

‘HINDUISM’

**ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE AND
CONTRAST TO THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS**



Peter Wilberg

2007

HINDUISM IN DISTINCTION TO THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS.....	3
ON THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF HINDUISM	6
WHAT HAS ‘HINDUISM’ TO SAY TODAY?	8
INDO-EUROPEAN VOICES FROM THE PAST	15
THE PHILOSOPHY OF TANTRIC HINDUISM.....	18
AN ‘ABC’ OF VEDIC SYMBOLISM – FROM SRI AUROBINDO.....	19
FROM THE RIG VEDA – TRANSLATED BY SRI AUROBINDO	20
APPENDIX 1: ABOUT THE NAME ‘HINDU’	21
APPENDIX 2: BECOMING A HINDU OR DEVOTEE IS EASY.....	26
APPENDIX 3: TANTRA AND VEDA - ONE TRADITION	32

HINDUISM IN DISTINCTION TO THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS

‘Hinduism’ is a modern word for the world’s oldest and still third-largest religion, with almost one billion followers. And yet it differs from all of the ‘Abrahamic’ faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam’ – in the most fundamental of ways. Otherwise known as ‘Sanatana Dharma’ (‘the eternal way’) ‘Hinduism’ is *not* essentially an dogmatic, sectarian and exclusivistic religious ‘-ism’ of any sort. In contrast, orthodox Judaism is an ethnically exclusive and non-Christian faith; Christianity is a non-Islamic faith, and - like both Judaism and Christianity - Islam is a non- or even anti-Hindu faith. ‘Hinduism’, on the other hand is not a ‘faith’ so much as an evolving and creative confluence of numerous diverse but non-dogmatic and non-exclusive religious world-views and philosophies rooted in the Indian sub-continent - in particular the Vedic and Indus Valley civilisations. The Persian term *Hindu* derives from the name of the *Sindhu* river – the Indus. And indeed the best symbolism of Hinduism is a flowing *river* with many tributaries. For even the earliest Hindu scriptures – the Vedas – recognised ‘no religion higher than truth’, and the many religious and philosophical currents and streams that have subsequently flowed from or into the fertile river that is ‘Hinduism’ have never been riven by scholastic disputes over dogma or narrow sectarian rivalries.

BASIC AND DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE HINDU WORLD-VIEW:

- In contrast to the Torah, Bible and Koran, Hindu ‘scripture’ has no dogmatically restricted canon of scriptures, no supreme institution, no single spiritual founder such as an Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Buddha or Mohammed and no authoritative leader such as a Pope, Archbishop, Ayatollah or Dalai Lama.

- Hindu scripture is not reducible to the Vedas ('the Knowledge'), but embraces a vast and diverse historical body of still-evolving spiritual teachings.
- God is not seen as a *person* or even a supreme being. Instead the Hindu gods in all their multiple forms are understood as diverse *personifications* of the Divine.
- Similarly, all individual beings are individualisations of the Divine. Thus the true Self (Atman) of every being is understood as both eternal and one with the Divine.
- Though not understanding God *as* a person, Hinduism not only allows for but encourages the attainment of a direct personal experience of the Divine - in particular through devotion to a chosen divinity or personification of the Divine.
- Hinduism stresses that the Divine needs to be *experienced* in order to be spoken of truly – simply citing or interpreting scriptures is no substitute for revelation emerging from direct experience.
- Strictly speaking, Hinduism is not a 'faith' at all - for faith is only needed where direct knowing (jnanas/gnosis) is lacking.
- In Hinduism, a 'guru' or teacher is needed to aid the individual in cultivating a direct experience of the divine and recovering a sense of union with it. The guru is not an evangelist or priest there to preach a gospel or faith.
- Hinduism does not see the world as something 'made' by a God but as understood as a creative *manifestation* of the Divine – in the same way that speech is a *manifestation* of meaning and not something 'made'.
- Since the entire *world* and everything in it is *itself* a sacred revelation of the Divine, its sacredness cannot be reduced to that of scripture - the revealed *word*.
- The Divine is understood as both transcendent and immanent in all things and all beings, the primordial womb of All That Is. Whilst it has both masculine and feminine aspects it ultimately transcends all distinctions of gender, caste, ethnicity and culture.

- Hinduism is ‘a-theistic’ – but only in the strict sense of not being *theistic* – not identifying the Divine with a supreme God-Being.
- Instead of being *monotheistic*, Hinduism is *monistic* - recognising the Divine as a singular, absolute, unifying reality underlying All That - as singularity or One-ness as such - not a single or ‘One’ God.
- The ultimate, absolute reality that is the Divine is traditionally called ‘Brahman’. Brahman in turn may be called by the same name as many specific Hindu divinities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Kali etc. In this way, Hinduism affirms the unity of the gods and God, of diverse divinities and the singularity of the Divine.
- The essential nature of the Divine as a singular reality is understood through the Sanskrit term ‘Sat-Chit-Ananda’ (‘Being-Consciousness-Bliss’). All of the many schools of Hindu religious philosophy ultimately address the question of how the meaning and reality behind this term can be understood and directly experienced.
- Hindu thought does not separate ‘philosophy’, ‘theology’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘science’ but is essentially ‘theo-sophical’ and ‘spiritual-scientific’ in character. ‘Yoga’ is the practical science of Hindu ‘theo-sophy’, aimed at cultivating and recovering knowledge and direct experience of the Divine in oneself and all things.
- ‘Idol worship’ is an important and powerful aspect of Hindu religious practice, but is not unique to it. The Abrahamic faiths worship many icons of their own, they are essentially forms of ‘bibliolatry’ - idolising the *word* or even treating scrolls and books as idols. Hinduism, on the other hand, recognises not only words but things themselves – all things - as expressions of the Divine. Thus it is not the idol as ‘mere’ thing that is worshipped, but rather the divinity ensouling it - and linking the worshipper to the Divine through it.
- Since Hinduism not only recognises not only the universal nature of the Divine but also the reality of reincarnation, being Hindu does not depend on upbringing or ethnicity but on acceptance, experience and active embodiment of its religious world-view.
- The aim of the Hindu is both to enjoy this life, and to achieve liberation (Moksha) within it, overcoming the need for further physical incarnations.

