Beings.

Varuna was regarded as the highest ethical creation as well as the great celestial Brahmana by the Vedic Hindus. Indra was worshipped as the god of victory being a warrior-king and was invoked very frequently as a god of storm. Agni and Soma were also given importance as terrestrial gods representing fire and plant respectively. Invariably both these gods were invoked during the rituals.

Agni as the fire consumes the sacrifice and as the priest he presents it to the gods above. In a way he is the mediator between the gods and humans. He is not only a priest who brings gods and humans together, but also the element who binds the three worlds. He is the sun in the heaven, lightening in the storm cloud, and used as fire by humans on the earth. His threefold birth corresponds to the threefold structure of the Universe. Soma is an indispensable plant used in the sacrifice. This plant is yellowish in color and is found in the mountains. The juice of this plant is filtered through a fine cloth. Since the juice is in liquid form it is likened to waters and streams. Soma is the Lord of streams and son of waters. Since the plant is yellow in colour it is likened to the lightening. Indra being the warrior god, he is depicted as manly of men. As a Vedic precursor Indra remained close to humans as their friend, brother, and their father and mother. He is both generous and quick to wrath. His favorites are not the priestly families as often mentioned in the Rigveda but the fighting men. His might is immeasurable and his generosity knows no bounds. If Varuna is the king by divine right, Indra is the king by right of conquest. One can also notice the signs of rivalry between these two gods in the Rigveda. Varuna is the Universal monarch whereas Indra is the monarch of his own making. Varuna abides by the law and truth as their guardian. In other words,

Varuna is the guardian of Ruta (ऋत), the 'cosmic order'. He possesses uncanny power (maya).

This is the reason why people must approach him with utmost fear and extreme circumspection. Rudra is another Vedic god who inspires terror. He kills and makes people alive, he wounds and he heals them. In the Vedas it is held that Rudra was not associated with other Vedic gods excepting with Maruts, also called Rudras, who are his sons. But there is another side of Rudra. He is not only the destroyer, but also a great physician with thousand remedies at his disposal. In the Rigveda it is mentioned that his hand is soothing and, healing and cool. His hand takes away all the ailments sent by other gods. Further the Rudra is developed as Rudra-Shiva in Atharvaveda he is given the title 'Pashupati' or the Lord of the cattle. It is in this form the devotees started worshipping him for they saw themselves as Rudra's cattle and the god

is the lord of the cattle. Coming to Vishnu, like Shiva, he is a great God of classical Hinduism. Shiva appeared in the form of the Vedic Rudra. But, out of 1,017 hymns found in the Rigveda only six hymns are addressed to Lord Vishnu and three of them he shares with god Indra. From these hymns we come to know that he measures the earth, the sky and the beyond. Mortals can only traverse the first two and Vishnu alone knows the third and the highest. Thus he sets limits to the finite world.

To sum up, the Vedas are the revealed scriptures of the Hindus and they are of not human origin. Philosophy and religion are promiscuously mixed up in the Vedas. They contain eternal truths. They are also known as Shruti for the Vedic wisdom was orally transmitted to the deserving disciples by the great seers and sages. The Vedic gods were the personification of natural forces. The entire universe was controlled by the moral order called Ruta (ऋत). The Vedic gods Indra, Varuna, Agni, Rudra and Vishnu were worshipped by the ancient Hindus. Thus one finds both religious and philosophical ideas in the Vedas. They may not be conspicuous but one has to look for them in the vast Vedic literature.

In Indian tradition there are fourteen or eighteen Vidyashtanas (abodes of knowledge/ cognition).

Svara or accent:

Sanskrit language can be put under two headings - Vaidika and Laukika. There is Svara or accent in Sanskrit language. But during the course of time Svara lost its significance in Laukika (secular or non-Vedic) literature. But Svara plays an important role in Vedic literature. Any change of Svara would lead to change of meaning. There are mainly three Svaras, viz. Udātta, Anudātta and Svarita.

दुष्टःशब्दःस्वरतोवर्णतोवा मिथ्याप्रयुक्तोनतमर्थमाह स वाग्वज्रोयजमानं हिनस्ति
यथेन्द्रशत्रुःस्वरतोऽपराधात् ॥

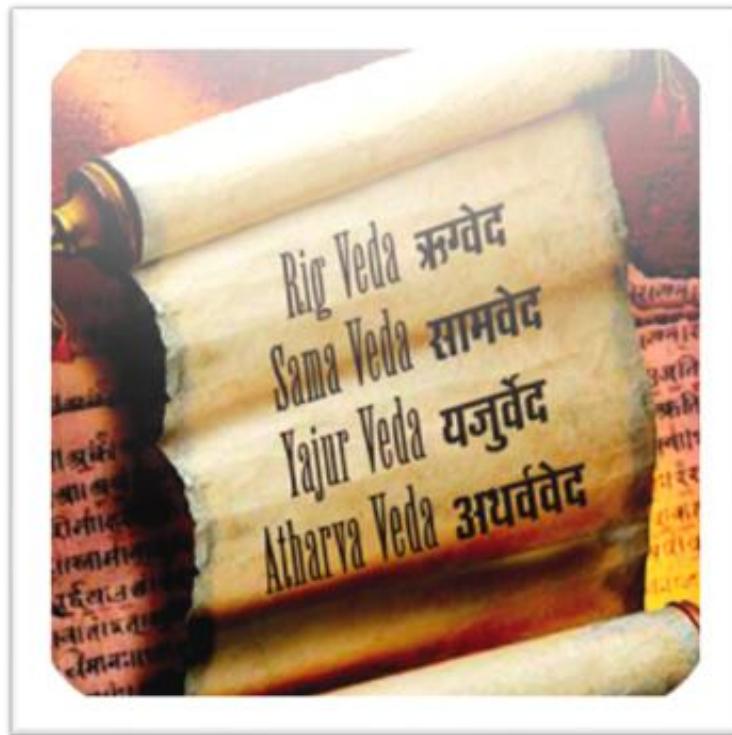
Classification of Vedas:

Veda can be put under four headings - Mantra, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishad. The Mantra portion is called Samhita. Mantras are commanding texts of different deities and literally mean - those, which protect if recited with concentration. Brahmanas comment on Mantras and explain the procedure of a rite. Both the above portions are useful for a person during Brahmacharyam (celibacy) and Gārhasthya (married life) - the first two Aashramas (stages of life) and also in the performance of different rites. The Aranyaka portion, which should be recited in a forest, as the name suggests, is useful for a person during the third Aashrama called Vanaprastha (living in a forest). Upanishads are useful during the fourth Aashrama called Samnyasa (giving up all Kamyakarmas such as Yaga etc. but still performing the Nityakarmas like Sandhyavandanam and Naimittikakarmas such as death ceremony of parents). One may directly go to Samnyasa from Brahmacharya.

Branches (shakhas) of Vedas:

Rigveda has got 21 branches but only two are available. Yajurveda has 9 branches. It is divided into two - KrishnaYajurveda and Shuklayajurveda. Four branches of KrishnaYajurveda and two branches of Śuklayajurveda are available. Sāmaveda has got 1000 branches of which only three are available. Atharvaveda has got nine branches of which only two are available.

1. Rigveda : 21 Branches
2. Yajurveda: 9 Branches
3. Samveda: 1000 Branches
4. Atharvaveda: 100 Branches



A Brief account of Vedas:

Rigveda:

‘Rik’ literally means a text of praise of a deity. Some Riks make a Sukta, some Suktas make a Maṇḍala. There are ten Maṇḍalas in Rigveda consisting of 1017 Sūktas and the total number of Riks is 10,472. Ayurveda is the Upaveda of Rigveda.

KrishnaYajurveda:

Yajus means ‘vakyam’ (sentence). Since the Yajus are found to be clustered for most of the part, it is called Samhita. The sentences are to be divided with the help of Purvamimamsa. In KṛṣṇayajusSamhita all the three kinds of texts, viz. Mantra (which praises the deity), Arthavāda (sentences of commendation and condemnation) and Brahmana (which explains the procedure)

are seen in an amalgamated form and therefore the word ‘Krishn’ (literally ‘black’) is prefixed. Some Riks are supplied by Rigveda; the procedural details of Yāga (sacrifice) are stated in Krishayajurveda, which is also called Taittiriyasamhita. There are seven Kandas, forty four Prapāthakas (or Adhyayas) and 635 Anuvakas (or Prashnas) in Taittiriyasamhita. Dhanurveda is the Upaveda of Krishayajurveda.

Shuklayajurveda:

Also called Shuklayajus samhita and it is useful in the performance of Yaga (sacrifice). In this Samhita there are Mantras and Arthavadas. Since the concepts are clear the term ‘Shukla’ (white) is prefixed. Yājnyavalkya was the disciple of Vaiśampāyana and learnt Yajurveda. There was some clash between them and Yajyavalkya returned the Veda to his Guru, worshipped Aditya (Sun), got the Vidyā and the same is called Shuklayajurveda. Other sages, following the order of Guru, in the form of Tittiri birds took the Vida, returned by Yajyavalkya and therefore it is called Taittiriyasmahita or Krishnayajurveda. Shuklayajurveda has got two versions called Mādhyandinapātha and Kāṇvapātha but without much difference. Dhanurveda is an Upaveda of Shuklayajurveda.

Samaveda:

Most of the Mantras are borrowed from 8th and 9th Maṇdalas of Rigveda; ‘Sama’ literally means ‘to sing’. If the Riks are assigned some music they would become Samas. SamaSamhita is divided into two parts - Purvarchikam and Uttararchikam. A group of Riks is called Arcikam. There are six Prapāthakas in Pūrvārcika whereas Uttarārcika has got nine Prapāthakas. Gandharvaveda is an Upaveda of SāmaSamhita.

Atharvaveda:

Atharvasamhita is divided into twenty Kandas. There are 736 Suktas and 5918 Mantras in this Samhita (Shaunakashakha). 1200 Mantras of this Samhita are borrowed from Rigveda. In this Samhita we come across a blend of prose and poetry. Atharva is the name of a Ṛṣi. Arthaveda / Arthashastra (polity) is an Upaveda of Atharvaveda.

General Points

‘Trayi’ is a term that is often used to refer to the combine of Rigveda, Yajurveda and Sāmaveda. In a Yāga, Rigveda is represented by Hota. Sāmaveda by Udgātā, Yajurveda by Adhvaryu and Atharvaveda by Brahma. In fact, Brahma, being the supervisor of Yaga, should know all the four Vedas. The first three Vedas produce only half of the Yaga that is in the form of speech whereas the rest in the form of mind is by Atharvaveda. Puruṣasūktam that is there in all five Vedas (Rigveda, KrishnaYajurveda, Shuklayajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda) clearly states that all the four Vedas were available at a single point of time - ṛcassāmāni jajnire chandamasi jajnire tasmāt yajustasmādajāyata. There are certain branches of Vedas named after Rishis - Kathaka, Kalapaka, Vashishtha etc. by which some scholars got confused and said that

those Śākhas were authored by the respective sages. But the fact is that they are propagators / specialists of those Mantras and are called Mantradraṣṭārah / Mantrakṛtah etc. As has already been stated in the Introduction, Vedas are Apaurusheya (not written by human beings). They have emanated from Brahman.

At the end of every Pralaya (the great destruction) the Vedas also disappear. Then, after the new creation has started, the Rishis (sages) perform Tapas (an ascetic life) and perceive the Mantras and therefore the same are named after them - Vasishtham Sama etc. We come across dozens of such Rishis across all the Vedasamhitas. The Mantras in Samhitas are assigned to different deities such as Agni, Indra, Vishnu, Rudra, Varuṇa, Surya, Vayu, Soma, Brihaspati, Pr̥thvī, Gāyatrī etc. Vedas are the origin of different Vedangas, Darshanas and Upavedas etc. Shruti, Anusarava, Trayi, Ammaya, Samamnaya, Chandas, Svādhyāya, Agama and Nigama are synonyms of Veda. Caranam is a name of Vedic text before it was divided into branches. Pratishakhyas is the name of Vedic grammar and there are five Pratishakhyas for five Vedas. Brihad devata is a treatise that explains the details of each Mantra and presently it is available for Rigveda only.

Summary

Among the 14/18 Vidhyashtanas, Vedas occupy the first place and out of 1130 branches only 12/13 are available. Vedas are Apauruseya and are the original source of all other Vidyas. At the end of each Pralaya all the Vedas disappear and the Rishis, with their Tapas, perceive / hear the Vedic Mantras and propagate them and therefore are called Mantrarakrutah. The Mantras / Vedic texts perceived by Rishis are named after them - Kathaka, Kalapaka, Paippalada etc. Samaveda is a musical form of Rigveda. Mantrabrahman part deals with Karma (rite) whereas Upanishad deals with Dnyana.

PART B: Doctrines of Veda

Veda means a mass of knowledge and is considered as the most ancient literature known to humans. Unlike any other literature, the Vedic one is Apaurusheya (non-human), i.e. not authored by human beings. Uninterrupted tradition tells us that Veda had emanated from Brahma at the beginning of Creation. Since Creation repeats, Veda is considered as "anadi" (beginningless) and "ananta" (endless) and as such it is indestructible.

Veda can be divided into two major parts – the first one deals with Karma (rituals) and the second one with Jnana (cognition). A careful survey of Veda leads us to believe that apart from the above two goals, Veda also offers - guidelines to protect the Elements, purification of mind, harmony in the society, personality development etc.

The roots of Dharma can be traced to Veda

Until Vedavyasa, a sage, ventured to divide, there was a single mass of Veda. Rigveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda and Atharvaveda have emerged after the division. Originally Rigveda had had 21 branches; Yajurveda, 100 branches; Samaveda, 1000 branches; and Atharvaveda, 9 branches. Presently only 12 branches of all Vedas are available. Rigveda contains Riks (hymns) that praise the deity. Yajurveda consists of Yajus (sentences) that explain the performance of rituals. Samaveda is nothing but Rigveda associated with music (Samagana). Atharvaveda consists of a blend of prose and poetry. Apart from spiritual matters, Atharvaveda deals with matters of mundane importance such as health, polity etc. also.



Dichotomy of Veda

Broadly Veda can be put under two headings – Mantrabhaga and Brahmanabhaga. The term "mantra" literally means, "the one that protects if recited with meditation". Mantras are used in Yajñas (sacrifices and rituals) and other Karmas (rites). Samhita is a synonym of Mantrabhāga. Brāhmaṇas explain the Mantras. Aranyakas and Upanishads are also included in Brahmanas.

The Vedic tradition firmly stands on a base called Dharma, i.e. one can attain Mokṣa (by which the cycle of birth and death is arrested once and for all) only by following Dharma and one should see that both Artha and Kama are associated with Dharma. Dharma leads one to Svarga (heaven) and Moksha, whereas Adharma (non-dharma) would cause Naraka (hell).

Why are these scriptures important?

To learn about any cultural scriptures of that country is important. There is no Author of Vedas but Rishis are seer of Vedas that's why Rishis are not Author but Seers of Vedas. Experience of Rishis is very dynamic. Vedas are books of knowledge of the nature of reality. Veda is a device that provides non-mundane solutions for getting the desired things and averting the undesired ones. It must here be emphasised that on the doctrinal level the Vedas deal both with worldly life and the inner life of the Self. They teach how to conduct ourselves in such a manner as to create Atmic well-being. And their concern is not with the liberation of the individual alone; they speak about the ideals of social life and about the duties of the public. How the Brahmin ought to lead his life and how the king must rule his subjects and what ideals women are to follow: an answer to these-stated in the form of laws-is to be found in these scriptures. The Vedas indeed constitute the apex of our law-books.

Yaga and Yajnya (sacrifice / ritual)

Yaga and Yajnya both the terms are synonyms. They are formed through the verbal root "yaj" (to worship). There are a number of Yagas described in Veda, such as Darśapūrṇamāsa (performed during new moon day and full moon day). One desirous of Svarga (heaven) should perform this Yāga –darśapūrṇamāsābhyaṁ svargakāmo yajeta.

Yajnya means give and take, we can see in Yajnya, Yajman (host of Yajnya) offers his precious belongings for it, because Yajman or vedic people are expressing gratitude through this act, as we have seen in vedic period all deities belong to nature, they are nature god, and nature gives everyone everything for free and Yajnya is medium by which we can give back to nature and express gratitude and also pray for the continuation of its offerings.

With this Yajnya system we can see that economy, social systems and also science had been developed that time, because to perform Yajnya one needs equipment of Yajnya, priest and other services too, for this Yajman (host) is depend upon all Varnas of society (i.e, for Yajnya equipment Yajman needs Carpenter, for Mantra chating Yajman needs Priest) and through this vedic economy got developed.

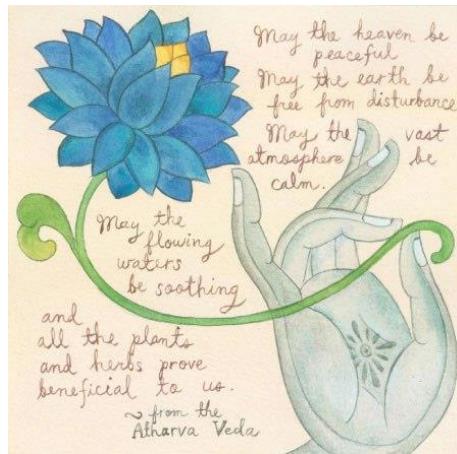
While performing Yajnya one was supposed to follow Muhurt (particular time), for that Vedic people were observing Timings of sun and moon, through this Astronomy got developed.

We can find Pythagoras theorem in Vedic Text. To perform Yajnya rituals, construction of YajnyaKunda (Vedi) is very important and it has particular measurements and through this Geometry had been developed. Like this only other branches of science like biology, botany, and metallurgy had been developed. So Yajnya was crucial and important part of Vedic people.

Vedas are multifaceted and Universal

If we conduct a careful survey of even the available Vedic literature we come across a number of issues concerning Creation, non-pollution of Elements, non-polluted mind, personality development, social unity, treatment of elders, conjugal relationship, polity, economic prosperity

etc., which are not directly confined to spiritual life but are essential in maintaining universal peace, health, hygiene, prosperity and unity. Here are some Suktas (chapters of good-sayings):



Rigveda 10-191-4

The last Mantra of Rigveda (10-191-4) deals with equality among human beings:

Let the desires of all of us be the same.
 Let the hearts of all of us be the same.
 Let the thoughts of all of us run on the same rope.
 Let all of us unite and become good friends.

समानी व आकृतिः समाना हृदयानि वः। समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति॥
 samānī va ākūtiḥ samānā hṛdayāni vah̄ ।
 samānamastu vo mano yathā vah̄ susahāsati ॥10-191-4

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः:

Aano bhadra krtavo yantu vishwatah
 [Sanskrit]

Let noble thoughts come to me from all directions
 - Rig Veda

Outcome of vedas

According to Vedic philosophy human life has a definite purpose. Whilst the final Goal of life is "Moksha", there are three other (intermediary) goals of life. These together are called four objectives or pursuits of life, which are as follows:-

1. DHARMA - Righteousness
2. ARTHA - Acquisition of wealth by proper means and its right use
3. KAMA - Fulfillment of noble desires
4. MOKSHA - Liberation or the final Goal

It is essential to have the proper understanding of these objectives (as also because these terms are highly used in our daily language to mean different things). We shall describe these briefly in the following paras:-

DHARMA

This is the first and foremost objective or pursuit of life. Dharma is a Sanskrit word and it has no exact equivalent in English language. It has much wider significance than the word 'religion', in its ordinary sense, as currently in vogue in the existing conventional forms. The word DHARMA has been derived from its root Dhri which means 'to uphold', 'to adopt', 'to safeguard', etc. In essence, therefore DHARMA means that which is worthy of being upheld or being practiced. Thus, DHARMA is a comprehensive term which covers an entire range of values.

DHARMA has two factors: (a) Genuine faith and devotion to God, as all noble qualities emanate from God; and (b) Practice of righteousness in ones life, also called as 10 basic principles of Dharma. The above two factors can be the unifying basis for all conventional religions. Hence, it has also been called as Sanatan (forever) or Manav (human) Dharma.

The ten basic principles of Dharma are the following:-

1. Forbearance:- It is the quality to remain calm and composed in all circumstances.
2. Control of mind:- One should exercise full control over the mind which is always restless and changing.
3. Kshama (Forgiveness):- It is virtue of those who are physically and morally strong. However, it is not desirable to forgive a habitual wrong doer.
4. Non Stealing:- One should not steal or take away or acquire anything which belongs to others, without paying its proper price and without permission of the rightful owner
5. Shauch (Cleanliness):- One should keep the body, mind and physical environment clean and pure.
6. Wisdom:- One should always try to gain wisdom through study, self experience and wise company.
7. Control of Senses:- One should keep one's sense (of action and knowledge) under control and become their master. There are five senses of Knowledge and five sense of action.
8. Knowledge:- One should acquire knowledge both of physical and spiritual domain from all possible sources
9. Truth:- One should practice truth in thought, words and deed
10. Non Anger: - One should try to remain calm and balanced even in the face of provocation.

ARTHA (Wealth)

ARTHA or the acquisition of wealth is the second most important pursuit or objective of human life. DHARMA comes first and ARTHA has to be based on Dharma. The observance of DHARMA takes priority. The following are the forms of ARTHA:-

1. Knowledge is the greatest wealth; both material and spiritual. Material Knowledge relates to our worldly life, requirements and activities, while spiritual knowledge relates to spirit, God and inner life. Material knowledge is necessary to live worldly life and it can be gained thru proper education, intellectual pursuits and everyday experience, etc. However, the spiritual knowledge is much difficult to acquire. Spiritual knowledge leads to self realisation. It can be attained through the hard practice of yogic discipline
2. Health is another form of Wealth. One has to acquire and practice the knowledge of attaining good health, which includes the well being at physical, emotional and mental levels. Good food, proper regular exercise and good thoughts are some of the fundamentals of good health.
3. Contentment is another wealth. It means abstinence of desire to possess more and more of life requirements and material possessions. It also implies that one should work honestly, try his best

and be satisfied with the results of his efforts. Contentment give mental peace and moral strength to remain calm in all circumstances

4. Material Wealth is another wealth. It should be acquired keeping the DHARMA. Some portion of money should be used for charitable purposes. It should be expended only for the necessities and not for one's greed (luxuries). One should not become slave of the material wealth but should master it.

KAMA (Controlled fulfillment of desires)

The third pursuit of Life is KAMA - the desire for the satisfaction of sensual urges in which sexual gratification occupies the prime position. On a wider scale, it includes fulfillment of other material desires also.

KAMA is two faceted.

- One (controlled and beneficial desire) acts as a catalytic agent for actions in life. Much of the personal and worldly progress is the result of desire to achieve something, to discover something new.
- Another (uncontrolled or not beneficial desire) can lead to destruction.

It is therefore utmost important to gain knowledge on differentiating between the facets and then to entertain the desires in a controlled way. Let us now examine how desires are produced.

- Desires are produced in the mind through thought process when mind dwells on the objects of senses. When this happens, attachment to external objects is produced. From attachment springs desire.
- The desire goes on increasing and one desire leads to another and so on. Like fire to which fuel is added, KAMA grows more and more with indulgence are overwhelmed by KAMA, the soul also gets deluded and the result is deterioration and destruction.
- Therefore, we should keep KAMA under proper check and at its desirable level in order to make life useful and purposeful.
- We should limit our desires to as low as necessary for the daily living and fulfilling ones duties. Desires which arise out of lust, greed and anger should be curbed absolutely.
- Such control should be enforced from the beginning through wisdom and discrimination. In other words, control of desires should be observed through proper understanding about the consequences of the desires; and should not be by suppression as suppressed desires will bounce back. Repeated reminders, checks and strong determination are useful tools to avoid harmful desires. The observance of principles of DHARMA plays a vital role in the curbing and control of unwanted and harmful desires.

MOKSHA (SALVATION)

This is the fourth and final objective of human life. It is the state of liberation from misery and pain which are so abundant in human life. It is the state of Ananda (perfect bliss) after attaining which nothing more remains to be attained.

Human life is unique. He (/she) is at the top of all creation. Only human beings, unlike other living beings, are endowed with higher intelligence, an ability to think, analyse and discriminate between right and wrong. Unless these endowments are used to full advantage, there is not much difference between human and animal life. Only human beings can go beyond the animal level and reach higher spiritual goals.

The attainment of MOKSHA is extremely difficult to achieve. This usually takes efforts on many births (and rebirths) and may or may not be achieved in one's current span of life except in a few rare cases. It requires arduous spiritual practice, constant and unselfish devotion to GOD an attitude of non-attachment, etc. Our knowledge, selfless action, pure and constant devotion are some of the means which are helpful in attaining MOKSHA.

The attainment of Moksha is the highest goal of life. This is the final objective of human life. But there is no instant Moksha. One has to first go through and attain the first three objectives of DHARMA, ARTHA and KAMA. Taking sanyasa (renunciation) from the very beginning from world life, except in certain rare cases, is not recommended. Life has to be first lived at the material level, when ARTHA (wealth) has to be acquired and subsequently all noble desires have to be fulfilled, but all these are required to be attained within the constraints of DHARMA. Thus KAMA and ARTHA have to be accommodated within the over all control of DHARMA

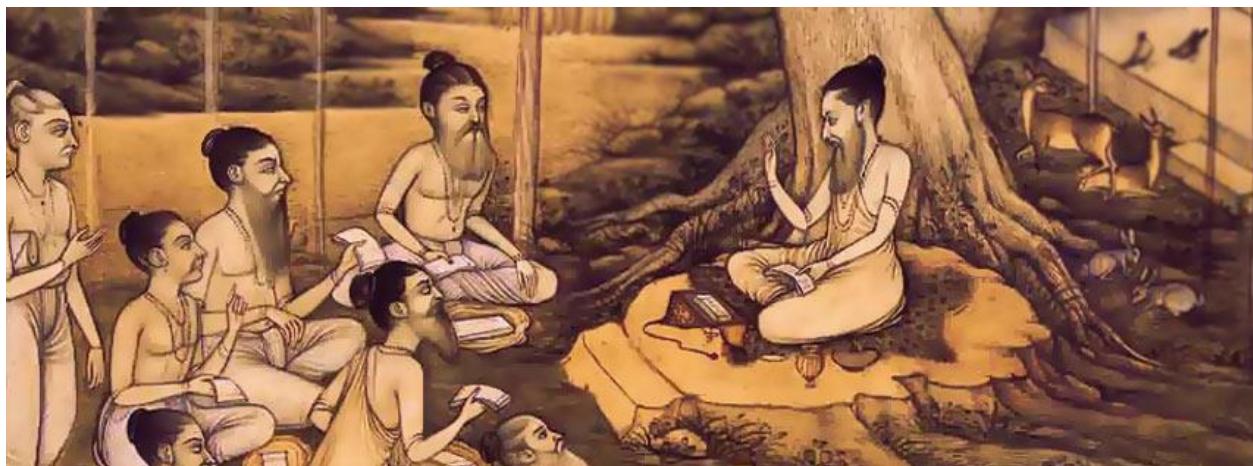
UPANISHADS

PART A : Introduction of Dashopanishad

Introduction

Upanishad is considered to be the end portions of the Veda (Vedanta). They represent the philosophical wisdom of the classical Indian tradition. Some hold that there are more than two hundred of them and for some only hundred eight. However some of the Upanishads are considered to be very important for any philosophical discussion as the great acharyas wrote commentaries on them. They are: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Chandogya, Brihad arnyaka. These Upanishad represent all the four Vedas as they do not belong to any single Veda. Many are omitted for the contents of those lesser known Upanishads are already found in the above mentioned major Upanishad. Let us discuss in detail the philosophical significance of each of them.

ईशा_केन_कठ_प्रश्न_मुण्ड_माण्डूक्य_तित्तिरि।
ऐतरेयं च छान्दोग्यं बृहदारण्यकं तथा ॥



What is Upanishad?

The term Upanishad means to sit nearby or close by. The deserving disciples used to sit close to the teacher (guru) in order to have knowledge of them. It is difficult to state anything about the great Upnishadic teachers and inquirers of truth. Sometimes their names are mixed up with the gods or mythological or historical persons. The philosophy of Upanishad is not a system of philosophy but several philosophical doctrines are brought together in these texts. Upanishad do not belong to the same time or place. They are also not composed by the same authors. Hence one finds different views and interpretations on the same texts. There is no uniform method followed in explaining the contents of the Upanishad and sometimes the methods do not adhere to any logic. Myths, etymologies, analogies, dialogues are used to explain philosophical purport of the Upanishad. They are the only logical proof.

The Upanishadic Personages

There is a tendency to mix up mythological persons, deities and historical persons in the Upanishad. We come across these names in the form of dialogues and narratives. For instance we often come across the names such as Yajnyavalkya, the spiritual guru of Janaka, It is believed that both lived around 9th century B.C. It appears that the former appeared in many controversies with many philosophers. The names of Maitreyi and Gargi, the two wives of Yajnyavalkya, also found in the Upanishadic literature. The other prominent names that one comes across in this literature include Śanatkumāra, Nārada, Sāndilya, Ajātaśatru, Gārgya, Bhrugu, Aupamānyava, Aśvapati, Budila, Gautama, Kausitaki, Raikva, Naciketa. The discussions, dialogues, and analogies are interrelated, overlapping and repetitious. It is very difficult to say very definitely who is earlier and who is later. Those names appeared in the earlier Upanishads are likely to be earlier than those appeared in the later Upanishad.

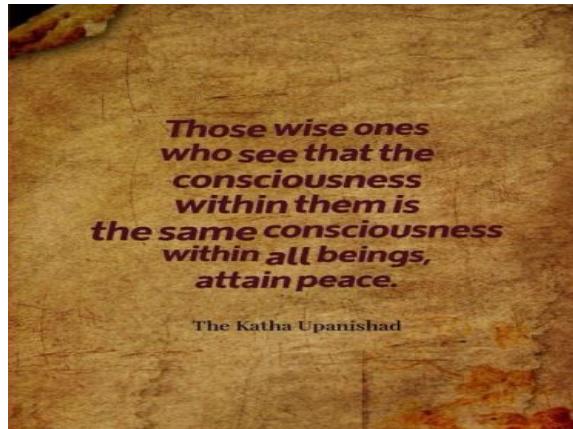
The Vedas find their final expression in the Upanishads. Indeed, the Upanishads are called "Vedanta". They form the final part of the Vedas in two ways. In each recension we have first the Samhita, then the Brahmana which is followed by the Aranyaka, the Upanishad coming at the close of the last-mentioned. The Upanishads throw light on the meaning and the purpose of the Vedas and represent the end of the scripture in more than one sense: while their text forms the concluding part of the Vedas, their meaning represents the Ultimate Truth of the same. A village or town has a temple; the temple has its gopuram; and the gopuram has a sikhara over it. The Upanisads are the sikhara, the summit, of our philosophical [and metaphysical] system.

"Upa-ni-sad" means to "sit near by". The Upanishads are the teachings imparted by a guru to his student sitting by his side [sitting at his feet]. You could also take the term to mean "that which takes one to the Brahman". "Upanayana" may be interpreted in two ways: leading a child to his guru; or leading him to the Brahman. Similiarly, the term Upanishad could also be understood in the above two senses.

If a student sits close to the teacher when he is receiving instruction it means that a "rahasya" (a secret or a mystery) is being conveyed to him. Such teachings are not meant to be imparted to those who are not sufficiently mature and who are not capable of cherishing their value. That is why in the Upanisads themselves these words occur where subtle and esoteric truths are expounded:"This is Upanisat. This is Upanishad". What is held to be a secret in the Vedas is called a "rahasya". In the Upanisads the term "Upanishat" is itself used to mean the same.

Central Teachings of the Upanishad:

By and large, the central doctrines of the Upanishad focus mainly on the ultimate Reality Brahman/Atman. Several illustrations are found in different Upanishad about the nature of Brahman/Atman and how it can be realized. Let us see how the following Upanishad discuss the ultimate truth.



Isha Upanishad:

This Upanishad is the part of Sukla-Yajurveda. It starts with a prayer which states that this and the other world are full. Even if something is taken out or something is added to the full, the full remains as it is. This is the doctrine of the infinite to which the addition or subtraction make no difference. Regarding Brahman this Upanishad says that it is One and does not move, yet it is faster than mind. It is far yet it is nearer. It is outwards, yet inwards to us. Those who take to the life of action (karma) are ignorant and go to the darker worlds. Through action we can only purify our minds. It is only through meditation we attain immortality. Everything in this world is pervaded by the Lord.

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वयत्किञ्चजगत्यांजगत्।
तेन यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मागृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम्॥

All this should be covered by the Lord, whatsoever moves on the earth. By such a renunciation protect (thyself). Covet not the wealth of others.

Kena Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Samaveda. It raises the question: What is it that impels the senses and mind to perceive and understand? What is it that sustains all, but which nothing sustains? He who says that he knows it does not really know it, and he who says that does not know it indeed knows it. That is the Atman, the Brahman. Without it the sense, mind, and even the gods can do nothing. In this Upanishad we come across the idea that Vidya (Logos or the Higher Reason) is the same as Uma, the wife of Lord Shiva by knowing which alone one can know the Brahman. Of the gods, Indra (the deity of our intelligence, buddhi, according to some commentators) also was able to see Vidya and recognise her as such.

Yakshopakhyan-

God verily obtained victory for the Devas or good forces (against evil forces). The Devas felt proud in this victory of God. They thought 'this victory is our own, this is our own greatness'. God verily knew about their pride and appeared to them. They did not know who this adorable one (Yaksha) was.

'The word Deva in Vedic literature does not necessarily mean 'God', it is used in a very wide sense and literally means 'shining' from the root div -'to shine'. They said to Agni 'O, all-knower! Find him out, who this adorable one is,' Agni answered 'Let it be so. He approached (Yaksha) who said to him, 'Who are thou?' Agni replied, 'I am Agni or I am Jataveda (All knower)'. (Yaksha said) 'What power is in thee so styled?' (Agni answered) 'I can burn all that is on this earth'. The Yaksha put a straw before him (Agni) and said: 'Burn this', Agni approached it with all its might, but was not able to burn it. He at once desisted from it, and (said to the Devas) 'I was unable to find out who this adorable one is.' Then they said to Vāyu. 'O, Vayu find this out, who this adorable one is.' He (Vayu) approached (Yaksha who said): 'Who are you?' VAYU answered, 'I am Vāyu indeed. I am Matarishva (mover in space). (The Yaksha said): 'What power is there in thee so styled?' (Vayu answered) 'I can blow or carry away all that exists on this earth'. (The Yaksha) put a straw to him (and said) 'Blow this away. 'He approached it with all his strength, but was not able to carry it away, He desisted from it, (and said to Devas): 'I am unable to find out who this adorable one is.' Then they said to Indra, 'O, Mighty one! Find this out who this adorable one is.' 'Be it so,' (said Indra) He approached Yaksha who disappeared from there. In that very space he came near a fair woman, Umā, well adored and decked in gold. He asked her, 'Who is this adorable one?'

The story of the Yaksha's appearance is to illustrate the quelling of pride. The quelling of pride is necessary before the realisation of Divinity.

The total cessation of individuality through a dissolution of the ego in knowledge is required before the achievement of Self realization.

Katha Upanishad:

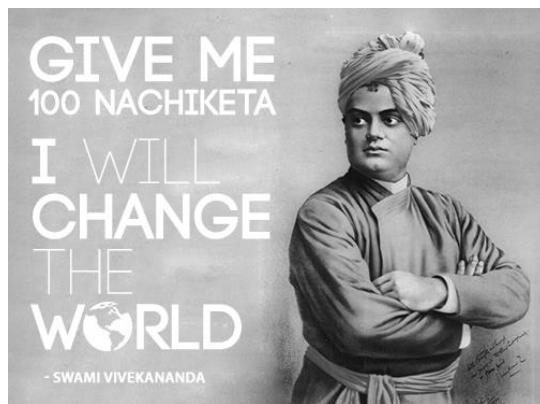
This Upanishad belongs to Sāmaveda. This is one of the philosophically important Upanishad. It teaches about the knowledge of what happens to man after death. Such knowledge is more valuable than any other knowledge in the world for it is none other than the knowledge of the Atman, which is the smaller than the smallest, and the greater than the greatest. The objects are the higher than the senses, and the mind higher than the objects, the individual's reason (buddhi) higher than mind, the Cosmic reason (Mahat) higher than the individual reason, the Unmanifest (Avyakta), the same as the goddess Aditi of the Vedas, higher than the Cosmic Reason, and the Purusha (Atman) is the higher than the Unmanifest. There is nothing higher than the Purusha. The Atman cannot be understood by reason. It has to be grasped only as 'Is'. It can be realized by withdrawing speech (senses) into mind, mind into reason (jnyan Atman), the reason into the Cosmic Reason (Maha Atman), and that into Atman of Peace (Shanta Atman).

आत्मानंरथिनंविद्धिशरीरंरथमेवतु।
बुद्धितुसारथिंविद्धिमनःप्रग्रहमेवच

The body is the chariot, Soul is riding on it, the intellect is the charioteer or the driver, the mind is the rein, the senses are the horses, the objects of the senses are the roads.

Story of Nachiketa:

There is an inspiring story in the Kath Upanishad about a little boy named Nachiketa. He was the son of Udalak rishi. Once Udalak organized a yagna to please the deities. It was customary in those days to donate cows to Brahmins at the end of the yagna. Udalak was a miser and he donated old and weak cows to the Brahmins. None of the cows yielded any milk. This disturbed Nachiketa. He asked his father about it, "Father, to whom would you give me in charity?" This made his father very angry, but he decided not to say anything. When Nachiketa repeated the question, Udalak lost his temper and said, "I give you to Yama." Yama is the king of Yamapuri-hell. Hearing this Nachiketa went to Yama's kingdom. It was his father's command. It would not be proper for him to disobey his father. 'I should fulfil his wish,' thought Nachiketa, even if it means leaving home. However his father realized his mistake and tried to stop him but Nachiketa did not stop. He reached Yama's kingdom and was told by Yama's guards that he had gone out for three days. Nachiketa decided to wait at his doorstep till he returned. He waited for three days. No food, no water. Three fasts! Yama returned on the fourth day and saw little Nachiketa at his doorstep. He felt pained for keeping a Brahmin waiting without welcoming him, without food and water. It was a sin not to welcome an atithi -guest at the doorstep. He scolded his wife Yami for not welcoming him. Both rushed around the house to serve Nachiketa. One went to fetch water. The other brought a mat for him to sit on. Yama still did not feel completely satisfied in serving him. So he told Nachiketa, "Dear child, I have offended you by keeping you waiting for three days. To wash my sin I request you to ask for three boons." Nachiketa declared, "My first wish is, when I return home may my father welcome me lovingly. My second wish is to grant me the knowledge by which I can be worthy of living in the heavens. My third and last wish is to grant me Atmajnyanm -knowledge of the atma." Yama granted the first two boons immediately and tried to convince Nachiketa to give up his third wish. He offered him gold, pearls, coins, horses' elephants and even the happiness of Swarg -heaven instead. "No, I do not wish for anything else," replied Nachiketa firmly. Finally, Yama granted him the third boon too, and Nachiketa was enlightened with the knowledge of the atma. Nachiketa inspires us to be kind to all creatures, to respect one's parents, to be strong willed to do something one has decided, even in the face of difficulties and obstacles and to seek for eternal happiness.



Two path from Kathopanishads -

The two leading paths, the good (Shreyas) and the pleasant (Preyas), have different aims, and they drag a person from different directions.

Of these two, he who chooses the good obtains blessings, but he who chooses the pleasant, deviates from his aim.

All pleasant things shall vanish, and only the good shall remain.

One cannot pursue the good and the pleasant at the same time, even as light and darkness cannot be perceived in the same place.

Prashna Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Atharvaveda. In this Upanishad the sage Pippalāda answers six very important questions asked by six different enquirers. The questions and their answers are mixed up with some mythological stuff. The first question is: How were creatures created? Prajāpati, the creator God did penance and through it created couples (polar opposites), which in turn created the world of beings. The couples were Rayi (material stuff) and Prāṇa (the life principle). The life principle is the Cosmic Person (Vaishvanara). This life principle is one's Atman. The second question is: Who are gods? And who among them is the greatest? The gods are Ether (akash), Air, Fire, Water, Earth, Speech, Mind, Eye and Ear. Greater than all of them is Prshna, the life principle. All other gods for their function are dependent on it. The third question is: What is the origin of Prana? How does it divide itself into senses, etc., of man? It is the reflection of Atman and employs its divisions for performing different functions in the body. The fourth question is: What happens to the gods in sleep and who is it that sleeps? In sleep all the senses become one with the god of mind.



Only Prana, the life principle, and its involuntary activities continue to work. They do not sleep at all. In dream the agent experiences whatever is experienced during the waking state again and even what is not then experienced. In dreamless sleep the agent is overpowered by a psyche force (tejas) the fire of his conscious being or its intense light and does not see dreams. Like birds resting on a tree everything rests in Atman. The fifth question is: What does the word 'Aum' represents? It is same as the Brahman, both manifest and unmanifest together. The sixth

question is about Purusha (Atman). There are sixteen phases of it. They are: Prana, Faith, the five elements, all the senses taken together, mind, food, semen, penance, sacred word, ethical action, the worlds, and name. All of them are fixed to the Atman like spokes in the axle. Atman is the center and circumference of the Universe.

Mundaka Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Atharvaveda. It distinguishes higher knowledge from lower one. The former is the knowledge of Brahman/Atman and the latter is the knowledge of empirical sciences, Vedas and their subsidiaries. Just as spider throws out its web and withdraws it into itself again, Atman throws the world out of itself and withdraws itself into itself. The life of action and sacrifices are simply unstable, they belong to the world of ignorance. The lower spirit in man looks for worldly benefits and the higher simply remains as a witness. It is often compared with two birds, one as a witness and the other as the bhokta. The former is the higher spirit and the latter is the lower one. It is the lower spirit which is subject to the rewards and punishments depending upon its merits and demerits. But it can overcome its bondage by realizing the higher spirit. Atman cannot be known through intellect or by study. One can know it only when one is chosen by it

Mandukya Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Atharvaveda. it is said that- ‘māndūkyam ekam eva alam mumukshūnām vimuktaye’ for the liberation of the mumukshū or seeker the Māndūkya alone is enough; and if you are able to understand the true meaning of this single Upanishad, there may not be a necessity to study any other Upanishad.

Mandukya upnishad contains only 12 mantras. It is the smallest Upnishad having the explanation of ‘Om’ - Ōmityetadakṣharamidam sarvam, tasyopavyākhyanam, bhūtam bhavatbhaviṣyaditi sarvamomkāra eva; yaccānyat trikālātītam tadapyomkāra eva. The Imperishable is OM, and it is ‘all this’. Everything else, whatever be of the past, present or future, is like an exposition, explanation or commentary on the meaning of this great Truth – the Imperishable Om. Sarvam Omkāra eva: Everything is Om, indeed. This is how the Upanishad begins. Ōm ityetadakṣharam idam sarvam: All this, whatever is visible, whatever is cognizable, whatever can come within the purview of sense-perception, inference or verbal testimony, whatever can be comprehended under the single term, creation – **all this is Om.**

This Upanishad contains the gist of the rest. It teaches us that Atman has four states. They are: waking (jagrt), dream (svapna), deep-sleep (sushupti) and it original pure state (turiya). In the first state the consciousness of the Atman is directed towards external material objects. In this state it has seven parts and nineteen gateways. The seven parts are: forehead, eyes, the life principle (prana), bodily center, abdomen, feet, and face. The nineteen gateways are: the five senses (ear, eye, taste, touch, and smell), the five organs of action (hands, feet, the generative organ, the excretory organ), the five vital principles (pran , apan, udan , vyan , and saman), the

four inner and internal instruments (manas , ahamkar , buddhi and citta). The Atman in this state is worldly or mundane person (Vaishvanara). In dream state it has all the seven parts and nineteen gates, but its consciousness is turned towards the dream objects. These objects are not made up of gross matter. In this state the Atman is called psyche (Tajasa) for its experience is constituted by psychic force. In the state of deep-sleep the Atman sees no dreams and desires nothing. Its consciousness is its only gate and all plurality becomes one with it. This state of Atman is called Prana, for it is pure and undifferentiated.

The fourth state is the pure state of Atman. In this state it is beyond thought and speech. It knows itself without any medium. It is free from the Unconscious.

Taittrīya Upanishad:

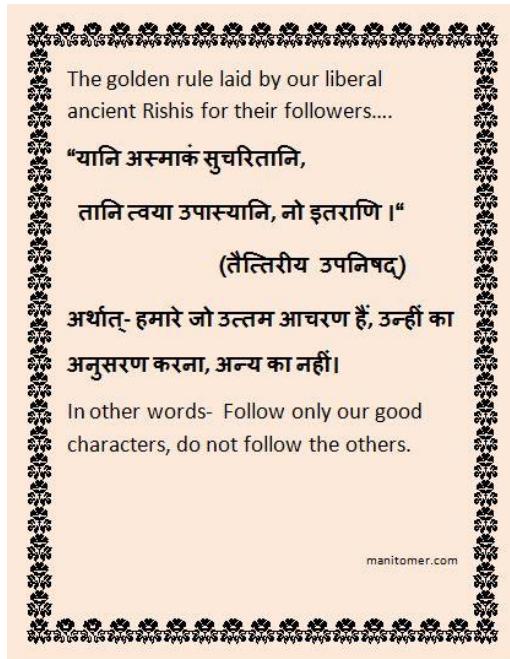
This Upanishad belongs to Sāmaveda. It talks about five types of union. They are: the union of physical elements like earth, water, air etc., the union of shining objects such as sun, fire, lightening; the union of knowledge like that in the teacher, student, and lectures; the union of creative beings like father, mother, and creation; and the union of physiological parts like upper jaw, lower jaw, and speech. The Brahman is the Truth, the Consciousness and the Infinite. From it born is ether, from ether air, from air fire, from fire water, and from water earth. And from earth are born plants, from plants food, from food Purusha (Atman) or man as 'I'. Since he eats, swallows, absorbs the different elements he is called Atman. It is enveloped by annamayakosha, pranomayakosha, manomayakosha, vijnyanmayakosha and anandamayakosha. The first two kosha belong to gross body (sthulasharira) and the rest to belong to subtle body (sukshmasharira) and the last kosha belong to causal body (karansharira). Each latter stage is the atman of the former. According to this Upanishad everything originated from Non-being in the sense that the Reality in the beginning is indeterminate, and it was the Unmanifest (avyakta). The bliss of the Atman is greater than everything else.



We observed that our individuality is constituted of different layers, and these layers are called *koshas* in Sanskrit.

There are primarily five such *koshas*, or sheaths, in which our consciousness is enveloped:

- Annamaya Kosha- *Anna*’ means food; *Maya* means ‘filled with’.The first ‘*kosha*’ speaks about importance of food which forms the basic necessity for human survival
- Pranamaya Kosha- *Prana*’ means breath; *Maya* means ‘filled with’.The second ‘*kosha*’ discusses the impact of science of breathing on human emotions
- Manomaya Kosha- ‘*Man*’ means mind; *Maya* means ‘filled with’The state of mind and journey of thoughts forms the basis of this ‘*kosha*’
- Vidnyanmaya Kosha- *Vidnyan*’ means knowledge; *Maya* means ‘filled with’.The conversion of thoughts during the phase of Manomaya Kosha, into worldly knowledge of real and unreal entities forms Vidnyanmaya Kosha
- Anandmaya Kosha- Taittiriya Upanishad discusses the nature of the innermost sheath in us, called the Anandamaya Kosha. The causal innermost sheath, which is the most subtle and pervasive in our personality, is called the Anandamaya Kosha. It is called Anandamaya because it is characterized by blissfulness or happiness. ‘*Ananda*’ means happiness; *Maya* means ‘filled with’. It is filled with and constituted of happiness only, warp and woof.



Aitareya Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Rigveda. It gives a semi-mythological account of creation. Atman correlates the microcosm and macrocosm and the gods become the psycho-physical principles. This Upanishad ends with a saying that all the mental functions are only names of our rational consciousness (prajnyanmay) and that our rational consciousness is the Brahman.

Chandogya Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Rigveda. It is second largest of the Upanishads. After liberation man's spirit rests with the gods and the Brahman in the highest world, according to this Upanishad. This conception is theistic. However, the Upanishad says that 'everything is verily the Brahman'. It is the innermost to us. Brahman is the smallest yet the largest. Uddālaka Aruṇi teaches his son Shvetaketu that in deep sleep speech enters mind; mind the life principle (prana), the life principle the psychic force (tejas), the psychic force the supreme Deity. All these belong to Atman and "That art thou (tattvamasi). Just as different rivers merge into the same ocean and lose their self-identity, so everything ultimately enters the Atman and becomes one with it. The idea of the person in the eye is elaborated in this Upanishad. Vairocana, the king of the Demons, and Indra, the king of the gods, approached Prajāpati, the creator god, to be taught about the Atman which is without disease and death. As the story goes, Prajāpati told them that the person seen in the eye was Atman. He asked both of them to adorn themselves and look at their reflections in a pot of water, and what they would see was the Atman. Following the advice of Prajāpati, Vairocana saw the reflection of his own body in the water-pot, and began to worship himself as the Atman, indulging himself in all the pleasures of his body. Similarly, Indra also followed the advice of Prajāpati and saw his perishable body in the water-pot, and doubted how his perishable body could be the Atman which is imperishable. So he came back to Prajāpati for

further instruction. Prajāpati told him that the person in the deep-sleep and dreamless sleep is Atman. It is the seer and is beyond deep-sleep and bodiless. It is unfettered and suffers no pain and pleasure. Therefore, "I am all this (ahameva idam sarvam).

Story

One day a young boy came to the ashrama of Sage Gautama and said: "Holy Sire, I want to get the sacred knowledge by serving you. Please accept me as your student." The sage asked: "Child, What is your gotra?" (Gotra is one's family name). The boy replied: "Sire, I asked it of my mother. She said: 'Child, when you were born, I used to be very busy serving guests at home. I had no time to ask the gotra from your father. Now he is no more. So I do not know it. My name is Jabala and yours, Satyakama. So call yourself Satya-Kama

-Jabala and say that to your Guru." On hearing it, the rishi smiled and said: "I admire you, child, for saying the truth. I am sure you must be born of a noble gotra. I shall accept you as my student. Go and get me some samid. I shall initiate you in brahmacharya." The twigs of the sacred peepal tree are called samid. For studying the sastras, one has to become a brahmachari. And the teacher has to be paid in kind like samid for his service. The boy brought the samid, and the guru made him a brahmachari by giving him the sacred thread and the Gayatri Mantra. This mantra says: "O God, give me intelligence!" After a few days, the rishi gave the boy four hundred lean and ill fed cows and said "Child, take these to the forest and graze them." The boy said: "Sire, I shall return when these cows multiply into a thousand." Satyakama built an ashrama for himself in the forest and looked after the cows. All the time he carefully practised the duties of a brahmachari.

Years went by. The number of cows increased to a thousand. One day a bull among them spoke to him: "Satyakama! Now the cows are a thousand in number. Take them to your Guru. I shall teach you 'a fourth' about Brahman or God. His name is Prakasavan. Agni, the God of fire, will teach you more lately." And he taught Satyakama a quarter of the sacred truth.

Accordingly, Jabala drove the cows to the Guru's ashrama. He stopped on the way for the night and lighted a fire to warm himself. From that fire God Agni appeared before him and said: "Satyakama! I shall teach you the second quarter of the sacred truth about Brahman. He is called Anantavan." And he taught him another quarter of the sacred knowledge. Accordingly, Jabala drove the cows to the Guru's ashrama. On the following evening Satyakama stayed near a lake along with the cows. At that time a swan came flying from the waters and said, "Satyakama! I shall teach you the third quarter of Brahman. He is called Jyotishman." And he taught him more of the sacred truth. On the following day, he stayed beneath a peepal tree. In the evening a waterfowl came before him and said: "Satyakama! I shall teach you the fourth and last part of Brahaman. And he taught him the fourth part, naming it "Ayatanavan." When Satyakama reached the Guru's ashram with the thousand cows, the Guru asked: "Child, your face shines with Brahma Gyana or the knowledge of Brahman. Who taught you?" Satyakama told him about his four teachers and said: "Sire, I now requests you to teach me

personally Brahma - Gyana. Then only will it be perfect." The rishi said: "Child! Whatever you have learnt is real Brahma Gyana. There is little else that I can add. I bless you!" By serving the Guru faithfully one gets real spiritual knowledge. This story is told in the great Upanishad called Chhandogya.

The Story of Svetaketu

When Svetaketu was twelve years old, he was sent to a teacher with whom he studied until he was twenty-four. After learning all the Vedas, he returned home full of conceit in the belief that he was consummately well-educated, and very censorious. His father said to him, "Svetaketu, my child, you are so full of your learning and so censorious, have you asked for that knowledge by which we hear the unhearable, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived and know what cannot be known?" "What is that knowledge, sir?" asked Svetaketu. His father replied, "As by knowing one lump of clay all that is made of clay is known - so, my child, is that knowledge, knowing which we know all."

"But surely these venerable teachers of mine are ignorant of this knowledge; for if they possessed it they would have imparted it to me. Do you, sir, therefore, give me that knowledge?"

"So be it," said the father... And he said, "Bring me a fruit of the nyagrodha tree." "Here it is, sir." "Break it." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?""Some seeds, sir, exceedingly small." "Break one of these." "It is broken, sir." "What do you see there?" "Nothing at all."

The father said, "My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there - in that very essence stands the being of the huge nyagrodha tree. In that which is the subtle essence of all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou Svetaketu art that."

"Pray, sir", said the son, "tell me more." "Be it so, my child", the father replied; and he said, "Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning."

The son did as he was told. Next morning the father said, "Bring me the salt you put in the water." The son looked for it, but could not find it, for the salt, of course, had dissolved. The father said, "Taste some of the water from the surface of the vessel. How is it?" "Salty." "Taste some from the middle. How is it?" "Salty." "Taste some from the bottom. How is it?" "Salty." The father said, "Throw the water away and then come back to me again." The son did so; but the salt was not lost, for the salt existed forever. Then the father said, "Here likewise in this body of yours, my son, you do not perceive the True;

but there, in fact, it is. In that which is the subtle essence, all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art that."

Moral of the story-

The variety of things, the diversity of objects and the multitudinousness is not really there. It is true that a substance when converted into a shape or a form called the effect, does not introduce into the effect anything new other than what was contained in itself alone; if clay is there in the pot and nothing else is there in the pot, it would be pointless to call that shape as a pot.

Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad:

This Upanishad belongs to Śukla Yajurveda. This is the largest of the Upanishad. One finds lots of discussion on philosophical matters in this Upanishad. According to it, the sacrificial horse, the horse sacrificed in the Ashvamedha is the cosmos. One who sacrifices the cosmos alone can realize Atman. In the beginning he was only Atman and he asserted 'I am' and became the 'I'. This 'I' felt lonely and afraid. But one can be afraid of someone else. There was nothing other than the 'I'. However, it could not rejoice and wanted another. Then it became two, man and woman. All humans are born out of them. The state of love and embrace is the Unmanifest (Avyakta). The Unmanifest becomes the manifest world. The Atman is the same as the Brahman. One who realizes one's Atman realizes Brahman. The king Ajatashatru teaches Balaki that the Atman is found in the deep-sleep. In the similar fashion, Yajnyavalykya teaches his wife Maitreyi that nobody wants an object of pleasure for the object's sake, but for the sake of the Atman. By knowing it everything else is known. Once the Atman is known then there is no difference between the knower and the known. How can one know the knower? This Atman is the Brahman (ayam atma brahma). There is also a debate between Yajnyavalykya and a number of enquirers after truth. Yajnyavalykya tells Artabhāga that after death the senses and mind of man would become one with their respective deities, who are their sources, but his karma, positive and negative, would accompany him to the next life. To Chakrayana he tells that Atman lives through the life principles and works through all life functions. None can see the seer, none can hear the hearer, and none can know the knower. It is not an object of any form of conspicuousness. To Uddalaka he explains that Atman is in everything and is inward (antaryamin). Yajnyavalykya teaches Gargi, a woman enquirer, that the Atman neither subtle nor gross, it is neither senses nor the life-principle and is neither inwards nor outwards. It is something imperishable. It is the same as Brahman. The king Janaka receives the instruction from Yajnyavalykya that the Atman is the guiding principle of man. The Atman being self-luminous one comes to see it through its own light.

Summary

The above account suggests us that the Upanishad discuss about the nature of the ultimate Reality and the origin of the world of objects. The ultimate reality is Brahman/Atman and is Unmanifest (avyakta). It is devoid of all attributes and is imperishable. The world in which we

live is the manifest form of Brahman/Atman whose being is shared by the world of existence. The perishable world appears to be real but behind its reality there is an eternal principle called Brahman/Atman. Ultimately everything subsumes under this eternal principle.

PART B: Doctrines of Upanishads

UPANISHADS - THE SCIENCE OF SELF

The famous physicist Neil Bohr says “we are both spectators and actors in the great drama of existence”. According to Upanishads, human existence is a mystery and it holds the key to other mysteries of the universe. The ‘science of human possibilities’ is what India found in the Upanishads and developing this science is an attempt to unfold the very existence of human beings. The sole purpose of Vedas is the welfare of all beings which can only be achieved by delving deeper into your true self and exploring those depths. Upanishads offered a great insight into ‘the science of thyself’ or self discovery. The more you delve deeper, the more you are closer to the ultimate truth of life. According to Upanishads, a human’s soul is equal to soul of the universe. If you unravel the mystery of your own self, you will unravel the mystery of the universe.

- **Atman**

Atman could not be described as a positive entity. It has been sought to be defined by characteristics which are contradictory to one another. For instance, it has been held that atman is stationary, yet faster than mind; it is near yet far, it exists inside everything and also outside. The Bhagavad Gita (II. 22-5), true to the spirit of the Upanishads, declares that weapons cannot cut atman, fire cannot burn it, water cannot damp it and wind cannot make it dry. It is further stated (11.20) that atman remains unaffected even when the body is killed.

The same atman has different experiences in the three states of jagrat (waking), svapna (sleep) and susupti (deep slumber). Beyond these stages is the condition called turiya, the fourth state in which the soul becomes one with Brahman (Supreme Spirit). The individual soul is covered by five koshas (vestures), viz., pranamaya (made of vital air), annamaya (made of food), manomaya (made of mind), vijhanamaya (made of intelligence) and anandamaya (made of bliss) which make the body enshrining the soul. Our ultimate goal is to realize the soul lying hidden by the above koshas like a sword covered by the scabbard.

- **Brahman**

Brahman and mahavakyas

The Great Utterances: The Mahavakyas are the Great Sentences of Advaita Vedanta and Jnana Yoga, and are contained in the Upanishads. Maha is Great, and Vakyas are sentences, or utterances for contemplation. They provide perspective and insights that tie the texts together in a cohesive whole. The contemplations on the Mahavakyas also blend well with the practices of yoga meditation, prayer, and mantra, which are companion practices in Yoga. The pinnacle of the wisdom and practices of the ancient sages is contained in the terse twelve verses of the Mandukya Upanishad, which outlines the philosophy and practices of the OM mantra.

These make the wisdom more accessible: Seven Mahavakyas are described below. By focusing on these seven Mahavakyas, the rest of the principles of self-exploration described in Vedanta

and the Upanishads are more easily accessible. Included with the descriptions below are suggestions on what to do with these seven Mahavakyas.

Validation in the inner laboratory: To truly understand the meaning of the Mahavakyas, it is necessary to practice contemplation and meditation in your own inner laboratory of stillness and silence. It means doing a lot of self-observation, including the four functions of mind. You may find it useful to learn both the Sanskrit and the English of the Mahavakyas. They are not practiced as blind faith beliefs, but rather are reflected on, so that their meaning is validated in direct experience.

Start by hearing the insights described: Some methods of contemplation give you a principle, a word, on which to reflect, but give no clues of the insights that will come. For example, if you contemplate on the word Truth, that is very broad, and may have many meanings. It might take a long time to even come to a core principle. Sometimes, in school or elsewhere, you have probably seen a study guide that has a list of questions that also includes the answers, in a Q&A format. With the Mahavakyas, it is somewhat like that, in that the Mahavakyas provide the answers, already written down. You still have to do the contemplations, but the journey is much more direct.

Direct experience, not mere belief: In contemplating the Mahavakyas, it is not a matter of merely accepting that the statements are true. In the oral teachings of the sages, it is said that you should never merely believe what you are told or what you read in a book. Rather, it is suggested that you should check it out for yourself in the inner laboratory of direct experience. It also seems true that, while ultimate oneness is the same for all, there is also a coloring of cultural and religious influences that determine the way in which different people will experience the early, or unfolding stages of insight. Dig deep into the well of only a few such Mahavakyas.

Dig deep in only a few wells: It can appear that exploring only a few sentences, like these seven, is a mere beginning point, and that one must subsequently learn hundreds or thousands of other sentences. This is definitely not the case. Although in academic circles one may do complex intellectual analysis of many scholarly commentaries, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, the seeker of direct experience digs deep into the well of only a few such contemplations. In the monastic traditions of the swami order, a monk may contemplate exclusively on a single Mahavakya or maybe several of them. The practice bears fruit by deeply going into one, or a few, rather than memorizing many, or doing only intellectual analysis of the many.

Mahavakyas are at the heart of Vedanta: These seven principles below are practices at the heart of the Vedanta part of the triad. Actually, all of these emerged out of the one source of teachings, and now appear to be three separate practices. The higher understanding and direct experience comes from person-to-person listening (written and oral), followed by deep reflection, contemplation, and deep contemplative meditation.

Advaita or Non-Dual Reality: Advaita is exactly what it says, Advaita, which means non-duality, not-two. If this little planet were to fall into the sun and burn up, there would no longer be any religionists or philosophers, but that which truly "is" still "is." Advaita is exactly what it says it is, Advaita, not-two, which stands alone. Any suggestion that there are things such as Hindu Advaita or Buddhist Advaita or Anything-Else Advaita are games of the mind. To transcend all of the levels of false identity so as to "Be" that Reality of Advaita is the Knowledge or Jnana that is sought. It is only the most sincere and longing of aspirants who seek and know this in direct experience. For others, it is merely an arena of philosophical and religious debate. For those who Know, Advaita stands alone.

Who am I? It has become very popular in recent years to criticize the practice of Mahavakyas, suggesting instead that one simply ask "Who am I?" and then reject any response which arises from within (other than "I am that!"). It is commonly suggested that one NOT contemplate any of the phrases such as "Aham Brahmasmi" ("I am Brahman, the Absolute Reality"). Such suggestions to NOT practice Mahavakyas presuppose the incorrect opinion that contemplation on Mahavakyas is only a mere mental process, missing the fact that the Mahavakya leads one to deep silence wherein the reality is experienced directly. Contemplation on the Mahavakyas is not mere chanting of mantras or reprogramming the mind with affirmations as if one were trying to inculcate an alternative belief system. It moves in stages, culminating in the highest of direct experience of the meaning of the Mahavakyas. Contemplation on the Mahavakyas and the question "Who am I?" are not in conflict with one another. Rather, they go hand in hand, in a systematic, unified practice.

Meaning of word Brahman

Root of the word: The word Brahman comes from the root brha or brhi, which means knowledge, expansion, and all-pervasiveness. It is that existence which alone exists, and in which there is the appearance of the entire universe.

Not subject to change: Brahman means the absolute reality, that which is eternal, and not subject to death, decay, or decomposition. In English, we speak of omnipresence or oneness. This is the principle of the word Brahman.

Not a proper name: Brahman is not a proper name, but a Sanskrit word that denotes that oneness, the non-dual reality, the substratum underneath all of the many names and forms of the universe. Brahman is somewhat like the difference between the word ocean, and the specific ocean called Pacific Ocean. The word Brahman is like ocean, not Pacific Ocean. Brahman is not a name of God. These contemplations neither promote nor oppose any particular religious concept of God.

It's really indescribable, as it is beyond form: However one chooses to hold the word Brahman, it is very useful to remember that Brahman is often described as indescribable.

For convenience sake, it is said that Brahman is the nature of existence, consciousness, and bliss, though admitting that these words, too, are inadequate.

Seek direct experience: The real meaning comes only in direct experience resulting from contemplation and yoga meditation.

1. Brahma satyam jagan mithya- The absolute is real; the world is unreal or only relatively real

Brahman is real: The way in which Brahman is real is like saying that the clay in a pot is real, or the gold in a bracelet is real (metaphorically speaking). The idea is that first there was clay and gold, and when those changed form, there now appears to be a pot and a bracelet.

The world is unreal: However, when the pot is broken, or the bracelet is melted, there is once again only clay and gold. It is in that sense that the pot and the bracelet are not real; they come and go from manifestation. They are not as real as are the clay and the gold. (Remember that these are metaphors, and that obviously, we could also say that clay and gold also come and go, such as when planets are born and die from the nuclear fire of suns. Also, note that using the English words real and unreal for the Sanskrit words satyam and mithya, are not perfect, but they are the best we have to work with.)

Something is more real than the temporary: In saying that the world is unreal, it means to say that literally everything we experience in the external world is, like the pot and the bracelet, in a process of coming, being, and going (so too with all of the objects of the subtle realm). If the Mahavakya stopped there, this might appear to be a negative, or depressing comment. But it does not stop there. It makes the added comment that this absolute reality is, in a sense, more real than the temporary appearances.

Two points: Thus, the Mahavakya does two major things:

- **Reminder of the temporary:** First, it serves as a reminder of the temporary nature of the worldly objects.
- **Reminder of the eternal:** Second, it serves as a reminder that there is an eternal nature that is not subject to change.

An invitation to know: In these reminders there is an invitation to come to know, in direct experience, the existence, consciousness, and bliss that is this eternal essence of our being.

Don't stop living in the world: When practicing contemplation with this, and the other Mahavakyas, it is important to not allow the reflection that the world is unreal to stop you from doing your actions in the external world. To think that the world is unreal, and therefore we need not do anything is a grave mistake. The realization of the unreality of the world and the reality of the essence behind the world brings freedom, not bondage or lethargy. .

What to do: The purpose of contemplation and yoga meditation exercises is to attain Self-realization, or enlightenment, which has to do with knowing or experiencing the deepest, eternal aspect of our own being. By working with this Mahavakya, one increasingly sees the difference between what is temporary and what is eternal.

- **Be mindful of the passing objects:** One way to work with this Mahavakya, is to simply be mindful of the world around you. Gradually, gently, and lovingly observe the countless objects that are ever in a process of coming and going.
 - **Remember the eternal:** Allow yourself to also remember the eternal nature that is always there, enjoying the beauty of how this process ebbs and flows through that unchanging, eternal essence.

Be mindful of your own temporary and eternal: As you witness the external world in this way, allow your attention to shift to your own physical, energetic, and mental makeup. Gradually comes the insight that these more surface aspects are also temporary, and in a sense, are also unreal, or only relatively real. It increasingly allows the mind to see that there is an eternal aspect of our being, and that this is actually the source of the mind itself. The mind comes to see that it must, itself, let go, so as to experience the eternal that is within.

Practice this at daily meditation time: By observing the world in this way, it is then easier to do the same kind of silent observation and contemplation while sitting in the stillness of your meditation time. Over time, the depth of the insights increase, as an inner expansion comes.

The different Mahavakyas work together: In practice, the Mahavakyas work together. This becomes evident by exploring the others, such as the ones that follow below.

2. Ekam evadvitiyam brahma - Brahman is one, without a second - (There is one absolute reality, without any secondary parts)

No object is truly independent: As our attention goes from object to object, image to image, we keep finding that those objects and images are only relatively real (as discussed above). Gradually, we come to see that no object exists independently from Brahman, the whole. Hence, it is said there is one, without a second. Wherever we look, whatever we think or feel, try as we will, we can find no second object or part. Everything is seen as a manifestation of something else.

The objects are made of the same stuff: To speak of one, without a second, is like thinking of thousands of pots or bracelets made from clay or gold. As you look at each of the pots and

bracelets, one at a time, you conclude that this pot, and this bracelet is not separate from the whole field of clay and gold. Suddenly you come to the insight that there is not a single pot that is separate from clay, and there is not a single bracelet separate from gold. In other words, you see that there is one field, without a second object, or simply stated, there is one, without a second.

Once again, this can also be viewed in a theological way, wherein immanence (versus transcendence) means the divinity existing in, and extending into all parts all parts of the created world. Thus, there is no object that does not contain, or is not part of that creation.

- **Ekam evadvitiyam brahma Brahman is one, without a second (There is one absolute reality, without any secondary parts)**

What to do: Keep exploring the latter part of the sentence, the part of being without a second. Consciously look at the objects of the world, and the thoughts that arise in the mind. Observe whether it has independent existence and permanence. It is like asking, "Does this object or thought exist on its own? Does it stay in this form, or does it go away? Is it, therefore a second object in comparison to the whole?"

- **Try to find a second object:** One practice is to repeatedly look for some second object, which has independent existence from the whole, from Brahman.
- **You'll find there is none:** The aspirant will repeatedly find that there is no second object, which has independent existence, but that all objects derive from some other, like the pots from clay, or bracelets from gold. This brings the increasing awareness of underlying wholeness.

See the beauty of oneness in diversity: If this is approached as a mere philosophical opinion, if we merely believe the principle, then the deep insight that comes from exploration will be missed. Each time that some new object or thought is seen to not be a second in relation to the whole, the personal realization of the truth of the principle will become deeper and more profound. We come to see the beauty in this, to see the joy of wholeness, of the unity within the diversity. The interrelationship between the Mahavakyas will also become clearer.

3. Prajnanam brahman - Brahman is the supreme knowledge (Knowing the absolute reality is the supreme knowledge) (from Aitareya Upanishad of Rig Veda)

Knowledge out of which other knowledge arises: There are many types of knowledge one can attain. However, they all stem from, or are a part of, a higher knowledge. There is one exception, and that is the absolute knowledge, which is the highest. It is called absolute because it is not stemming from something else. Supreme knowledge is the ground out of which the diversity of knowledge and experience grows. The plant, though appearing separate, is made of the stuff of the ground.

Many metaphors for higher knowledge: It is just about impossible to write words describing this notion of supreme knowledge, which is part of the reason that there are so many different descriptions given by many people. Thus, we use metaphor after metaphor trying to capture and communicate the essence of the meaning. This Mahavakya is saying that as you climb the ladder of knowledge, this higher knowledge is to be found at the level of Brahman, the oneness of universal consciousness.

Reflect on lower knowledge to find the higher: Reflecting on lower knowledge might give some idea. The knowledge of how to ride a bicycle is a form of knowledge, but it is based on the higher knowledge of how to move your body. The knowledge of complex mathematics is based on the higher, more foundational, prerequisite knowledge that allows the thinking process itself. When you see a person that you recognize as your friend, there was first an ability to see and conceptualize, which is a higher knowledge.

Find the foundation: Intuitively, you come to see that there is consciousness, or whatever term you would like to use, that is higher, more foundational, or prerequisite to the lower knowledge in all of its other forms. The highest rung of the ladder is called supreme knowledge, prajna, and this is said to be one and the same with Brahman, the oneness.

Knowing is not mere intellectualizing: It is extremely important to note here, that this is not a process of intellectualizing. Knowledge refers to knowing or awareness, not just a linear, cognitive thinking process. The knowledge here, is more like the knowledge of recognizing an object as a tree, than the process of adding up a list of numbers. There is simply no more straightforward way of saying it, than to say it is a matter of knowing the tree.

Knowing applies to both head and heart people: Also, it is not that some people are intellectual, or head people, while others are emotional, or heart people. While these differences between people might be real, this Mahavakya is talking about a universal principle that applies to all people. The practices themselves are applicable to all people, whether inclined towards the head or the heart, though different people will quite naturally have different experiences leading to the same ultimate realization.

- **Prajnanam brahman -Brahman is the supreme knowledge (Knowing the absolute reality is the supreme knowledge)**

What to do: In trying to reflect on the nature of supreme knowledge, the eternal substratum of all other knowledge, the mind will present many memories, images, impressions, thoughts, sensations, and emotions. All of these are some form of knowledge, that's for sure. However, they are not the highest knowledge.

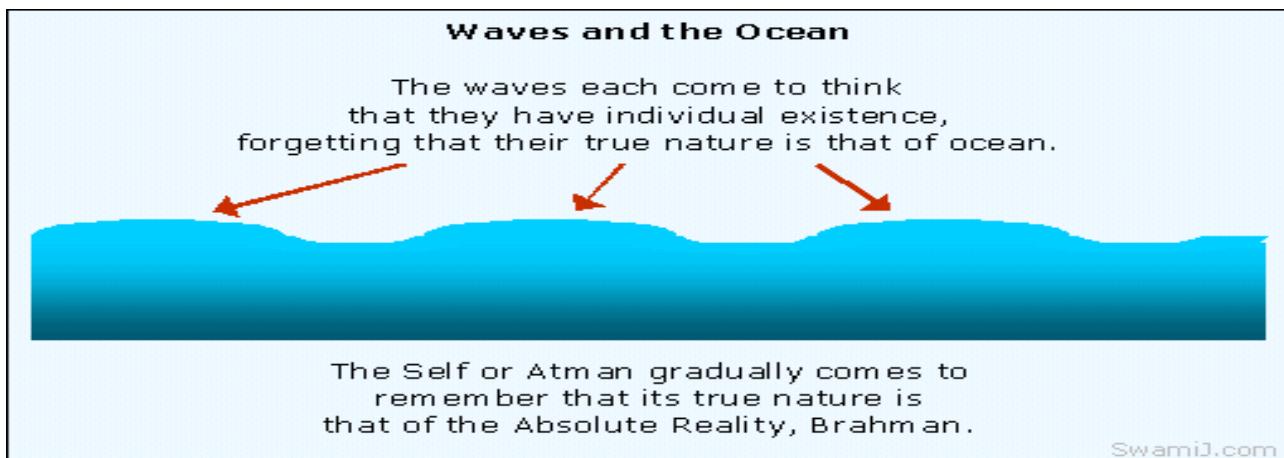
Ask yourself if a knowledge is lower or higher: Simply allow these thought patterns to arise. Then ask yourself, "Is this the higher knowledge?" Repeatedly you will find that the answer is no that it is not the higher, but is a lower form of knowledge. Remember there is higher

knowledge: This kind of reflection leaves a quietness in which the intuition of the existence of the higher knowledge starts to come. The intuition deepens with practice. This quietness is not one of lethargy or laziness, but rather of clarity and openness. It brings a smile to the face and to the heart, as the field of knowing gradually expands towards the wisdom of the Mahavakya.

4. Tat tvam asi -That is what you are (That absolute reality is the essence of what you really are) (from Chandogya Upanishad of Sama Veda)

That is what YOU are: This Mahavakya is stated as if one person is speaking to the other, saying, "That is what you are!" when referring to Brahman. The person speaking is the teacher, and person being spoken to is the student.

It is YOU at the deepest level: Imagine that the teacher has explained to you all of the above Mahavakyas, that you had reflected on these, and that you started to have some sense of the meaning of the oneness called brahman. Imagine that the teacher then pointed a finger at you and explained, "That brahman, that oneness, is who you really are, at the deepest level of your being!" It is like telling a wave in the ocean that it IS the ocean.



You are the person underneath the personality: Often, we hold on to our personal identities, such as being from this or that family, organization, or country. We take on the identity of our roles in our jobs or in our families, such as father or mother, sister or brother, son or daughter. Or, we come to believe that who we are, is our personality traits that have developed through living. We forget our true nature that is underneath all of these only relative identities.

We continue our duties, holding identities loosely: The realization of this Mahavakya, Tat tvam asi, leads us to see that the relative identities are not who we really are. It does not mean that we drop our duties in the world, or stop acting in service of other people because of this realization. Rather, we become ever freer to hold those identities loosely, while increasingly being able to act in the loving service of others, independent of attachment to our false identities.

- **Tat tvam asi -That is what you are (That absolute reality is the essence of what you really are)**

What to do: As if talking to yourself, direct your attention inward, possibly towards the heart center. Say to yourself, "That is who you are!" Point a finger at yourself: You might want to even point your index finger at your own chest, the place from where you experience, "I am." As you hold in awareness the essence of the truth that this Brahman, this oneness, is who you really are, also observe how you can gently let go of the false identities, seeing that they are only temporary and relatively me.

Say to yourself, "That is who you are": When reflecting on the other Mahavakyas, such as brahman is the supreme knowledge, then shift the observation from that truth, directing attention to your own inner being and say, "Tat tvam asi; That you are!" **Remember the inner feeling:** Notice the inner feeling that comes from the statement and the realization of your spiritual nature, rather than your more surface level of mental or physical identity.

5. Ayam atma brahma Atman and Brahman are the same (The individual Self is one and the same with the absolute) (from Mandukya Upanishad of Atharva Veda)

The wave and the ocean are one: Is the wave separate from the ocean? Not really, but sometimes we lose sight of that. Imagine that you are standing by the ocean, watching the vastness of the ocean. Imagine that a really big wave starts to come ashore, and that your attention comes to this one wave. You intently notice it, becoming absorbed in the crashing of the surf, and the feel of the salt spray. In that moment, you are only aware of the immensity of this one wave. The ocean itself is forgotten during that time. Then, an instant later, you recall with an inner "Aha!", that the wave and the ocean are one and the same.

- **Atman** refers to that pure, perfect, eternal spark of consciousness that is the deepest, central core of our being.
- **Brahman** refers to the oneness of the manifest and unmanifest universe.

It is like saying that atman is a wave, and Brahman is the ocean. The insight of Ayam atma brahma is that the wave and the ocean are one and the same.

Atman seems to be here, and Brahman there: Notice how the statement Ayam atma brahma (Atman and Brahman are the same) is framed as if you are a separate observer of both Atman and Brahman. It is like standing at the beach, looking out at both the wave and the ocean, and declaring that the wave and the ocean are one. You are observing from a witnessing stance, outside of both of them. Notice how this perspective contrasts with Aham brahmasmi (I am Brahman), which declares that "I am!" an inner experience, rather than from an observing standpoint (like being on the beach).

Different perspectives for the underlying reality: In this way, each of the Mahavakyas gives a different perspective of the same underlying Reality. Gradually, they are seen as mirror reflections of the same Absolute Reality. That integrated flash of insight touches on the true meaning of the word Brahman. It is like gaining different points of view from different viewing points. Together, they converge in a complete understanding.

- **Ayam atma brahma -Atman and Brahman are the same (The individual Self is one and the same with the absolute)**

What to do: Sit quietly and reflect on the inner core of your being, such as by placing your attention in the space between the breasts, the heart center.