ON THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF HINDUISM

It is no secret that we in the West live in a time of spiritual crisis. Western civilization has been guided by Christianity. Now it appears that this period is drawing to a close. Both religious institutions and social structures are in disarray. A great many things that were considered basic assumptions of western thought are being challenged. The reality of the external world, the soul, the linear nature of time.

Stephen Cross

For those now disenchanted with industrialization and scientific materialism as well as pseudo-spirituality, India's ancient spiritual heritage provides a rich alternative. Eastern philosophy, and the devotional heart of India's Vedanta in particular, can fill the empty shopping bag of our Western accomplishments.

Swami B. V. Tripurari

Recently, increasing numbers of Westerners in revolt against what they have found to be the shallow, gadget-dominated, spiritually empty civilization of the West have turned to "Hinduism" in search of greater meaning or purpose in life. There is no doubt that the great Hindu tradition offers profound spiritual insights, as well as techniques for attaining self-realization, detachment, and even ecstasy.

Beatrice Pitney Lamb

India indeed has a preciousness which a materialistic age is in danger of missing. Some day the fragrance of her thought will win the hearts of men. This grim chase after our own tails which marks the present age cannot continue for ever. The future contains a new human urge towards the real beauty and holiness of life. When it comes India will be searched by loving eyes and defended by knightly hands.

W. J. Grant

A philosophically revived and refined Hinduism can and should serve the noble and most necessary purpose of resisting 'The New Atheism' and the secular 'Monotheism of Money' that dominate today's world - along with the unquestioned assumptions of the purely technological 'science' that is its dominant 'religion'. In this way, a new Hinduism can help bring an end to the rising ocean of spiritual ignorance, and to the grave ecological devastation, economic inequalities and global mayhem that go with worship of science technology and the monotheistic god of the Abrahamic faiths - essentially a divinisation of the *ego* and of the human being's narrow and limited *ego-consciousness*. Hinduism alone can accomplish this world-transforming aim - not through Jihad, violence or war but through the supreme principle and innate power of Awareness (Chit). 'The New Yoga of Awareness' is a new Hindu world-view which recognises that 'God' is not a supreme being 'with' awareness - a type of divine Superego. Instead God IS awareness - that pure awareness whose light is the divine Source of all beings, yet also immanent within them as their eternal and divine Self.

Peter Wilberg

Indian thought, with its usual profundity and avoidance of arbitrary divisions, regards Philosophy as religious and Religion as philosophical. The "liberty-loving nations of the West" have been in the past greatly, and still are to some extent, behind India in the matter of intellectual and religious freedom. As has been finely said in India, *Satyannasti para dharmah* ('There is no religion higher than Truth') and as the Vedas have proclaimed, 'Truth will conquer' (Satyam jayate).

Hinduism may not be called a religion in the sense other religions are known. It is much more than a religion, it is a total way of life. Hinduism has no founder. Its authority is Eternal Truth. The cumulative record of metaphysical experimentation. Behind the lush tangle of religious imagery, is a clear structure of thought. Compared to the rugged originality of the Indian traditions, the language of today's philosophers concerned with being often sound a little contrived. Hindus have always been metaphysicians at heart. It is the underlying ideas, and not the images which count As stated at the outset in the Rig Veda: "Truth is one, the wise call it by various names."

Sir John Woodroffe

It is not too much to say that the mind of the West with all its undoubted impulses towards the progress of humanity has never exhibited such an intense amount of intellectual force as is to be found in the religious speculations of India ...These have been the cradle of all Western speculations, and wherever the European mind has risen into heights of philosophy, it has done so because the Brahmin was the pioneer. There is no intellectual problem in the West which had not its earlier discussion in the East, and there is no modern solution of that problem which will not be found anticipated in the East.

Matheson

In the history of the world, Hinduism is the only religion that exhibits a complete independence and freedom of the human mind, its full confidence in its own powers. Hinduism is freedom, especially the freedom in thinking about God. In the search for the supernatural, it is like travelling in space without a boundary or barrier.

S. Radhakrishnan

Hinduism has proven much more open than any other religion to new ideas, scientific thought, and social experimentation. Many concepts like **reincarnation, meditation, yoga** and others have found worldwide acceptance. It would not be surprising to find Hinduism the dominant religion of the twenty-first century. It would be a religion that doctrinally is less clear-cut than mainstream Christianity, politically less determined than Islam, ethically less heroic than Buddhism, but it would offer something to everybody. It will appear idealistic to those who look for idealism, pragmatic to the pragmatists, spiritual to the seekers, sensual to the here-and-now generation. Hinduism, by virtue of its lack of an ideology and its reliance on intuition, will appear to be more plausible than those religions whose doctrinal positions petrified a thousand years ago.

Klaus L. Klostermaier

WHAT HAS 'HINDUISM' TO SAY TODAY?

What has Hinduism to say today - to today's world?

What have its ancient and profound 'theo-sophical' traditions, uniting theology and philosophy, religion and science, psychology and metaphysics, to offer the world today?

As Ghandi said: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." That is one major reason why a new and truly global 'Hinduism', one freed of attachment to ethnicity, caste and gender discrimination, communalism - and the current encroachments of global capitalism and consumerism in its mother country - is so much needed. Such a Hinduism would no longer be identical with 'India' or the ethnic Hindu Diaspora from the Asian subcontinent. Yet it alone could offer the world an alternative to the world-destructive war that is raging between:

1. rampant secular materialism, consumerism and imperialism,
2. its religious-political prop in the form of Judaeo-Christian Zio-Nazism, and
3. reactionary feudalistic and fundamentalist Islamism.

That is because the Hindu theosophical tradition offers us a fundamentally different understanding of both God and the Universe from that of both religious and scientific *fundamentalisms* - whether the fundamentalist dogmas of modern science and cosmology or those of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

The difference is profound. For in the Hindu theosophical traditions of *Advaita* and *Tantra*, 'God' is *not* understood as some supreme being 'ruling' like a judge or politician over Creation and over Creatures of its own artificial 'making'. Instead God is understood as identical with *consciousness* - not individual consciousness but a Universal Consciousness out of which the entire universe, all of creation and all creatures emerge as through a process of spontaneous creativity. 'God', in this tradition, is not merely one being among others 'with' its own individual consciousness. Instead God *is* this Universal Consciousness out of which the entire universe emerges.

The entire universe of 'matter' is but a materialisation of this Universal Consciousness, emerging from its maternal womb or 'matrix' - and *not* the other way round as 'materialist' or even quantum-physical 'energeticist' science has it. For awareness *as such* cannot, *in principle*, be the by-product or property of any force, energy or material body we are *aware of* - including the human body and brain. It cannot - in principle - be a *property* of matter, energy or of any thing or *being* whatsoever - human or divine. For the Divine is not a being or Being, but the source of all beings - their primordial *awareness* of Being.

The Divine is a Universal Consciousness that has the character of an infinite field - not of 'energy', but of pure *awareness*. This is awareness inseparable and yet absolutely distinct from any content of consciousness - any thing we are conscious or aware *of*. Since it transcends every element of our conscious experience - every thing we can possibly be conscious or aware *of* - this pure awareness can also free us from *attachment* to all the things and activities that our everyday consciousness ordinarily binds us to.

Instead things and all beings are individualised portions of this Universal Consciousness that *is* God, an infinite field of pure awareness that embraces and "enowns" them all. To *experience* this Universal Consciousness or pure awareness therefore, *is* to experience 'God' - the Divine. Yet this is no *impersonal* experience, impersonal consciousness or impersonal 'God'. How could it be, since it is the very source of our own personhood, individual consciousness - and that of all beings and all things.

In the Hindu Tantric tradition known as Kashmir Shaivism or 'Shiva-ism', God is not seen as a *person* like Christ or Krishna, nor as three persons or three persons in one. Yet neither is God an impersonal abstraction - but rather that Divine Universal Awareness which knowingly *personifies* itself in all persons. The word 'person' refers to a 'face' or 'mask' (*persona*). The image or *Murti* of the Hindu god *Shiva* is a symbol of the human face or *personification* of divinity. And it is the *Mantra* of *Shiva* that allows the Divine Universal Consciousness to 'per-sonify' itself in another way - to 'sound through' human beings (*per-sonare*).

Shiva, as *Mahadeva* or ‘Great God’, is always portrayed in a state of profound meditation. Who or what then, is *Shiva* meditating? He is meditating the Divine Universal Consciousness that is the very *source* of his own human image and form – and that of all beings, human and trans-human. That source is His Other – none other than the ‘Divine Mother’ - the ‘Great Goddess’ or *Mahadevi*. She is the ‘pregnant’ dimension of the Divine Universal Consciousness – its nature as dark, maternal womb and seed repository of all possible worlds and beings, and their power or *Shakti* of self-actualization and manifestation. *Shiva* on the other hand, is the Divine Universal Consciousness as the pure light of awareness – that which releases all potential worlds and beings into actuality or Being from the womb of potentiality or Non-Being.

In Tantric theosophy ‘God’ is the Divine Universal Consciousness (*Anuttara*) understood as an inseparable and dynamic relation of the divine-masculine (*Shiva* as *pure awareness* of all that manifests) and the divine feminine (*Shakti* as *pure power* of manifestation). This is God as *Shiva-Shakti*.

“Only a god can save us now.” Martin Heidegger

Hinduism has no religious prophets, popes or ‘saviours’. Yet *Shiva* is that most primordial ‘god’ who alone can “save us now” - saving us as individuals from descending with the world into violence and barbarism, offering us the freedom from bondage to the world that only a higher and deeper *awareness* can bring, and providing us with a gateway to the Great Goddess and to ‘God’ as such, experienced and understood not just as *Shiva* but as *Shiva-Shakti*.