Be aware of your center: Don't visualize anything, but allow your awareness to touch the feeling aspect of the center of your being. Or, if you like to visualize internally, imagine a tiny spark of light that represents the eternal essence your own self, the atman. Hold this attention for a few seconds or minutes.

Shift to awareness of the universe: Then, shift your attention in such a way that you are imagining the breadth of the entire manifest and unmanifest universe, the gross, subtle, and causal realms. Imagine the oneness that permeates all, and is all. Do this in a way that you are aware of the essence in which all exists, like being aware of the gold or the clay described above.

Then be aware of both as separate: Then, allow your attention to hold both the awareness of the spark that is atman and the universal essence that is Brahman. Be aware of atman also being within that oneness of Brahman. Allow this to bring insight and peace. You might want to internally think the words of the Mahavakya, "Ayam atma brahma; atman and brahman are the same."

Be aware of both as one: It is a beautiful practice to do the same thing in relation to other people. Think of the people who are closest to you, including family, friends, and coworkers. Allow yourself to notice the surface levels of their actions and speech, their physical features, and their personalities. Be aware of the subtle aspects of their makeup, and of the spark of the eternal that is the center of their consciousness. Be aware of how that spark, atman, is one with the oneness, Brahman.

Different insights from different Mahavakyas: Notice the different insights and feelings between the Mahavakyas. The insight from Tat tvam asi (That is who you are) is experienced differently from Ayam atma brahma (This individual Self is one with the absolute). The two simply feel different internally, yet they work together, describing the same

fundamental truth about who we are. By experiencing the separate vantage points, the whole is more completely experienced.

6. Aham brahmasmi - I am Brahman (Who I really am, is that absolute reality.) (from Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of Yajur Veda)

If a gold bracelet could speak: Imagine two possibilities of what a gold bracelet might say, if it could speak. It might say one of these two things:

1. "I am a bracelet!"
2. "I am gold!"

Bracelet is temporary: Which is truer, more everlasting? We might be tempted to say that #1 is more accurate, in that bracelet seems more encompassing, being both bracelet and gold at the same time. However, the bracelet aspect is not eternal. It is temporary. It is only a matter of the particular shape in which the gold was molded. Is bracelet what it really is?

Gold is everlasting: What is always true, is #2, that "I am gold," everlasting, ever pure, and not subject to death, decay, and decomposition. (One might argue that gold is not everlasting either, but in the metaphor, gold is being only used as an example.)

Bracelet is gold; I am gold: Note that this metaphor may sound similar to the ones above, regarding the impermanence of a bracelet and the permanence of the gold (metaphorically speaking). This is not the case. The realization that, "I am gold!" or "I am brahman!" is an internal experience compared to the statement, "The bracelet is gold!" (Which sounds like the bracelet over there). The two insights are separate, though they also come to be the same.

Similarly, it is very different to realize, in direct experience, "I am brahman!" than one of the statements such as, "Brahman alone is real!"

- **Out there:** "Brahman alone is real!" seems to be about the world out there. It is a valid perspective.
- **In here:** "I am brahman!" is an inner declaration of who I am, in here. This is also a valid perspective.

Truth comes in the stillness of intuitive flash: The truth of a Mahavakyas comes through intuitive flash that is progressively deeper as one practices. It is not merely an intellectual process, as it might appear to be by explaining the gold metaphor. The metaphors are used as a means of explaining the principle, but this is not the end of the process. In a sense, such explanations are only the beginning of the process. The key is in the still, silent reflection in the inner workshop of contemplation and yoga meditation.

After thinking, let go into contemplative insight: The initial insights come somewhat like the creative process when you are trying to solve some problem in daily life. You think and think, and then finally let go into silence. Then, suddenly, the creative idea just pops out, giving you the solution to your problem. The contemplation on the Mahavakyas is somewhat like that at first. Later, it goes into deeper meditation.

Insight comes within your own context: One may experience himself or herself as being like the gold or the clay, or like a wave in an ocean of bliss, that realizes the wave is also the ocean. With all these metaphors used only as tools of explanation, the insight of each person will come in the context of their own culture and religion, and will not seem foreign or unnatural. One's religious values are not violated, but rather, are affirmed.

- **Aham brahmasmi -I am Brahman (Who I really am, is that absolute reality.)**
(From Brihadaranyaka Upanishad of Yajur Veda)

What to do: Reflect on the oneness, or Brahman, and the meaning, as suggested in the practices above. Allow your attention to focus on the insights from those Mahavakyas, such as Brahman is one, without a second.

Literally ask questions of yourself: Ask yourself, internally, "Who am I? Am I this body, or do I have a body? Am I this breath, or is this breath just flowing? Am I this mind, or is this mind a manifestation of some deeper truth? Who am I, really? Who am I?"

Make your own declarations: Inside the chamber of your own being, declare to yourself, "I am brahman. I am not only a wave, I am made of ocean. I am ocean!" Allow the truth of the statements to expand. Be sure to practice such affirmations only if you have reflected on them, and find truth in them. This is not about selling yourself, but on affirming what you know.

In daily life, when sitting, or resting: As you do these contemplations, you might be right in the middle of your daily life. Or, you might be sitting straight in a formal yoga meditation posture. Or, you might be resting comfortably in a chair, on a sofa, or lying down in a relaxed position. There is a great diversity of settings in which you can do this type of contemplation.

7. Sarvam khalvidam brahma- All of this is Brahman (All of this, including me, is that absolute reality)

The various insights are revealed: Gradually, one comes to understand and increasingly experience the deeper aspects of the other Mahavakyas (the six described above):

- Brahman is real; the world is unreal.
- Brahman is one, without a second.

- Brahman is the supreme knowledge.
- That is what you are.
- Atman and Brahman are the same.
- I am Brahman.

- **Sarvam khalvidam brahma- All of this is Brahman (All of this, including me, is that absolute reality)**

What to do: Allow your awareness to try to encompass, at one time, the entire manifest and unmanifest universe, the objects and people in the world around you, as well as your own body and mind. Hold these together, as one whole, and reflect on the words, "All of this is brahman! All of this is one!" This builds on the other practices, and expands in its experience.

Mind is set aside in an explosion of awareness: Eventually, in the depth of meditation and contemplation, the entire mind is set aside in an explosion of awareness, in which the truth of the Mahavakyas comes forward, and is seen to have been there all along, ever still, waiting to be discovered in direct experience

They sing a song together: As one comes to experience the truth of the individual Mahavakyas, it seems they come together in a song that cries out in joy, "All of this is brahman!" As was said in the beginning, it is a process that comes from person-to-person listening (written and oral), followed by deep reflection, contemplation, and meditation.



Realization comes in stages:

- First, there is cognitive understanding of the meaning.
- Second, intuition rolls down, revealing deeper meanings.
- Finally, it is as if the one doing the practice travels upwards to merge in the direct experience, even though there was never any division in the first place.

Four traditional Mahavakyas

Four of the Mahavakyas above are most traditional to Vedanta. Some 1200 years ago Adi Shankaracharya assigned one Mahavakya to one of four monastic teaching centers or mutts in India.

Mahavakya	Source	Mutt/Center	
पञ्चानं ब्रह्म ।			
Prajnanambrahman Brahman is supreme knowledge	Aitareya 3.3, of Rig Veda	UpanishadPuri/Govardhana East	
तत् त्वं असि ।			
Tattvamasi That is what you are	Chandogya Upanishad	Upanishad Dwaraka/Sarada/Gujrat West	
अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म ।			
Ayatmatmabrahm Atman and are	brahman same	Mandukya Atharva Veda	Upanishad Jyoti/Badrinath North
अहं ब्रह्मास्मि ।			
Aham I	brahma smi brahman	Brihadaranyaka 1	Upanishad Veda, Sringeri/Mysore South

- **Maya**

Maya means illusion, and accordingly to Vedic philosophies the world is an illusion. The world is real but is not what appears to us. It looks temporary but it has always been there and will always be there. It appears to be materialistic but actually it is spiritual. It appears to be unconscious, but in reality it is conscious. It appears that you are born and you will die, but you have always lived.

- **Karma**

It is most fundamental and moral law in Hinduism. Your karma defines your past and future incarnations.

- **Samsara**

The cycle of birth, death and rebirth is called Samsara. Your reincarnation mean you are coming back to the material world again and again. We ultimately long to get rid of the cycle.

- **Moksha**

The stop to the cycle of reincarnation is called Moksha. Upanishads say it is the ultimate goal of human life. It's the only goal worth pursuing. But maya or illusion does not let us see the worth of Moksha, and thus, does not less us come out of the reincarnation cycle. Moksha is the ultimate liberation soul. Of Moksha, and thus, does not less us come out of the reincarnation cycle. Moksha is the ultimate liberation soul.

EPICS

The Ramayana, along with the Mahabharata and the Puranas, constitutes the epic literature of India, composing the Itihasa (History) and the Purana, the study of which has been lightly stressed as necessary for the correct interpretation of the Vedas. For over two thousand years, the Ramayana, like the Mahabharata, has been influencing deeply the religious and moral thought. Swami Vivekananda declared Ramayana and Mahabharata as the two encyclopedias of the ancient Aryan life and wisdom, portraying an ideal civilization, which humanity has yet to aspire after. According to MacDonnell, ‘Probably no work of world literature, secular its origin, has ever produced so profound an influence on the life and thought of a people as the Ramayana. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, representing the ethos of the Indians, are the two national Epics of India.

The Ramayana

Ramayana contain 24000 shokas that is why it is known as “Chaturvinshasahasi”

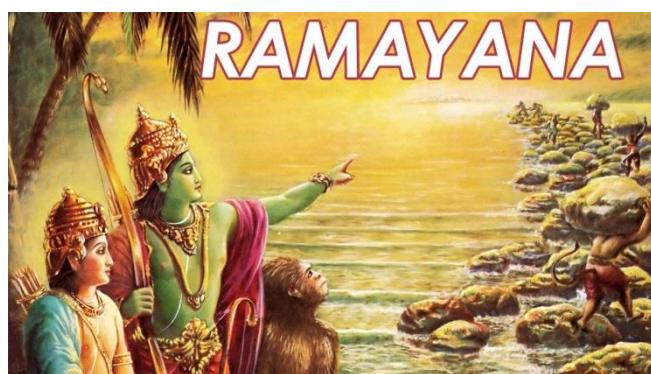
Attributed to sage Valmiki, it consists of the following chapters-

Ramayana Chapters known as Kanda.

I. Bala-(or Adi) kanda, II. Ayodhya-kanda, III. Aranyakanda,

IV. Kiskindha-kanda, V. Sundara-kanda, VI. Lanka-(or Yuddha) kanda, and VII. Uttara-kanda.

Each of the above chapters comprises several cantos (sargas).



The main story is briefly as follows:

Dasaratha, king of Ayodhya, has three queens, the eldest named Kausalya, the second Kaikeyi and the youngest Sumitra. Four sons are born to them; Rama was the son of Kausalya, Bharata and Satrughna of Kaikeyi and Laksmana of Sumitra. When they grow up, Dasaratha arranges for the coronation of Rama, the eldest son. But, Kaikeyi asks Dasaratha for the fulfilment of the two unspecified boons which he promised to her on a previous occasion. Of the two boons, one is that Rama would be banished; the other is that Bharata would be installed as king.

Dasaratha is extremely shocked, but, in order to honor his promise, grants her the above two boons. Accordingly, Rama takes to forest-life. His devoted brother, Laksmana and loving wife Sita also accompany him. They put up in a hut in Panchavati forest which is haunted by demons. Surpanakha, the wicked sister of demon-king, Ravana of Lanka, makes overtures of love to Laksmana. This enrages him who chops off her nose. Insulted by this act, Ravana comes to that forest. One day, seeing a golden deer moving about in the forest, Sita is bent on getting it. At her request, Rama keeps Laksmana to guard Sita, and sets out to bring the golden deer which is really demon Maricain disguise. The demon-deer, being struck by Rama's arrow, cries in a plaintive tone Laksmana. Agitated by this cry, Sita, apprehending danger to Rama, insists on Laksmana's running for help to her dear husband. Seeing Sita unprotected, Ravana abducts her, and carries her away to Lanka. Rama comes back only to see the hut bereft of Sita.

Having learnt of her abduction by Ravana. Rama is determined to rescue his beloved consort. There upon, Rama allies himself with the monkey-king Sugriva, and commissions his (Rama's) loyal devotee, the noble monkey Hanumat to carry his signet-ring to Sita at Lanka. Having entered Lanka, Hanumat secretly meets Sita. He is, however, found out by Ravana's men who set fire to his long tail as punishment. Hanumat, with his blazing tail, burns Lanka, and comes back to Rama. The simian followers of Rama builds a bridge across the ocean. Rama and Laksmana, with a large retinue, invade Lanka, and after many reverses, succeed in extirpating the demons, and rescue Sita with whom Rama returns to Ayodhya, and is eventually anointed King. While Rama had been reigning, his subjects expressed their dislike of the fact that he had accepted Sita, tainted by her association with the despicable demons. Like a true king, intent on the satisfaction of the subjects, Rama banished Sita into a forest where she got asylum in the hermitage of Valmiki. There, she gave birth to two sons, Lava and Kusa. After many incidents, Valmiki, accompanied by Sita, came to Ayodhya. Sita, to give convincing proof of her chastity, prayed to Mother Earth to take her into herself. Earth showed a cleft into which Sita disappeared for ever.



ORIGIN AND DATE

The Epic originated, at an unknown time, as ballads transmitted orally and sung by two classes of people, viz. Sutas living in royal courts and Kusilavas who were travelling singers comparable, to a great extent, to the French troubadours.

A long period elapsed before the above ballads came to be written. It is not known when the above ballads came to be written. It is not certain when the Ramayana was written for the first time. This much is certain that many interpolations crept into the Epic, as is evidenced by the existence of more recessions than one which will be dealt with later on. As we have stated earlier, there is neither means to determine when the Ramayana ballads originated nor do we know precisely when they started to be written. After examining arguments and counter-arguments, Winternitz who was German scholar concludes that the extant Ramayana is, perhaps, the result of evolution through the period between the fourth or third century BC and the second century AD.

LITERARY VALUE OF THE RAMAYANA

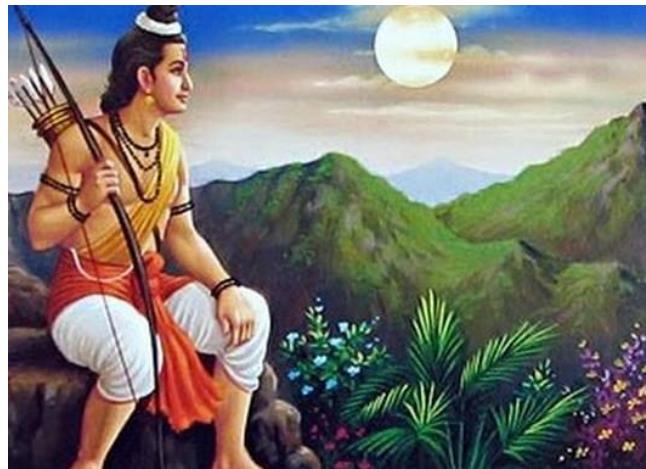
In comparison with the other Epic, the Ramayana is more artistic, ornate and refined. It contains almost all the characteristics of a mahakavya according to the later writers on poetics. It is called adikavya, the first poetical work. The story goes that a brigand, named Ratnakara, while roaming in a forest, suddenly saw a couple of birds in copulation. Of them, one was killed by a fowler. Extremely moved to pity, Ratnakara uttered the following verse:

मा निषादप्रतिष्ठांत्वमगमःशाश्वतीःसमाः।यक्तौंचमिथुनादेकमवधीकाममोहितम् !!

English Translation- You will find no rest for the long years of Eternity
For you killed a bird in love and unsuspecting.

It is said that, in course of time, as a result of long and arduous penance, Ratnakara became a sage, Valimki by name. He is traditionally known as the author of the Ramayana. As he was the first poet, his Epic came to be known as adi-kavya. Besides occupying the place of honor in the annals of the kavya literature, this Epic reveals some intrinsic qualities. Its language is limpid, style racy. Nowhere is there any attempt to show off pedantry or tour de force which detracts from the merit of some later poetical works, particularly of the age of literary decadence. The reader seldom or never requires the help of a commentary in comprehending what the author wants to convey. The Epic contains elements of romance, as a glance at the contents of the Sundara-kanda reveals. Descriptions of nature in the Epic are delectable. In the Kiskindha-kanda, the pen-picture offspring, rains and autumn are, indeed, graphic and testify to the fact that the poet had an eye to see and an ear to hear. In short, the Epic fully conforms to the ideal of poetry according to a critic who holds that poetry should be simple, sensuous and impassioned. The delineation of some of the characters reveals the masterly hand of the poet. Rama was not only an obedient son acting up to his father's wish, and giving up the throne without a word of protest. He was a true hero with a keen sense of honor. He did not hesitate to wage war against the powerful Ravana, the abductor of his dear wife. Overcoming heavy odds, he succeeded in rescuing Sita and restoring her position as the queen-consort. A true king as he was, his concern

was to keep his subjects pleased. They expressed resentment at his accepting Sita whose chastity, in the custody of the powerful Ravana, was suspected by them. In order to please them, he banished Sita though she was dearer to him than his own life. His love of her was so great that he never married again. Rama's fraternal affection found poignant expression in his laments over the body of Laksmana struck down by the enemy's missile. Sita has been depicted as an ideal woman. Sheer sense of duty and love for her husband urged her to forgo the comfort of royal harem and to resort to the arduous forest-life. This she did despite Rama's persuasion to stay back. While in the forest, she did not flinch from her duties. She was forcibly carried away by Ravana who coaxed and cajoled her to live with him, and held out the tempting prospects of royal position in which she could enjoy all the pleasures of life. But, faithful to her husband, she spurned the overtures of the demon-king. He kept her body in captivity, but could not exercise control over her mind. No homily or threat could wean her away from her husband whose image was always before her mind's eye. When she came to know of her exile in an alien forest, she felt utterly helpless as she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. From then, she did not accuse Rama, but calmly accepted her wretched condition as the result of her own deeds in the previous life. Poetical skill is revealed in the use of various figures of speech relating to both word and sense. The prosodic variety makes the Epic a pleasant read.



RAMAYANA AND MAHABHARATA—WHICH IS EARLIER?

Traditionally, the Ramayana preceded the Mahabharata. But, for certain reasons, the fact appears to be the other way round. Some of these reasons are as follows: Panini's grammar mentions the Mahabharata characters Arjuna (IV.3.98) and Yudhisthira (VIII.3.95). But, it is silent about the characters of the Ramayana.

The Mahabharata retains the old balled style, e.g., Arjuna uvaca, etc. But, the other Epic contains no such trace. The style of the Ramayana is obviously more ornate and polished than that of the Mahabharata. Again, the society, depicted in the Mahabharata, is much rougher and ruder than that revealed by the Ramayana. The Mahabharata depicts Draupadi as having five husbands. Polyandry was a very ancient practice which is not found in the Ramayana. Those, who think the

Ramayana was earlier, point out that the Mahabharata contains, in Vana-parva (273-90), the story of Rama. But, it is not known whether the Mahabharata got the story from the Epic Ramayana or from the much older Rama ballad. It is also argued that the Harivarhsa, a part of the Mahabharata, refers to the Ramayana. The counter-argument is that the Harivarhsa was a later supplement (khila) to the Mahabharata. It is noteworthy that, in the Vllth chapter (143-66), the Mahabharata contains verbatim a verse of the Vlth book (8 1/28) of the Ramayana. If this portion of the former is genuine, then it points to priority of the latter. Valmiki is mentioned several times in the Mahabharata. Some scholars hold that the nucleus of the Mahabharata may have been earlier than that of the other Epic, but, their present forms, the Epic Ramayana appears to be earlier.

This verse tells us popularity of Ramayana -

यावत्स्थास्यन्तिगिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।
तावद्रामायणकथालोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

People as long as the mountains and rivers will exist on the earth. Children hear the story of the Ramayana from their elders even before they learn the alphabets. This story is regarded as the best medium for inculcating the basic moral principles to the boys and girls. Rama's regard for his father, Laksmana's devotion to the elder brother, Rama, Sita's fidelity towards her husband, etc., have become proverbial. That the Ramayana played a great part in molding the literature in ancient India. Many Sanskrit works, prose, poetical and dramatic, have drawn upon the Ramayana through the ages. The vernacular literatures of India also reveal the deep impact of this Epic. Besides stories, based on episodes of this work, in the different regions of India, we have adaptations of the entire Ramayana. Among such adaptations, the most noteworthy are Kambana's Ramayana in Tamil, Krttivasi Ramayana in Bengali, Tulasidasa'sj Ramacaritamdnasa in Hindi and the Nepali Ramayana of Bhanubhakta. Many Ramayana plays were written in Bengali as also in other regional languages. In Bengal, such plays were stage for popular entertainment in what was known as yatra. Professional kathakaras (narrators) used to narrate the Ramayana story for the entertainment and edification of the public. Even the Buddhists and Jains took recourse to this popular Epic as a vehicle for the propagation of their respective religions among the populace. For instance, the Das'aratha-jataka is an example of the Buddhist adaptation of the Ramayana story. The Jainas wrote a Ramayana, called Paumchariu. Naqib Khan, Badauni and Haji Sultan translated (ad 999) into Persian the Ramayana; this version was the basis of a versified form produced later on by Sadullah of Panipath in the Mughal regime of India. In Foreign countries The popularity of this Epic spread far beyond the confines of India. Bhanubhakta's Ramayana, written in Nepali, is a national Epic of that country. Two Ramayana-based Sanskrit dramas, composed there, are the Mahtravana-vadha and Ramayana-nataka. Mentioned earlier, was composed in Ceylon.

Vashishtha: the pioneer of Ramrajya-

- The early traits of self-governed and self-disciplined state

- Timely realization of bringing in more systematic and precise administration
- The system of Kingship governed by values and morals under supervision of selfless Rishis
- The constant efforts (तप्) for five generations bores the fruit of an ideal state i.e. Ramrajya

The occult love between the king and the subjects

- The king Ram was loved by the subjects.
- All of them followed Ram and decided to go to exile with him.
- Ram left the people as they were in deep asleep and moved to exile.
- He met all sorts of people who were a part of society.
- He helped Sadhakas, worshippers and inhabitants of Dandakaranya with words as well as using bow and arrow.

Work and contribution of Ram in exile

- Killing of more than 14000 enemies, Asuras and Rakshas in Dandakaranya
- Protected inhabitants of Dandakaranya from early invaders from Lanka then
- Pacified and protected all Rishis and gave a message of harmony and peace
- to foul/cruel/demon powers
- Established harmony in Kishkindha and catered justice to Sugriv.
- Built an armor of Vanaras and fought with minimal force to achieve maximum victory

रघुकुल रीत सदा चली आई, प्राण जाई पर वचन ना जाई

This is famous phrase about this dynasty.

Personalities from Ramayana-

- **Bharat: the ideal brother-** Gets to know about Ram's exile and denies his position
- Slams his own mother and leaves Ayodhya to bring Ram back
- Comes back and decides to be the caretaker of the kingdom
- Lives outside the palace in a hut and carries out his duties selflessly for 14 years as a governor
- Waits for Ram outside the town and as soon the exile is over, hands over throne to Ram

with respect

Laxman: the shadow of Ram

- Accompanied Ram to exile sacrificing his luxury and claim to throne indirectly.
- Protected Ram in all possible ways.
- Ram was seen restless and deeply sad as Laxman was unconscious in a war.
- Ram ended his life right after Laxman completes his work of Incarnation by jumping into Sharayu River.

Virtue to vice: a case study of Ravan

- A born priest who commanded and recited verses of vedas.
- A great warrior who defeated deities and challenged Shiva.
- He composed Shvetandva stotra.
- Dashanan is a metaphor. Because he was speaking 10 different things to different people.
- He disrespected Shiva.
- He killed many sages, Rishis and Sadhus.
- He kidnapped Sita.
- Sent his brothers to war for his own means.

Though he was great warrior or devotee he was killed by Ram because of his own bad deeds.

Sita: the life line of Ram

- A princess, a queen to be leaves Ayodhya with Ram without being asked to accompany
- She stays in exile and suffers pain in woods
- She merges her own personality into Ram
- She shows a strong character in Lanka and makes Ravan kneel to his ambition
- She believes in Ram and conveys to Hanuman her message
- She doesn't object on any word or decision of Ram throughout

Hanuman: the first messenger ever in epics

- Very intelligent and known for his devotion to Ram
- Travels to Lanka and keeps a strong stand of Ram

- He brings moral down of army of Ravan
- A small monkey kind soldier can burn down the city; what would Ram be like?
- A huge psychological impact created on opposition
- Meets Sita and conveys the message of Ram
- Brings Sanjivani medicine for Laxman to cure from attack of Indrajeet

The Mahabharata

There has been different versions of Mahabharat. Hence, the versions are called as Jay, Bharat and Mahabharat. Jay was initially of 8800 verses. Bharat consists of 24000 verses. Mahabharat turned out to be of 1,00,000 verses in totality.

Attributed to sage Vyasa, it is an Epic consisting of 18 chapters, called Parvas.

Names of 18 parvas as follow-

1. Adi Parva
2. Sabha Parva
3. Vana Parva
4. Virata Parva
5. Udyoga Parva
6. Bhishma Parva
7. Drona Parva
8. Karna Parva
9. Shalya Parva
10. Sauptika Parva
11. Stri Parva
12. Shanti Parva
13. Anushasana Parva
14. Ashvamedika Parva
15. Ashramavasika Parva
16. Mausala Parva
17. Mahaprasthanika Parva
18. Svargarohana Parva

It has a supplement, entitled Harivamsa. Its contents are briefly as follow-

The Kauravas were cousins of Pandavas. Pandava Yudhisthira, the eldest of them, was crowned king. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, was jealous of Yudhisthira whom he defeated in a deceitful game of dice. In accordance with the terms of a wager in the game, Yudhisthira, along with his four brothers and common wife, Draupadi, went into exile for 12 years plus one year of living incognito. Yudhisthira, having asked for the restoration of the throne after the expiry of the stipulated period, Duryodhana refused to give up the throne without a battle. In a gory battle at Kuruksetra, the Kauravas were completely routed and lost their lives. After victory mainly with the help of Krsna, Yudhisthira occupied the throne and, in course of time, the Pandavas

attained heaven, Around this nucleolus were woven various legends and anecdotes, e.g., the stories of Nala-Damayanti, Savitri-Satyavan, Dusyanta- Sakuntala, hero-mother Vidula, Nahusa, churning of the ocean, flood-legend, the story of king Sivi and so on so forth. Incidentally, attempts have been made to inculcate morality, politics, dharmashastra, philosophical precepts, heroism, etc. Due to the diversity of contents, it has been characterized as an ‘entire literature’.



HARIVAMSA

Orthodox scholars regard it as an integral part of the Epic. But, modern scholars think that it is a much later supplement (khila) containing 16,373 stanzas. It is sometimes rightly referred to as the Harivamsa Purana. Its connection with the Epic story is tenuous and external. It is in the three sections, called Harwams'a-parva, Visnu-parva and Bhavisya-parva. The first section contains a full account of Krsna in his divine form. The second section deals with Krsna as an incarnation of Visnu. The subjects, discussed in the last section, are prophecies about the future ages, creation, detailed descriptions of Visnu's incarnations as Boar, Man-Lion and Dwarf, incarnation of the worship of Visnu and Siva, good effect of the study of the Epic, account of the burning of Tripura by Siva, epitome of the Harivamsa, good effect of listening to the recital of the Harivamsa.

INFLUENCE OF THE EPIC

This Epic has been influencing the life and literature of the Indians through ages. It is even now publicly recited for edification. Anecdotes and parables serve as media for moral instruction in the formative periods of the lives of youngsters. The righteousness of Yudhisthira, Arjuna's heroism, Draupadi's spirited reaction to the enemy's machination and devoted service of her husbands, etc., are still regarded as models for the formation of character. The Gita, mentioned earlier, and the Virata-parva are recited as holy texts in the obsequie rite, called s'raddha.

The Epic is both a great Epic and dharmashastra; its influence on dharmashastra works is marked. And also many literatures based on Mahabharata, For example, the Kiratarjunlya of Bharavi, Sisupala-vadha of Magha are two noted poetical works which have derived themes from the Epic. Bhasa's Urubhaiiga, Kalidasa's Abhijhana sakuntalam are two important dramas based on it. It should be noted that the Epic legend has been drawn upon by quite a number of works in the

different vernaculars of India. Like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata also travelled far beyond India. It has been mentioned in a Cambodian (Kampuchean)

Inscription of about 6th AD. There is evidence that this Epic used to be studied in ancient Champa (South Annam). The Javanese rendering of the Epic is an important treatise there. The Javanese work, Sarasamuccaya contains the translation of several verses from the Anusasana-parva of this Epic. The Javanese works, Sang Satyavan, Keravasrama, and Navaruci are based on the Mahabharata.

The translations of this Epic or of parts of it into several languages of the world testify to its world-wide popularity. In this connection, special mention is deserved by the Nala-Damayanti legend, contained in the Epic.

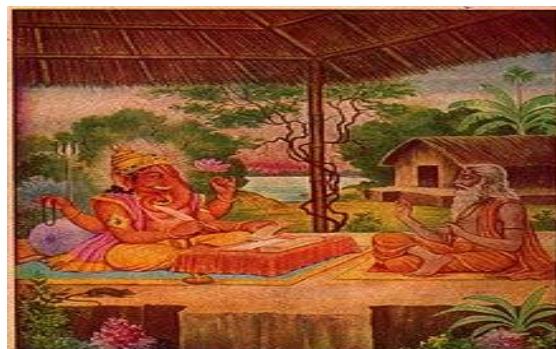
AUTHORSHIP AND EVOLUTION

Traditionally, it is attributed to sage Vyasa. That it passed through three stages of development is borne out by internal evidence. The total number of verses in it is stated to be satasahasra (hundred thousand or one lakh), caturvimsati-sahasra (24,000) and astau sloka-sahasrani astau stokasatani (8,800).

LITERARY VALUE OF THE EPIC

Some modern critics regard the Mahabharata as a formless fermenting verbiage. It is true that the work contains exaggerations and hyperboles, etc., usual in such Epics. But, it is not devoid of literary value. As is to be expected in bardic poetry, the Mahabharata contains a lot of folk elements and a number of pithy sayings and maxims which represent the experience and wisdom of people through ages.

We note below renderings of some such sayings. In this connection, the speech of Vidura, a friend of the Pandavas and an ardent devotee of Krsna, deserves special mention. The ideals of Indian life have been held out through some characters. Each character has its own distinctions. Some of the female characters dispel the common impression that, in ancient India, women were looked upon as mere chattels and child-producing machines. Let us look at Darupadl. Even personalities such as Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna could not eclipse her personality as a spirited lady of uncompromising principles. Ever since her disgrace by the Kauravas in the open court, she had been nursing a strong feeling of revenge.



The opportunity to feed fat her ancient grudge came after long 13 years when the selfish and insolent Kaurava king refused to hand over the throne to the Pandavas who were legitimately entitled to it. Finding the Pandavas devoid of initiative, she made a strong appeal to Krsna to declare war. Where Duryodhana is alive even for a moment, fie upon the famed archery of Arjuna and the heroism of Bhima. She would not rest so long as she does not see the tainted hand of Duhshasana that dishonoured her, lying severed on the ground. It should not be supposed that she articulated her grievances in a fit of emotional outburst. Her speech was rational, and based on political principles. She said that danda (war) was the way of bringing on his knees the enemy who could not be brought to terms by Sama (conciliation) and Dana (gift). She further referred to the time-honoured wise principle that as it is a sin to kill an innocent man, so it is sinful not to kill one who deserves death. We meet with another spirited lady, Vidula (Udyoga-parva, 133-6). Her son, Sanjaya, vanquished by the enemy, became dispirited, and lost his will to fight again. Unlike a doting mother, Vidula, fired by the true Kshatriya spirit, exhorts her son to take up arms. She says —up, coward, up, by accepting defeat do not enhance the delight of enemies and the grief of kinsmen. A true man goes on doing duties regardless of gain or loss, and is not stricken with the fear of life. It is better to take away the fang of a serpent than dying like a dog. The son remonstrates by saying that he is her only son, how can she, having a mother's heart, incite him to a battle in which his death is certain. But, she keeps on prodding him; the Kshatriya in her does not give in to the mother. Some male characters also are admirable. For instance, Kama appears as uncompromising in his honor, loyalty and charity. When he was ridiculed as a suta-putra (son of a charioteer), his spirited reply was —birth in a particular family depends on fate, but heroism is self-acquired. Kama was born to the Pandava mother, Kunti in her pre-marital life, and was abandoned by her. He was, however, picked up by a suta, and reared by him. Krna revealed his identity, and tried to win him over from the side of Kauravas to that of the Pandavas. Krisna held out an exalted position to be enjoyed by him as the eldest of the Pandava brothers, and as another husband of Draupadi. Moreover, Kg'sna himself offered him all assistance if he defected to the Pandava camp. But, Karna, owing allegiance to the Kauravas, did not flinch. Lord Indra, disguised as a brahmana guest, approached Karna, and asked for his armour and ear-ring which were congenital and the protectors of his life. Knowing the risk involved in fulfilling the wish of the guest, Karna did not hesitate to do so remembering that honouring the guest was a sacred duty. It should, however, be noted that the Epic depicts, in Karna, a human being of flesh and blood, and not as a divine being. Hence, we find some foibles too in his character another noble character was Bhisma. For facilitating the marriage of his father with the latter's desired lady, Satyavati, he promised never to marry. This firm resolve testifies to his devotion to father on the one hand and to the great strength of character on the other. After the death of his sonless brother, Vicitravirya, mother Satyavati tried, in many ways, to persuade Bhisma to accept Vicitravirya's two beautiful wives as his wife according to levirate. Satyavati argued that, by doing so, he would, at the same time, uphold religion, perpetuate the lineage and satisfy the departed ancestors. But Bhisma was unshaken in his resolve. He replied that he would forsake the kingdom of the three worlds rather than swerve from the truth.

Bhism's appointment as the general in the Kaurava Army and his part in logistics in the battlefield bespeak his military skill. Bhism was a real appreciator of merit. Though in the opposite camp, Yudhisthira was advised to show proper honour to Karna who, in his opinion, was unparalleled in merit. Bhism was upright enough to utter even an unpalatable word when occasion demanded. Hearing the pitiable appeal of Draupadi, brought to the court, Bhism blamed the Kauravas. He described them as passionate and influenced by greed and delusion. He told Draupadi that the silent elderly ones such as Drona were like dead persons. In the Udyoga-parva, he reprimanded Duryodhana for shabby treatment towards Pandavas and disgraceful conduct towards Draupadi. He also repeatedly asked him to share the kingdom with the Pandavas. Bhism was one who could never be killed. The Pandavas felt that, without killing him, they could not defeat the Kauravas, and tried various means in vain to put an end to his life, Bhism, however, embraced death voluntarily. This he did presumably for two reasons. He felt that the Pandavas were wronged; their victory would be just. Secondly, disgusted at the loss of lives in battle he lost the will to live. Thus, his voluntary death invests his life with a halo of nobility. Even today, thousands of people offer libations of water to the soul of this sonless man who was unparalleled in truthfulness and self-restraint.

What is Mahabharat

धर्मेर्चार्थेर्चकामेचमोक्षेचभरतर्षभा।
 यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र। यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित् ॥(१/६२/५३)

O King! In matters pertaining to Dharma (righteousness), Artha (economics), Kama (desires), and Moksha (liberation), whatever has been said here may be found elsewhere, but whatever is not found here does not exist anywhere else!

- A mirror of the society
- A factual representation of good and evil altogether
- The script embedded with political as well as thoughtful imprints of time
- The battle of vice and virtue
- The duty bound mindset vs personal attributes
- The choice between self and society
- The battle between greed and sacrifice
- **Some famous personalities from Mahabharata-**
- Krishna: the heart of the epic**
- One who guided Pandavas

- One who established values over rules (his pledge not to participate into the war)
- One who integrated all communities and princely states
- One who followed Tit for Tat and enforced discipline
- He took every possible step to bring in harmony irrespective of his position and power(Krishna becomes a messenger for Pandavas)
- The neutral state of governance was his motive
- His eyes got wet as he witnessed the sacrifice of Abhimanyu
- Being calm and composed after getting cursed by Gandhari
- Stands by Pandavas and helps them throughout irrespective of their blunder of playing Dyut.
- Establishes the rule of यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः|(धर्म is duty, rationalism and welfare of mass)
- The supreme creator of Bhagvadgeeta; the scripture of humanity

Arjuna: the holy weapon of lord!

- The warrior of his time
- The dedicated soul for lord's work
- The best choice for his master (revenge of Drupad)
- The hardworking student (learning art of archery at night too)
- His quest for learning new things fetched him Pashupatastra from Lord Shiva.
- Acceptance and dedication towards lord and holy work
- His stand or the state of mind in the middle of the battlefield is a representation of mankind.
- Arjuna Award is offered to recognize outstanding achievement in sports.

Duryodhana: a foul and vice of all

- जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिः जर्जनामि पापं न च मे निवृत्तिः |
- It's a symbol of attitude and lifestyle
- Self-centered personality
- Driven by greed and power
- Utilizing resources for selfish purposes(friendship with Karna)

- Evil intentions to demolish enemies(attempt to kill Bhim in childhood, Lakshagruh episode)
- Disrespect to women

Karna

- A philanthropist person
- Donated his Kundals knowing the consequences
- Stood by his friend for his word and succumbed to death
- Proved his candidature by his deeds and hard work(not by birth but by deeds)
- An inner conflict of two duties (friendship vs ethics)

Bheesham

- A patron of Hastinapur
- Known for his Bhishm-pratigya
- He lived and died for his vow
- An obedient son who followed celibacy for his father
- He recognizes lord Krishna's presence and feels happy when Krishna picks up a weapon
- He held the mechanism, civilization throughout

Drona

- Guru of Kaurav and Pandav
- Extremely attached to his son and fatherly feelings
- Wishes to take revenge of his humiliation by Drupad
- Accepts offer as a tutor at Hastinapur
- His Gurudakshina is to handcuff Drupad and kneel him down(envy, revenge)

Drutarashtra

- The caretaker of the kingdom till Yudhishtir is grown up
- His sons are his weakness
- Knows faults of son yet overlooks
- Approves plans to kill Pandavas by any possible way

- Selfishness takes over duty of a king and ruler

The era after war

This is important part of mahabharat because we are know story of Mahabharata till war but after war era was very most imporatant part because mahabharata is not about glorification of war but it shows bad consequences of war.

- Striparv, Shantiparv and Anushasanparv are the core chapters after war.
- The chapters elaborate the agony, cry and repentance of women who lost their family members, the establishment of peace and governance of welfare and the administration of higher state as guided by Bhishama

Takeaways-

- Dedication and acceptance
- Honesty
- Philanthropy
- Truthfulness - सते हितं सत्यम्
- Friendship
- Mentoring
- Tutoring (Balram – Duryodhana and Bheema)
- Sacrifice (Abhimanyu)
- Keeping a word
- Values based civilization

The Bhagavad-Gita

The modern man has come to the realization that science and technology alone are not capable of solving human problems. He is groping in the dark, and is in desperate need of a guiding light. He doesn't know which way to turn, what course to adopt, and how to move towards a better state of things. Hence, his life is filled with anxiety, sense of constant insecurity and restlessness; resulting into misery & unhappiness all the time.