Along with pre-historic mother goddesses or *Mahadevis*, *Mahadeva Shiva* is one of the oldest and most primordial of human god images. Yet the earliest and most primordial of gods are not merely those furthest behind us – and thus long since ‘past’ or ‘transcended’ by later, more historically recent gods. On the contrary, as Heidegger recognized, the earliest and most primordial god is the one who, having set out longest ago, is also *latest to arrive* – the last to fully realise itself and be recognized and understood *as* a god.

What Heidegger called “The Last God” - that god who will be *last to arrive* and is therefore *still to come* – that god is *Shiva*. *Shiva* is a god of the future and not merely the past, a god still to be fully born – not as a supreme God-Being nor as a supreme human Guru, Saviour or *Avatar* - but as a higher *Awareness*. To take *Shiva* into our hearts as our *personal* God or Divinity is to take the Awareness that he is as Supreme or Divine Guru - and as our personal mediator and gateway to the power or *Shakti* of that *trans-personal* awareness that is Divinity or ‘God’ as such. Human beings become Gurus not by virtue of being *sole* human embodiments of God (for there is no one who is *not* a living embodiment or ‘son’ or ‘daughter’ of God) but because they recognise *Shiva* alone - and *no human being or teacher* - as Supreme Guru. It is because of this that they are able to receive knowledge and enlightenment through Him, as well as from those higher, trans-human beings that dwell in His realm - that plane of awareness known as *Shivaloka*.

No world ‘religion’ is merely founded on a creed, faith, dogma or doctrine. Instead it is more like a great work of *drama* enacted on the stage of our earthly human reality - one designed to alter our metaphysical understanding and experience of ourselves and the world in the most direct way, and in doing so transform our way of being in the world and relating to others. It is because of their nature as religious dramas, that religions require characters – *dramatis personae*. Yet though these may draw from religious symbols of the past, if these symbols are imbued with new experiential and metaphysical comprehensions they become vehicles by which the *future* can realise itself in and transform the present.

A genuinely new future for humanity cannot be forged by clinging to the *past* and yet, in Heidegger’s words, it is the “arrival of what has been” - of what has yet to be fully comprehended, experienced and *brought to presence in awareness*. The work of bringing to presence in awareness belongs to those few human beings whose awareness has already been expanded enough to receive currents of knowing that flows towards us from the future – and that also come down to us directly from the multidimensional universe of awareness surrounding us and the trans-human beings or ‘gods’ that dwell therein.

For the religious practitioner of Hindu Tantrism, to ‘worship’ a god is to *become* that god. This means to experience it directly - through our *body* and *as* our most essential *self*. This is not a self that ‘has’ or ‘possesses’ awareness but that Self which - like God - *is* awareness - an awareness infinite and unbounded, pervading not only our bodies but all bodies, and all of space and time. Shiva is ‘Lord’ because he is ‘Lord of Yoga’ – of meditation. The human image of *Shiva* presents him as *meditating* both himself and all things as an expression of the Divine - and therefore knowing himself as identical *with* the Divine. That is why the activity of meditating Lord Shiva meditating *his* Divine nature turns his *Mantra* and *Murti* into both a *personification* of our own Divine nature and a living personification *of* the Divine.

Knowing himself *as* the Divine through meditating his Divine Nature in human form, the image of *Shiva* reveals him to us not just as ‘symbol’ of the divine but as a living embodiment of it - one that does not just teach us to meditate the Divine, but allows us to directly experience and identify with it in its most tangible, bodily and sensuous immediacy. Like *Shiva*, each of us can learn to wordlessly know and say – in and through every atom and cell of our body, every aspect of our self, and every element of our experience, that ‘Shiva am I’ (*Shivoham*) and that every ‘thing’ around us is a mere outward ‘mark’ or ‘symbol’ of Shiva - his *Lingam*.

Lingam means ‘mark’ or ‘symbol’. The *Lingam* of *Shiva* is the *absolute symbol* of that absolutely pure and *symbol-free awareness* that *is* the Divine Universal Consciousness, and beyond which there is ‘nothing higher’ (*A-nuttara*). Only a new and invigorated Tantric Hinduism - and not any copycat form of narrow Indian religious nationalism and Hindu ‘fundamentalism’ - can bring human beings to the threshold of a *higher awareness* out of which alone the world can be transformed. We stand therefore at the dawn of a glorious *new* religious drama rooted in Hinduism - one that has the power to transform our world through *awareness* rather than war, and in doing so also undo the untold damage wrought by wars present and past. For before its occupation by Muslim invaders, even the land of Afghanistan, now but a ravaged site of global strife between Islamism and US Imperialism, was replete with temples celebrating *Shiva* and *Shakti* - in peace.

But what about Buddhism? The great religious drama that was seeded by the life of Gautama Buddha and the whole subsequent evolution of 'Buddhism' in all its stages can be seen as a first attempt to give birth to a 'new' Hinduism freed of ethnic, racial and caste distinctions - and freed also of crude 'theistic' understandings of God as a single being and of the Universe as a mere multiplicity of self-subsistent things. Yet like the birth of a universalist Christianity from an ethnically rooted Judaism, the 'birth' of Buddhism from 'Hinduism' - from Indian Vedic and Brahmanic culture - also ended up as a *miscarriage*. Put simply, Buddhism threw out the baby of true religious feeling and connection with the Divine with the bathwater of crude 'theistic' understandings of the Divine - whether 'monotheistic' or 'polytheistic'.

Instead of acknowledging the Divine as an Awareness with both a wholly trans-personal and transcendental nature *and* a personal face and faces, Buddhist philosophy sought to do away with the whole idea of beings, whether human beings or gods. Doing so however, it found itself forced to eventually replace them with numberless 'Buddhas' - each with their own highly individual character and qualities of awareness! Yet in place of the Divine Universal Awareness - itself 'no-thing' - it substituted the idea of a Nothingness that was not only empty of all things, but also empty of *awareness*.

The Buddhist idea of 'enlightenment' as 'becoming aware of' or 'awakening' to this *Absolute Emptiness* replaced the Hindu Tantric aim of experiencing this apparent 'emptiness' as the pure space (*Akasha*) and light (*Prakasha*) of an *Absolute Awareness* - one distinct from each and every thing we are or could be *aware of*. In this way the whole notion of *En-Lightenment* was divorced from the *Light of Awareness* associated with the *Shiva* and with all those who shine with that Light - 'shining ones' being the root Sanskrit meaning of *Devas* or 'gods'. Buddhist spiritual *a-theism* then, replaced not just religious monotheism, polytheism, pantheism and 'panentheism' (the immanence of God in all things) but also Hindu Shaivist and Tantric 'nootheism' - the recognition that Awareness absolute and unbounded (Greek *noos*) is the Divine, personified as Lord Shiva. As a result the defining Buddhist principle of 'Awakening' (*Bodhi*) replaced the Tantric principle of Awareness (*Chit*). Hence all talk of 'Buddhist Tantra' is inherently misleading. For all the truly 'Tantric' elements of Buddhism derive from 'Hindu' Tantrism and not from Buddhism as such

- from the religious principle and practice of 're-linking' to an *ultimate and divine awareness* and not from the secular principle and practice of seeking an *ultimate state of human awakening or enlightenment*.

How then can each of us actually begin to experience the reality of the Divine as Awareness? Normally we think of and feel our awareness as something contained within our own bodies - or even just our own heads. The first step we can take towards experiencing the Divine Awareness is to become constantly aware – not just with our eyes but with our body as a whole – of the space *surrounding our bodies*. In this way we learn to sense space itself as an open and unbounded field of awareness – not 'our' awareness, 'yours' or 'mine', but that awareness which is the Divine. If we can also feel the *insideness* of our own bodies as a hollow space - not just the insideness of our heads but that of our chest, belly and abdomen – then we can learn to sense that 'inner' space too as a space of awareness - one not in any way separate from the space around us.

We know that matter is composed mostly of empty space. Through the simple practice of identifying with the space within and around our bodies - and experiencing them as one – we begin to feel the very materiality of our bodies as something as much pervaded by pure awareness as it is by empty space. We cease then, to experience ourselves as contained within our own skins and merely looking out at things through the peepholes of our eyes. Instead we begin to sense the entire physical environment around us in space as our own *larger body* – part of the universal body of the Divine Awareness. We feel our own 'smaller' human body then, as just one body among others contained within this *larger awareness* which, as the very 'aether' of space, surrounds, embraces and pervades them all. We no longer see things or people merely as bodies 'in' space. Instead we sense both our own bodies and those of all the things and people around us as *living embodiments and expressions* of the pure awareness (*Shiva*) that permeates space, and of the innate vitality or *Shakti* that pervades it - the breath or 'air of awareness' that is called *Prana*. All this was already indicated in the *Vijnanabhairavatantra* - one of the most important practical treatises or *tantras* of Shaivist Tantra, and one of the many gifts of 'Hinduism' - more properly speaking the *Sanatana Dharma* or 'Eternal Way'.

INDO-EUROPEAN VOICES FROM THE PAST

In India our religions will not ever take root: the primordial wisdom of sexuality will not let itself be reduced to events in Galilee. On the contrary, Indian wisdom is flowing back to Europe and will bring about a fundamental transformation in our knowledge and thinking.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Devoid of intellectual discernment are those Europeans who want to convert and civilise the Hindus.

... to begin with we see that Europe [can only] reproduce what in India, under the people of thinkers, had already accomplished several thousand years ago as a commandment of thinking.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Our purpose will surely be served when the Indian world-view becomes known. It will make us aware that we, with our entire religious and philosophical thought, are caught in a colossal one-sidedness, and that there can be found yet a quite different way of grasping things than the one which Hegel has construed as the only possible and rational way.

Paul Deussen

We Westerners are about to arrive at the crossroads that the Indian thinkers had already reached about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ.

... the gods were never dethroned in India. They were not disintegrated and dissolved by criticism and natural science, as were the deities of the Greeks ... The gods of Homer became laughable, and were ... later regarded as incompatible with the more spiritual and ethical, later concepts of divinity ... India, on the other hand, retained its anthropomorphic personifications ... to assist the mind in its attempt to comprehend what was regarded as manifested *through* them ... What is expressed through the personal masks was understood to transcend them, and yet the garb of the divine *personae* was never actually removed. By this tolerant, cherishing attitude a solution of the theological problem was attained that preserved the personal character of the divine powers for all the purposes of worship and daily life, while permitting an abstract, supreme and transcendental concept to dominate for the more lofty, supraritualistic stages of insight and speculation.