Fortunately, we have the ancient sacred treasure in the form of 'The Bhagavad-Gita' which contains the words of wisdom and the practical teachings pertaining to every challenge the man faces today – from personal to professional, material to metaphysical, trivial to subtle. It is not a message addressed only to warrior prince Arjuna, but to each and every individual living at what-so-ever the place on the earth, and what-ever be their vocation in life. Metaphorically, the character Arjuna here is not an Individual, but a representative of every human being. It is not a temporal history recounted in the form of some entertaining story, but, an in-depth portrayal of the eternal drama that is played in the cosmos, and is therefore meaningful, for all times, under every circumstance, and to every person.

This most revered ancient scripture transcends the bounds of any particular race or religion, and is actually 'Divine Wisdom' addressed to mankind for all times; past, present & future; to resolve all the dilemmas human face during their existence on planet earth from birth till death.

Pain is inevitable in life, but suffering is optional. With the Divine yet pragmatic teachings of 'The Bhagavad-Gita', one is able to free himself from all limiting factors, and reach a state of perfect balance, inner stability, mental peace and equanimity of mind, total freedom from grief, fear, anxiety and confusion. Perhaps, no literature in the world teaches with such accuracy, authenticity and authority, on such a wide range of topics from world to God, from matter to mind, from local to global. It opens for each one of us the whole secret of self-mastery and how to maintain calmness and quietude of mind and be in peace even in the midst of all the trials and tribulations of daily life.

The fundamental message in 'The Bhagavad-Gita' being purely philosophical, psychological, ethical and psychical in nature, irrespective of one's caste, creed, faith, race or religion, one can

fully grasp and assimilate it in totality, leading to a whole new world of clarity and an enriched life. Through various chapters and the verses therein, many messages are conveyed to treat every conceivable disease and illness of human nature in the form of medicine of the spiritual truths (which are nothing but the fundamental laws of nature) contained in every verse.

Historical Background of ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’:

The Bhagavad-Gita, also commonly referred to as ‘The Srimad Bhagavad-Gita’ is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and warrior Pandava prince Arjuna, narrated in the ‘Bhishma Parva’ of the great Indian epic ‘The Mahabharata’. It comprises eighteen chapters of a total of 701 Sanskrit verses. In these verses, Lord Krishna reveals the profound, sublime and soul stirring spiritual truths, and expounded the rare secrets of Yoga, Vedanta, Bhakti, Karma and Brahmanavida. Therefore, ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’ is also called as ‘The Celestial Song’ or ‘The God’s Song’, and is venerated as the quintessence of the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads.

‘The Mahabharata’ tells us about the five Pandavas; prince Arjuna and his four brothers namely Yudhishthira, Bhima, Nakul and Sahadev; growing up in north India at the court of their uncle, the blind king Dhritarashtra, who became the ruler after the death of the previous ruler Pandu, the father of these five Pandavas.

There is always a great rivalry between the Pandavas (the five sons of Pandu) and the Kauravas (the one hundred sons of Dhritarashtra). Eventually, the old king Dhritarashtra gives his nephews some land of their own; however, his eldest son Duryodhana, defeats Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava, in a game of dice, although by cheating. Duryodhana forces Pandavas to surrender their land and go into exile for thirteen long years.

On Pandavas return, the old king tries in vain to persuade his son Duryodhana to restore their heritage. In spite of efforts of reconciliation by Sanjaya – Dhritarashtra’s charioteer, by Bheeshma – Dhritarashtra’s senior-most wise counselor, and even by Lord Krishna himself, Duryodhana could not be persuaded to restore the rightful land and heritage of the Pandavas, and the war could not be averted. Very soon, the rival hosts face each other on the battlefield of Kurukshetra (modern day Haryana) with their giant armies. It is at this point that ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’ begins.

When Arjuna takes a look on the battlefield, on seeing his own brothers and revered masters (Gurus) in the rival army, he is filled with moral dilemma and despair about the violence and death the war will cause. He contemplates to renounce, and drops his bow and arrow, and in utter dejection and frustration seeks Krishna’s counsel as to what is the right thing to do under such circumstances. Arjuna’s queries and questions and Lord Krishna’s subsequent responses to them constitute this universally known most sacred spiritual text ‘The Bhagavad-Gita’.

The Bhagavad-Gita consisting of eighteen chapters is broadly divided into three sections.

1 The Karma Yoga (The path of action)

2 The Bhakti Yoga (The path of devotion)

3 The Jnana Yoga (The path of knowledge)

Among these three yogas, the Bhakti yoga is regarded as the easiest means for an ordinary person in the present age, who may have neither the strength nor the facilities for the performance of Karma nor the brilliant intelligence and endurance for practicing Jnana Yoga.

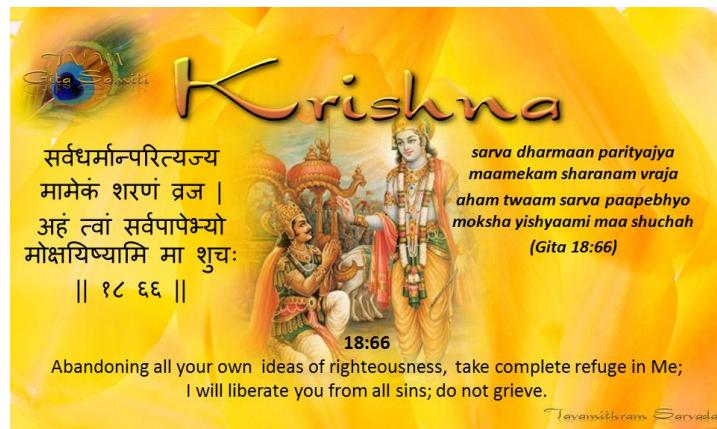
1. The Bhakti Yoga: The Yoga of Loving devotion

In Chapter Twelve of the Bhagavad-Gita, Shri Krishna describes the benefits of devotion to God.

Warrior prince Arjuna asks Shri Krishna that between the two types of seekers – one which is completely devoted to you, exclusively worships you in total surrender; and the other type which believes in impersonal, absolute and imperishable, who is better able to reach to the ultimate truth i.e. the union of the individual with the universal. Krishna replied that the ones who are devoted to him are superior. Herein, Krishna is establishing the supremacy of the Bhakti Yoga.

Krishna, however, clarifies that those who are focused on the impersonal, absolute and imperishable universal consciousness also reach the same goal of liberation. However, their journey is quite arduous as embodied humans have a very strong identification with the human form.

This suggests that The Bhagavad-Gita's whole approach is quite practical in dealing with any issue pertaining to human existence on earth, from mundane to moksha. This further means that focusing on Krishna personally is easier as it is difficult to keep your attention on an impersonal God.



The Nature of Bhakti:

The term Bhakti is derived from the root ‘Bhaj’ meaning ‘to serve’. Thus Bhakti means serving the Supreme Lord with intense love. The idea of Bhakti or devotion to a personal God is the central feature of many sects of Hinduism.

The Bhakti or the path of devotion is the only and the easiest way to salvation. The Karma and Jnana are to be practiced under the guidance of Bhakti; then only they can be conducive to the spiritual well-being of a soul. Bhakti denotes the positive aspect, an active longing, a state of love, an outpouring of devotion and admiration, a total and unconditional surrender.

Bhakti is germinated only if man experiences his/her limitations, and a deep understanding dawns upon him that the only Supreme God is superior and independent, and all of us are His subordinates.

The path of Bhakti does not demand qualifications such as caste, clan, birth, sex, time, place and stage of life. Lord Krishna boldly states to Arjuna that ‘Not by the study of Vedas nor through regular penance, nor through generous gifts, nor by sacrifices, but God manifests Himself only to those who love Him’. It infers, then, that the key means by which the universal form of the Lord can be unlocked is ‘Loving Devotion’ i.e. Bhakti. It is the only path for the final bliss, the other two; Jnana and Karma are the supporting factors to Bhakti.

In Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna repeatedly emphasizes that whoever fixed their minds upon Him and remain absorbed in His contemplation are bound to receive His protection and immediate attention.

Bhakti has two aspects –

- i) **Sadhana Bhakti:** It is more of the nature of Karma like worship, constant rememberance of the Divine names of supreme Lord accompanied by love. It is Bhakti towards an Avatara or the personal God, and is the easiest and the sweetest.
- ii) **Nirguna Bhakti:** It is a state of intense devotion wherein love flows unobstructed towards impersonal God. According to Shankaracharya, it is a state of meditation upon Brahman for securing liberation.
Shankaracharya says that ‘as soiled cloth cannot be cleaned well without soap water, so also impure intellect cannot be made pure without Bhakti’.

Four Kinds of Bhaktas:

- i) **Arta:** Arta is the distressed devotee who is suffering very much and who craves for the grace of God in order to get himself relieved from pain and sorrow.
- ii) **Jijnasu:** Jijnasu is the inquisitive seeker after knowledge who feels that he is ignorant, and who wants the grace of God in order to have wisdom.
- iii) **Artharthi:** Artharthi is the seeker of wealth, who longs for earthly possessions, money, land etc. in order to enjoy a happy life, and who propitiates God to get His grace to have wealth and abundance.

- iv) **Jnani:** Jnani is the wise one who is satisfied with the Self, who is contented in the Self, who has no desires, is free from all desires, and is just longing to know the true nature of his own Self.

Although all devotees are noble, yet, the Jnani (the man of wisdom) is deemed by God as his own Self who is in perfect union with Him and is extremely dear to Him.

Krishna describes that the person who does not envy any living being, and is friendly and sympathetic to all, who is compassionate, without sense of proprietorship, ego, maintains equipoise in success and failure, always content, self-controlled with firm resolve and dedicates mind and intelligence to me is the best and the most dear to me.

Purity of heart and devotion are supremely important in the path of Bhakti Yoga. Whatever is offered to Him; a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, with pure devotion, that sacred offering of the pure soul is accepted with unconditional love. Such an offering can be extended even to a person's whole life and his activities. A true devotee can convert his whole life into an offering to God.

Some Shlokas on BhaktiYoga -

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्णसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥ 18. 65 ॥

Always think of me and become My devotee. Worship me and offer your homage unto me. Thus you will come to me without fail. I promise you this because you are my very dear friend.

ये तु सर्वाणि कर्माणि मयि सञ्चयस्य मत्पराः ।
अनन्येनैव योगेन मां ध्यायन्त उपासते ॥ 12. 6 ॥

For one who worships Me, giving up all his activities unto Me and being devoted to Me without deviation, engaged in devotional service and always meditating upon Me, who has fixed his mind upon Me, O son of Pr̥thā, for him I am the swift deliverer from the ocean of birth and death.

2. The Jnana Yoga: (The Buddhi Yoga) or (The Yoga of Meditation)

The second chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita is known as Jnana Yoga or Samkhya Yoga. Some scholars says that it is a summary of the Bhagavad-Gita itself as it contains all the important concepts and ideas of the entire scripture. It is the path that intellectually oriented people tend to prefer.

The word 'jnana' means knowledge. This word has many connotations. Knowledge is viewed as the means to achieve certain ends. It can be used to fulfill our desires or liberate ourselves from the cycle of births and deaths.

The knowledge that helps us realize our selfish desires and perpetuate our limited identities is considered ‘lower knowledge’ or ‘avidya’ or ‘ignorance’.

The knowledge that helps us control our minds and senses; and teaches us how to center ourselves in our spiritual selves so that we can release from the cycles of births and deaths, and helps us attain Moksha or liberation is considered as ‘higher knowledge’ or ‘the real knowledge’.

In Classical Advaita Vedanta, there are three practices for Jnana Yoga.

1 Shravana (Hearing): It involves listening to the teachings of the sages on the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta, and also study of Vedantic texts.

2 Manana (Thinking): It means reflection on these teachings.

3 Nididhyasana (Meditation): It refers to realization and consequent conviction of the truths contained in these teachings.

Jnana Yoga is the most difficult of the three classical paths for salvation or liberation as it deals with “formless reality” or “avyakta”. While the path of devotion is described as superior to the other two, Jnana Yoga is suitable for people who are deeply intellectual. On the path of liberation, it is important to possess right knowledge which comes through the study of the scriptures.

According to Bhagavad-Gita, we should not identify ourselves with our minds and bodies as we are immortal, spiritual beings and to transcend our limited nature, we have to gain control over our sense organs and our desires through detachment and equanimity, and each one has to work for his/her salvation by performing actions for the sake of God.

The Bhagavad-Gita describes following practices for Jnana Yoga.

1 Developing correct awareness of the body, the mind and the Atman or Self.

2 Stabilizing the mind in the Self through self-discipline and self-absorption.

3 Acquiring true awareness of the world around and the Supreme Self beyond through discernment.

4 Practicing various disciplines and other techniques as a means to self-purification, for the predominance of ‘sattva’ and suppression of ‘rajas’ and ‘tamas’.

Some Shlokas on Jnana yoga:

न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते ।
तत्स्वयं योगसंसिद्धः कालेनात्मनि विन्दति ॥ 4.३८ ॥

Indeed, there is nothing purifying here comparable to Knowledge. One who has become perfected after a (long) time through yoga, realizes That by himself in his own heart.

श्रद्धावॉल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥ 4.39 ॥

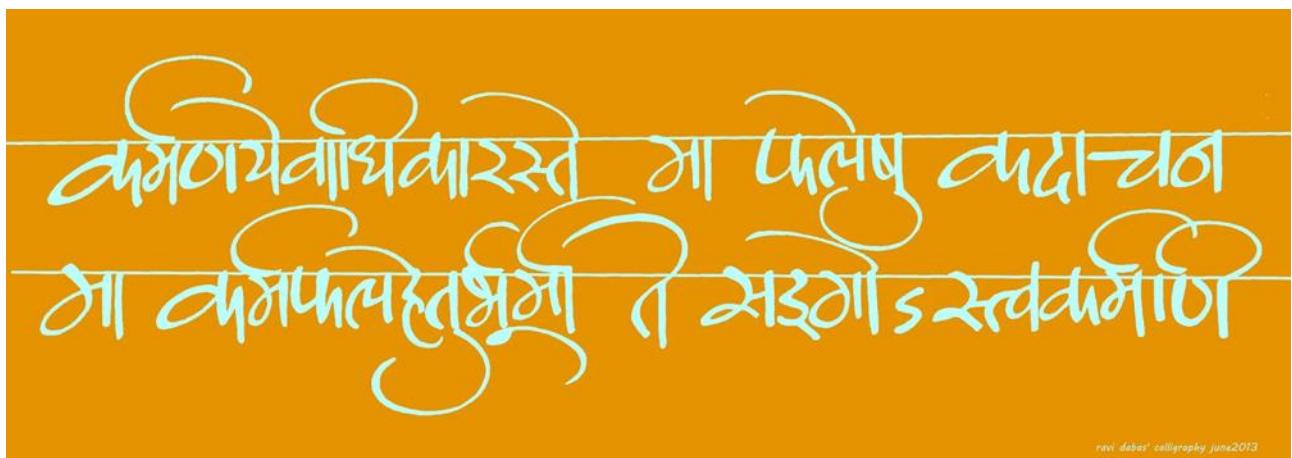
The man who is full of faith, who is devoted to it, and who has subdued the senses obtains (this) knowledge; and having obtained the knowledge he attains at once to the supreme peace.

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्टते।
प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥ 7.17 ॥

Of them the wise, ever steadfast and devoted to the One, excels (is the best); for I am exceedingly dear to the wise and he is dear to Me.

3. Karma Yoga: The Yoga of Action

Primarily Bhagavad-Gita is considered to be the gospel of work or the gospel of Karma Yoga. Karma Yoga has been our sacred heritage from times immemorial. In the context of Bhagavad-Gita, Karma is not merely physical action but includes thoughts as well. Karma Yoga is one of the oldest and most widely accepted practice meant for the realization of the ultimate goal of life. It is the combination of all that is best in spiritual science, in actual action, and in an unselfish meditative life.



The Bhagavad-Gita stands for the teaching of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. The setting of the teaching of this holy treatise is the battlefield of Kurukshetra also known as Dharmakshetra wherein the two forces of Dharma and Adharma are ready to fight against each other. On seeing that he had to fight against his own people, Arjuna refused to fight and said that he would rather renounce and go to forests than to fight and kill his own relatives.

Arjuna, thus overwhelmed with grief and dejection and utter helplessness surrenders and seek counsel from Lord Krishna. In response, the treatise on Nishkam-Yoga or the gospel of disinterested action (popularly known as Karma Yoga), which is the central theme of the Bhagavad-Gita is delivered by the Lord Himself.

The word ‘karma’ comes from the root ‘Kr’ which means doing or activity. All the actions which we perform are included in the word karma, whether bodily actions (kaya), vocal actions (vacha), or mental actions (manas). So, Karma means action, duty, work etc. To perform one’s own duty is to worship the Lord, and in the language of the Gita, that is ‘Karma’.

Actions are unavoidable, how-so-ever one may try. We are so constituted that we cannot but perform duties, helplessly driven to actions by our nature born qualities. Even breathing, which is so essential for our survival is a kind of action. It is further said that the actions are the causes of bondages. Actions bind us. The question, therefore, naturally arises is ‘should we ever remain in bondage as we are bound by karmas which are inevitable on our part’?

The answer is an emphatic ‘NO’. The Bhagavad-Gita gives us the way by following which we can get rid of the bondage even though we perform our allotted duties.

Duties performed without any desire of reward or fruits cannot bind us. So, the Bhagavad-Gita teaches us to perform duties without caring for the results it may yield; with a total disregard to their consequences. This kind of activity is known as ‘disinterested actions’ (Nishkama Karma). The Bhagavad-Gita also teaches us to surrender all the fruits of our actions to the Lord.

Thus, the greatest teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita is that we should perform our duties simply for the sake of duty. ‘Duty for the sake of duty’ is the golden rule of life. It is the ideal of Nishkama Karma or disinterested action. And it promises that such actions do not bind us. Bhagavad-Gita teaches us that action alone must be our guiding principle – ‘action disinterested and well thought out’.

Here, one must note that the Bhagavad-Gita does not teach inactivism. It regards the performance of duties as better than renunciation of actions; because the latter never leads to liberation. It advocates that all works should be done as service to God. And all the fruits surrendered to God.

Lord Krishna says...

“You are concerned with duty only, not with the fruit or the result of the deeds. One should not do one’s actions with any expectation of fruit. Be unattached with the result. Do perform your actions proficiently, but even while doing that, don’t bother about the fruit of your action. No matter whether you obtain the fruit of your actions or not, you must do your work/duty”.
2 - 47

A person must perform his duty honestly and through that alone he can attain his destination. After achieving dexterity or proficiency in work, one should not abandon that. Therefore,

everyone must adhere to his duty. If one performs his duties without any feeling of attachment, those actions never bind him.

Karma or action has been classified into three categories.

- i) Karma (action)
- ii) Vikarma (wrong action)
- iii) Akarma (Inaction)

KARMA:

Karma usually means right action which results in happiness, here or hereafter. Only right actions performed with the body (kaya), speech (Vacha) and mind (manas) are generally recognized as coming under the category of Karma.

VIKARMA:

Vikarma means wrong action which results in suffering, here or hereafter. Wrong actions proceeding from the body, mind or speech such as doing injury to others, telling lies, thieving etc. are recognized as wrong actions.

AKARMA:

It is that action or renunciation of action which does not produce any reaction.

Some Shlokas on Karma Yoga -

न हि कश्चित्क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्मकृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥ 3.5 ॥

Verily none can ever remain for even a moment without performing action; for everyone is made to act helplessly indeed by the qualities born of Nature.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पुरुषः ॥ 3.19 ॥

Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty; for by working without attachment, one attains the Supreme.

PURANAS

PART A: History & 18 Puranas

INTRODUCTION

Purana, (Sanskrit: “Ancient”) in the sacred literature of Hinduism, any of a number of popular encyclopedic collections of myth, legend, and genealogy, varying greatly as to date and origin. The holy Puranas are a vast treasure of literary and spiritual knowledge that throw light on past, present and future. It is said that the Puranas are the richest collection of mythological information in this world. In totality, the Eighteen Puranas contain information about ancient myths and folklores that pertain to some form of spiritual knowledge. Each of these Puranas is a book of hymns, stories, knowledge and instructions regarding sacred rituals and the way life should be led. It contains cosmic knowledge and how the universe affects our living. Traditionally, there are supposed to be 18 major Puranas. Puranas were written almost entirely in narrative couplets, in much the same easy flowing style as the two great Sanskrit epic poems, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The early Puranas were probably compiled by upper-caste authors who appropriated popular beliefs and ideas from people of various castes. Later Puranas reveal evidence of vernacular influences and the infusion of local religious traditions. These religious scriptures discuss varied topics like devotion to God in his various aspects, traditional sciences like Ayurveda, Jyotish, cosmology, and concepts like dharma, karma, reincarnation and many other Sages. The Puranas are a genre of important Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religious texts, notably consisting of narratives of the history of the universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. Puranas usually give prominence to a particular deity, usually written in the form of stories related by one person to another. Brahmin scholars read from them and tell their stories, usually in Katha sessions (in which a traveling Brahmin settles for a few weeks in a temple and narrates parts of a Purana).



Time period of Puranas Most of them attained their final form around 500 A.D. but they were passed on as an oral tradition since the time of Krishnadwaipayana (c. 1500 B.C.). In reference to the Origin of Indian Puranas, an early reference is found in the Chandogya Upanishad 500 BCE. **Author of Puranas** Sage Vedavyasa The Puranas are part of Hindu Smriti. Sage Vyasa is credited with compilation of Puranas from age Yuga to age, and for the current age, he has been identified and named Krishna Dvaipayana, the son of sage Parashara. According to tradition they were written by Vyasa at the end of Dvapara Yuga, while modern scholarship dates them to the latter half of the first millennium AD. Vyasa is credited with compilation of Puranas from age Yuga to age, and for the current age, he has been identified and named Krishna Dvaipayana, the son of sage Parashara. According to tradition they were written by Vyasa at the end of Dvapara Yuga, while modern scholarship dates them to the latter half of the first millennium AD. One of the main objectives of the Puranas was to make available the essence of the Vedas to the common man, and the Vedas were basically meant not for the scholars but for the ordinary man. They bring forth the Vedic knowledge and teachings by way of myths; parables, allegories and stories; legends; life stories of kings and other prominent persons; and chronologies of historical events. The Puranas unfolds the principles of Hinduism in a very simple way. In all these Puranas the goddess Lakshmi is given a laudable place without any sectarian dispute. In the Vaishnavite Puranas, Shiva starts telling the efficacy of Vishnu to the Goddess Parvati. While Shaiva mythology places goddess Parvati, the consort of Shiva, as one half of His body (ardha naareeshvara tattva), Vaishnavites place the Goddess Lakshmi in the heart of Vishnu itself, as if it were a lotus (hridaya kamala). This is to depict the inseparable union of Universal purusha and prakriti, seed and field, or male and female. Puranas (aka Puranams) usually refer to the Mahapuranas. There are also smaller Puranas known as Upapurana.



Contents of Puranas

सर्गश्चप्रतिसर्गश्च वंशोमन्वन्तराणि च ।
वंशानुचरितं चैव पुराणं पञ्चलक्षणम् ॥

As per some scholars, Puranas have mainly five characteristic topics

1. The creation of the universe -**सर्ग**
2. Its destruction and renovation -**प्रतिसर्ग**
3. The genealogy of gods, kings, heroes and demigods-**वंश**
4. The reigns of the Manus-**मन्वन्तर**
5. The history of the Solar and Lunar races of kings-**वंशानुचरित**

The Puranas are the basis for getting knowledge about history, culture and heritage of the bygone eras. Most of the puranas provide details of the lineages and the role they provided in the upliftment of the society. The Puranas are the richest collection of mythology in the world. With the Origin of Indian Puranas, the civilization was introduced to various cosmic concepts. The mass can learn about the Sarga; the creation of the universe, the Pratisarga; Secondary creations, mostly recreations after dissolution, the Vamsa; Genealogy of gods and sages, the Manvantara; The creation of the human race and the first human beings. The epoch of the Manus' rule, seventy one celestial Yugas or 308,448,000 years and the Vamsanucaritam: Dynastic histories. **The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad refers to Purana as the "fifth Veda" and reflects the early religious importance of these myths.** The term also appears in the Atharvaveda. According to Pargiter, it is believed that, the original Purana were written during the final redaction of the Vedas. In addition to that, Gavin Flood also connects the commencement of the written Purana. According to historical chronicles, the Puranas are related to each other. However, each of them presents a view of ordering of the world from a particular perspective. Since the Origin of Indian Puranas, these texts are given due importance and they were compiled by particular groups of Brahmins to propagate a particular vision. The texts narrate tale and legends of several deities such as Vishnu, Shiva or Goddess Durga. The Puranas come in various vernacular translations and are spread by Brahmin scholars. These texts are disseminated from one generation to another orally.

MNEMONICS TO REMEMBER THE NAMES OF THE 18 MAHA PURANAS

As it has been discussed in the previous module the Puranas are classified into different groups as : Maha Puranas, Upa Puranas, Aupa Puranas, Upopa Puranas and Upaupa Puranas having 18 texts of different names in each the present module deals with the basic details of the 18 Maha Puranas in brief. To memorize the names of all the 18 puranas a technique of mnemonics was adopted by the ancient traditional scholars. Accordingly a sloka is available in our tradition composed with the first letters of all the 18 Maha Puranas by memorizing which one can very easily remember all the 18 Maha Puranas.

मद्यं भद्यं चैव ब्रत्र्यं वचतुष्यम् ।
अनापलिंगकूस्कानि पुराणानि प्रचक्षते ॥

This sloka is composed of the beginning letters of the names of the 18 Maha Puranas

मद्यं - मत्सस्यपुराणम्, माककण्डेयपुराणम् (Two Puranas beginning with the letter म)

भद्यं - भागवतपुराणम्, भनवष्टपुराणम् (Two Puranas beginning with the letter भ)

ब्र-त्रयम् - ब्रह्मपुराणम्, ब्रह्माण्डपुराणम्, ब्रह्मवैवतकपुराणम् (Three Puranas beginning with the letter ब्र)

व- चतुष्यम् - वराहपुराणम्, वामनपुराणम्, वायुपुराणम्, नवष्णुपुराणम् (Four Puranas beginning with व)

अ - अनिपुराणम्

ना - नारदीयपुराणम्

प- पद्मपुराणम्

लिंग - पुराण

ग - गरुडपरुणम्

कू - कूमकपुराणम्

स्क - स्कान्दपुराणम्

These names of the 18 Maha Puranas, the total number of slokas in each of these Puranas and the major details of the contents of each are given in detail in Shiva Purana, Devi Bhagavata, Srimadbhagavata, Naradiya Purana, Markandeya Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Lingapurana, Varaha Purana, Kurma Purana, Matsya Purana and Padma Purana.

All these 18 Maha Puranas give voluminous information about different subjects besides fulfilling all the Characteristics of a Purana. The information about each of the subjects given in these texts are larger and elaborate than the contents in any of the independent treatises on each of the subjects.

Here is a brief introduction to each of these Puranas:

Matsya Purana

This purana has 291 chapters and the sloka Sankhya in this purana varies from source to source. A brief account of Manvantaras, the story of Pitr Devatas (Manes), a detailed description of the kings of Lunar Dynasty and the victory of Shiva over the Three Demons of Tripuras are some highlighting episodes of this purana. The slaughter of Tarakasura also is well described. As the description of the Incarnation of Matsya (Matsyavatara) is predominant this is called Matsya Purana. The description of the holy places Kasi and Prayaga are note worthy. In about 25 chapters all the details of Royal Policy (Raja Niti) and about the Temple Architecture are of great importance.

Markandeya Purana

This has 137 Chapters and 9000 slokas. The story of Madalasa and her son Alarka, a Brahma Jnani, is an important narrative in this purana. The interesting thing in this episode is that Madalasa was the Brahmopadesa Guru to her son.

The Stotra of Durga in 700 slokas which is popularly known as Durga Saptasati or Chandi Saptasati is a part of this purana only. Here the magnanimous grace of Mahakali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Sarsvati and the slaughter of the demons like Sumbha, Nisumbha, Mahishasura and others was well described. This content in 13 Adhyayas is also known as Sri Devi Mahatmya. A detailed account of Mavantaras also is available in this purana.

Bhagavata Purana

This is very popular among all the puranas as the toughest of all Puranas. It has popularity is Bhakti Sastra also. It is now available in 18000 slokas having been divided into 12 skandhas. This very beautifully bridges connecting the three main paths of Moksha: Karma, Bhakti and Jnana and prove the supremacy of Jnana. The 23 popular incarnations of Lord Vishnu are very authentically presented in this great work. Particularly the 10 Skandha of Bhagavata is spared for the very beautiful narration of the story of Sri Krishna.

If anybody proclaims that he is a scholar his knowledge should be tested in the text of Bhagavatha Purana. If he succeeds he can be declared a scholar. This notion is much spread in the Indian tradition. (Vidusham Bhagavate Pariksha).

There is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding which text to be included by the title Bhagavata in the list of 18 Maha Puranas. While some people support Vishnu Bhagavata for inclusion others plead in support of Devi Bhagavata. There is another famous notion that Vishnu Bhagavata was written by a later scholar named Bopadeva. Hence the Sakteya Devi Bhagavata was included in the list in place of Vishnu Bhagavata.

But both the texts have their respect and status among the scholars. Like Vishnu Bhagavata, the text of Devi Bhagavata also was divided into 12 Skandhas with 18000 slokas in it. Devi Bhagavata deals with various incarnations of Goddess Para Sakti. Sarvam Sakti Mayam Jagat – is the declaration of Devi Bhagavata.

Bhavishya Purana

This is an interest text in 18500 slokas consisting of the stories of many historical dynasties of Kings who ruled Bharata Varsha in the post Mahabharata War period. As Veda Vyasa belongs to Dvapara Yuga and this text deals with the accounts of the Kings of Kali Age this text is popularly known as Bhavishya Purana (the future to Dvapara Yuga). Besides the stories of the historical dynasties of the kings this text gives a detailed information of different the then existing cults and rituals too. Thus it has ritualistic importance too.

Brahma Purana

Another name of this Purana is Adi Purana as this text is considered by the scholars as the earliest of all the 18 Maha Puranas. The number of slokas in this text vary from 10000 to 13500 according to different sources. This has 245 Adhyayas in total. The description of Solar and Lunar Dynasties (Surya Vamsa and Chandra Vamsa), The episodes of Parvathi, Markandeya and Gautami Kshetra are very popular. This text deals with Sri Krishna's Story in 22 Adhyayas which is larger in content, description and nature than the Sri Krishna charita in the Bhagavata Purana. Further this Purana gives a wonderful description of Konarka Temple, Jagannatha Kshetra and many other holy kshetras of ancient India.

Brahmanda Purana

This Purana has 12000 slokas divided into four quarters, Prakriya Pada, Anushanga Pada, Upodghata Pada and Upasamhara Pada by names. As the very name suggests this is a very beautiful text on the description of the Brahmanda, the Seven Dvipas: Jambu Dvipa, Salmala Dvipa, Kusha Dvipa, Krauncha Dvipa, Saka Dvipa and Pushkara Dvipa. The extensive description of all the Varshas, Countries, Mountains, Rivers, Forests, Cities, Towns, Janapadas and Villages of Jambu Dvipa is matter of great interest for the researchers on ancient World Geography. The story of Parasurama is elaborately given here. The popular Sri Lalithopakhyanam, the most adorable story of the Goddess Sri Lalita Paramesvari, is a main constituent part of this Purana.

Brahma Vaivarta Purana

This Purana is presently available in 18000 or 18500 slokas varying from source to source. This four Khandas: Brahma Khanda, Prakriti Khanda, Ganesha Khanda and Sri Krishna Janma Khanda. The 16th Adhyaya of Brahma Khanda dealing with the science of Indian Medicine Ayurveda has a great importance. The Prakriti Khanda establishes PRAKRITI as the Prime Cause of the Universe and the Goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Savitri, Radha and others as the Divine Manifestations of that MULA PRAKRITI. Ganesha Khanda describes the detailed story of the Birth and Grace of Ganesha. Sri Krishna Janmakhanda has the very interesting instance of the Marriage of Radha and Sri Krishna ritualistically performed by the Creator

Brahma in the presence of all Gods and Nanda. The People of Gauda Region of India consider this as the holy text in their tradition of Sri Krishna cult.

Varaha Purana

This is in the form of a conversation between the Goddess Earth (Bhu Devi) and Varaha Swami (The incarnation of Vishnu), the Earth as the questioner and Varaha Swami as the narrator. Hence this is called Varaha Purana. According to various source this purana had 25000 slokas. But this is presently available in 11000 slokas. While the ancient text was consisting of innumerable Shiva Legends the presently available texts presents all detailed accounts of Indian Vishnu cult, the rituals related to Vishnu such as : Matsya Dvadasi, Kurma Dvadasi, Varaha Dvadasi, Nrsimha Dvadasi, Vamana Dvadasi, Prasurama Dvadasi, Rama Dvadasi, Ashadha Dvadasi, Buddha Dvadasi, Kalki Dvadasi and Padmanabha Dvadasi. The episodes of Madhura, Nachiketas and various Vishnu incarnations have prominence in the present text.

Curiously there are several aspects of Ramanujya Vaishnava cult, the importance of Pancharatra Agama and many standardized aspects of Vishnu cult found in this text. Hence some scholars opine that these are latter interpolations.

Vamana Purana

This is one of the smaller Puranas of the 18 Mahapuranas consisting of 10000 slokas in 95 Adhyayas. This consists of the stories of various incarnations of Lord Vishnu. This extols the greatness of Lord Shiva and Shiva Bhakti with high attention. The details of a good number of Shiva Bhakti kshetras is note worthy here.

Vayu Purana

This is 24000 slokas according to all sources and is in 112 Adhyayas. Another popular name of this Purana is Shiva Purana. This Purana has four quarters by names Prakriya Pada, Anushanga Pada, Upodghata Pada and Upasamhara Pada. This texts gives many interesting aspects of Cosmology. Then it deals in detail with the Varna Dharmas and Ashrama Dharmas. The Geographical description of the earth given in this Purana is vivid and detailed. In the Adhyayas 50 to 53 the astronomical description also given with all rare details of the celestial world. The information about Yajnas, Yagas, The sages, the races of sages, ancient royal dynasties and the social customs has a great prominence in assessing the ancient Indian Knowledge spheres. The chapters 86 and 87 deal with the secrets of Music. Though this is said to be a Purana dealing with the stories of the glory of Siva there is a considerable account of various incarnations of Vishnu also. While 11th to 15th chapters deal with Pasupata Yoga with a

lot many facts and method of practising it, the last 9 chapters of the text are spared for an exhaustive narration of Vaishnavism.

Vishnu Purana

This is one of the most authentic one among the 18 Puranas. This has 23000 slokas distributed to six Amshas and 126 Adhyayas. The first Amsha is about the Creation of the Universe. The second Amsha gives a detailed Geographical Picture of the Globe. The Third Amsha is meant for the elaboration of Varna Dharmas and Ashrama Dharmas. The fourth Amsha exclusively explains the stories of the Kings of Chandra Vamsha (The Lunar Dynasty). In the fifth Amsha the story of Sri Krishna is narrated which matches at length with the Dasama Skandha of Srimadbhagavata. The sixth Amsha is about the very systematic process of Dissolution of the Universe. This Purana reconciles both the paths of Bhakti and Jnana to pave a safer and straight way for salvation. The specialty of this Purana is that it was quoted by Adi Shankara also. He paid respect to this text on par with the text of the Mahabharata.

Agni Purana

This Purana is encyclopedic by nature having 16000 slokas in 383 Adhyayas presenting the stories of all the incarnations of Vishnu, the story of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in brief. Besides these stories many chapters are spared for dealing with various branches of learning such as : Temple Architecture, canons of Indian ethical code, Ritualistic procedures, Astronomy, Astrology, Prosody, Grammar, Poetics, Yoga Sastra, Gemology, Ayurveda, Geology and subjects related to many other sciences and arts.

Narad Purana

This Purana is in praise of the Glory of Vishnu in 25000 slokas and is divided into two parts. In the Purva Bhaga of this Purana there are 125 Adhyayas and in the Uttara Bhaga there are 82 Adhyayas. This text highlights the Pancharatra Agama tradition. This purana gives a detailed information of various festivals and rituals that occur on all different Tithis in both bright fortnight and dark fortnight of all the twelve months of a year. Particularly the 24 Ekadasivratas in a cycle of every year and their ritualistic and devotional importance in Sanatana Dharma are well annotated. Just like in the Agni Purana in this Text also there are very rare topics presented pertaining to Vyakarana (Grammar), Nirukta (Etymology), Jyotisha (Both Astrology and Astronomy), Chandas (Prosody) and other branches of learning. In addition to this there are many interest details of different Mantras of Rama, Hanuman, Krishna, Kali, Mahesha and other gods.

Padma Purana

This is the second largest of all the 18 Maha Puranas. It has 55000 slokas divided into six Khandas: Srishti Khanda, Bhumi Khanda, Brahma Khanda, Patala Khanda, Svarga Khanda and Uttara Khanda. As these names suggest the Srishti Khanda gives the accounts related to the Churning of Milky Ocean, the episode of the Sovereign King Prthu, The slaughter of the demon

Vrtra, The incarnation of Vamana, The story of Markandeya, The birth of Kartikeya, The slaughter of the demon Tarakasura, The story of Rama and many other stories are described in a novel manner. In the Bhumi Khanda the stories of ancient kings of different dynasties are narrated. The Brahma Khanda establishes the glory of the worship of Shiva and Keshava with equal respect. The equal stature of Brahma with Shiva and Vishnu to is very devotedly established. The Svarga Khanda presents an interesting description of the regions of Gods, Gandharvas, Apsaras and Yakshas. The episode of Shakuntala with all closest similarities with the theme of Kalidasa's Abhijnana Shakuntalam is found in this Purana and this episode of Shakuntala has striking differences from the episode of Shakuntala in the Mahabharata. The Patala Khanda describes the beauty and glory of the region of great Serpents. Scholars are of the opinion that Uttara Khanda is a latter addition as it has all the details of the clashes between Shaivas and Vaishnavas during the reign of Kulottunga Chola of 1133 AD. Besides, this part of this Purana gives details of the story of Ramanuja also.

Linga Purana

This is a Purana in 11000 slokas. This Purana deals with various incarnations of Lord Shiva. As this text has a special reference to the story of Agni Linga (A Firy Linga) this is called Linga Purana. Besides the stories of Shiva's glory this Purana gives the details of many sacred places of Shiva Temples in India.

Garuda Purana

Another name of this Purana is Sauparna Purana. Except in the Matsya Purana in all the other sources it is said that this is a text in 19000 slokas while Matsya Purana says that this has 18000 slokas only. This Purana has 264 Adhyayas in two Khandas. This is a wonderful text on different disciplines of knowledge such as: Royal Policy, Ayurveda, Architecture, and different systems of Indian Philosophy giving prime importance to Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta, Prosody, Gemology, Ethics, Agamas etc. All these matters are well described in the Purva Khanda. The latter Khanda is in 45 Adhyayas and popularly known as Preta Khanda. This part of Garuda Purana is recited in Indian tradition during the days of the demise of any person in traditional families. But this Purana gives many interesting accounts of various fields of knowledge satisfying the thirst of knowledge seekers. This Purana was narrated by Vishnu to Garuda. Hence this is known as Garuda Purana.