“The identity of the hidden nature of the worshipper with the god worshipped is the first principle of the Tantric philosophy of devotion [Bhakti].”

Heinrich Zimmer

Brahman ... is not conceptual knowledge of Being, though wisdom about Being (SAT-VIDYA), or about Brahman as Being, is part of it. Brahman is SAT (Being), the ground of all that is, including my own being which is of the nature of sheer, pure CHIT ('awareness', of which 'knowing' is itself a derivative mode)... From the Rigveda to Aurobindo, the central Indian tradition has made the choice in favour of the primacy and priority of consciousness.

J.L.Mehta

“Once upon a time a sannyasin entered the temple of Jagganath. As he looked at the holy image he debated with himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed his staff from left to right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him; he concluded that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. He understood that God had form. Thus he understood that God has form and, again, is formless.

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that is was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Awareness. The image [Murti] was Awareness, the altar was Awareness, the water-vessels were Awareness, the door-sill was Awareness, the marble floor was Awareness – all was Awareness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss – the Bliss of Satchitananda (Being-Awareness-Bliss). I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him I also saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother.”

Shri Ramakrishna

FROM THE WRITINGS OF SRI AUROBINDO

It is ... the office of Asia to take up the work of human evolution when Europe comes to a standstill and loses itself in a clash of vain speculations, barren experiments and helpless struggles to avoid the consequences of her own mistakes. Such a time has now come in the world's history... the result ... will be no more Asiatic modification of Western modernism, but some great, new and original thing of the first importance to the future of human civilisation.

The later [Abrahamic] religions endeavour to fix the type of a supreme truth of conduct, erect a system and declare God's law through the mouth of an Avatar [God incarnate] or prophet. These systems, more powerful and dynamic than the dry ethical ideas, are yet for the most part no more than idealistic glorifications of the moral principle sanctified by religious emotion and the label of a superhuman origin. Some, like the extreme Christian ethics, are rejected by Nature because they insist unworkably on an impractical absolute rule. Others prove in the end to be evolutionary compromises and become obsolete in the march of Time. The true divine law, unlike these mental counterfeits, cannot be a system of rigid ethical determinations that press into their caste-iron moulds all our life-movements.

The law divine is truth of life and truth of the spirit and must take up with a free living plasticity and inspire with the direct touch of its eternal light each step of our action and all the complexities of our life-issues. It must not act as a rule and formula but as an enveloping and penetrating conscious presence that determines all our thoughts, activities, feelings, impulses of will by its infallible power and knowledge.

A moral law cannot be imposed as a law or ideal on numbers of men who have not attained that level of consciousness, or that fineness of mind and will and psychic sense in which it can become a reality to them and a living force.

Only by our coming into constant touch with the divine Consciousness and its absolute Truth can some form of the conscious Divine, the dynamic absolute, take up our earth-existence and transform its strife, stumbling, sufferings and falsities into image of the Supreme Light, Power and Ananda [bliss].

... it is the individual who must climb to this state as a pioneer and precursor.

But if a collectivity or group could be formed of those who had reached the state of supramental perfection, there indeed some divine creation could take shape; a new earth could descend that would be a new heaven, a world a supramental light could be created here amidst the receding darkness of this terrestrial ignorance.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TANTRIC HINDUISM

Tantra is school of Indian religious philosophy and practice which, in contrast to 'Vedanta', understands the essential nature of the Divine not as 'Being' or as a supreme being but rather as **Pure Awareness** (personified by Shiva) and its **Autonomous Power** (Shakti).

THE CENTRAL TENETS OF TANTRA

**GOD IS NOT 'BEING' OR A
SUPREME BEING 'WITH' AWARENESS.
GOD IS AWARENESS.**

**JUST AS THERE CAN BE
NOTHING 'OUTSIDE' SPACE SO
THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE AWARENESS,
NOTHING OUTSIDE GOD.**

**JUST AS EVERYTHING EXISTS WITHIN AWARENESS,
SO DOES EVERYTHING EXIST WITHIN GOD.**

**JUST AS AWARENESS IS WITHIN EVERYTHING.
SO IS GOD IS WITHIN EVERYTHING.**

**JUST AS AWARENESS IS EVERYTHING AND MORE.
SO IS GOD EVERYTHING AND MORE.**

**THE DIVINE AWARENESS IS SOURCE
OF ALL BEINGS - OF ALL THAT IS.**

AN 'ABC' OF VEDIC SYMBOLISM – FROM SRI AUROBINDO

ADITI – Originally the pure consciousness of infinite existence, one and self-luminous; She is the Light that is the Mother of all things. As the infinite she gives birth to Daksha, the discriminating and distributing Thought of the Divine Mind.

AGNI [fire-god] – Agni is the most important, the most universal of the Vedic gods... The flame of the Divine Will or Force of Consciousness working within the worlds ... Agni, the divine priest of the offering, stands up in the dawn of the illumination to offers to the gods, to each great god, his portion ... He is inherently pure and he is not touched or soiled by the impurities on which he feeds ... He burns in order to purify. He destroys in order to save... Without him the sacrificial flame cannot burn on the altar of the soul ... That flame of Agni is the seven-tongued power of the Will, a Force of God instinct with knowledge. This conscious and forceful will is the immortal guest in our mortality, a pure priest and a divine worker, the mediator between earth and heaven. It carries what we offer to the higher powers and brings back in return their force and light and joy into our humanity ... He is the god whose burning eyes can gaze straight at truth, which is the Seer's own aim and desire and on which all the Vedas is based...

ARYAMAN – the aspiring power and action of the Truth. Represents, in creation, the light of the divine consciousness working as Force. The force of sacrifice, aspiration, battle, journey towards perfection and light and celestial bliss by which the path is created, travelled, pursued beyond all resistance and obscuration to its luminous and happy goal.

ARYAN [noble] – He who does the work of sacrifice, finds the sacred word of illumination, desires the gods and increases them and is increased by them into the largeness of the true existence; he is the warrior of the light and the traveller to the Truth.

BRAHMAN – the Vedic Word or Mantra in its profoundest aspect as the expression of the intuition arising out of the depths of the soul ... the soul or soul-consciousness emerging from the secret heart of things... the Blissful One to whom the movement of the Gods ascends, manifest as at once the Male and the Female... He can be realised through any of his names or aspects, through Indra, through Agni, through Soma...

BRAHMANA – He who has the word and the inspired knowledge it carries with it. The word certainly does not mean Brahmans by caste or priests by profession ...

BULL AND COW – The bull is the *purusha*, soul or conscious being; the cow is the *prakriti*, the power of consciousness ... the word *go* means in Sanskrit both a cow and a ray of light. This double sense is used by the Vedic symbolists to suggest a double figure which was to them more than a figure; for light, in their view, is not merely an apt poetic image of thought, but is actually is physical form.

COW AND HORSE – Cow is the symbol of consciousness in the form of knowledge; the Horse is the symbol of consciousness in the form of Force ... they represent the two companion ideas ... which to the Vedic and Vedantic Mind, were the double or twin aspects of all the activities of existence.

FROM THE RIG VEDA – TRANSLATED BY SRI AUROBINDO

“In the dawn I call to the Divine Mother infinite, in the mid-day and at the rising of the Sun.”

“Oh Flame, sit with the gods on the seat of the soul’s fullness.”

“Who make him [Agni] the priest of the sacrifice reaches the perfection that is the fruit of his striving, a home on a height of being where there is no warring and no enemies ... Thou art the Godhead!”

“Following the thought with the heart he has reached knowledge of the light.”

“Our fathers found out the hidden light, by the truth in their thoughts they brought to birth The Dawn.”

“We bring to thee, O Fire, by the illuminating word, an offering that is shaped by the heart.”

“The shining host has arisen in my soul, the host of the Thought-Gods, and they sing a hymn as they march upward, a hymn of the heart’s illumination. March thou on, O my soul, impetuously to their violent and mighty music ... They are the comrades of a firm and blazing Light and in the force of the Light they work out their lofty aggressions ... Violent are they as a herd of rushing bulls; the nights come against them but they overleap the nights; they possess the earth in our thoughts and they rise with them to the heavens. No half-lights, no impotent things are they, but mighty in aggression and puissant to attain ... They have bathed their limbs in the waters of *Purushni*, in the stream that has a multitude of currents, they have put on their divine raiment and now with the wheels of their chariots they break open all of nature’s secret caves. Sometimes they march on a thousand branching paths; sometimes their paths are within, sometimes they follow outward nature’s thousand ways; the world-sacrifice fulfils itself by the many names of their godhead and by their ever-widening march. Now they make themselves as galloping forces of our life, now they are gods and powers of the soul; at last they have put on forms of a supreme world, forms of vision, forms of light. They have attained to the goal, they support the rhythms of the world, chanting they weave their glorious dance round the very fountain of things; they are creators of supreme forms, they expand the soul in vision and make it a divine blaze of light. Lo, they march on in their cohorts and companies; let us follow in their steps with the pace of our thinkings. For they bear with them an imperishable seed of creation and the grain of immortal forms, and if this they plant in the fields of the soul, there shall grow as its harvest universal and bliss transcendent. They will put by all that derides our aspiration and pass beyond all that limits us; they will destroy all faults and dumbness and the soul’s poverties. For there is the rain of abundance of heaven and theirs the storms that set flowing the rivers of life; their thunders are the chant of the hymn of the gods and the proclamation of the Truth ... luminous leaders of the mind ... The Woman, the Divine, is with them who shall put away from us hurt and thirst and desire and refashion man’s mind in the form of the godhead.”

APPENDIX 1: ABOUT THE NAME 'HINDU'

By Stephen Knapp (from www.stephen-knapp.com)

I feel there needs to be some clarification about the use of the words “Hindu” and “Hinduism.” The fact is that true “Hinduism” is based on Vedic knowledge, which is related to our spiritual identity. Many people do accept it to mean the same thing as *Sanatana-dharma*, which is a more accurate Sanskrit term for the Vedic path. Such an identity is beyond any temporary names as Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or even Hindu. After all, God never describes Himself as belonging to any such category, saying that He is only a Christian God, or a Muslim God, or a Hindu God. That is why some of the greatest spiritual masters from India have avoided identifying themselves only as Hindus. The Vedic path is eternal, and therefore beyond all such temporary designations. So am I calling the name “Hindu” a temporary designation?