Kurma Purana

This Purana contains 17000 slokas according to most of the available sources. But Matsya Purana says that this is in 18000 slokas. This was narrated by Vishnu in the Kurma incarnation to the king Indradyumna. Hence this is called Kurma Purana. Descriptions of many holy places and rivers are widely presented in this text. Though this was narrated by KURMA-VISHNU the main subject matter of this Purana relates to Shiva only. Hence this is included in the list of the six Shaiva Puranas.

Skanda Purana

This is the largest of all the 18 Maha Puranas. While Shiva Purana mentions this to have 84000 slokas, all the other sources say that this has around 81000 slokas in total. The 81000 slokas are divided into six Samhitas (Texts) by names: 1. Sanatkumara Samhita (36,000 slokas), 2. Suta Samhita (6,000 slokas), 3. Shankara Samhita (30,000 slokas), 4. Vaishnava Samhita (5,000 slokas), 5. Brahma Samhita (3,000 slokas) and 6. Saura Samhita (1,000 slokas).

According to another division the entire Skanda Purana is divided into 7 khandas by names: Maheshvara Khanda, Vaishnava Khanda, Brahma Khanda, Kashi Khanda, Reva Khanda, Tapi Khanda and Prabhava Khanda.

Of all the Six Samhitas of the first division Suta Samhita is very prominent one which is with a great devotion recited by the devotees of Shiva. This Suta Samhita has four major divisions: 1. Shiva Mahatmya Khanda, 2. Jnana Yoga Khanda, 3. Mukti Khanda and 4. Yajna Vaibhava Khanda. This is a very prominent Purana on the worship of Shiva. This is rich even in the poetic beauty also when compared to all the rest of the Puranas.

THE PURPOSE OF PURANAS

Puranas narratives about Hindu cosmology and philosophy. In these narratives, you will find a complete description of a particular deity. These intriguing tales about gods are written in a story form, which talks about the omnipresent and omniscient nature of god. Puranas constitutes the essence of Vedas and it aims to set forth universal truths and in a simple manner which can be understood by people. The purpose of Puranas is to ignite the feeling of devotion for god through historical events, epics, myths, and through the intriguing anecdotes of the lives of kings and saints. Among all these Puranas, Vishnu Purana and Bhagavata Purana are the most renowned ones and display explicit devotional literature. However, none of these Puranas are completely devoted to one god; in fact all of these Puranas are intertwined, and thus, have mention of each other.

Summary

This is the brief description of all the 18 Maha Puranas. A detailed study of all the Puranas will help to estimate the valuable contributions of the Puranas in understanding and appreciating our ancient Indian Geography and Indian history. The extant Puranas reveal a lot of other matters, e.g. , philosophy, poetics, prosody, Dharmasutra, botany, chemistry, medical science, music, and architecture, sculpture, etc. In short, the Puranas are epitomes of ancient Indian culture. The Agni Purana is encyclopedic.

Essence of Puranas told by Mahrshi Vyas –

अष्टादशपुराणेषु व्यासस्य वचनद्वयम् ।

परोपकारायपुण्यं पापाय परपीडनम् ॥

Translation- In all the 18 Puranas, only two messages of Maharshi Vyas hold prominence : Doing favour to others is the 'Punya' and Giving troubles to others is the 'Paap'.

Part B: Introduction to Avatara (Incarnation)

The word 'avatara' means 'one who descends' (from Sanskrit avatarati). The descents of Vishnu from Vaikuntha to earth are his avatars or incarnations. The form in each time he descents will be different because the needs of the world each time are different. The different avatars thus balances and reinforce the dharma that rules and regulations that maintain order. They are harmed when the demands of evil clash with the good for order. As man's understanding of the world changes, desires change and so do concepts of order.. Social stability and peace on the earth must not be compromised, yet new ideas that are good for mankind must be respected. Vishnu's descents are not just about

The word specifically refers to one who descends from the spiritual sky. The word 'incarnation' is can also mean as 'one who assumed flesh body'

Meaning of Dasavatara

The word "dasavatara" or "dasa-avatara" denotes not a category of avatars like yuga-, lila-, manvantara-, but the most famous list of ten avatars. In Sanskrit "dasa" is equal to "10". We can find this list as per Garuda Purana. There are other lists as well, like 25 avatars in Bhagavata Purana but these ten are the most popular ones. These Avatars are praised by many saints and devotees in various forms of poems stotras.



Dashavatara

The ten avatars of Vishnu are called Dashavatara who is the Hindu god of preservation. Vishnu is said to descend in form of an avatar to restore cosmic order. These Avatars play a major role in shaping human evolution through centuries.

Vishnu's earthly incarnations have many avatars. His ten avatars are

Matsyavatara (fish)

Koorma (tortoise)

Varaha (boar)

Narasimha (the man lion)

Vaamana (the dwarf)

Parasurama (the axe man)

Lord Rama (the perfect human of the Ramayana)

Lord Krishna (the divine diplomat and statesman)

Gautam the Buddha

Kalki avatar (the yet to appear 10th incarnation)

(Some consider Balarama (Krishna's brother) as an avatar instead of Buddha which is 9th in the order)

In the Bhagavad Gita there is a verse which supports the theory that God incarnates on earth to guide it on the right course. "Whenever there is a decline in righteous and wherever there is a predominance of unrighteousness. I incarnate on earth"- Bhagavad Gita 4:7

Different Traditions list the avatars differently. The most accepted list of avatars is as follows

MATSYA

A SatyaYuga Avatar; when the world was at the brink of extinction Manu was instructed by God to rescue the life form on earth, he chooses 1 male and 1 female from every species, also collects plants of different species and loads them all on the big ship he had already built. The whole world was washed up in rain and as a result there was no land to stay. A fish (matsya) with horns comes to the rescue. The ship was tied to the horn of the fish, the fish pulls the ship with great speed towards the Himalayas where there was a small island for all the life forms to gradually grow and increase in number.

KOORMA

A SatyaYuga Avatar; When the devas and asuras were churning the Ocean of milk in order to get amrita, the nectar of immortality, with serpent Vasuki as the rope and the mount Mandara as the churning staff, the mountain starts to sink, Vishnu took the form of a tortoise to bear the weight of the mountain.

VARAHA

A SatyaYuga Avatar; when the demon Hiranyaksha stole the earth (goddess Bhudevi) and hid her in the primordial waters, Vishnu appeared as Varaha to rescue her. The battle between Varaha and Hiranyaksha is believed to have lasted for a thousand years. Varaha finally slew the

demon and retrieved the Earth from the ocean, lifting it on his tusks, and restored Bhudevi to her place in the universe. In the Vishnu Purana, Varaha represents yajna (sacrifice), as the eternal upholder of the earth. During the Varaha avatara His feet represent the Vedas (scriptures) His tusks represent sacrificial stakes. His teeth are offerings. His mouth is the altar with tongue of sacrificial fire. The hair on his head denotes the sacrificial grass The eyes represent the day and the night. His coarse hair represents sexual prowess The head represents the seat of the Brahmin (priest) The mane represents the hymns of the Vedas His nostrils are for oblation His joints represent the various ceremonies The ears are said to indicate rites (voluntary and obligatory) Thus, Varaha is the embodiment of the Supreme Being who brings order amidst chaos in the world by his sacrifice.

NARASIMHA

A SatyaYuga Avatar; The younger brother of Hirṇayakṣa, Hiranyakaśipu wanted revenge on Vishnu and his followers. He undertook many years of austere penance to take revenge on Vishnu for the death of his brother. Brahma thus offers the demon a boon and Hiranyakaśipu asks for immortality. Brahma tells him this is not possible, but that he could bind the death of Hiranyakaśipu with conditions. Hranyakashipu asks that he not be killed by man or animal, inside or out, day or night, on earth or the stars, with a weapon either living or inanimate.

Vishnu descended as an anthropomorphic incarnation, with the body of a man and head and claws of a lion. He then disembowels the rakshasa at the courtyard threshold of his house, at dusk, with his claws, while he lay on his thighs.

VAMANA

A Treta yuga Avatar; The dwarf incarnation, son of Kasyapa Muni and Aditi Assuming the form of a dwarf brahmachari the Lord visited the fire sacrifice of Bali Maharaja. He begged three steps of land and with those steps He took the whole universe. The fourth descendant of Hiranyakashyap, Bali, with devotion and penance was able to defeat Indra, the god of firmament. This humbled the other deities and extended his authority over the three worlds. The gods appealed to Vishnu for protection and he descended as the dwarf Vamana. During a yajna of the king, Vamana approached him and Bali promised him for whatever he asked. Vamana asked for three paces of land. Bali agreed, and the dwarf then changed his size to that of a giant. He stepped over heaven in his first stride, and the netherworld with the second.

Bali realized that Vamana was Vishnu incarnate. In deference, the king offered his head as the third place for Vamana to place his foot. The avatar did so and thus granted Bali immortality. Then in appreciation to Bali and his grandfather Prahlada, Vamana made him ruler of Pathala, the netherworld. Vamana taught King Mahabali that pride should be abandoned for advancement in life, and that wealth should be appreciated as it can easily disappear.

PARASURAMA

A Treta Yuga Avatar; King Kartavirya Arjuna and his army visited the father of Parashurama at his ashram, and the saint was able to feed them with the divine cow Kamadhenu. The king

demanded the animal, Jamadagni refused, and the king took it by force and destroyed the ashram. Parashurama then killed the king at his palace and destroyed his army. In revenge, the sons of Kartavirya killed Jamadagni. Parashurama took a vow to kill every Kshatriya on earth twenty-one times over, and filled five lakes with their blood. Ultimately, his grandfather, rishi Ruchekka, appeared and made him halt. He is a Chiranjivi (immortal), and believed to be alive today in penance at Mahendragiri.

Parashurama is most known for ridding the world of kshatriyas twenty-one times over after the mighty king Kartavirya killed his father. He played important roles in the Mahabharata and Ramayana, serving as mentor to Bhishma, Karna and Drona. Parashurama also fought back the advancing seas to save the lands of Konkan, Malabar and Kerala. He is one of the seven immortals mentioned in the scriptures.

SRIRAMA

A Treta Yuga Avatar; The prince and king of Ayodhya. Rama's life and journey is one of adherence to dharma despite harsh tests and obstacles and many pains of life and time. He is pictured as the ideal man and the perfect human. For the sake of his father's honour, Ram abandons his claim to Ayodhya's throne to serve an exile of fourteen years in the forest. While in exile from his own kingdom with his brother Lakshman and the monkey king Hanuman, his wife Sita was abducted by the demon king of Lanka, Ravana. He travelled to Ashoka Vatika in Lanka, killed the demon king and saved Sita. Lord Ramacandra, son of King Dasaratha and Kausalya. He came to perform pleasing work for the demigods, protect His devotees and kill Ravana and his followers. The Lord assumed the form of a human being and exhibited superhuman powers by controlling the Indian Ocean.

BALARAMA

There are schools of thought who consider Balarama the elder brother of Krishna as the 7th Incarnation among the Dasavathara. Balarama is elder brother of Sri Krishna performed many miracles along with Lord Krishna during the Avatar. He is portrayed as short tempered and righteous. He was teacher for Bhima and Duryodhana in the skill of Mace fighting. Throughout Krishnaleela Balarama supported Srikrishna and depicted as inseparable brother.

VASUDEVA SRI KRISHNA

A Dwapara Yuga Avatar; during the last Dwapara Yuga, which was predominantly an age of Rajas (passion/power) the earth was filled with Rajasic people and there was chaos and war everywhere. Fight for power was destroying the earth. On the plea of mother earth Lord Vishnu incarnated as Lord Krishna and killed many demons and evil kings.

His mission was not only to destroy the evil but also to give the pious people with true Dharma so that the true spirituality is understood by the people of the age. Both Balarama and Krsna appeared in the family of Vrsni (Yadu dynasty) and in doing so removed the burden of the world.

BUDDHA

A KaliYuga Avatar; this avatar is considered by a set of people among the Dasavatara as 9th Avatar instead of Balarama Avatar. In kaliyuga when the world had lost real understanding of the scriptures and was stooped in ignorance and practices without right understanding. Siddartha a prince of Sakya clan renounces his materialistic riches and left his kingdom in quest of the Truth. Later known as Buddha an enlightened man reiterated the importance of self-realization and self-effort in realizing oneself. When the world had lost real understanding of the scriptures and was stooped in ignorance (practices without right philosophy), Buddha an enlightened man reiterated the importance of self-realization and self-effort in realizing oneself.

He was responsible for changing the course of Hinduism towards the philosophy of Liberation away from the philosophy of heaven and hell. He also appeared to stop animal slaughter in the name of Vedic sacrifices by preaching non-violence and by not accepting Vedic authorities.

KALKI

A KaliYuga Avatar; Kalki is the final incarnation of Vishnu in the current Mahayuga, foretold to appear at the end of Kali Yuga, the current epoch. Religious texts called the Puranas foretell that Kalki will be atop a white horse with a drawn blazing sword. He will mount a horse, Devadatta, and taking His sword, will kill millions upon millions of degraded barbarian humans. He will also commence Satya-yuga.

Scientific analogy of Avatars and Darwinian Theory of Evolution

While many explanations are given for the 10 avatars of Vishnu, one can see striking similarity of these stories with the theory of evolution of life. There is a clear striking similarity with first 6 Avatars of Vishnu.

Some modern interpreters sequence Vishnu's ten main avatars in a definitive order, from simple life-forms to more complex, and see the Dashavataaras as a reflection, or a foreshadowing, of the modern theory of evolution. Such an interpretation was first propounded by Theosophist Helena Blavatsky in her 1877 opus *Isis Unveiled*, in which she proposed the following ordering of the Dashavataaras

INCARNATIONS OF VISHNU	DARWIN'S THEORY OF EVOLUTION
Matsya(Fish)	Life starts in water (600 million-400 million years ago)
Kurma(Turtle)	The first amphibians emerge (100 million years ago)
Varaha (Boar)	The first mammals evolve (60 million years ago)
Narasimha(half man-half lion)	Half man-half animal appear (30 million years ago)

Vamana	(short man) Homo Erectus Upright, yet short and weaponless (5 million - 2 million years ago)
Parashurama (parashu=axe, Rama=name of God)	Bronze age; the coming of Ramapithecus; development of first weapons such as axe. Homo Sapiens (350,000-100,000 years ago)

Summary

Vishnu is often depicted as reclining on a Sheshanaga – the coiled, many-headed snake floating on cosmic waters that represents the peaceful Universe. This pose symbolizes the calm and patience in the face of fear and worries that the poisonous snake represents. The message here is that you should not let fear overpower you and disturb your peace.

PART C: MORAL AND ETHICAL STORIES IN PURANAS

Puranas are treasure house of many moral illustrations. There are several stories of kings illustrative of different qualities. The Moral and Ethical standards of our nation are preserved, propagated and promoted through the stories of various kings and even common men. Necessity of morals and ethics in human life has all time demand in the human world. The following are a few stories of some noble kings to illustrate from the volumes of Puranas of India as the icons of various ethical standards.

HARISHCANDRA – TRUTH

For the sake of protecting the truth the king faced all the tests of FATE. He left the kingdom, wife and even his own son. He became the caretaker of a burial ground.

His story runs like this.

Harishchandra, was an ancestor of Rama. He ruled over Ayodhya with his wife Chandramati and son Rohitashwa. He was a just and noble king, and his subjects led a happy and peaceful life during his reign.

Harishchandra having learnt the value of truth took a vow to never tell a lie, or go back on his word. In time, he gained fame for his truthfulness, honesty and integrity. This fame reached the heaven, and the gods wanted to test him. They chose the sage Vishwamitra and sent him to test the king, and accordingly he set out his plans.

Seeking to accomplish his task, Vishwamitra tried many things to get Harishchandra to lie or to renege on a promise, but all his efforts went in vain, for Harishchandra was as committed to his values as had been heard by the gods.

Finally, Vishwamitra manipulated circumstances into a situation where Harishchandra was obliged to give up his kingdom and all his possessions to the sage. Even when thus tricked, Harishchandra gave up his kingdom with a smile, and with his wife and son, wearing only rags and barks of trees, set out for the forest. Stunned by such generosity, and in a last attempt at provoking the king, Vishwamitra asked him for the donation which is given to a sage after charity – the Dakshina. As the king had no money on him to pay the Dakshina to the sage he asked him to give a month's time to arrange for the payment.

Nowhere he could find any source to earn. He reached the holy city of Kashi. He could not get even his livelihood there. By the advice of his wife he sold her in the slave's market to an old brahmin and gave the money to the sage Vishwamitra.

To pay the sage further he joined in the service of Chandala to assist him in the cremation grounds for which he was paid some money. The king gave that money was freed from the debts of the sage Vishwamitra. The king learnt all the toughest deeds of the cremation ground under the training of the Chandala and the later was using him as an utter slave.

One day Chandramathi who was serving as a slave in the house of the old brahmin had to brought the body of Rohitaswa who was sanke bitten and died to the burial ground for cremation. As she was in her veil Harischandra could not identify her and asks her to pay him the charge of cremation. She told that she had no money with her as she was leading her life as a slave. Then he demanded her to offer her ‘golden Mangalasutra’. She was stunned. Her mangala sutra has a rare power that it could be seen only by her husband. So she could notice that he was none else than her husband.



She wept and told him the happenings. Harishchandra recognized her, and wept for his dear son, as well as their condition, but yet he demanded for money to cremate her son. The she request him to accept half of her cloths which she put on and to cremate her son. Harischandra agreed. She was tearing her clothes. Gods wanted to put an end to their test. Gods in appreciation of his great commitment to the vow of speaking TRUTH showered flowers on the couple. The gods and the sage Vishwamitra appeared before him and blessed him to get back his son alive. Yama who was in the form of Chandala also relived the king from his slavery having appeared before him in His true form of Yama. All of them permitted the king to go back to his kingdom to rule it as its king and to reach heaven after his mortal life.

Harischandra along with his wife and son reached Ayodhya ruled it justly and in his old age having made Rohitashwa the king of it reached heaven. Thus he became a synonym of Truthfulness.

NALA – THE KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The King Nala is an icon of Dharma. He prepared himself to loose his love for Damayanti for the sake of the word he gave to the Dikpalakas. When he knew that he is about to become a dwarf person he left his wife with a thought that at least she would be safer and led an insignificant life in the kingdom of Ruparna with a name Bahuka.

The details of the story are as follows:

King Veerasena of Ayodhya had two sons Nala and Pushkara. Nala wanted to marry Damayanti, the beautiful daughter of king Bhima. Damayanti did not know him, so Nala sent his swan to her.

The swan flew to Damayanti's palace and finding her alone in the garden, sang praises of Nala. Meanwhile, King Bhima arranged for her swayamvara, where many princes gathered from whom Damayanti could choose her husband. Damayanti chose Nala and they got married in spite of the Gods' play (Dikpalakas' trick) to test the committed love of both of them.

When King Veerasena died, Nala became king. He conquered many other kingdoms and became famous. This made his brother Pushkara jealous. He knew gambling was Nala's weakness. Pushkara challenged Nala to a game of dice in which Nala lost everything. Pushkara became the king and banished Nala from his kingdom.

This is all due to the wicked trick of Kali Purusha who has been awaiting a chance to deviate the king Nala from the path of Dharma as he challenged the gods that he would force Nala to deviate from the path of Dharma.

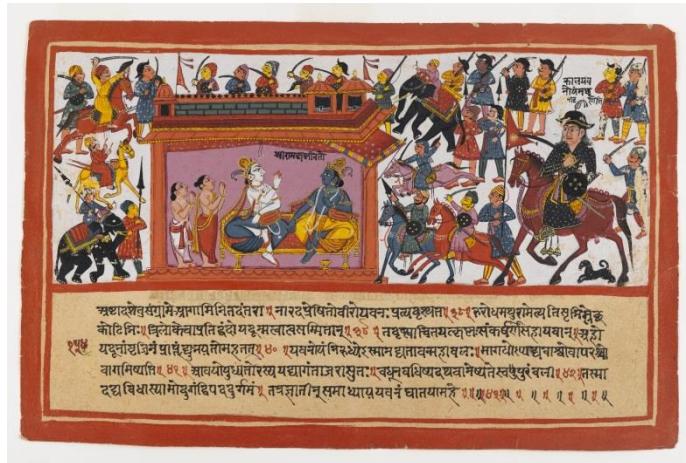
Nala went to the forest and Damayanti, who loved him very much followed him. As they walked in the forest, Damayanti injured her feet. Nala did not want the delicate Damayanti to go through hardships with him, so when she was sleeping he left her and went ahead. Further into the forest, he found a snake on the top of a tree that had caught fire from below. As he tried to bring it down, the snake bit him and Nala turned dark and developed a hunchback. Nala asked the snake, "Why did you bite me? I was trying to save your life." The snake said, "I am your father Nisadh. The Next twelve years will be full of difficulties for you. So I have changed your form to protect from your enemies. Whenever you want to get back your original form you put on this ornament. You will attain your original form." He said these words gave the ornament and disappeared.

Nala proceeded to another kingdom. Meanwhile, when Damayanti woke up she found a note from Nala asking her to go to her parents. As she moved ahead, she met a demon that threatened to eat her. Impressed with her fearlessness he came into his real form. He was actually a god, who told her that she would unite with her husband after twelve years. Damayanti proceeded to Achalpura kingdom where she became the queen's maid. Nala went to the kingdom of Ruparna and became a servant of the king. Many years passed.

One day, King Bhima's men found Damayanti in Achalpura and brought her back to her father. King Bhima tried to find Nala but failed, so he made a plan. He arranged the swayamvara of Damayanti knowing that when Nala came to know about the second marriage of his wife, he would certainly come to her. King Bhima was right. Nala came with his master, the king of Samsumara. A day before the swayamvara Damayanti saw the dark hunch back servant. She immediately recognised him. Nala also put on the ornament given by his father and regained his original looks. But the swayamvara had been arranged to Damayanti asked him to be present there. But the swayamvara had been arranged to Damayanti asked him to be present there.

On the day of swayamvara she put the garland around Nala's neck and they were united. The twelve-year period was also over. With the help of King Bhima's army, Nala won his kingdom back and again became the king of Ayodhya.

Eventually, Nala and Damayanti had a son. After making him king, they renounced the world in search of spiritual enlightenment. This story presents Nala as an icon of Righteousness.



SHIBI – EPITOME OF HELPING AND SAVING OTHERS

Sibi Chakravarthi is an epitome of saving the refugees. His magnanimity is proved through his preparedness to offer his lives for the sake of protecting a dove from a Merlin.

Shibi story

Shibi chakravarti was the son of Ushinara maharaja. Shibi was a maha-daata and his virtue of charity was praised by many in the 14 bhuvanas. Devendra and Agnideva once wanted to test the greatness of Shibi's virtue of charity. Agnideva took the form of a Kapotam (dove). Devendra took that of a Syena (merlin).

The Kapotam, which was chased by the Syena, came to Shibi chakravarti's royal court and pleaded "Help! Help! O King!" Seeing this, a Raja-purohita said "Maharaja! With a fear for life this dove came to you. Every being has fear of death. Also there is no greater deed than protecting others. However we know that giving shelter to a dove is an indication of one's own death. Hence we may have to perform some compensatory ritual which will be necessary".

Dove replied "Maharaja! Afraid of the Syena I have asked you to save me. Actually I am a great sage, now in this form. Vedas say that a king must protect the wretched and helpless". The Syena, which reached the royal court by then, said "Maharaja! Every being takes many forms. This creature came to you seeking your help in the form of this dove. Don't forget that dove is food for a Syena. Please leave this dove, which is my food, and save my life".

Shibi chakravarti thought "In a country ruled by a king who does not give assurance from fear to a refugee who has fear for life there will be no rains, no crops and it will be the nilayam for Kshaama-devata. Also the people will have to face many difficulties and finally such king will reach narakam.

However, the Syena is with hunger and has put in a lot of effort chasing its prey. Taking away food from its mouth is also a sin. Now what should I do?"

Shibi: O Syena! I will give you a better, tastier food than this. Please leave this dove.

Syena: Maharaja! No other thing can be tastier than this flesh. It was decided by Brahma Deva that doves are food for us.

Shibi: O Syena! I cannot leave this dove that is in my shelter and cannot cross the limits of righteousness. I am also ready to leave my life to save that of the dove. All worlds also know this. You ask me whatever you want except this.

Syena: Maharaja! If you are really such a kind one, give me the flesh from your right thigh which is equal in weight to that of the dove.

Immediately Shibi chakravarti got a balance and kept the Kapotam on one side and started to cut his thigh and weigh it. How much ever he cut it was not enough. He tried cutting flesh from his right thigh, then he himself sat on the balance. Syena said "enough. I am going" and went away. Seeing this the king Shibi asked "O dove! Who are you? What is your story?"

"Maharaja! I am Agnihotra. This Syena is Devendra, We came to test your kindness to the beings who seek your shelter and your virtue of charity. You qualified it. Your fame will spread to all the worlds. Your son will also keep your name" said and both the Fire God and Indra appeared before him in their real forms and bestowed up on him many boons.

PURURAVAS – VALOR

The king Pururavas who was other wise popular as Vikram is known for his valor in helping Indra and also for his love for Urvashi.

Vikram used to go directly to the royal court of Indra where he used to be honored by the offering of the half-throne of the King of the Gods. It was because of the dauntless heroism of Pururavas in killing all the demons. He equally loved Urvashi as more than his own life.

GARUDA – MATRUBHAKTI

Garuda is a treasure of all virtues. His strength is peerless. He is a mighty personality. Besides all these qualities his devotion to his mother is unique.

Garuda is the son of Kashyap, a great sage, and Vinata, a daughter of Daksha, a famous king. Garuda was born with a great hatred for the evil and he is supposed to roam about the universe devouring the bad, and also well-known for his aversion to snakes, a dislike he had acquired from his mother, Vinata.

Kashyap, Garuda's father, had two wives: Kadru, the elder, and Vinata, Garuda's mother, the younger. There was great rivalry between the two wives. Once, they had an argument over the color of the horse Uchchaisravas, produced during the Churning of the Ocean just after the time

of creation. Each chose a color and laid a wager on her own choice. The one who lost would become the other's slave. Kadru proved to be right by cheating Vinatha with the help of her sons Nagas who by the word of their mother entwined to the tail of the horse creating an illusion from a distance that the tail part of the horse was black. And, as part of the agreement, imprisoned Vinata in the nether regions, Patala, where she was guarded by serpents, the sons of Kadru herself.

Garuda, on hearing of his mother's imprisonment, descended to Patala and asked the serpents to release Vinata. They agreed to do so and demanded as ransom a cup of amrita (ambrosia). So Garuda set off for the celestial mountain where the amrita was kept. Before he could get to the amrita he had to overcome three hazards set up by the gods to guard the celestial drink. He had a great fight with them all and defeated them. Indra, king of the gods, struck him with his thunderbolt but Garuda proved a superior warrior and defeated the gods and continued unscathed on his journey to Patala.

When the serpents got the amrita they were overjoyed and released Vinata. Garuda got his mother back but he became an inveterate enemy of the serpents, the sons of his mother's rival Kadru. Also the serpents, the Nagas, symbolized evil and that automatically invoked Garuda's hatred. This is an instance of the staunch devotion of Garuda towards his mother.

After saving his own mother Garuda took back Amrita and handed over it to Indra. In that process some drops of Amrita fell on the Darbha grass which were licked by the snakes and as a result their tongues were forked into two due to the sharpness of the Darbha Grass. Ever since all the snakes became double tongued.

DHARMA VYADHA - DUTIFULNESS

The story of Dharma vyadha supports the Pauranic principle that it is acceptable even if a Dharma practically followed by a person is imparted by that person irrespective of all differences.

This story was narrated by Markandeya to Yudhisthira. Once there was a Brahmana named Kaushika who was a highly principled celibate. He did a very sincere penance. He studied all the Vedas and Vedangas very keenly. Once he was sitting under a tree reciting vedas. A crane sitting on the tree left excreta on him from above the tree. Kaushika became very angry and looked at the crane. Due to his serious and angry looks the crane fell down dead.

Thereafter another time Kaushika went to beg alms. He stood in front of a house. The housewife was busy in cleaning the utensils. Then her husband arrived. She served him sincerely, washing and drying his feet and then feeding him. After that she came out with alms to the mendicant Kaushika and said, "Sorry, pardon me for waiting". Kaushika looked at her very angrily for keeping the brahmana in waiting. But she said, "Be not angry with me and remember that I kept you waiting only because I was dutifully serving my husband. I am no crane that perched on the tree, to be killed by a violent thought and your rage can do no harm to a woman who devotes

herself to the service of her husband. O Great one! You do not know the secret of duty, and you are also not aware that anger is the great enemy that dwells in man. Forgive the delay in attending to you. Go to Mithila and be instructed in the secret of good life by Dharmavyadha living in that city.” The Brahmana was apologetic and he thanked the lady and went to Mithila to meet Dharmavyadha.

He thought he is searching for some lonely hermitage. Instead he finally reached a butcher’s shop, in which was a man selling meat. He was astonished when he learnt that this man was Dharmavyadha. The Brahmana was shocked beyond measure and stood at a distance in disgust. The butcher suddenly rose from his seat, came to the Brahmana and inquired, “Revered sir! Are you well? Did that chaste Brahmana lady send you to me?” Kaushika was stunned to receive that question from him. This is a second surprising thing to him to be received from him. The Butcher said, “Let us go to my home”. The Brahmana saw there a happy family and greatly struck by the devotion with which he served his parents. He took his lessons from that butcher on dharma, man’s calling and duty.

Afterwards Kaushika returned to his house and began to tend his parent’s duty which he had rather neglected before. Thus this story narrates how the duty-mindedness of a person even a person like butcher makes him successful and acceptable to be a preacher to others like the celibate Kaushika.

DADHICHI – OFFERING EVERYTHING

नास्यदेयंमहात्मनाम्।

Nothing is not difficult to be offered to others by great people.

Dadhichi was a sage who offered his own back bone in the gesture of charity. His backbone became the mighty weapon Vajrayudha of Indra with the help of which Indra killed the demon Vrtra.

RAMA – ALL VIRTUES

क्षणियैः धायतभेचापः नातशभद्वोर्वददणत्। The rulers of royal class hold a bow in their hands just to protect the helpless people. Hence Rama held the bow and was called Kodanda Rama. Rama stands as a human manifestation of Dharma. Hence he is said to have been the representative of Dharma. (रामोणवग्रहवान्धमभः।) He has all the noble qualities of an ideal human being.

SUMMARY

शरीरस्यगुर्नांचदरूमत्यन्तमन्तरम्।

शरीरंक्षिणवध्वंणिकल्पान्तस्थाणयनोर्गुर्हीतः॥ There is a great gap between the body and virtues of every man. The body is perishable where as the virtues stay even after the lapse of the great length of time Kalpa.

Thus Puranas suggest everyone to give utmost preference to developing a good character and noble qualities for the welfare of society and individuals.

SCIENTISTS OF ANCIENT INDIA

In this lesson, you will read about the contributions made by ancient Indians in the field of Mathematics and Science, including Medical Science, Ayurveda, Yoga, Astronomy, Astrology, etc. You will be surprised to know that a lot of scientific knowledge was evolved in ancient India, so many years ago.

1. MATHEMATICS & ASTRONOMY

Science and Mathematics were highly developed during the ancient period in India. Ancient Indians contributed immensely to the knowledge in Mathematics as well as various branches of Science. In this section, we will read about the developments in Mathematics and the scholars who contributed to it. You will be surprised to know that many theories of modern day mathematics were actually known to ancient Indians. However, since ancient Indian mathematicians were not as good in documentation and dissemination as their counterparts in the modern western world, their contributions did not find the place they deserved. Moreover, the western world ruled over most of the world for a long time, which empowered them to claim superiority in every way, including in the field of knowledge. Let us now take a look at some of these contributions of ancient Indian mathematicians.

1.1 Baudhayana

Baudhayana was the first one ever to arrive at several concepts in Mathematics, which were later rediscovered by the western world. The value of pi was first calculated by him. As you know, pi is useful in calculating the area and circumference of a circle. What is known as Pythagoras theorem today is already found in Baudhayana's Sulva Sutra, which was written several years before the age of Pythagoras.

1.2 Aryabhatta

Aryabhatta was a fifth century mathematician, astronomer, astrologer and physicist. He was a pioneer in the field of mathematics. At the age of 23, he wrote Aryabhattiya, which is a summary of mathematics of his time. There are four sections in this scholarly work. In the first section he describes the method of denoting big decimal numbers by alphabets. In the second section, we find difficult questions from topics of modern day Mathematics such as number theory, geometry, trigonometry and Beejganita (algebra). The remaining two sections are on astronomy. Aryabhatta showed that zero was not a numeral only but also a symbol and a concept. Discovery of zero enabled Aryabhatta to find out the exact distance between the earth and the moon. The discovery of zero also opened up a new dimension of negative numerals. As we have seen, the last two sections of Aryabhattiya were on Astronomy. Evidently, Aryabhatta contributed greatly to the field of science, too, particularly Astronomy. In ancient India, the science of astronomy was well advanced. It was called Khagolshastra. Khagol was the famous astronomical observatory at Nalanda, where Aryabhatta studied. In fact science of astronomy was highly advanced and our ancestors were

proud of it. The aim behind the development of the science of astronomy was the need to have accurate calendars, a better understanding of climate and rainfall patterns for timely sowing and choice of crops, fixing the dates of seasons and festivals, navigation, calculation of time and casting of horoscopes for use in astrology. Knowledge of astronomy, particularly knowledge of the tides and the stars, was of great importance in trade, because of the requirement of crossing the oceans and deserts during night time. Disregarding the popular view that our planet earth is ‘Achala’ (immovable), Aryabhatta stated his theory that ‘earth is round and rotates on its own axis’ He explained that the appearance of the sun moving from east to west is false by giving examples. One such example was: When a person travels in a boat, the trees on the shore appear to move in the opposite direction. He also correctly stated that the moon and the planets shined by reflected sunlight. He also gave a scientific explanation for solar and lunar eclipse clarifying that the eclipse were not because of Rahhu and/or Ketu or some other rakshasa (demon).

1.3 Brahmgupta

In 7th century, Brahmgupta took mathematics to heights far beyond others. In his methods of multiplication, he used place value in almost the same way as it is used today. He introduced negative numbers and operations on zero into mathematics. He wrote Brahm Sputa Siddantika through which the Arabs came to know our mathematical system.

1.4 Bhaskaracharya

Bhaskaracharya was the leading light of 12th Century. He was born at Bijapur, Karnataka. He is famous for his book Siddanta Shiromani. It is divided into four sections: Lilavati (Arithmetic), Beejaganit (Algebra), Goladhyaya (Sphere) and Grahaganit (mathematics of planets). Bhaskara introduced Chakrawat Method or the Cyclic Method to solve algebraic equations. This method was rediscovered six centuries later by European mathematicians, who called it inverse cycle. In the nineteenth century, an English man, James Taylor, translated Lilavati and made this great work known to the world.

1.5 Mahaviracharya

There is an elaborate description of mathematics in Jain literature (500 B.C -100 B.C). Jain gurus knew how to solve quadratic equations. They have also described fractions, algebraic equations, series, set theory, logarithms and exponents in a very interesting manner. Jain Guru Mahaviracharya wrote Ganit Sara Sangraha in 850A.D. which is the first textbook on arithmetic in present day form. The current method of solving Least common Multiple (LCM) of given numbers was also described by him. Thus, long before John Napier introduced it to the world, it was already known to Indians.

2 SCIENCE

As in Mathematics, ancient Indians contributed to the knowledge in Science, too. Let us now learn about the contributions of some scientists of ancient India.

2.1 Kanad

Kanad was a sixth century scientist of Vaisheshika School, one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. His original name was Aulukya. He got the name Kanad, because even as a child, he was interested in very minute particles called “kana”. His atomic theory can be a match to any modern atomic theory. According to Kanad, material universe is made up of kanas, (anu/atom) which cannot be seen through any human organ. These cannot be further subdivided. Thus, they are indivisible and indestructible. This is, of course, as you may be knowing, what the modern atomic theory also says.

2.2 Varahamihira

Varahamihira was another well known scientist of the ancient period in India. He lived in the Gupta period. Varahamihira made great contributions in the fields of hydrology, geology and ecology. He was one of the first scientists to claim that termites and plants could be the indicators of the presence of underground water. He gave a list of six animals and thirty plants, which could indicate the presence of water. He gave very important information regarding termites (Deemak or insects that destroy wood), that they go very deep to the surface of water level to bring water to keep their houses (bambis) wet. Another theory, which has attracted the world of science is the earthquake cloud theory given by Varahmihira in his Brhat Samhita. The thirty second chapter of this samhita is devoted to signs of earthquakes. He has tried to relate earthquakes to the influence of planets, undersea activities, underground water, unusual cloud formation and abnormal behaviour of animals.

Another field where Varahamihira's contribution is worth mentioning is Jyotish or Astrology. Astrology was given a very high place in ancient India and it has continued even today. Jyotish, which means science of light, originated with the Vedas. It was presented scientifically in a systematic form by Aryabhatta and Varahmihira. You have already seen that Aryabhatta devoted two out of the four sections of his work Aryabhattiyam to astronomy, which is the basis for Astrology. Astrology is the science of predicting the future. Varahamihira was one of the nine gems, who were scholars, in the court of Vikramaditya. Varahamihira's predictions were so accurate that king Vikramaditya gave him the title of 'Varaha'.

2.3 Nagarjuna

Nagarjuna was a tenth century scientist. The main aim of his experiments was to transform base elements into gold, like the alchemists in the western world. Even though he was not successful in his goal, he succeeded in making an element with gold-like shine. Till date, this technology is used in making imitation jewelry. In his treatise, Rasaratnakara, he has discussed methods for the extraction of metals like gold, silver, tin and copper.

3 MEDICAL SCIENCE IN ANCIENT INDIA (AYURVEDA & YOGA)

As you have read, scientific knowledge was in a highly advanced stage in ancient India. In keeping with the times, Medical Science was also highly developed. Ayurveda is the indigenous system of medicine that was developed in Ancient India. The word Ayurveda literally means the science of good health and longevity of life. This ancient Indian system of medicine not only helps in treatment of diseases but also in finding the causes and symptoms of diseases. It is a guide for the healthy as well as the sick. It defines health as an equilibrium in three doshas, and diseases as disturbance in these three doshas. While treating a disease with the help of herbal medicines, it aims at removing the cause of disease by striking at the roots. The main aim of ayurveda has been health and longevity. It is the oldest medical system of our planet. A treatise on Ayurveda, Atreya Samhita, is the oldest medical book of the world. Charak is called the father of ayurvedic medicine and Susruta the father of surgery. Susruta, Charak, Madhava, Vaghbhata and Jeevak were noted ayurvedic practitioners. Do you know that Ayurveda has lately become very popular in the western world? This is because of its many advantages over the modern system of medicine called Allopathy, which is of western origin.

3.1 Susruta

Susruta was a pioneer in the field of surgery. He considered surgery as “the highest division of the healing arts and least liable to fallacy”. He studied human anatomy with the help of a dead body. In Susruta Samhita, over 1100 diseases are mentioned including fevers of twenty-six kinds, jaundice of eight kinds and urinary complaints of twenty kinds. Over 760 plants are described. All parts, roots, bark, juice, resin, flowers etc. were used. Cinnamon, sesame, peppers, cardamom, ginger are household remedies even today.

In Susruta Samhita, the method of selecting and preserving a dead body for the purpose of its detailed study has also been described. The dead body of an old man or a person who died of a severe disease was generally not considered for studies. The body needed to be perfectly cleaned and then preserved in the bark of a tree. It was then kept in a cage and hidden carefully in a spot in the river. There the current of the river softened it. After seven days it was removed from the river. It was then cleaned with a brush made of grass roots, hair and bamboo. When this was done, every inner or outer part of the body could be seen clearly.

Susruta's greatest contribution was in the fields of Rhinoplasty (plastic surgery) and ophthalmic surgery (removal of cataracts). In those days, cutting of nose and/or ears was a common punishment. Restoration of these or limbs lost in wars was a great blessing. In Susruta Samhita, there is a very accurate step-by-step description of these operations. Surprisingly, the steps followed by Susruta are strikingly similar to those followed by modern surgeons while doing plastic surgery. Susruta Samhita also gives a description of 101 instruments used in surgery. Some serious operations performed included taking foetus out of the womb, repairing the damaged rectum, removing stone from the bladder, etc. Does it not sound interesting and wonderful?

3.2 Charak

Charak is considered the father of ancient Indian science of medicine. He was the Raj Vaidya (royal doctor) in the court of Kanishka. His Charak Samhita is a remarkable book on medicine. It has the description of a large number of diseases and gives methods of identifying their causes as well as the method of their treatment. He was the first to talk about digestion, metabolism and immunity as important for health and so medical science. In Charak Samhita, more stress has been laid on removing the cause of disease rather than simply treating the illness. Charak also knew the fundamentals of Genetics. Don't you find it fascinating that thousands of years back, medical science was at such an advanced stage in India.

3.3 Yoga & Patanjali

The science of Yoga was developed in ancient India as an allied science of Ayurveda for healing without medicine at the physical and mental level. The term Yoga has been derived from the Sanskrit work Yoktra. Its literal meaning is "yoking the mind to the inner self after detaching it from the outer subjects of senses". Like all other sciences, it has its roots in the Vedas. It defines chitta i.e. dissolving thoughts, emotions and desires of a person's consciousness and achieving a state of equilibrium. It sets in motion the force that purifies and uplifts the consciousness to divine realization. Yoga is physical as well as mental. Physical yoga is called Hathyoga. Generally, it aims at removing a disease and restoring healthy condition to the body. Rajayoga is mental yoga. Its goal is self realization and liberation from bondage by achieving physical mental, emotional and spiritual balance.

Yoga was passed on by word of mouth from one sage to another. The credit of systematically presenting this great science goes to Patanjali. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Aum is spoken of as the symbol of God. He refers to Aum as a cosmic sound, continuously flowing through the ether, fully known only to the illuminated. Besides Yoga Sutras, Patanjali also wrote a work on medicine and worked on Panini's grammar known as Mahabhasaya.

Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah | 1.2

Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (Chitta) from taking various forms (Vrittis).

This means that yoga means controlling the thought waves of the mind. The thoughts, feelings, emotions arising in the mind are vrittis (nature), which should be controlled. This is called yoga. The broader perspective is expected and the word Chitta here means Individual consciousness, which covers all states conscious, sub conscious and unconscious.

While trying to control the vrittis (thoughts, emotions, feelings), certain disturbances are created which stop or divert the growth. Patanjali has addressed them as "Antaray(Disturbances) creating chitta vikshepa".

Yoga has its roots about 5000 years BC as described in Vedic Philosophy and Tantras. Patanjali, great sage composed this path into a Darshan(Philosophy) in his Book Patanjali Yoga Sutra. In which he has formulated Yoga as a Eight Limbs or Eight Fold path.

EIGHT LIMBS OF ASHTANGA YOGA

1. Yama (Principles or moral code)
 - Ahimsa - A principle of non-violence
 - Satya - A principle of Truthfulness
 - Asteya - A principle of non stealing
 - Brahmacharya - Continence / Celibacy
 - Aparigah - A principle of non-hoarding or non possessiveness
2. Niyama (Personal Disciplines)
 - Shoucha - Purity
 - Santosh - Contentment
 - Tapa - Endurance
 - Swadhyaya - Self study
 - Eshwar Pranidhan - Dedication
3. Asana (Yoga Positions or Yogic Postures)

A stable and comfortable posture which helps attain mental equilibrium.

4. Pranayama (Yogic Breathing)

Extension and control of breath.

5. Pratyahara (Withdrawal of Senses)

A mental preparation to increase the power of mind.

6. Dharana (Concentration on Object)

Concentration of mind on one object and its field.

7. Dhyana (Meditation)

With drawing mind from all external objects and focusing it on one point and meditating on it.

8. Samadhi (Salvation)

State of Super bliss, joy and merging individual consciousness in to universal consciousness. Union between Jivatman and Paramatman. Union of Shiva and Shakti in Sahasrar Chakra (the top of the head). Realizing the Bramhan (pure consciousness) or Realization of God is the ultimate achievement of Human Birth.

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RELIGIONS



Buddhism

Buddhist literature is divided into canonical and non-canonical texts. This is the most widely accepted and popular categorization of Buddhist texts.

Canonical texts

Canonical literature deals with Buddha teachings or the word of the Buddha and its main divisions are called Pitakas – Sutras, Vinaya and Abhidharma. In Pali language, together they are called Tripitakas, or “The Three Baskets”. Canonical texts are called Sutras in San-skrit and Suttas in Pali.

Non canonical texts

Non-canonical texts are observations and commentaries on canonical texts in Pali, Tibetan, Chinese and other East Asian languages, to explain the canonical texts to monks in Sri Lanka. Pali, a Middle Indo-Aryan language of north Indian origin, is the classical and liturgical language of the Theravada Buddhism. Theravada translates to ‘the doctrines of the elders’ and these elders are referred to as senior Buddhist monks. A major chunk of the non-canonical texts were composed by the Sri Lankan monks. Non canonical Buddhist texts also include some of the most important non-canonical works of Sri Lankan monks including The Dipavamsa (the Island Chronicle), The Mahavamsa (The Great Chronicle), and Culavamsa (the Lesser Chronicle). Non canonical texts feature important historical information, quotes, definitions, biographical stories, rituals and jatakas (birth stories).

The ravada and Mahayana Buddhism

In the modern times, Buddhism is divided into two main branches – Theravada in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia and Mahayana in Himalayas and East Asia. Theravada uses Buddha teachings preserved in Pali canon or Tripitaka as a core scripture. Mahayana is the largest major tradition of Buddhism with total 53% practitioners. It spreads from India to Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, China and countries in Southeast Asia. It teaches that enlightenment can be attained in one’s life time, even by a lay man. Mahayana considers Tripitaka as sacred text, while including other holy texts as well.

Tripitaka

Tripitaka, known as Pali canon, is the earliest collection of Buddhist writings and the word literally translates to three baskets (tri-three and pitaka = basket). Tripitaka is considered as the core scripture in all branches of Buddhism.

1. Vinaya Pitaka

The first basket Vinaya Pitaka or Discipline basket teaches about the rules and guidelines of monastic life. From basic moral principles to guidelines on interaction between monks, nuns and ordinary people to robe-making, Vinaya Pitaka gives a deep insight into 227 regulations made for monastic discipline. The origin of these rules and further development are also explained in Vinaya Pitaka.

2. Sutta Pitaka

Sutta Pitaka, the Discourse Basket, is the largest basket consisting of the discourses ascribed to Buddha and his close disciples. Sutta Pitaka is also given the name of Buddhavacana, which simply translates to ‘the word of the Buddha’. It contains the records of Buddha teachings, presents theology (study of the nature of god and religious beliefs) and a detailed account on the matters of moral behaviour for all monks. Dhammapada is the most widely known Buddhist text and an important part of Sutta Pitaka.

3. Abhidharma Pitaka

Abhidharma Pitaka or the Basket of Special Doctrines mainly consists of poetries, songs and stories that revolve around the life of Buddha and his previous lives. It comprises 7 works which mainly deal with the philosophy and doctrine of Buddhism appearing in the suttas. Many Buddhist schools do not consider Abhidharma as canonical text.

Dhammapada – The Buddha's path to wisdom

Found in Pali canon and forming the core testament of ancient Bud-dhism, Dharampada or Dhammapada is a succinct expression of Bud-dha's teachings. It offers instructions about the true nature of your exis-tence and help you walk the path of liberation. The teachings in Dhammapada are solely based on Buddha's understanding of reality and his clarity of thought. The one who practices these teachings attain the same level of understanding and knowledge which help extricate the root cause of suffering.

The twenty six chapters with four hundred and twenty three verses in Dhammapada throw light on the multiple aspects of Buddha teachings. Through these teachings Buddha wanted people to free themselves from the evils of hatred, passion and ignorance, in order to achieve the greatest of conquests: the conquest of self. Max Muller translated the verses of Dhammapada in 1870 and then it was later translated into many languages in many countries in the world.

Some important verses of Dhammapada

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment. Psychological Science Study defines it as "the non-judgemental awareness of experiences in the present moment". It is one of the most important verses that helps achieve tranquility and insight meditation.

Buddha's last verses before he died also emphasised on mindfulness, which should be endeavoured diligently to free yourself from the round of rebirths. It is believed that this verse on mindfulness had such a profound impact on Emperor Asoka of India and King Anawrahta of Burma, that they adopted Buddhism and propagated its teachings in their respective countries. One needs to practice mindfulness meditation to attain this blissful state of tranquillity.

Buddhist Quotes:

1. "All that we are, is the result of what we have thought. It is founded on our thoughts. It is made up of our thoughts. If one speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows one, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon".

Explanation:

Every experience begins with a thought. No matter where you go, your evil acts and thoughts will follow. And it will eventually result in unpleasant circumstances and bad experiences. This is similar to the cartwheel that follows the foot of the ox that draws the wagon. However, if you act with good thoughts and good deeds, happiness will follow like a shadow that never leaves.

2. Who bears within them enmity:

"He has abused and beaten me,
defeated me and plundered me",
hate is not allayed for them.

Explanation:

Dwelling on the thought that you were insulted, robbed, assaulted and defeated will continue to increase your anger. It becomes difficult for a person to subside his anger when he keeps thinking over his imaginary trouble. This also leads to the desire to avenge. The only way to overcome your anger is forgive and forget the wrongs done to you.

3. "Better than a thousand hollow words is one useful word, hearing which one attains peace"

Explanation:

This is similar to saying the man who conquers himself is always better than a man who conquered thousands of battles. Or you can put this as conquest of self is always better than conquest of others. A single stanza that makes you feel peaceful is better than a thousand verse poem of empty sounds. With this you can relate to the common adage 'simple living and high

thinking'. It highlights the beauty of minimalism in life. For example, it is always better to have single faithful friend than a bunch of fake friends.

Buddhist Philosophical Solutions

How to bring the science of happiness to life

The material and physical world keep people shackled to it and do not let them see the reality. This is the reason Buddha believed in a minimalist life, which helps illuminate the higher consciousness.

Buddha focuses people on Vimutti: Spiritual freedom which is the liberation of mind from bonds and fetters, physical and mental sufferings, wandering in samsara, and the cycle of rebirths.

Meditation is certainly one of the important techniques to control your mind.

It brings about

- I. A sense of detachment from the world
- II. Trains the mind to learn the art of living in the present, without worrying about the past or the future.
- III. Helps get rid of your delusions, misunderstandings and cravings.

Everyday Philosophy Guidelines

- The minimum humans can do to live a peaceful life is make peace with ourselves and live in harmony with our family and fulfill our social responsibilities.
- It is important to eliminate conflicts that poison relationships and bring immense sufferings.
- These guidelines are basic and similar to what most of the world religions teach. Along with keeping your personal integrity intact, you must consider the welfare of the ones who may get affected by your actions.
- One must try to exercise self control over his mind, body and speech.
- One should abstain from destroying life, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxicants.
- The person on the path to enlightenment should treat all beings with kindness and compassion and live a sober upright life.
- Fulfilling duties to parents, family and friends is important.
- Manifesto of peace
- Responding hatred with hatred will only breed more hatred and more violence leading to the vicious circle of vengeance and retaliation. Hatred should only be answered with love. You should learn to be patient and forgiving when someone wrongs you. In such circumstances, control your anger like a driver controls a chariot.
- The quality of generosity, truthfulness, patience and compassion distinguishes a superior human being from the ordinary ones.
- The scent of virtue, the Buddha declares, is sweeter than the scent of flowers and perfume.

• A good person will always outshine and like water his generosity will always find its way. Like a lotus always rises above the muck, the disciple of Buddha will rise above the mass of ignorant fools to attain wisdom.

Mindfulness:

Mindfulness meditation is good for your mental and physical health

- I. It decreases the stress hormone cortisol and thus helps lower stress.
- II. It helps you conquer the common blind spot and analyse yourself in order to get to know your true self.
- III. According to the researchers from the University of California, college students who practiced mindfulness meditation performed better in the verbal reasoning section of the GRE. The study says that it is an efficient way to improve your working memory with wide reaching consequences.
- IV. It helps your brain have better control over processing pain and emotions, thus makes you feel more focused and Zen.
- V. It helps you indulge in music in a way that you truly enjoy what you are listening to.
- VI. There are four major elements of mindfulness – body-awareness, self-awareness, regulation of attention and regulation of emotion. The meditation practice helps you get consciousness to regulate all four elements.
- VII. It lowers depression risk among teens and pregnant women. Researchers at the University of Michigan say that mindfulness yoga lead to an empowered and positive feeling about pregnancy. The teens that practice this technique through school programs experience less anxiety and stress.
- VIII. According to a survey conducted by American Psychological Mindfulness Yoga and meditation is an excellent way to lose weight.
- IX. One of the greatest benefits of mindfulness is that it helps you sleep better at night. According to experts, higher mindfulness is directly proportional to lower activation at bedtime. People who practice this technique enjoy quality sleep and develop ability to manage stress well.

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Mahavir & Jainism

Introduction to Mahavira

Mahavira was a wealthy prince named Vardhamana born in 599 BC in Bihar. He was 24th and last Tirthankara of the Jain religion. Jain philosophy believes that all Tirthankaras were born as normal or average human beings, but through meditation and self-actualization they attained the state of perfection and enlightenment, and became the gods of Jains.

Similar to the origin of Buddha, Lord Mahavira was the son of a king and blessed with many worldly pleasures. He chose to give up on material possessions at the age of thirty and left his home in search of the ultimate truth and for the meaning of life.

Ahimsa or nonviolence was one of his core teachings and practices, as he believed that every living being has a soul and it shouldn't be harmed. After leaving his home, Lord Mahavira spent 12 intense years in deep silence and meditation. During this time, he carefully avoided harming any living creature and sustained without food for long periods, enabling him a deeper spiritual connect, leading him to develop super powers. Due to unbearable hardships he had gone through, he was given the name Mahavira, meaning brave and courageous.

He then travelled all across the length and breadth of India, in order to preach to the people the eternal truth he had realised. His objective was to minimise the sufferings of people and show them the path of liberation and total freedom from pain, misery, and the cycle of life and death.

Lord Mahavira is widely regarded as the founder of Jainism as he persuaded the valuable teachings of his predecessors, the 23 Tirthankaras or prophets. Lord Mahavira's immediate disciples were known as Gandharas and Srut-kevalis. These invaluable teachings of Lord Mahavira were later compiled by his disciples into the significant texts that now form the basis of Jain Literature.

The teachings of Mahavira were initially transferred orally from gurus to their disciples, as religious scriptures were considered as precious as materialistic possessions. And non-possession or non-attachment is one of the five important vows of Jainism.

What is Jainism?

- Jainism is a way of life and one of the oldest religions of the world.
- It believes in a cyclical nature of universe. It discourages superstition and blind faith and encourages free and rational thinking.
- Jainism lays heavy emphasis on non-violence (ahimsa) and discipline.
- According to Jain philosophy, all Tirthankaras were born as human beings but they have attained a state of perfection or enlightenment through meditation and self realization. They are the "Gods" of Jains.
- Jains have always practiced non-violence, vegetarianism, meditation, yoga, and environmentalism.

However, after one thousand years of Mahavira's death (nirvana), it became difficult for Jain Acharyas to memorise everything taught by the scholars in the past. Unfortunately, significant amounts of knowledge were lost, others were modified and polluted, with no means to verify. The Archarayas then felt the need to document these texts.

At the same time, two major sects named Digambar and Shwetambar were formed. These two aspects have opposing views on the validity and acceptance of the now documented Jain Scriptures.

Jain literature is majorly divided into two categories

- B. Agam Literature (canonical texts):** Comprised of written Prakrit language, Agam literature constitutes original scriptures compiled by the Gandharas and elder monks, known as Sutkevalis.
- C. Non-agam Literature (non-canonical texts):** Written in prakrit, Sanskrit, old Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, German and English, non-agam literature constitutes commentaries and explanations of Agam Literature and independent works of scholars.

A. Agam Literature

Also known as Agam Sutras or Jain Agams, these scriptures are considered as sacred books of Jain literature. While other religions have the Gita, the Bible or the Quran, Jainism does not have any sacred book. Instead, the scriptures of Jainism have multiple sacred sutras.

Each teaching is a great reverence for all forms of life, Agam sutras constitute strict codes of nonviolence, vege-tarianism, non-possession, and compassion. Agam Lit-erature is further divided into two groups - Ang Agams and Angbahya Agams. Ang sutras are direct teachings of Lord Mahavira and Angbahya are the commentaries and explanations of Agam sutras.

B. Digambar Literature

According to Digambar Litrature, there were total 26 Agam sutras and all of them were lost over the years. Because of this belief, the followers of Digambar sect do not consider agam sutras as authentic scriptures. The religious scriptures that the followers of this sect believe in are the ones written by Great Acharayas from 100 to 1000 AD. The basis of their work is the original agam sutras.

Five main principles propagated by Lord Mahavira

A. Belief in soul and Karma: Mahavira believed that every living creature or anything that breathes has a soul. The soul is held in a constant state of bondage due to Karma- the natural consequence of our thoughts, words and actions. The soul, how-ever, can be liberated from this bondage by disintegrating Karmic force and freedom from worldly attachments and possessions.

When the soul crumbles the cycle of Karma, one can feel the innate power and intrinsic value of soul. The soul (atma) becomes parmatama when it attains infinite greatness and shines to its full radiance. Hence, Jains do not believe in worshipping one particular god. In fact, they admire the liber-ated souls of Tirthankaras who attained nirvana.

B.Niravana:

Mahavira, the enlightened, believed that the ultimate objective of life is to achieve salvation. He insists that one should avoid the evil karmas done in the past and prevent indulging in new evil karmas. This can be achieved by following the five important vows:

- Non-violence (Ahimsa)
- Speaking truth (Satya)
- Non-stealing (Asteya),
- Non-adultery (Brahmacharya)
- Non-possession (Aparigraha)

In addition to these vows, Mahavira also throws light on the principles of right conduct, right knowledge, and right faith. While these vows and principles are for householders, there are strict codes for monks in Jain scriptures.

C. Non-belief in God:

Mahavira believed that universe has no starting and end and hence there is no creator or destroyer of the universe. The universe and its elements simply change their form. This means the liberation of man does not depend on any outside authority; man is the maker and destroyer of his own destiny. He can get rid of his miseries and sorrows by subduing the bodily desires and leading the path of austerity. According to him, renunciation is the best way to achieve salvation.

D. Ahimsa:

Ahimsa is one of the most significant principles persuaded by Mahavira. Ma-havira believed that every creature including animals, plants, stones and rocks etc has life and it shouldn't be harmed come what may. Jains took greatly to the concept of Ahimsa, popularised it and put an end to sacrifices.

E. Freedom to women:

Mahavira believed in the freedom and liberation of women. According to him, the right to attain nirvana is equally important for women. At a time when sages and wise men did not pay attention to the condition of women, Mahavira wanted them to be on the same level as men. Mahavira was not a believer in the caste sys-tem and distinction of classes on the basis of that.

Modern Outlook of Jainism: Inception of modern concepts for the upliftment of society.

Besides discovering “brahmi and other lipis”, the first Tirthankara of Jainism Lord Rsabhadeva started sowing the seeds for future generations by introducing the concepts of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Also, the Bhagwad Purana of the Hindus has some reference to Jainism. The three great religions of India, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, have played a significant role in shaping the culture and civilization of India. The ultimate aim of these three religions is the attainment of “moksha” or absolution “niravana”. The subjects of cooking, building, construction, reading writings have been taught to Jain monks, laymen and women by Rsabhadeva. These teachings enabled them to lead fulfilling social lives, while preserving and sustaining Indian Culture.

The Indian King Siddharaja offered great respect to Jainism and educated people about literature, art, sculpture, painting and music under its influence. The great King Akbar is said to pay heed to Jain pontiffs and persuaded Jainism to shape the culture of India. There have been several Jain monks well-known for their contributions to literary accomplishments. These monks have explained the brilliant concepts of astronomy, astrology, prosody and didactic literature through dramas, kathas and scientific literature.

Video

<https://youtu.be/KAc33hNc7ak>

Jainism in the current scenario

Looking at the current day scenario where wars are constantly happening between countries for possession of land and its resources, Jain practices like Ahimsa and Aparigraha (non-possession) are of great importance when used astutely and wisely. These practices can go a long way when it comes reshaping the life of people socially and economically.

Jain scripture as well as, other ancient scriptures say the first 25 years is the Brahmacharya life, in other words, it is the time you spend on acquiring knowledge and not on pleasure or pleasurable activities. Unfortunately we flout all that is laid down in our scriptures because of ignorance of our own scriptures. Our youth craves for guidance but it is not forthcoming from adults which is their irresponsibility.

Jainism opened its door for anyone and everyone, irrespective of one's caste colour and creed. There is no concept of untouchability and class system, as the religion believes in humanism or the equality of human beings. The five Mahavrataas of Jainism can help set up a new value system that can help tackle modern day problems like bad eating, drinking and overall lifestyle of current generation. These problems are corroding the life of individuals.

Jainism can be reformed to form a new value system

Like Mahavira reformed the existing religion to fit in the value system of current generation, Jainism can be reformed, rationalized and re-oriented to adapt with the change in time. Religions cannot be static; instead they should be dynamic to ensure that the past glory perfectly translates into permanent reality. The Jain philosophy of understanding and respecting others

views is quite progressive and has the potential to bring about a synthesis between its ancient doctrines and social, economic and cultural needs of the current century.

Conclusion: Change is the only constant

Jainism is more of moral code than a religion that believes in a supreme being. However, it reveres the individuals who understood their higher consciousness and became spiritually great. The most progressive thing about Jainism is that it did not dogmatise, according to its fundamental logic there is no absolute affirmation and denial. If necessity arose, Jainism will not be unwilling to accept the existence of Supreme Being. The power of accommodation and dynamism is that the religion survived in India till date.

What is the similarity between Buddhism and Jainism?

Similarities Between Hinduism and Buddhism

- Both religions believe in the concept of karma and reincarnation.
- Both emphasize compassion and non-violence towards all living beings.
- Both believe in spiritual practices like meditation and concentration to help reach a certain state of mind.
- Both believe in renunciation of worldly life to enter spiritual life. Both consider desire as the chief cause of suffering.
- Both believe that liberation, nor rebirth or heavenly life, is the best solution to the problem of suffering and bondage.

Three jewels in Jain philosophy

Right belief

The first step to self-actualization is adopting a rational attitude in life and renouncing superstitious beliefs. Right perception means one should be able to see and understand the true nature of every substance in the universe. One should not only try to understand the nature of reality, but also understand one's own self, religious goals and the path that needs to be followed to achieve them. To invest in one's full faith in preaching of Tirthankas, one should know, analyze, verify, test and be satisfied of its nature of reality and efficacy.

Right knowledge

Right knowledge means the true and relevant knowledge of reality. To understand reality, it is important to understand the elements of the universe and their relationship. Essentially, it means the proper knowledge of six universal substances and 9 tattvas. While the six substances

include soul, matter, motion, rest, space and time, nine tattvas include soul, matter, asrava, bandh, punya, papa, samvara, nirjara, and Moksha.

Right Conduct

Proper, appropriate, correct and honest conduct of human soul is called known as Right Conduct. The aim of human soul is to attain the state of perfect equanimity. This can only be achieved by liberating yourself from attachment, aversion and impure thoughts, words and deeds. To practice the principles of self-realization, one needs to have right conduct, which comprises ethical codes, roles and disciplines.

The Jain theory of Non absolutism and Syadvada

The theory of Non-absolutism (Anekantavada) is one of the important principles of Jainism. The theory teaches the art of maintaining open-mindedness. It talks about the recognition of different perspectives and preaches respect for differences in belief. This theory of Jainism encourages its followers and believers to be considerate about the point of views and beliefs of opposing parties. Also, the theory had a great influence on Mahatma Gandhi who adopted the principle of Ahimsa and religious tolerance.

The theory is based on a practical observation that all objects in the universe exist in a variety of modes and possess infinite qualities. Therefore, it's not possible for the finite human perception to grasp all the possible manifestations and aspects of objects. However, Kevalins (omnipresent beings) have the potential to absorb objects in their all or full manifestations; others are only partially capable. And thus, a particular point of view can't claim to represent the absolute truth.

Other important teachings by Lord Mahavira

Five rules of conduct (Samitis)

The First rule is about the Regulation of walking, which says one should look ahead up to 6 feet distance while walking in order to avoid causing injury to any living being. The second rule talks about Regulation of Speaking, which encourages to avoid eight faults of speech including pride, deceit, fear, gossip, anger, slander, greed, and laughter. And, one should always use sinless and concise speech.

The third samiti encourages begging monks to search for pure food and other articles and use them in a faultless manner. Fourth Samiti is about the regulation of taking and keeping which preaches one take up or lay down an article in a careful manner to ensure even the tiniest creature is not harmed or killed in the process.

The last is the Regulation of Disposal which says while disposing of mucus, urine and stool; it is important to ensure that it does not spread germs around and cause any kind of illness or disease to anybody.

The impermanence of world - Like Buddha, Mahavira also emphasized on the concept of impermanence which says nothing in the universe is permanent. However, the whole universe is

permanent. Thus, spiritual values are important to achieve freedom from the worldly pleasures. It is important to break all worldly attachments to achieve ultimate stability.

No one provides protection – According to this principle, people think they can't fight death, old age and disease. But one can conquer all these by destroying his karma. This means a person is responsible and accountable for his own actions and karma. He is his own saviour and responsible for achieving total freedom and enlightenment.

The solitude of the soul – The soul comes to the world alone and departs alone. It is solitaire and lonely in existence. Since the soul is accountable for its actions, it deems to suffer the bad consequences and enjoy good circumstances

Separateness - This principle says that the body is matter and soul is consciousness. The soul leaves the body after death, so one shouldn't be controlled by the desires and greed of his body. Developing attachment to worldly objects will make your soul lingering in the never-ending cycle of birth and death.

The influx of Karma – Every time you suffer or enjoy through your five senses, you accumulate more karma. Such a thought will make you more conscious and prevent the influx of karma. To stop the influx of karma, one should stop the evil thoughts and indulge in meditation and achieve spiritual knowledge. To destroy your previously acquired karma, it is important to tread the path of austerity and meditation.

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Jesus & Christianity

Jesus - The Son of God

Jesus was a Galilean Jew who was baptized by John the Baptist and subsequently began his own ministry, preaching his message orally and often being referred to as "rabbi". Jesus debated with fellow Jews on how to best follow God, engaged in healings, taught in parables and gathered followers. He was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities, and turned over to the Roman government, and was subsequently crucified on the order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect. After his death, his followers believed he rose from the dead, and the community they formed eventually became the Christian Church.

His birth is celebrated annually on December 25 (or various dates in January for some eastern churches) as a holiday known as Christmas, his crucifixion is honored on Good Friday, and his resurrection is celebrated on Easter. The widely used calendar era "AD", from the Latin Anno Domini ("in the year of the Lord"), and the alternative "CE", are based on the approximate birth date of Jesus.

Christian doctrines include the beliefs that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of a virgin named Mary, performed miracles, founded the Church, died by crucifixion as a sacrifice to achieve atonement, rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven, from where he will return.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another – Jesus Christ

Introduction to Christianity

The three great monotheist religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) maintain that every one of us can enter into a personal relationship with a God who: listens to each of us, tries to speak to each of us and offer guidance/ support to each of us.

All three religions believe that God wants each of us to enter into that relationship with him. Actually, he attempts through whatever means that become available to him to draw us into it – encouraging us to respond to him.

With 2.1 billion followers all across the world, Christianity is hands down the world's largest religion. The sacred texts of Christianity are based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, who is known to have lived in the Holy Land over 2000 years ago.

Christianity is all about one life, the life of Jesus the Son of God. The Bible teaches that Jesus was God Himself, come to live in His world as a human. The name "Jesus Christ" itself explains Christ's divine and human nature. "Jesus" is an expression of his humanity while "Christ" (from Greek Christos, anointed) describes how he is indeed the Son of God. Thus, his name is a unification of his divine and human natures.

In Christianity, the single most important event is the Resurrection. Particularly for the time period, Jesus' death was unique among other religions.

Please take note of this because as the other ancient belief systems were sacrificing animals to the gods Jesus was the first human sacrifice.

According to the texts he is born again. In the Apostles' Creed, Jesus goes down into hell or, more precisely, Sheol, and rises up into heaven. This allows for the deceased to enter heaven. Before Jesus' death, hell and death were closely connected. Since the death of Christ the fear that was linked with death has been removed, as the philosophy now clearly pointed to being united with the father (if you did good things, ie).

The Entry of Afterlife

The basic ideas of heaven and hell became extremely relevant and people struggled to ensure that they would do good, serve and live in peace in order to attain 'salvation'. But the idea that there is life beyond the grave is an important thought. However, that place is in heaven. This negates the notion of reincarnation and karma. It brings the belief of judgment by the Lord who will decide whether you are worthy of heaven or hell. In popular culture heaven and hell are essentially deserved compensations for the kind of earthly lives we live. Good people go to heaven as a deserved reward for a virtuous life, and bad people go to hell as a just punishment for an immoral life; in that way, the scales of justice are sometimes thought to balance.

Christianity 101

1. God's love towards man is a major theme in Christianity

God is always ready to give us humans far more than we rightfully deserve. Grace, more than anything else, demonstrates that God really wants a loving personal relationship with each one of us.

2. Holy Trinity

The Trinity consists of God the Father, God the Son (or Jesus the Son of God) and God the Holy Spirit.

3. Jesus and the "Cross"

Jesus as God's incarnate was still a God. According to Christianity God's so loved us that he provided his 'own son' as a sacrifice to save all of mankind. The Lamb of God (lambs were sacrificed for God) in order to pay for humankind's wrongdoings. Wrongdoings in the Christian sense are known as 'SINS'.

It is also believed that the 'resurrection' to new life and 'ascension' into heaven by Jesus, after his death 'on the cross', demonstrates most positively the victory over death that is offered to us.

4. Jesus as "Our Lord and Saviour"

The savior who dearly loves us all and deals with each and every one of us (and humanity as a whole) in an all knowing pragmatic manner.

The 10 Commandments

Jesus' special Two Commandments

But when Jesus was asked, in an attempted act of entrapment, which of the Ten Commandments did he consider the most important, he provided much more by offering his own two commandments of love, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Then continuing, Jesus added, "Love your neighbour as yourself" [Matthew 22:24-37].

The Three G's

The three most important words for the Christian life begin with a "G." They are guilt, grace, and gratitude, and they're words you should know.

1. Guilt

According to Romans 3.20, the Law of God exposes our guilt, and it shows us where exactly we have broken God's commandments. Without hearing the Law, we will continue to go on in our lives thinking that we're doing just fine. We will inevitably create standards (a.k.a. "laws") by which we can live and others will never really measure up to—avoiding the reality that all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. We need to hear a message of guilt, so that we will wake up to the message of grace.

2. Grace

The Gospel of God is all about God's grace to lawbreakers. In his Son, God has taken upon himself the judgment and punishment we deserved for breaking the law, and he has also perfectly obeyed all of the law for us. Jesus Christ measured up so we wouldn't have to. The message of grace is what God has done for us—not what we can do for God.

3. Gratitude

Our only response to hearing this message of grace is heartfelt gratitude to God and loving service to our neighbors. When someone gives us a gift that we weren't expecting, our usual response is gratitude. The gospel does this to us a hundredfold and causes us to rejoice and praise God! We are filled with faith, hope, and love; and even good works spill over onto others because of this great work that God has done for us—and is doing in us.

The Philosophy of Christianity

The Philosophy of Christianity is a way of life. It involves the reason for human life, why human life was created and sustained by God and nourished by His Spirit, and lastly, to where our human life is destined to lead us in the future.

The word "life" by which Christianity is denominated is interpreted by its profound and expansive usage as promoted and detailed by the apostle John in his Gospel.

He writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of

all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.... [Christ Jesus is] the true light, which enlightens everyone" (John 1:1-9 NRSV).

This is the true "life" that mankind must adopt. Its acceptance by humanity makes Christian-ity to be a Philosophy of Life. It is our emulating and living that particular "Life" that en-lightens us with unlimited truth and in an inseparable way it unites us with the personality and the bodily presence of Christ Jesus.

The Philosophy of Christianity shows that our lives are centered "in Christ." It is not a matter of what we do or what we do not do in a religious sense that makes the difference. The key to the whole thing is: Who is it who lives in us? Who are we a part of ? Who is co-bodied with us? If Christ does indeed live in us (as we are assured by the Holy Scriptures that he does), then we are even now reckoned by God the Father to be as holy, altogether righteous and absolutely worthy in His eyes as is Christ Jesus himself. We are gracefully endowed with such righteousness in God's eyes (not that we are actually righteous of ourselves), that when the Father looks on Christ at the present in heaven, He sees US IN HIM. And even more wonderful in one way of viewing it, when the Father sees us now on earth, He see CHRIST IN ALL OF US! In a word, we have already been saved "in Christ" and we will always be saved. Christ saves all humans in particular time periods known to Him (II Timothy 2:4-6).

Christian philosophy represents an entire worldview, a view that is consistent with the Bible throughout.

The Christian philosophy embraces the meaningful, purposeful life, a life in which you shape your beliefs according to a coherent, reasonable, truthful worldview. Philosophy after all is a way of life, and the Christian believes that he has the true way—the true pattern for living. It is the task of the Christian leader to understand the ideologies of his day so that he may be able to meet their challenges. The task is a never-ending one, for, although the Chris-tian's worldview does not change, the world about him does. Thus the task of showing the relevance of the Christian realistic philosophy to a world in process is one which requires eternal vigilance.

The Bible

The book that the Christians follow is called The Bible. It is an entire library, with stories, songs, poetry, letters and history, as well as literature that might more obvi-ously qualify as 'religious'.

The Christian Bible has two sections, the Old Testament and the New Testa-ment. The Old Testament is the ori-ginal Hebrew Bible, the sacred scriptures of the Jewish faith, written at different times between about 1200 and 165 BC. The New Testament books were written by Christians in the first century AD.

The sheer diversity of literature in the Bible is one of the secrets of its continuing popularity through the centuries. There is something for all moods and many different cultures. Its mes-sage is not buried in religious jargon only accessible to either believers or scholars, but re-flects the

issues that people struggle with in daily life. Despite their different emphases, all its authors shared the conviction that this world and its affairs are not just a haphazard sequence of random coincidences, but are the forum of God's activity - a God who (unlike the God of the philosophers) is not remote or unknowable, but a personal being who can be known by ordinary people.

Many pastors interpret the bible according to their understanding, however, the true meaning could be quite different from what is being sermonised at the pulpit. One thing that is certain, in today's scenario the Bible cannot be taken literally. Because if you do, then you end up acting like a crazy person, and stoning adulterers. It's been passed down through centuries which were relevant then but the essence of Christianity remains true even today for those who follow the religion.

There is a lot of debate between Christians on the relevance of the Bible and the Church. Many believe that even though times have changed the bible is still relevant as there are truths and wisdom that does not change.

However, modern believers and thinkers in recent evolution believe that the Bible is irrelevant in today's culture. Especially on the topic of embracing gay marriages. However, the point of debate is that everyone has a relationship with God which is based on love. And that is what many pastors try to maintain and talk to people about that as the Gospel is time-less.

The Old Testament-Word of God:

The Bible (from biblos, Greek for 'book') is the basis of two great religions, Judaism in the Old Testament and Christianity in the New Testament. In each case it brings together a group of documents to tell the story of the founders and early followers of the religion. In doing so it also explains their beliefs.

The books of the Jewish Bible are believed to have been written over several centuries, beginning in the 10th century BC - by which time the Hebrews are settled in Canaan, or Palestine.

The holiest part of the Bible for Jews is the first five books, known as the Torah ('instruction' or 'law' in Hebrew)

In Exodus, the second book of the Torah, the religious identity of the Hebrew tribes is firmly established through the leadership and inspiration of Moses.

It is to Moses that God reveals his name (from the burning bush), saying 'I Am Who I Am'.

This gives him a name written with four Hebrew letters, YHWH, meaning 'He Who Is'.\\

God's name is later considered too holy to be spoken, but with its vowels added it is Yahweh.

In Christian versions of the Old Testament it becomes written as Jehovah.

God also reveals to Moses the ten commandments. If the Hebrews obey these laws, God will favour them as his chosen people and will bring them into the promised land of Canaan.

The Ten commandments are followed by Catholics today but many of the Commandments have become obsolete. Viewing the Law of Moses as a whole, there are hundreds of laws that today are no longer in force. The New Testament has quoted some of the old Testa-ment commands as being inadequate or in need of replacement and some are quoted with approval. The New testament does not quote the Ten commandments as a moral authority of Christians.

Perfect Symmetry of the 39 Books of the Old Testament				
17 Books of History		5 Books of Wisdom, Poetry, and Praise	17 Books of Prophecy	
5 Books Law (Torah)	12 Books OT History		5 Books Major Prophets	12 Books Minor Prophets
1 Genesis	6 Joshua	18 Job	23 Isaiah	28 Hosea
2 Exodus	7 Judges	19 Psalms	24 Jeremiah	29 Joel
3 Leviticus	8 Ruth	20 Proverbs	25 Lament.	30 Amos
4 Numbers	9 1 Samuel	21 Ecclesiastes	26 Ezekiel	31 Obadiah
5 Deuteronomy	10 2 Samuel	22 Song of Songs	27 Daniel	32 Jonah
	11 1 Kings			33 Micah
	12 2 Kings			34 Nahum
	13 1 Chron			35 Habakkuk
	14 2 Chron			36 Zephaniah
	15 Ezra			37 Haggai
	16 Nehemiah			38 Zechariah
	17 Esther			39 Malachi

BibleWheel.com

9/3 division based on the Babylonian Exile

What is the importance of the Old Testament?

The teachings of the New Testament, which is widely adopted by most churches and Christians, are based on the teachings and events of the Old Testament.

The Old and the New Testament have a shared heritage. For Christians, the Old Testament sets the cosmic and temporal contexts for the New Testament. It is "Part One" of a unique two-part epic. Jesus, Peter and Paul, Matthew and John, and numerous others in the New Testament, frequently quote from the Old Testament. On the temporal plane, that is life here and now, the Old Testament is essential for anyone seeking to understand the human condition and humankind, for anyone seeking the answers to the most fundamental questions of life and death.

During the rapid growth of Christian community, Old Testament was considered as the main source of literature. One can easily understand the teachings of the New Testament if they know the events, characters, laws, and promises of the Old Testament. One can find guidance for his/her own life while learning about the characters of Old Testament. It teaches to stand firm in your conviction, to await the fruits of faithfulness, and to sincerely confess sin early. It explains that your sins can have an adverse consequence on our loved ones and similarly your

good behavior can have a positive reward for those around you. The book teaches us to love and serve God. It unveils God's character interestingly. The famous stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, and Abraham and Sarah are a part of the Old Testament.

The New Testament:

Written between 50 and 100 AD, the New Testament consists of 27 books, divided into two sections – The Gospels and the Letters. While gospels tell the story of Jesus, the Letters (written by Christian's leaders) is the source of guidance for the earliest church communities. Church leaders used to communicate with their converts through these Letters. These letters offered advice to people on how to express their commitment to Jesus. These letters are answers to questions, as reading them is like listening to the one half of a conversation. The gospels tell the story of teachings of Jesus, his death, and resurrection. They don't demonstrate the biographies of Jesus but emphasise on his significance for different cultures. It reflects the story of how Christianity spread and became a world-wide faith.

The New Testament builds on the Old Testaments foundation with further revelation from God. The New Testament offers a fresh perspective on the Old Testament and interprets the true meaning of human life and history. It adheres to the core Jewish faith that there is only one God and he makes a moral claim on human life. God's revelation in Scripture is progressive; the New Testament brings into sharper focus principles that were introduced in the Old Testament. Jesus was not trying to teach a new standard of conduct and new rules of living. In fact, he was shedding light on the old ethic and giving a fresh perspective to it. He was the God of Old Testament revelation, as his teachings were directly from the writings of Moses.

Church History:

The history of the Christian faith, began about 30 A.D. in Palestine with a small number of Jews and Jewish Proselytes, following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. By the third century A.D., Christianity had grown to become the dominant religion of the northern Mediterranean world. It also gained important extensions to the east and south of the Mediterranean.

The Christian Church is a term generally used by Protestants to refer to the whole group of people belonging to Christianity throughout history. The Church is the place of worship for all believers of Christianity. The leadership of the Church began with the apostles. The Church spread throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. At the same time it became a highly persecuted religion. The Roman authorities persecuted it because like Judaism, its monotheistic teachings were foreign to the polytheistic traditions of the ancient world and a challenge to the imperial cult. However, the Church grew rapidly until it was legalised and promoted by the Emperors in the 4th century as the state Church of the Roman Empire.

The Roman State took on Christianity as a religion in 380 AD. Religion then on became political as the followers of Trinitarian Christianity were entitled to be referred to Catholic Christians, while others were considered to be heretics, considered illegal. This new legal

situation resulted in capital punishment of the heretic. In centuries of state sponsored Christianity, non believers and pagans were routinely persecuted.

There had been long frictions between the Bishop of Rome and the eastern patriarchs within the Byzantine empire. Rome's changing allegiance set the Church on a course toward separation. As a result the redevelopment of Western Europe and the gradual fall of the Eastern Roman Empire to the Arabs and Turks resulted in Eastern scholars fleeing the Moslem hordes bringing in ancient manuscripts to the West. This was a factor of the period of the Western Renaissance there.

During the 16th century the changes brought by Renaissance eventually led to Protestant Reformation. At this time, a series of non-theological disputes also led to the independence of the Church of England. Western Europe spread the Catholic Church and the Protestant and reformed churches around the world, especially in America. These developments led to Christianity being the largest religion in the world today.

Differences between Protestants and Catholics

They worship the same God, but the principles of their faith are different. Five hundred years after the Reformation, there are still painful divisions between Protestants and Catholics.

In Germany, the country of the Reformation, a deep animosity divided Catholic and Protestant Christians up until a few decades ago. This division had deepened over the centuries through religious conflicts and wars.

It all started when Reformation took place, 500 years ago, as Martin Luther (1483-1546) tried to reform the Catholic Church. His attempt to do so instead led to a schism in the church.

Christianity as we see it today

We live in a time of change. We have seen attacks terrorize the West, revolutions topple long standing regimes and technologies change the way we communicate. And we are also witnessing changes in the world's largest religion—Christianity. Nominal Christianity is in a very fluid state of change.

For Example

The Globalization of Christianity

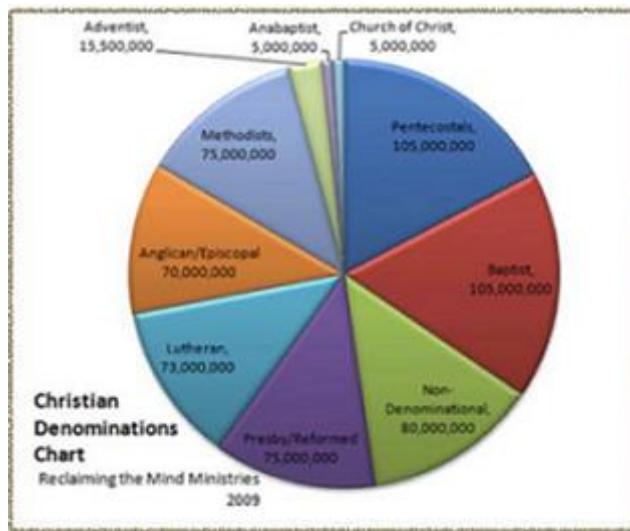
A. In the early modern world, the West spread Christianity to Asians, Africans, and Native Americans. At the same time, the West developed a modern scientific outlook that sharply challenged Western Christianity.

1. Christianity achieved a global presence for the first time
2. the Scientific Revolution fostered a different approach to the world
3. there is continuing tension between religion and science in the Western world

B. The early modern period was a time of cultural transformation.

1. both Christianity and scientific thought connected distant peoples
2. Scientific Revolution also caused new cultural encounter, between science and religion
3. science became part of the definition of global modernity

C. Europeans were central players, but they did not act alone.



- I. The pope is reaching out to different groups in a way, it seems, no pope has done before. The conciliatory positions of Pope Francis I have led people to describe him as “the people’s pope” and “a pope for everyone.”
- II. More and more denominations are endorsing and/or performing same-sex marriages or civil unions.
- III. Megachurches that have no firm doctrines, but mainly serve as social and community service hubs for attendees, have become popular.
- IV. Many churches are changing their teaching of hell, transforming it into an ethereal “state of mind” of eternal separation from God’s love.

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ISLAM

The Beginning of Islam

Life of Muhammad the Prophet

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are three of the world's great monotheistic faiths. They share many of the same holy sites, such as Jerusalem, and prophets, such as Abraham. Collectively, scholars refer to these three religions as the Abrahamic faiths, since it is believed that Abraham and his family played vital roles in the formation of these religions.

Islam began with the Prophet Muhammad. Islam means "surrender" and its central idea is a surrendering to the will of God. Its central article of faith is that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger". Followers of Islam are called Muslims. Muslims believe that they are following in the same tradition as the Judeo-Christian figures Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus who they believe were significant prophets before Muhammad.

The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, provides very little detail about Muhammad's life; however, the hadiths, or sayings of the Prophet, which were largely compiled in the centuries following Muhammad's death, provide a larger narrative for the events in his life (although there is significant debate in the Muslim world as to which Hadiths are accurate). Muhammad was born in 570 C.E. in Mecca, and his early life was unremarkable. He married a wealthy widow named Khadija who was 15 years older and his employer. Around 610 C.E., Muhammad had his first religious experience, where he was instructed to recite by the Angel Gabriel. After a period of introspection and self-doubt, Muhammad accepted his role as God's prophet and began to preach word of the one God, or Allah in Arabic. His first convert was his wife. Muhammad's divine recitations form the Qur'an and are organized into books (surahs) and verses (ayat). Because these revelations focused on a form of monotheism considered threatening to Mecca's ruling tribe (the Quraysh), which Muhammad was a part of, the early Muslims faced significant persecution. Eventually in 622, Muhammad and his followers fled Mecca for the city of Yathrib, which is known as Medina today, where his community was welcomed. This event is known as the Hijra, or emigration. 622, the year of the Hijra (A.H.), marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar, which is still in use today.

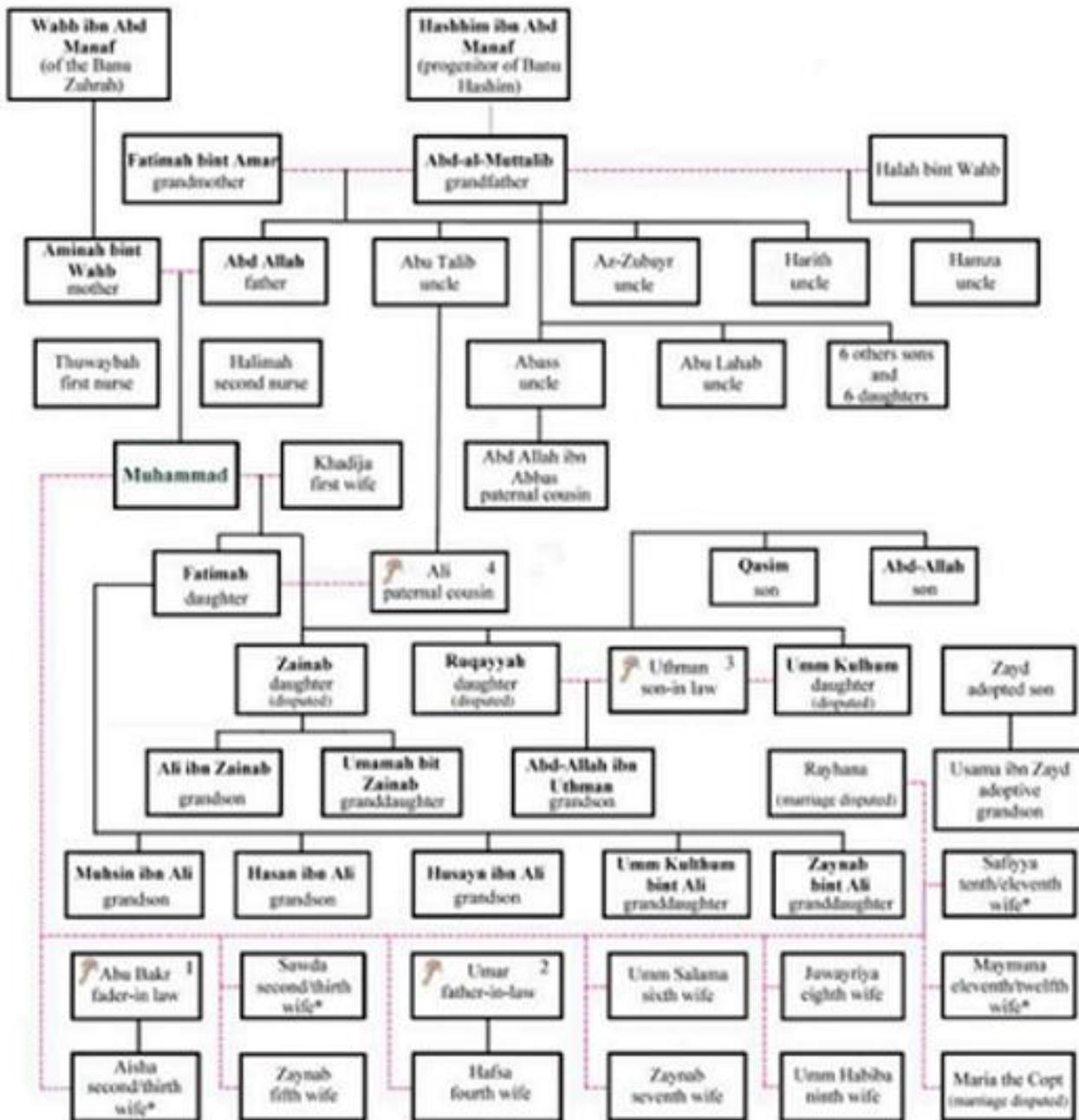
Between 625-630 C.E., there were a series of battles fought between the Meccans and Muhammad and the new Muslim community. Eventually, Muhammad was victorious and reentered Mecca in 630. One of Muhammad's first actions was to purge the Kaaba of all of its idols (before this, the Kaaba was a major site of pilgrimage for the polytheistic religious traditions of the Arabian Peninsula and contained numerous idols of pagan gods). The Kaaba is believed to have been built by Abraham (or Ibrahim as he is known in Arabic) and his son, Ishmael. The Arabs claim descent from Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar. The Kaaba then became the most important center for pilgrimage in Islam. In 632, Muhammad died in Medina. Muslims believe that he was the final in a line of prophets, which included Moses, Abraham, and Jesus.

After Muhammad's Death

The century following Muhammad's death was dominated by military conquest and expansion. Muhammad was succeeded by the four "rightly-guided" Caliphs (khalifa or successor in Arabic): Abu Bakr (632-34 C.E.), Umar (634-44 C.E.), Uthman (644-56 C.E.), and Ali (656-661 C.E.). The Qur'an is believed to have been codified during Uthman's reign. The final caliph, Ali, was married to Fatima, Muhammad's daughter and was murdered in 661. The death of Ali is a very important event; his followers, who believed that he should have succeeded Muhammad directly, became known as the Shi'a ("party" or "followers"), referring to the followers of Ali. Today, the Shi'ite community is composed of several different branches, and there are large Shia populations in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain. The Sunnis, who do not hold that Ali should have directly succeeded Muhammad, compose the largest branch of Islam; their adherents can be found across North Africa, the Middle East, as well as in Asia and Europe.

During the seventh and early eighth centuries, the Arab armies conquered large swaths of territory in the Middle East, North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and Central Asia, despite ongoing civil wars in Arabia and the Middle East. Eventually, the Umayyad Dynasty emerged as the rulers, with Abd al-Malik completing the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest surviving Islamic monuments, in 691/2 C.E. The Umayyads reigned until 749/50 C.E., when they were overthrown. The Abbasid Dynasty assumed the Caliphate and ruled large sections of the Islamic world. However, with the Abbasid Revolution, no one ruler would ever again control all of the Islamic lands.

Family tree of Muhammad



The direct lineage is marked in bold

*Indicates that the marriage order is disputed

☞ The Rightly Guided Caliphs or The Righteous Caliphs

Islam: 7th century

In the 7th century Arabia becomes the cradle of the world's third great monotheistic religion. All three have begun within a small area of southwest Asia. First Judaism, somewhere in the region stretching up from the Red Sea to Palestine; then Christianity at the northern end of this area; and finally Islam to the south, in Mecca, close to the Red Sea.

Each of the later arrivals in this close family of religions claims to build upon the message of its predecessors, bringing a better and more up-to-date version of the truth about the one God - in this case as revealed to the Messenger of God, Muhammad. Islam means 'surrender' (to God), and from the same root anyone who follows Islam is a Muslim.

It is on Mount Hira, according to tradition that the archangel Gabriel appears to Muhammad. He describes later how he seemed to be grasped by the throat by a luminous being, who commanded him to repeat the words of God. On other occasions Muhammad often has similar experiences (though there are barren times, and periods of self doubt, when he is sustained only by his wife Khadija's unswerving faith in him). From about 613 Muhammad preaches in Mecca the message which he has received.

Muhammad's message is essentially the existence of one God, all-powerful but also merciful, and he freely acknowledges that other prophets - in particular Abraham, Moses and Jesus - have preached the same truth in the past. But monotheism is not a popular creed with those whose livelihood depends on idols. Muhammad, once he begins to win converts to the new creed, makes enemies among the traders of Mecca. In 622 there is a plot to assassinate him. He escapes to the town of Yathrib, about 300 kilometres to the north.

Muhammad and the Muslim era: from 622

The people of Yathrib, a prosperous oasis, welcome Muhammad and his followers. As a result, the move from Mecca in 622 comes to seem the beginning of Islam. The Muslim era dates from the Hegira - Arabic for 'emigration', meaning Muhammad's departure from Mecca. In the Muslim calendar this event marks the beginning of year 1. Yathrib is renamed Madinat al Nabi, the 'city of the prophet', and thus becomes known as Medina. Here Muhammad steadily acquires a stronger following. He is now essentially a religious, political and even military leader rather than a merchant (Khadija has died in 619).

He continues to preach and recite the words which God reveals to him. It is these passages, together with the earlier revelations at Mecca, which are written down in the Arabic script by his followers and are collected to become the Qur'an - a word (often transliterated as Koran) with its roots in the idea of 'recital', reflecting the oral origin of the text. The final and definitive text of the Qur'an is established under the third caliph, Othman, in about 650.

The Muslims and Mecca: 624-630

Relations with Mecca deteriorate to the point of pitched battles between the two sides, with Muhammad leading his troops in the field. But in the end it is his diplomacy which wins the day.

He persuades the Meccans to allow his followers back into the city, in 629, to make a pilgrimage to the Ka'ba and the Black Stone. On this first Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad's followers impress the local citizens both by their show of strength and by their self-control, departing peacefully after the agreed three days. But the following year the Meccans break a truce, provoking the Muslims to march on the city.

They take Mecca almost without resistance. The inhabitants accept Islam. And Muhammad sweeps the idols out of the Ka'ba, leaving only the sacred Black Stone. An important element in Mecca's peaceful acceptance of the change has been Muhammad's promise that pilgrimage to the Ka'ba will remain a central feature of the new religion. So Mecca becomes, as it has remained ever since, the holy city of Islam. But Medina is by now where Muhammad and his most trusted followers live. And for the next few decades Medina will be the political centre of the developing Muslim state.

Muhammad lives only two years after the peaceful reconciliation with Mecca. He has no son. His only surviving children are daughters by Khadija, though since her death he has married several younger women, among whom his favourite is A'isha.

Muhammad and the caliphate: from 632-656

There is no clear successor to Muhammad among his followers. The likely candidates include Abu Bakr (the father of Muhammad's wife A'isha) and Ali (a cousin of Muhammad and the husband of Muhammad's daughter Fatima). Abu Bakr is elected, and takes the title 'khalifat rasul-Allah'. The Arabic phrase means 'successor of the Messenger of God'. It will introduce a new word, caliph, to the other languages of the world.

Abu Bakr, the first caliph, lives no more than two years after the death of Muhammad. Even so, within this brief time Muslim armies have begun their astonishing expansion, subduing the whole of Arabia and striking as far north as Palestine.

Abu Bakr is succeeded in 634 by Omar (another father-in-law of Muhammad), who in 638 captures Jerusalem. Six years later Omar is stabbed and killed in the mosque at Medina - for personal reasons, it seems, by a Persian craftsman living in Kufa.

Othman, chosen as the third caliph, is a son-in-law of Muhammad. By the end of his reign, in 656, Arabs have conquered as far afield as north Africa, Turkey and Afghanistan.

Othman, like his predecessor, is assassinated - but this time by rebellious Muslims. They choose Ali, another son-in-law of Muhammad, as the fourth caliph. For the first time within the Muslim community the selected caliph is the choice of just one faction. Ali's caliphate eventually provokes the only major sectarian split in the history of Islam, between Sunni and Shi'a.

Sunni and Shias**Video: Differences and Similarities**<https://youtu.be/p0Prs99ANvY>

Sunni and Shia Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith and are the two main sub-groups within Islam. They do differ, however, and the separation between them stemmed initially not from spiritual distinctions, but political ones. Over the centuries, these political differences have spawned a number of varying practices and positions which have come to carry a spiritual significance.

A QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

The division between Shia and Sunni dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. This event raised the question of who was to take over the leadership of the Muslim nation. The word "Sunni" in Arabic comes from a word meaning "one who follows the traditions of the Prophet." It is considered to be the orthodox branch of Islam.

Sunni Muslims agree with the position taken by many of the Prophet's companions at the time of his death. This is that the new leader should be elected from among those capable of the job. It is what was done when the Prophet Muhammad's close friend and adviser, Abu Bakr, became the first Caliph (successor or deputy of the Prophet) of the Islamic nation. On the other hand, some Muslims believe that leadership should have stayed within the Prophet's own family, among those specifically appointed by him, or among Imams appointed by God Himself.

Shia Muslims believe that following the Prophet Muhammad's death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali bin Abu Talib. Throughout history, Shia Muslims have not recognized the authority of elected Muslim leaders, choosing instead to follow a line of Imams which they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or God Himself. The word "Shia" in Arabic means a group or supportive party of people. The commonly-known term is shortened from the historical "Shia-t-Ali," or "the Party of Ali." This group is also known as Shiites or followers of "Ahl-al-Bayt" or "People of the Household" (of the Prophet).

Within the Sunni and Shia branches, you can also find a number of sects. For example, in Saudi Arabia, Sunni Wahhabism is a prevalent and puritanical faction. Similarly, in Shiitism, the Druze are a somewhat mysterious sect residing in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel.

WHERE DO SUNNI AND SHIA MUSLIMS LIVE?

Sunni Muslims make up an 85 percent majority of Muslims all over the world. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia are predominantly Sunni. Significant populations of Shia Muslims can be found in Iran and Iraq. Large Shiite minority communities are also in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Lebanon. It is in areas of the world where Sunni and Shiite populations are in close proximity to one another

where conflict can arise. Coexistence in Iraq and Lebanon, for example, is often difficult. The religious differences are so embedded in the culture that intolerance often leads to violence.

DIFFERENCES IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

From this initial question of political leadership, some aspects of spiritual life have been affected and now differ between the two groups of Muslims. This includes rituals of prayer and marriage. In this sense, many people compare the two groups with Catholics and Protestants. Fundamentally, they share some common beliefs, they simply practice in a different manner. It is important to remember that despite these differences in opinion and practice, Shia and Sunni Muslims share the main articles of Islamic belief and are considered by most to be brethren in faith. In fact, most Muslims do not distinguish themselves by claiming membership in any particular group, but prefer to call themselves simply "Muslims."

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Shia Muslims believe that the Imam is sinless by nature and that his authority is infallible because it comes directly from God. Therefore, Shia Muslims often venerate the Imams as saints. They perform pilgrimages to their tombs and shrines in the hopes of divine intercession. This well-defined clerical hierarchy can play a role in governmental matters as well. Iran is a good example in which the Imam, and not the state, is the ultimate authority. Sunni Muslims counter that there is no basis in Islam for a hereditary privileged class of spiritual leaders, and certainly no basis for the veneration or intercession of saints. Sunni Muslims contend that leadership of the community is not a birthright, but a trust that is earned. It may be given or taken away by the people themselves.

RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND PRACTICES

Sunni and Shia Muslims follow the Quran as well as the Prophet's hadith (sayings) and sunna (customs). These are fundamental practices in the Islamic faith. They also adhere to the five pillars of Islam: shahada, salat, zakat, sawm, and hajj. Shia Muslims tend to feel animosity towards some of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. This is based on their positions and actions during the early years of discord about leadership in the community. Many of these companions (Abu Bakr, Umar ibn Al Khattab, Aisha, etc.) have narrated traditions about the Prophet's life and spiritual practice. Shia Muslims reject these traditions and do not base any of their religious practices on the testimony of these individuals. This naturally gives rise to some differences in religious practice between the two groups. These differences touch all detailed aspects of religious life: prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and more.

Spread of Islam

After prophet Muhammad's death, the Muslim community found itself without a leader. While as the 'seal of the prophets' he could have no successor, as a political guide Muhammad was succeeded by the so-called al Khulafa' al Rashidun, the four 'rightly-guided caliphs' who were chosen from his most loyal companions. It was during the leadership of these caliphs (632 – 56

), and particularly under the second caliph and great statesman ‘Umar ibn al Khattab (634–44), that the conquest of territories outside Arabia began. Influenced by the political systems of these conquered areas, the leadership became hereditary, and the Umayyad dynasty (661 – 750) emerged out of the aristocracy of the Quraysh While the Rashidun caliphs were based at Mecca and Medina, the Umayyads moved the seat of power to Damascus. Their successors, the ‘Abbasids (750 – 1258), who were less Arab-centered, built a new capital, Baghdad, in a fertile area on the main routes between Iraq, Iran and Syria.

The History of the Conquests

The Arab conquests started as sporadic tribal raids. A proper army was probably not organized before 634 , but once formed, it made expeditions eastwards towards the Sasanian empire and northwards to Palestine and Syria against the Byzantine empire.

1. Islamic Expansion to 750

Under the leadership of commanders such as ‘Amr ibn al ‘As and Khalid ibn al Walid, the army defeated the Byzantines at Yarmuk (636), and the newly organized Muslim navy destroyed the Christian fleet at the Battle of the Masts (655). Constantinople was sporadically besieged during this period, though never captured. On the oriental front, the Sasanian army suffered a crushing defeat at the battle of al Qadisiyah (637), and Ctesiphon was taken soon afterwards; this caused the disintegration of the Sasanian empire. ‘Amr ibn al ‘As then moved westwards towards Egypt in 639 , and by 646 Heliopolis and Alexandria had fallen. The city of Fustat was founded in 643 , and northeast Africa was occupied. From Al-exandria, naval expeditions were launched against Cyprus and Sicily and under the Umayyad dynasty the Muslims emerged as a major sea power. The eighth century saw further expansions eastwards as far as the river Indus and the Sind region and westwards through northern Africa to Spain and France where the over-stretched army was stopped at the battle of Poitiers by Charles Martel.

The surprising speed at which the conquests took place can be attributed to the weakness of countries debilitated by long external conflicts (the Sasanian empire) or by the fragility of internal structure (Spain). There was also discontent with despotic leadership and heavy taxation among the local population, especially in Syria and Spain.

Army and Society

The expanding Muslim army was at first only composed of Arab tribal groups, mostly infantry and some cavalry forces. Gradually it transformed itself by recruiting locally during its campaigns. The role played by the mawali ('con-verted non-Arab clients'), such as Berber warriors in the western campaign to Spain and, eastwards, Persians and Turks, is well-known. The Umayyad armies relied on elite Syrian corps and increased the role of the cavalry and especially of units in armour, though the infantry was predominant. The first Abbasid armies, on the other hand, relied mostly on Khurasani elite forces and, by the early ninth century, the

cavalry became clearly dominant. From the eleventh century onwards the horse-back archery techniques of Central Asian and Turkish origin began to play a major role in Muslim warfare.

Muslim commanders left the social structure of the conquered territories almost intact by appointing local Muslim governors and relying on local administrative and financial systems. The populations were not converted en masse but in time the frequency of conversions increased. The reasons for embracing Islam ranged from a desire to come closer to the new masters and share their privileges, to an acknowledgment of, or belief in, the tolerant and syncretistic nature of the new faith. Tolerance, however, could only be granted to the Ahl al Kitab ('the people of the Book') that is, those people whom the Qur'an cites as having received revealed scripture: Jews, Christians and the 'Sabians'. These could not, in principle, be forcibly converted (as could polytheists and disbelievers), and were guaranteed protection and religious autonomy against the payment of a special tax.

Islam in Spain

By the end of the first Muslim campaign into Spain (711 - 13) all but the northwest corner of the Iberian peninsula came under Arab rule.

2. Islamic Spain to the 13th Century

When the Umayyad dynasty collapsed in Damascus at the hand of the 'Abbasids, one of its few surviving princes, 'Abd al Rahman I, moved to the far west and seized Cordova in 755 , founding the Umayyad dynasty of Spain which was to last for over 300 years. The achievements of this period are embodied in the building in 788 of the Great Mosque of Cordova, which became a vibrant center of learning. In time, however, the central authority of the state declined and, by the early eleventh century, Spain had broken up into a multiplicity of small kingdoms. The Christian states of the north captured Toledo in 1085 and this marks, to some extent, the first step towards the Crusades of the Middle Ages.

Islamic Spain then came under the rule of Berber dynasties such as the Almoravids (1056 – 1147) and the Almohads (1130 – 1269), who held the entire political power of the western lands of Islam. The coalition of Christian states eventually reduced the presence of Islam to a strip of country in the southeast around Granada where, for a further 250 years, the Nasrid dynasty ruled. The Alhambra ('the red' castle) at Granada, the architectural masterpiece of Western Islam, belongs to this last period of Muslim rule. In 1492 , Granada surrendered to the Christians and, within a few years, all Muslims (and Jews) were expelled from Spain.

Islamic Spain had played an important role as the intellectual Muslim centre in the West, through which Far and Near Eastern as well as Greek and Arabic technical, scientific and philosophical knowledge reached medieval Europe.

Islam in India

Islam is the second largest religion in India, with 14.2% of the country's population or roughly over 172 million people who are Muslim. Islam first came to the western coast of India when

Arab traders as early as the 7th century CE came to coastal malabar and Konkan-Gujarat. Cheraman Juma Mosque in Kerala is thought to be the first mosque in India, built in 629 CE by Malik Deenar.

Following an expedition by the governor of Bahrain to Bharuch in the 7th century CE, immigrant Arab and Persian trading communities from South Arabia and the Persian Gulf began settling in coastal Gujarat. Ismaili Shia Islam was introduced to Gujarat in the second half of the 11th century, when Fatimid Imam Al-Mustansir Billah sent missionaries to Gujarat in 467 AH/1073 CE. Islam arrived in North India in the 12th century via the Turkic invasions and has since become a part of India's religious and cultural heritage. Over the centuries, there has been significant integration of Hindu and Muslim cultures across India and Muslims have played a notable role in economics, politics and culture of India.

- 1) "Islam" means "surrender" or "submission". "Salam" (which means "peace") is the root word of "Islam". In a religious context the word "Islam" means "the surrendering of one's will (without compulsion) to the true will of God in an effort to achieve peace".
- 2) "Muslim" means "anyone or anything that surrenders itself to the true will of God". By this definition, everything in nature (trees, animals, planets, etc.) are "muslims" because they are in a state of surrender to God's will. In other words, they are fulfilling the purpose for which God created them.
- 3) Islam is not a new religion or cult. It is a universal way of life and civilization. Studies show that between 1.5 and 1.8 billion people in the world identify their religion as Islam. Along with Judaism and Christianity it traces its roots through Prophet Abraham and back to the first humans Adam and Eve.
- 4) There are five pillars of practice in Islam. These practices must be undertaken with the best of effort in order to be considered a true Muslim:
 - A) Declaration of faith: A statement proclaiming the belief in One God and that Muhammad is a prophet of God. To become Muslim a person simply recites this statement publicly, and in Arabic.
 - B) Formal prayer five times a day.
 - C) Poor-due tax: 2.5% of one's excess wealth given to the needy once a year.
 - D) Fasting during the daylight hours in the month of Ramadan.
 - E) Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once, if physically and financially able.
- 5) There are six articles of faith in Islam. These are the basic beliefs that one must have in order to be considered a true Muslim. They are belief in:
 - A) the One God.
 - B) all of the true prophets of God.
 - C) the original scriptures revealed to Moses, David, Jesus and Mu-hammad.

- D) the angels.
- E) the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter.
- F) destiny.

6) Muslims believe in the one Creator of the Universe, referring to Him as “Allah” which is the Arabic word for “God”. Muslims worldwide, even English-speaking Muslims, frequently use the Arabic word “Allah” because Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. But Allah is no different than the God of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The Creator is the Creator regardless of what people call Him. In the English language He is most commonly referred to as “God”. Yet Jesus spoke a different language, referring to God as “Eloi” in Mark 15:34 of the New Testament. Are “God” and “Eloi” different gods? Many Hispanics call God “Dios” and many French say “Dieu”. It would logically follow then that people who refer to God as “Allah” in the Arabic language are referring to the very same God. In fact, many Arab Jews and Arab Christians call God “Allah”. And the word “Allah” is written in Arabic script on the walls of many Arab churches and on the pages of Arabic Bibles. So while the understanding of God may differ between faith groups, the various names used to describe Him does not change the fact that the one Creator of the Universe is the God of all people.

7) The Islamic concept of God is that He is loving, merciful and compassionate. Islam also teaches that He is all-knowing and the perfect judge of affairs, and will punish (or forgive) accordingly. However, Allah once said to Muhammad, “My mercy prevails over my wrath”. So Islam teaches a balance between fear and hope, protecting one from both complacency and despair.

Muslims believe that God has revealed 99 of His names, or attributes, in the Qur'an. It is through these names that one can come to know the Creator. A few of these names are the All-Merciful, the All-Knower, the Protector, the Provider, the Near, the First, the Last, the Hidden and the Source of All Peace.

8) The Christian concept of “vicarious atonement” (the idea that Jesus died for the sins of humanity) is alien to the Islamic concept of personal responsibility. Islam teaches that on the Day of Judgment every person will be resurrected and will be accountable to God for their every word and deed. Consequently, a practicing Muslim is always striving to be righteous while hoping and praying for God's acceptance and grace.

9) Muslims believe in all of the true prophets that preceded Muhammad, from Adam to Jesus. Muslims believe they brought the same message of voluntarily surrendering to God's will (Islam, in a generic sense) to different peoples at different times. Muslims also believe they were “muslims” (again, in a generic sense) since they followed God's true guidance and surrendered their will to Him.

- 10) Muslims neither worship Muhammad nor pray through him. Muslims worship the Unseen, Omniscient Creator, Allah.
- 11) Muslims accept the original unaltered Torah (as revealed to Moses) and the original unaltered Bible (as revealed to Jesus) since they were revealed by God. But none of these scriptures exist today in their original form or in their entirety. Therefore, Muslims follow the subsequent, final and preserved revelation of God, the Qur'an.
- 12) The Qur'an was not authored by Muhammad. It was authored by God, revealed to Muhammad (through angel Gabriel) and written into physical form by his companions.
- 13) The original Arabic text of the Qur'an contains no flaws or contradictions and has not been altered since its revelation.
- 14) Actual 7th century Qur'ans, complete and intact, are on display in museums in Turkey and other places around the world.

15) If all Qur'ans in the world today were destroyed, the original Arabic would still re-main. This is because millions of Muslims, called "hafiz" (or "guardians") have memorized the text letter for letter from beginning to end, every word and every syllable. Also, chapters from the Qur'an are precisely recited from memory in each of the five formal prayers performed daily by hundreds of millions of Muslims throughout the world.

Sharia is the law that regulates the daily life of a Muslim and serves as a guide for living by Islamic principles. As Islam is not only a belief system but a complete way of life, the law covers all aspects of living including moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical economical, political, etc. Sharia law is derived by scholars through interpretations of Islam's canonical texts, the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings and actions of Muhammad). As with any legal system the interpretations can range across the liberal-conservative spectrum, and opinions on the meanings and applications will often differ. Therefore sharia law is essentially an effort to comprehend God's instructions and apply them in daily life. Since the interpretations are made by humans, they are subject to error and even perversion. This occurs when unqualified, ignorant and/or corrupted individuals make the interpretation. For instance the KKK perverts Christian texts to conjure up false rulings. The same can be said for certain Muslim groups and so-called "Islamic states" regarding Islamic texts. While there is no Pope in Islam to serve as the authoritative interpreter, there are recognized institutions and scholars whom analyze, discuss, deliberate and arrive at reasonable rulings through a process known as "fiqh" (Islamic jurisprudence). This nuanced and sophisticated science operates on the premise that the Islamic texts are fluid and dynamic; that anything outside of the very basic tenets can, and should, be interpreted according to the particular time, place and culture. So if any version of sharia advocates brutality, injustice, extremism, terrorism, etc., the question must be asked: are such rulings endorsed by mainstream

Islamic scholars, or are they being posited by those devoid of a true understanding of the religion, or the wisdom to apply it?

16) Some attribute the early and rapid spread of Islam to forced conversions by the sword. While it is accurate that the Muslim empire initially spread, for the most part, through battles and conquests (a common phenomenon for that time) the religion of Islam it-self was never forced on anyone who found themselves living under Muslim rule. In fact, non-Muslims were afforded the right to worship as they pleased as long as a tax, called “jizyah”, was paid. During the Dark Ages, Jews, Christians and others were given protection by the Muslims from religious persecutions happening in Europe. Islam teaches no compulsion in religion (Qur'an 2:256 and 10:99). For more, read “The Spread of Islam in the World” by Thomas Arnold.

Terrorism, unjustified violence and the killing of non-combatant civilians (and even intimidating, threatening or injuring them) are all absolutely forbidden in Islam. Islam is a way of life that is meant to bring peace to a society whether its people are Muslim or not. The extreme actions of those who claim to be Muslim may be a result of their ignorance, frustration, uncontrolled anger or political (not religious) ambitions. Any-one who condones or commits an act of terrorism in the name of Islam is simply not following Islam and is, in fact, violating its very tenets. These people are individuals with their own personal views and agendas. Fanatical Muslims are no more representative of the true teachings of Islam than fanatical Christians are of the true teachings of Christianity, or fanatical Jews are of the true teachings of Judaism. The most prominent examples of such “religious” fanatics are Anders Behring Breivik, the 2011 Norwegian terrorist who claimed in his manifesto to be “100 percent Christian” and Baruch Goldstein, perpetrator of the 1994 Hebron massacre who is considered by some Jews to be a “hero” and a “saint”. Extremism and fanaticism are problems not exclusive to Muslims. Anyone who thinks that all Muslims are terrorists should note that terror groups like ISIS (or ISIL), Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram kill Muslims as well. Also, the former boxer Muhammad Ali, perhaps the most celebrated person of our era, was a practicing Muslim.

17) Some Muslims may say they are going for “jihad” when fighting in a war to defend themselves or others, but they say this because they are conceding that it will be a tremendous struggle. But there are many other forms of jihad which are much more relevant to the everyday life of a Muslim such as the struggles against laziness, arrogance, stinginess, one's own ego, or the struggle against a tyrant ruler or against the temptations of Satan, etc. Regarding the so-called verses of “holy war” in the Qur'an, two points: A) The term “holy war” neither appears in the Arabic text of the Qur'an nor in any classical teachings of Islam. B) The vast majority of verses in the Qur'an pertaining to violence refer to wartime situations in which Muslims were permitted to defend themselves against violent aggression. Any rational, intellectual analysis of the context and historical circumstances surrounding such verses, often ignored by pundits or violent extremists, proves this to be true. Other verses of violence deal with stopping oppression, capital punishment and the like.

18) Women are not oppressed in Islam. Any Muslim man that oppresses a woman is not following Islam. Among the many teachings of Muhammad that protected the rights and dignity of women is his saying, "...the best among you are those who treat their wives well."

19) Islam grants women many rights in the home and in society. Among them are the right to earn money, to financial support, to own property, to an education, to an inheritance, to being treated kindly, to vote, to a bridal gift, to keep their maiden name, to worship in a mosque, to a divorce, and so on.

20) Muslim women wear the head-covering (hijab) in fulfillment of God's decree to dress modestly. This type of modest dress has been worn by religious women throughout time such as traditional Catholic nuns, Mother Teresa and the Virgin Mary.

21) Forced marriages, honor killings, female genital mutilation and the confinement of women to their homes are all forbidden in Islam. These practices stem from deeply entrenched cultural traditions and/or ignorance of the true Islamic teachings or how to apply them in society. Arranged marriages are allowed in Islam but are not required. In fact, one of the conditions for a valid Islamic marriage contract is the mutual consent of both parties to the marriage. And divorce is permissible provided the Islamic guidelines are followed which protect the rights of all affected parties, especially women and unborn children.

25) Islam and the Nation "of Islam" are two different religions. Islam is a religion for all races and enjoins the worship of the One Unseen God who never took human form. On the other hand "the Nation" is a movement geared towards non-whites that teaches God appeared as a man named Fard Muhammad and that Elijah Muhammad was a prophet. According to orthodox Islam these are blasphemous beliefs that contra-dict the basic theology defined throughout the Qur'an and other authentic texts. The followers of "the Nation" adhere to some Islamic principles that are mixed with other practices and beliefs completely alien to authentic Islamic teachings. To better understand the differences read about Malcolm X, his pilgrimage to Mecca and his later comments to the media. Islam teaches equality amongst the races (Qur'an 49:13).

26) All Muslims are not Arab, Middle-Eastern or of African descent. Islam is a universal religion and way of life that includes followers from all races. There are Muslims in and from virtually every country in the world. Arabs only constitute about 20% of Muslims worldwide. The countries with the largest Muslim populations are not located in the Middle East. They are Indonesia (over 200 million Muslims) and Pakistan and India (over 350 million Muslims combined).

- 27) In the five daily prayers Muslims face the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is a cube-shaped stone structure that was built by Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael on the same foundations where Prophet Adam is believed to have built a sanctuary for the worship of the One God. Muslims do not worship the Kaaba. It serves as a focal point for Muslims around the world, unifying them in worship and symbolizing their common belief, spiritual focus and direction. Interestingly the inside of the Kaaba is empty.
- 28) The hajj is an annual pilgrimage to the Kaaba made by about 3 million Muslims from all corners of the Earth. It is performed to fulfill one of the pillars of Islam. The rituals of hajj commemorate the struggles of Abraham, his wife Hagar and their son Ishmael in surrendering their wills to God.
- 29) Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today. Conversions are a major factor but natural growth is the main reason. Statistically Muslim women have the highest fertility rates in the world. According to the Pew Research Center by the year 2050 Muslims will equal the number of Christians for the first time in history. Currently, the most popular name in the world is Muhammad. And perhaps most interesting is the fact that Muhammad (alternate spellings included) is the most popular name for new-born boys in England and Wales.
- 30) Over the past 1400 years Muslim intellects have made substantial contributions in the areas of physics, medicine, mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, philosophy and geography. At no time was this more evident than in the Middle Ages, a period commonly referred to as the “Golden Age of Islam”. It produced such luminaries as Jabir ibn Hayyan (considered the father of early chemistry), al-Khwarizmi (one of the fathers of algebra), al-Zahrawi (a father of surgery), al-Razi (father of pediatrics), Ibn Sina (one of the greatest medical scholars in history), Jabir ibn Aflah (promoter of trigonometry in Europe), Ibn Rushd (reviver of Aristotle) and Ibn Khaldun (a father of modern sociology, historiography, demography and economics) to name only a few. Their contributions ultimately helped to usher in the European Renaissance. This influence on Western civilization is recognized in a mural painted in the 1890s on the ceiling of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Islam is included along with England, France, America, Greece, Rome and others in a depiction of the “Evolution of Civilization”.

Philosophy

By philosophy we mean here the rational study of the nature of Existence. The foundation of Islamic philosophy - like the foundation of Islamic Science- is Allah, the Supreme Being. That is, Islamic philosophy starts from an acceptance of the premise that Existence, or reality, actually and already exists, external to and independent from ourselves as human beings, and it names the very Being of Existence itself as Allah. This may be said to be the first fundamental principle of Islamic philosophy.

The fundamental quest of Islamic philosophy is therefore to understand the nature of Al-lah, our own relation to Allah, and in general how the nature of all beings relate to the Being which is named Allah.

At the same time it would not be incorrect to mention that there is no generally accepted definition of what Islamic philosophy is, and the term will be used here to mean the sort of philosophy which arose within the culture of Islam. There are several main strands to Islamic philosophy. Peripatetic philosophy follows broadly the Greek tradition, while Sufism uses the principle of mystical knowledge as its leading idea. Some would argue that Islamic philosophy has never lost its concentration on the Qur'an and other significant Muslim texts, and that throughout its history it has sought to understand the essence of the realities both of the Sacred Book and of the created world.

It is critical to mention this history here, as one is aware how certain scriptures can be interpreted according to the understanding and knowing of the people at the time and in that particular region.

Islamic Philosophy – Introduction

Islamic Philosophy and Christian philosophy agree in some ways because both are theistic and share some biblical roots. Both affirm the supernatural and miracles. Both also use faith and reason to support their religious beliefs. Islamic Philosophy is summed-up by Hammuda Abdalati as follows: “Belief in angels originates from the Islamic principle that knowledge and truth are not entirely confined to the sensory knowledge or sensory perception alone.”

Traditions of Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophers were greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and sought to use it to understand, defend, and further their faith. However, their theorizing often led them astray from orthodox Islamic teachings. For example, some of them believed, following Aristotle, that the material world was eternal, though they also affirmed that it existed only because God made it to exist. Others denied physical resurrection, substituting the continued existence of the soul. Still others proposed a replacement body that looked like the original, but actually was not. Most philosophers advocated the idea that God was a Necessary Being (a being who could not not exist) and that the world was dependent upon God for its existence.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God was developed by Islamic philosophers and is both commended and employed by Christian philosophers today. The cosmological argument, for example, is the argument from creation to a Creator. “It argues a posteriori, from effect to cause, and is based on the principle of causality. This states that every event has a cause, or that everything that begins has a cause. The Kalam (Arabic: ‘eternal’) argument is a horizontal (linear) form of the cosmological argument. The universe is not eternal, so it must have had a Cause. That Cause must be considered God. This argument has a long and venerable history among such Islamic philosophers as Alfarabi, Al Ghazali, and Avicenna. Some scholastic philosophers also used it, especially Bonaventure.” Some Islamic philosophers

ventured into mysticism. Rahman asserts that much of the Islamic philosophic tradition fell away from orthodox Islam, but was retained and furthered in Sufism, a semi-mystic sect of Islam. Though some traditionalist Muslims believe such ventures into philosophy inherently conflict with the Qur'an and the Hadith, many others believe such attempts to explain and de-fend Islam with philosophical tools are entirely appropriate (though they would not be able to affirm all that Islamic philosophers have concluded).

Islamic Philosophy – Affirming Supernaturalism

Islamic philosophy argues for the existence of entities beyond the natural world; affirmation of the existence of God, for example, illustrates that Islam denies naturalism in favor of Supernaturalism. Islam also affirms the existence of the human spirit beyond death, as well As the existence of angels and jinn. Abdalati writes, “The true Muslim also believes in the angels of God. They are purely spiritual and splendid beings whose nature requires no food or drink or sleep. They have no physical desires of any kind nor needs material. They spend their days and nights in the service of God. There are many of them, and each is charged with a certain duty. If we cannot see the angels with our naked eyes, it does not necessarily deny their actual existence . . . Belief in angels originates from the Islamic principle that knowledge and truth are not entirely confined to the sensory knowledge or sensory perception alone...”In admitting the existence of angels, Abdalati also alludes to the Islamic view of epistemology: not all things may be known through human senses, nor may we limit the field of existence to what our senses perceive.

Islamic Philosophy – Life after Death and Resurrection

Fundamental to Islam is the belief in final judgment, necessitating an implied belief in life after death. Muslims further affirm the bodily resurrection of the dead (though they deny that Jesus died and was resurrected). “See thee not that God, Who created the heavens and the earth... is able to give life to the dead? Yea, verily He has power over all things (Qur'an 46:33). And he [unbelieving man] makes comparisons for Us, and forgets his own (origin and) Creation: He says, ‘Who can give Life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?’ Say, ‘He will give them Life Who created them for the first time! For He is well-versed in every kind of creation’” (36:78–79).

Islamic Philosophy – Miracles

The story of Islam begins with Muhammad receiving divine visions and communicating with the angel Gabriel, indicating an acceptance of the supernatural. Indeed, the Qur'an affirms that prophets of old performed many miracles. Consider some passages regarding Moses:

1. (Pharaoh) said: ‘If indeed thou hast come with a Sign, show it forth, if thou tellest the truth.’ Then (Moses) threw his rod, and behold, it was a serpent, plain (for all to see)! And he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white to all beholders! (7:106–107)

2. Said Moses [to the sorcerers of Pharaoh's court]: 'Throw ye (first).' So when they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people, and struck terror into them: for they showed a great (feat of) magic. We put it into Moses' mind by inspiration: 'Throw (now) thy rod': and behold, it swallows up straightaway all the falsehoods which they fake! Thus truth was confirmed and all that they did was made of no effect. (7:116–118)

3. Then we sent Moses and his brother Aaron, and with Our Signs and Authority manifest.' (23:45; see, 7:106–108)

4. The miracles Jesus performed are also acknowledged.

5. Then will God say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favor to thee and to they mother . . . and thou halest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold, thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. And behold, I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee when thou didst show them the Clear Signs. . . . (5:113)

These stories presuppose a view of supernaturalism wherein God intervenes in the world (miracles) and seeks to convey His will to human beings (revelation). Orthodox Islamic philosophy affirms the occurrence of miracles and the existence of supernatural beings.

Culture of Islam

It is true that Muslims share certain fundamental beliefs, such as those expressed in the shahadah, the profession of faith: there is only one God and that Muhammad is His Prophet to whom was revealed the Qur'an. But as the religion spread in different regions and cultures ranging from Bosnia to Yemen and Zanzibar, it came to be interpreted in diverse ways. This diversity was the result of the core set of religious beliefs interacting in complex ways with the many different contexts in which Muslims lived. Each of these contexts is defined by multiple factors, including its history, cultural traditions, its social, economic, political structures, and its geography and physical location in the world. Recognizing this reality, Abdol Karim Soroush, a contemporary Iranian intellectual, states, "There is no such thing as a "pure" Islam or an ahistorical Islam that is outside the process of historical development. The actual lived experience of Islam has always been culturally and historically specific, and bound by the immediate circumstances of its location in time and space. If we were to take a snapshot of Islam as it is lived today, it would reveal a diversity of lived experiences which are all different, yet existing simultaneously."

In view of this diversity, the late Edward Said, University Professor of English at Columbia University and a cultural and literary critic, wrote, "The problems facing anyone attempting to say anything intelligible, useful, or accurate about Islam are legion. One should therefore begin by speaking of Islams rather than Islam (as the scholar Aziz al-Azmeh does in his excellent book *Islams and Maternities*), and then go on to specify which kind, during which particular time, one is speaking about." He goes on to say that keeping in mind the complexity and variety of concrete human experience, "it is much more sensible to try to talk about different kinds of Islam, at different moments, for different peoples, in different fields....once one gets a tiny step beyond core beliefs (since even those are very hard to reduce to a simple set of doctrinal rules) and the centrality of the Koran [Qur'an], one has entered an astoundingly complicated world

whose enormous – one might even say unthinkable – collective history alone has yet to be written.” (“Impossible Histories: Why the many Islams cannot be simplified,” Harper’s Magazine, July 2002, 69-74



The Five Pillars are

1. The Shahadah (Declaration of faith) - Trusting and understanding the words of the Shahadah. "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad (SAW) is the final messenger."
2. Prayer (Salah) - Praying five times a day, kneeling towards Mecca. There are specific ritualistic movements and prayers that are said.
3. Charity or alms-giving (Zakat) - Each year a Muslim should give money to charity (Usually 2.5% of their savings). If a person does not have much money, they can do other things instead.
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm)
5. A pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) - Muslims should go to Mecca on a pilgrimage. They should do this at least once in their lives. A person does not have to make this pilgrimage if they cannot afford to, or they are physically unable to (Though they can get someone else to go on their behalf).

Prayer

Daily prayer is central to the lives of millions of Muslims and is one of the five pillars of Islam. Islam requires its followers to pray five times daily: once in the morning, at noon, early afternoon, at dusk and at night. The prayer is preceded by a ritual washing (called "wudhu") of the hands, arms, feet, legs and head. Muslims may pray anywhere provided they are facing the direction of Mecca, Islam's holiest site. In many Muslim communities, mosque officials use a public address system to call followers to prayer; this is both a re-minder and a suggestion to pray with others, which is preferable to praying alone.

Clothing

Islam urges its adherents to dress modestly at all times, both to discourage showing off one's body and to minimize sexual temptation. Though it is not explicitly required by Islam, Muslim women often wear a head covering called a hijab or a scarf to keep their hair--an often attractive and very feminine trait--from the view of men. Some even wear covering that hides all of the face except the eyes. Muslim men are also encouraged to dress modestly in loose-fitting clothes and to wear a head covering called a kufi.

Prohibitions

Islam provides guidance on what daily activities are haram (forbidden) and halal (encouraged and beneficial). For example, consuming alcohol using mind-altering drugs and engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage are all haram. Alcohol and drugs cloud judgment and remove inhibitions, while infidelity shows disrespect to the sanctity of marriage. Muslims are also prohibited from consuming pork, as pigs are considered dirty animals.

Other prohibitions include theft, cheating, greed, showing disrespect to parents (especially mothers) and other family members and being uncharitable to widows, orphans and neighbors.

Interacting with Others

Muslims are required to treat everyone, even enemies, with courtesy and respect. With other Muslims, they offer a traditional Islamic greeting: "As-salamu alaykum," which translates to "Peace be with you." Islam also strongly encourages Muslims to adopt an attitude of forgive-ness and forbearance in everyday life, even with strangers. The Quran states that the ideal mindset would enable a Muslim to forgive others instantly, be blind to faults and do good deeds even to those who wrong them. Sharing the Islamic faith is also an important part of living a good Muslim life, provided it is done gently, without pushiness or aggression.

Hindu Muslim Unity

Peace and Harmony

The Indus is one of the oldest and longest rivers in Asia. Though it originated in the Tibetan Plateau in China, much of it flows across Pakistan. Various religions and cultures have thrived here: Animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Islam. Each of these religions were indigenized. Historically, the strand of Sufism which emerged on the banks of Indus (especially in Punjab and all the way across Sindh), consciously eschewed religious orthodoxy and, at times, even rebelled against it. They also celebrated with devotion in other states of southern India like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Hindu The poetry and music that emerged from Sufi circles along the river is therefore largely a result of the theological, political and social tensions between Sufis and the orthodox ulema and clerics.

Proud to be an Indian

Hindu Muslim Unity: Ganesh celebrations that take place in mosques

KOLHAPUR: Setting a unique example of communal amity, Hindus and Muslims gathered at mosques in Kolhapur region on the occasion of Ganesha festival on Friday. Ganesha statues are placed inside mosques and devotees from both the communities participate in the festivity with great fervor. On Friday, Muslim devotees said the Ganesh deity was installed in at least half-a-dozen mosques in the region during the 10-day-long festival. Later, members of the both the communities take part in the immersion of the idol. ”

In Siro Taluka village in Kolhapur we have the idol of lord Ganesha placed inside the mosque. For the past 50-60 years we have been performing this ritual here. We have such idols in six to seven mosques. Hindu and Muslims take part in the immersion of the idol together. This way we are trying to spread this message of amity among the people of the whole country to live together in peace,” said Mansoor Sheikh, a Muslim devotee.

“See, for the past 40-50 years we have been celebrating the festivals of Hindu and Muslims like Muharram (a Muslim festival), Ganpati, Navratri (Hindu festivals) together with religious amity. We celebrate all these festivals together with brotherhood and love. No violence occurs here and we celebrate every festival with great fervor and zeal,” said Mahesh Janvekar, a Hindu devotee. At the end of the 10-day-long festival, the idols of Lord Ganesha are taken in grand processions and immersed in water bodies such as wells, ponds, rivers and the sea. Ganesha Chaturthi is the most important festival in Maharashtra, and it is Muslim Unity: Hindus distribute sweets on Eid.

VARANASI: This Eid will bring extra sweetness with love and compassion for Razia, Najma, Khushboo and many others, as the swain they will prepare to celebrate the festival has come from their Hindu sisters and brothers.

About 300 poor Muslim families of the locality were given food items for Eid celebration. The Anaj Bank, run by women’s NGO Vishal Bharat Sansthan, collected food grains and other edibles from its account holders for free distribution among poor families

Sikhism:**Gurunanak Dev Ji**

Guru Nanak has been called “one of the greatest religious innovators of all time”. He travelled far and wide teaching people the message of one God who dwells in every one of His creations and constitutes the eternal truth. He set up a unique spiritual, social, and political platform based on equality, fraternal love, goodness, and virtue. Sikhism is one of the most recent religions founded by Guru Nanak Dev towards the end of the fifteenth century. A study of history of the period reveals that Bhakti Movement was in full swing in India then and religious leaders of various traditions were engaged in disseminating their message throughout the country.

The teachings of the cult of Bhakti were very simple and direct:

God is one and is omnipresent.

Though people address Him by different names yet His commandments remain the same for all. Every Scripture, Vedas or Qur'an, points to this direction. It is, therefore, the duty of every human to revere them.

Before Him there is no distinction of caste. Whether one is a Brahman or a Shudra, a Hindu or a Muslim, every person can have access to God.

The protagonists of Bhakti did not believe in bodily exercises and ostentatious modes of worship, nor did they view approvingly the renunciation of the world. It is noteworthy that all the Bhaktas preached their ideas in the languages of their respective regions which the common people could understand.

Guru Nanak Dev's teachings had proximity with those of the Bhaktas. He died in 1539 A.D. He was succeeded by Guru Angad who energetically developed the work of Nanak. After the third Guru Amar Das, he was succeeded by his son-in-law Guru Ram Das, who before his death assigned his youngest son Guru Arjan Singh as the fifth Guru of the Guru of the Sikhs. Hence onwards the seat of the Sikh Gurus remained in the same family.

Guru Nanak's words are registered in the form of 974 poetic hymns in the holy text of Sikhism, the Guru Granth Sahib, with some of the major prayers being the Japji Sahib, the Asa di Var and the Sidh-Ghost. It is part of Sikh religious belief that the spirit of Guru Nanak's sanctity, divinity and religious authority descended upon each of the nine subsequent Gurus when the Guruship was devolved on to them.

Guru Sahib's inherent nature of not accepting what was told and taught at its face value led him to evolve as an original spiritual thinker. He believed in listening, understanding and having first hand knowledge before expressing or forming his own opinion. He listened to people of all faith and cultures. He read extensively about the religion he was born in – Hinduism, and the dominant religion of the region Islam. He also studied Buddhism in depth. He traveled widely to famed and acclaimed seats of learning of those times. Traveling towards the east he stayed at Haridwar, Varanasi, and Kamrup in Assam and Jagannath Puri in Orissa and visited/ camped at

many other important towns and schools of thought. His journey towards south of Punjab took him to temples and places of worship spread across the four states in the southern part of India and Sri Lanka. In his travels to north, north east and west of Punjab he covered the holy lands of Tibet, mainland China, Mecca (Saudi Ara-bia) and Baghdad (Iraq).

The beliefs & philosophies of Guru Nanak Dev, the first Guru of Sikhs, were not very popular in the beginning. But, today, it is the teachings of Guru Nanak that are guiding principles of Sikhs. The three teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji are known as Nam Simran, Kirt Karo and Wand Chako. The term ‘Nam Simran’ means think about God. ‘Kirt Kaara’ preaches people to lead a normal life by earning their living through hard work and hon-esty. ‘Wand Chhako’ means to share whatever spare things you have with poor and needy people.

Guru Sahib desired a Sikh to- (Sikh – origin the Sanskrit word Shishya – Student)

Believe in one God

Do selfless worship at all times (not only in the time of need)

Do service to humanity without any self interest

Share and care, especially with those who are in need

Earn an honest living by ensuring that no action leads to cheating or exploitation

Shed all inequalities, rich – poor, men – women, higher caste – lower caste

Be compassionate

Be open to the view of others on all matters

Practice brotherhood and not be self-centered

Be not scared of death

The Sikh Principles can be summed up in the Mool Mantar:

1. One Universal Creator God
2. The Supreme Unchangeable Truth
3. The Creative Being
4. Without Fear
5. Without Hate
6. Timeless whose spirit is throughout the universe
7. Beyond the cycle of death and rebirth
8. Self-existent

9. By the grace of the guru
10. God is made known to humanity.
11. Chant and meditate on His name
12. True in the beginning, true now, says Nanak, will be true forever.

Religion and Philosophy

The Sikh religion is strictly monotheistic, believing in One Supreme God. Absolute yet All-pervading, the Eternal, the Creator, the Cause of Causes, without enmity, without hate, both Immanent in His creation and beyond it. He is no longer the God of one nation, but the God of Grace. That being so, He creates man not to punish him for his sins, but for the realization of his true purpose in the cosmos and to merge in from where he issues forth.

The basic belief in Sikhism is that life is not sinful in its origin, but has emanated from a pure source, the True One abides in all. Not only does all Sikh philosophy, but the whole of Sikh history and character flows from this principle.

The word Sikh means a disciple. A Sikh is a person who believes in One God.

The Sikhs do not recognize the caste system, nor do they believe in Idol-worship, rituals, or superstitions. The religion consists of practical living, in rendering service to humanity and engendering tolerance and brotherly love towards all.

The Sikh Gurus did not advocate isolation from the world in order to attain salvation or enlightenment. It can be achieved by any one who earns and honest living and leads a normal life.

Sikhism does not accept the ideology of pessimism. It advocates optimism and hope. Sikhs have an honour bound duty, at the risk of their own lives, to save others from danger and oppression and to stand up for their own, as well as others', beliefs. Seva (Selfless Service) and Simran (Contemplative Meditation) are two main pillars of Sikh way of life. While Seva instills humbleness, patience, a sense of self-sacrifice for the better-ment of humanity and steadfastness on the path of God in the disciple, Simran serves as the medium for the disciple to become a God-oriented person. Simran not only brings one closer to God, but also transforms the individual into a perfect and God-oriented human being. Engaging in Simran leads to the creation of an ideal human by rising above worldly desires and attaining God-like attributes resulting in the union of human soul with the Al-mighty God.

Sikhs believe in living in this world as a householder carrying out his or her duties and responsibilities to the fullest. Vand Chakna – to share their wealth within the community and outside by giving Dasvand and practising charity (Daan), to “share and consume together.” The Sikh Gurus mention that our mind and spirit are constantly being attacked by the five evils;

Kam (Lust), Krodh (Rage), Lobh (Greed), Moh (Attachment) and Ahankar (Ego). A Sikh needs to constantly attack and overcome these five vices.

The Sikh Gurus taught the Sikhs to develop and harness the five virtues which lead the soul closer to God and away from evil. These are Sat (Truth), Daya (Compassion), Santokh (Contentment), Nirmata (Humility) and Pyare (Love).

Nanak stimulated the people to get rid of priesthood, polytheism and caste system. He offered consolation by preaching that their misfortunes were due to their misdeeds in the past life, and assured them that a good life would bring them salvation hereafter.

Thus he preached the principle of fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. The Gurus addressed their followers as Bhai, Bhai Mardana, Bhai-Bala, Bhai Budha, Bhai Lahna. Guru Tegh Bahadur, while writing to a sangat, mentioned every member by name even when the number was 50, 60 or 70, calling every male member Bhai and every woman as Bebe.

The Gurus asserted it did not matter if God was called Allah or Khuda and Ram or Parmeshwar. The real test lay not in belief but in action. All formalities and rituals were completely discarded. He roamed all over the country preaching to the people at village well, under a shady tree where people rested in the afternoon, at fairs and festivals, at places of pilgrimage, and on occasions of marriages and mourning's

Woman's Empowerment

At the time of Guru Nanak, Indian women were severely de-graded and oppressed by their society. Given no education or freedom to make decisions, their presence in religious, political, social, cultural, and economic affairs was virtually non-existent. Her function was only to perpetuate the race, do household work, and serve the male members of society. Female infanticide was common, and the practice of sati, the immolation of the wife on her husband's funeral pyre, was encouraged, some-times even forced.

Guru Nanak condemned this man-made notion of the inferiority of women, and protested against their long subjugation. The Ultimate Truth was revealed to Guru Nanak through a mystic experience, in direct communion with God. Guru Nanak conveys this Truth through the bani, Sikh Scripture: "In a woman man is conceived, from a woman he is born, with a woman he is betrothed and married, with a woman he contracts friendship. Why denounce her, the one from whom even kings are born? From a woman a woman is born, none may exist without a woman." The fundamental analogy used in the bani depicts the relationship between God and man, and proves that the physical body does not matter. The bani parallels all human beings (men and women) to the woman / wife, and God to the man/husband. This means that every person is a

sohagan - a woman who is the beloved of the Lord - whether they have the body of a man or woman. Because the human body is transitory, the difference between man and woman is only transitory, and as such superficial. Thus, according to Sikh ideology, all men and women possess equal status. All human beings, regardless of gender, caste, race, or birth, are judged only by their deeds.

Sikh Language and Holy Book

By this time seventy years had passed since the founding of the Sikh religion, and it had well taken root during this period.

Besides spiritual attainments Guru Angad possessed, linguistic proficiency as well. He invented the Gurmukhi alphabet — script currently in use for Punjabi language.

Guru Nanak's biography (Janam sakhi) was written in this script.

Guru Ram Das founded the city of Amritsar which later became a place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs and their principal center.

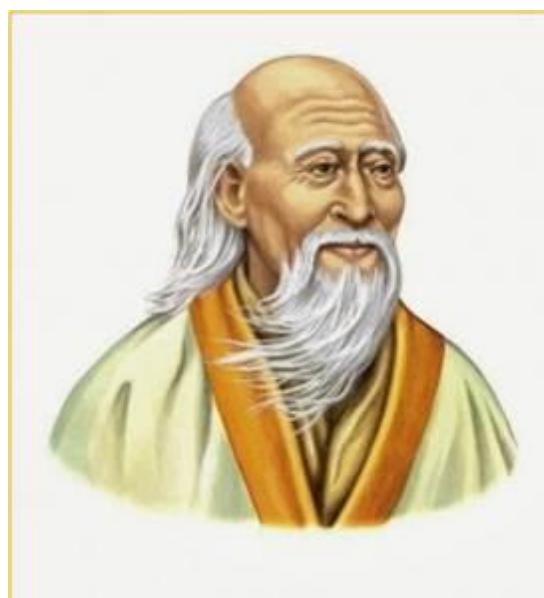
Guru Arjan Dev compiled the Granth Sahib. Thus a 'new' language, a central holy shrine and a holy book had been provided for the Sikhs, which means that all the ingredients to lend contiguity to this community had been made available.

The number of Gurus' disciple began to swell steadily, and with their gifts and offerings the Guru's annual income became substantial. Consequently they attained a high position in society, spiritual as well as temporal.

Each Guru added to this and reinforced the message taught by the previous, resulting in the creation of Sikhism. However, it was not until the tenth Guru Gobind Singh that religious practices were formalized on 13 April 1699. Guru Gobind Singh was revolutionary during his time and baptized five persons from different social backgrounds to form Khalsa. The first five, Pure Ones, then baptized Gobind Singh into the Khalsa fold. This gives the order of Khalsa, a history of around 300 years.

LAO TZU

Lao-Tzu (also known as Laozi or Lao-Tze) was a Chinese philosopher credited with founding the philosophical system of Taoism. He is best known as the author of the Tao-Te-Ching, the work which exemplifies his thought. The name by which he is known is not a personal name but an honorific title meaning 'Old Man' or 'Old Teacher' and there has been countless speculation as to whether an individual by that name ever existed or whether Lao-Tzu is an amalgam of many different philosophers.



Introduction:

"Lao-Tze, greatest of the pre-Confucian philosophers, was wiser than Teng Shih; he knew the wisdom of silence, and lived, we may be sure, to a ripe old age – though we are not sure that he lived at all" - Will Durant

A Semi-legendary figure, Laozi was usually portrayed as a 6th-century BCE contemporary of Confucius, but most modern historians consider him to have lived during the Warring States

period of the 5th or 4th century BCE. A central figure in Chinese culture, Laozi is claimed by both the emperors of the Tang dynasty and modern people of the Li surname as a founder of their lineage. Laozi's work has been embraced by both various anti-authoritarian movements as well as Chinese Legalism.

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFb7Hxva5rg>

FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES:

The Four Cardinal Virtues are found in the Tao Te Ching, a collection of sayings expounding the principal Taoist teachings. It has 81 short poetic verses packed full of universal wisdom for politics, society, and personal life, and aims to support personal harmony through the right view and understanding of existence.

The Tao (also known as the Way or the Dao) has baffled its readers for centuries with its cryptic and deliberate contradictions, yet it offers a profound contemplation to seekers, lending itself to varied interpretations and inner questioning.

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The Tao is both named and nameless. As nameless it is the origin of all things; as named it is the Mother of 10,000 things. Ever desireless, one can see the mystery; ever desiring, one sees only the manifestations. And the mystery itself is the doorway to all understanding." — Wayne W. Dyer, Change Your Thoughts - Change Your Life: Living the Wisdom of the Tao

The Tao Te Ching is the basic text of Taoism, but it has also influenced Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism, and is among some of the most translated works in world literature. This powerful text of the Tao, road or way of life, reflects the force of the universe and even the universe itself. While many have tried to make sense of its mystery, one man immersed himself in this text, literally living its wisdom, and then distilled the essence of these ancient mystery teachings for a modern audience.

The four cardinal virtues, or rules for living life, can provide a framework for a life filled with inner peace and purpose.

1. Reverence for All Life

This virtue manifests as having unconditional love and positive regard for all creatures in the universe, starting with ourselves, then this will naturally flow out to all others. This reverence is for all life, not just some forms. It is honouring all forms of life, and at its core has an innate spiritual understanding of how the universe truly works – that we are all sparks of the one fire. When we live with reverence for all life, we surrender our need to control and to dominate. We

naturally come into heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for all of life. This first virtue is the key to diminishing the ego.

“Affirm this as often as you can, for when you see yourself in a loving way, you have nothing but love to extend outward. And the more you love others, the less you need old excuse patterns, particularly those relating to blame.” Wayne Dyer

2. Natural Sincerity

This virtue encompasses kindness and authenticity. To me, it has a feeling of compassion and an all-encompassing love for all beings. When we are sincere and act with integrity, we move towards peace and inner tranquility. Our conscience clear, we don't have the inner niggles over our dishonest actions that can erode a peaceful mind. Much of these four pillars relate to karma, the law of cause and effect, and maintaining equilibrium and impeccability. This virtue is honesty, simplicity, and faithfulness, says Wayne Dyer. It is about being true to yourself and walking your talk.

According to Dyer, if you find this challenging, try affirming, “I no longer need to be insincere or dishonest. This is who I am, and this is how I feel.”

3. Gentleness

Gentleness is a deeply powerful trait. Often interpreted as weakness, gentleness is sensitivity, respect, and reverence for all life. Perhaps this virtue can be summed up by the Dalai Lama who often says; “my religion is very simple, my religion is kindness.” In life, it is far more important to be kind than to be right, and to be kind rather than important. Gentleness is an umbrella for forgiveness, acceptance and love. It is much like the yogic term ahimsa, or non-violence. When we give up being right and being superior, we start accepting ourselves and others, and so much conflict in our lives drops away.

“Gentleness generally implies that you no longer have a strong ego-inspired desire to dominate or control others, which allows you to move into a rhythm with the universe. You cooperate with it, much like a surfer who rides with the waves instead of trying to overpower them. Gentleness means accepting life and people as they are, rather than insisting that they be as you are. As you practice living this way, blame disappears and you enjoy a peaceful world.” – Wayne Dyer

4. Supportiveness

When we are supportive of ourselves, with kind words, loving actions and self-care, we are naturally supportive of others. This virtue is the basic tenet of humanity. We are naturally social beings and, at our core, we want to be with others and to help others. Many experiments show how humans are motivated by connection and will move towards this rather than other things. When we give to others, share and support others, we become happy. Our lives become meaningful and our hearts full. Supportiveness is about service. Open hearted service for the sake of helping others and benefiting others, with no thought to our own gain. Supportiveness is also about holding space for another, listening to another, and being there for others. It is

radical loving kindness in action. This quote by the poet, Hafiz, sums it up: "Even after all this time, the sun never says to the earth 'you owe me.'"

"The greatest joy comes from giving and serving, so replace your habit of focusing exclusively on yourself and what's in it for you. When you make the shift to supporting others in your life, without expecting anything in return, you'll think less about what you want and find comfort and joy in the act of giving and serving." Wayne Dyer

Let these four virtues fragrance your life, and notice the grace and ease that will come your way. For each one of these virtues brings in a way of being that is light, graceful and flowing and will help you shed destructive, self defeating patterns that sabotage your inner peace and happiness.

"The four cardinal virtues are a road map to the simple truth of the universe. To revere all of life, to live with natural sincerity, to practice gentleness, and to be in service to others is to replicate the energy field from which you originated." Dr Wayne Dyer

Philosophy of Tao

The Taoist philosophy can perhaps best be summed up in a quote from Chuang Tzu:

"To regard the fundamental as the essence, to regard things as coarse, to regard accumulation as deficiency, and to dwell quietly alone with the spiritual and the intelligent-- herein lie the techniques of Tao of the ancients."

One element of Taoism is a kind of existential skepticism, something which can already be seen in the philosophy of Yang Chu (4th century B.C.) who wrote:

"What is man's life for? What pleasure is there in it? Is it for beauty and riches? Is it for sound and colour? But there comes a time when beauty and riches no longer answer the needs of the heart, and when a surfeit of sound and colour becomes a weariness to the eyes and a ringing in the ears."

"The men of old knew that life comes without warning, and as suddenly goes. They denied none of their natural inclinations, and repressed none of their bodily desires. They never felt the spur of fame. They sauntered through life gathering its pleasures as the impulse moved them. Since they cared nothing for fame after death, they were beyond the law. For name and praise, sooner or later, a long life or short one, they cared not at all."

Contemplating the remarkable natural world Lao Tzu felt that it was man and his activities which constituted a blight on the otherwise perfect order of things. Thus he counseled people to turn away from the folly of human pursuits and to return to one's natural wellspring.

The five colours blind the eye.

The five tones deafen the ear.

The five flavours dull the taste.

Racing and hunting madden the mind.

Precious things lead one astray.

Therefore the sage is guided by what he feels and not by what he sees.

He lets go of that and chooses this.

The central vehicle of achieving tranquillity was the Tao, a term which has been translated as 'the way' or 'the path.' Te in this context refers to virtue and Ching refers to laws. Thus the Tao Te Ching could be translated as The Law (or Canon) of Virtue and its Way. The Tao was the central mystical term of the Lao Tzu and the Taoists, a formless, unfathomable source of all things.

Look, it cannot be seen - it is beyond form.

Listen, it cannot be heard - it is beyond sound.

Grasp, it cannot be held - it is intangible.

These three are indefinable, they are one

From above it is not bright;

From below it is not dark;

unbroken thread beyond description.

It returns to nothingness.

Form of the formless,

Image of the imageless,

It is called indefinable and beyond imagination.

Stand before it - there is no beginning.

Follow it and there is no end.

Stay with the Tao, Move with the present.

Knowing the ancient beginning is the essence of Tao.

Lao Tsu taught that all straining, all striving are not only vain but counterproductive. One should endeavor to do nothing (wu-wei). But what does this mean? It means not to literally do nothing, but to discern and follow the natural forces -- to follow and shape the flow of events and not to pit oneself against the natural order of things. First and foremost to be spontaneous in ones actions.

In this sense the Taoist doctrine of wu-wei can be understood as a way of mastering circumstances by understanding their nature or principal, and then shaping ones actions in accordance with these. This understanding has also infused the approach to movement as it is developed in Tai Chi Chuan.

Understanding this, Taoist philosophy followed a very interesting circle. On the one hand the Taoists, rejected the Confucian attempts to regulate life and society and counseled instead to turn away from it to a solitary contemplation of nature. On the other hand they believed that by doing so one could ultimately harness the powers of the universe. By 'doing nothing' one could 'accomplish everything.' Lao Tzu writes:

The Tao abides in non-action,
Yet nothing is left undone.
If kings and lords observed this,
The ten thousand things would develop naturally
If they still desired to act
They would return to the simplicity of formless substance.
Without form there is no desire.
Without desire there is tranquillity.
In this way all things would be at peace.

In this way Taoist philosophy reached out to council rulers and advise them of how to govern their domains. Thus Taoism, in a peculiar and roundabout way, became a political philosophy. The formulation follows these lines:

The Taoist sage has no ambitions, therefore he can never fail. He who never fails always succeeds. And he who always succeeds is all-powerful. From a solitary contemplation of nature, far removed from the affairs of men, can emerge a philosophy that has, both in a critical as well a constructive sense -- a direct and practical political message. Lao Tzu writes:

Why are people starving?
Because the rulers eat up the money in taxes.
Therefore the people are starving.
Why are the people rebellious?
Because the rulers interfere too much.
Therefore they are rebellious.

Why do people think so little of death?

Because the rulers demand too much of life.

Therefore the people take life lightly.

Having to live on, one knows better than to value life too much.

Practise TAO

The Flow

Taoism teaches a person to flow with life.

Taoism teaches a person to live in their heart.

Here are some simple starting tips to help a person live as a Taoist. Having a set of basic guidelines can be helpful. However realistically, guidelines don't determine how to live; instead, Taoism teaches by living you will express your nature.

- A. With care, I aid those who are extended expressions of my nature
- B. Be true to me
- C. Connect to the world as I want to be treated.
- D. Connect to those outside my nature with decisive action.
- E. To those unwilling to accept me for my true nature, no action is required:
- F. Just silently let them be themselves as I remain myself.
- G. I own nothing; I am merely a passing custodian of items outside of my nature.
- H. Discover a set of practices to aid keeping the mind, body and spirit engaged and strong.

Tao-Te-Ching Quotes / Lao-Tzu Quotes:

- ❖ Knowing others is Intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.
- ❖ Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.
- ❖ Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.
- ❖ When you are content to be simply yourself and do not compare or compete, everyone will respect you.
- ❖ The truth is not always beautiful, nor beautiful words the truth.
- ❖ If you know how to be satisfied, you are rich.
- ❖ If you die without loss, you are eternal.
- ❖ Give evil nothing to oppose, and it will disappear by itself.
- ❖ If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to.
- ❖ If you are not afraid of dying, there is nothing you cannot achieve.

- ❖ He who conquers others is strong; he who conquers himself is mighty.
- ❖ When there is no desire, all things are at peace.
- ❖ He who rushes ahead, doesn't go far.

He who has power over others, can't empower himself.

He who clings to his work, will create nothing that endures.

If you want to accord with the Tao, just do your job, then let go.

- ❖ Not-knowing is true knowledge;

Presuming to know is a disease.

First realize that you are sick;

then you can move toward health.

- ❖ Rushing into action, you fail.

Trying to grasp things, you lose them.

Forcing a project to completion;

You ruin what was almost ripe.

- ❖ If good happens; good.

If bad happens; good.

- ❖ The gentle overcomes the rigid.

The slow overcomes the fast.

The weak overcomes the strong.

The soft overcomes the hard.

..... Yet no one applies this knowledge.

- ❖ Scholars of the highest class, when they hear about the Tao, earnestly carry it into practice.

❖ Truly good people are not aware of their goodness,
And are therefore good.

❖ Let the Tao be present in your life;

And you will become genuine.

Let it be present in your family;

And your family will flourish.

Let it be present in your country;

And your country will be an example to all countries in the world.

Let it be present in the universe;

And the universe will sing.

How do I know this is true?

By looking inside myself.

- ❖ In dwelling, choose modest quarters.

In thinking, value stillness.

In dealing with others, be kind.

In choosing words, be sincere.

In leading, be just.

In working, be competent.

In acting, choose correct timing.

Follow this.... and there will be no error.