We must remember that the term “hindu” is not even Sanskrit. Numerous scholars say it is not found in any of the Vedic literature. So how can such a name truly represent the Vedic path or culture? And without the Vedic literature, there is no basis for “Hinduism.”

Most scholars feel that the name “Hindu” was developed by outsiders, invaders who could not pronounce the name of the Sindhu River properly. Some sources report that it was Alexander the Great who first renamed the River Sindhu as the Indu, dropping the beginning “S”, thus making it easier for the Greeks to pronounce. This became known as the Indus. This was when Alexander invaded India around 325 B.C. His Macedonian forces thereafter called the land east of the Indus as India, a name used especially during the British regime.

Later, when the Muslim invaders arrived from such places as Afghanistan and Persia, they called the Sindhu River the Hindu River. Thereafter, the name “Hindu” was used to describe the inhabitants from that tract of land in the northwestern provinces of India where the Sindhu River is located, and the region itself was called “Hindustan.” Because the Sanskrit sound of “S” converts to “H” in the Parsee language, the Muslims pronounced the Sindhu as “hindu,” even though at the time the people of the area did not use the name “hindu” themselves. This word was used by the Muslim foreigners to identify the people and the religion of those who lived in that area. Thereafter, even the Indians conformed to these standards as set by those in power and used the names Hindu and Hindustan. Otherwise, the word has no meaning except for those who place value on it or now use it out of convenience.

Another view of the name “Hindu” shows the confusing nature it causes for understanding the true essence of the spiritual paths of India. As written by R. N. Suryanarayan in his book *Universal Religion* (p.1-2, published in Mysore in 1952), “The political situation of our country from centuries past, say 20-25 centuries, has made it very difficult to understand the nature of this nation and its religion. The western scholars, and historians, too, have failed to trace the true name of this Brahmanland, a vast continent-like country, and therefore, they have contented themselves by calling it by that meaningless term ‘Hindu’. This word, which is a foreign innovation, is not made use by any of our Sanskrit writers and revered

Acharyas in their works. It seems that political power was responsible for insisting upon continuous use of the word Hindu. The word Hindu is found, of course, in Persian literature. *Hindu-e-falak* means ‘the black of the sky’ and ‘Saturn’. In the Arabic language *Hind* not *Hindu* means nation. It is shameful and ridiculous to have read all along in history that the name Hindu was given by the Persians to the people of our country when they landed on the sacred soil of Sindhu.”

Another view of the source of the name Hindu is based on a derogatory meaning. It is said that, “Moreover, it is correct that this name [Hindu] has been given to the original Aryan race of the region by Muslim invaders to humiliate them. In Persian, says our author, the word means slave, and according to Islam, all those who did not embrace Islam were termed as slaves.” (*Maharishi Shri Dayanand Saraswati Aur Unka Kaam*, edited by Lala Lajpat Rai, published in Lahore, 1898, in the Introduction)

Furthermore, a Persian dictionary titled *Lughet-e-Kishwari*, published in Lucknow in 1964, gives the meaning of the word Hindu as “*chore* [thief], *dakoo* [dacoit], *raahzan* [waylayer], and *ghulam* [slave].” In another dictionary, *Urdu-Feroze-ul-Laghat* (Part One, p. 615) the Persian meaning of the word Hindu is further described as *barda* (obedient servant), *sia faam* (black color) and *kaalaa* (black). So these are all derogatory expressions for the translation of the term *hindu* in the Persian label of the people of India.

So, basically, Hindu is merely a continuation of a Muslim term that became popular only within the last 1300 years. In this way, we can understand that it is not a valid Sanskrit term, nor does it have anything to do with the true Vedic culture or the Vedic spiritual path. No religion ever existed that was called “Hinduism” until the Indian people in general placed value on that name and accepted its use. So is it any wonder that some Indian *acharyas* and Vedic organizations do not care to use the term?

The real confusion started when the name “Hinduism” was used to indicate the religion of the Indian people. The words “Hindu” and “Hinduism” were used frequently by the British with the effect of focusing on the religious differences between the Muslims and the people who became known as “Hindus”. This was done with the rather successful intention of creating friction among the people of India. This was in accord with the British policy of divide and rule to make it easier for their continued dominion over the country.

However, we should mention that others who try to justify the word “Hindu” present the idea that rishis of old, several thousand years ago, also called central India Hindustan, and the people who lived there Hindus. The following verse, said to be from the *Vishnu Purana*, *Padma Purana* and the *Bruhaspati Samhita*, is provided as proof, yet I am still waiting to learn the exact location where we can find this verse:

*Aasindo Sindhu Paryantham Yasyabharatha Bhoomikah
MathruBhuh Pithrubhoochaiva sah Vai Hindurithismrithaah*

Another verse reads as: *Sapta sindhu muthal Sindhu maha samudhram vareyulla Bharatha bhoomi aarkellamaano Mathru bhoomiyum Pithru bhoomiyumayittullathu, avaraanu hindukkalaayi ariyappedunnathu*. Both of these verses more or less indicate that whoever considers the land of Bharatha Bhoomi between Sapta Sindhu and the Indian Ocean as his or her motherland and fatherland is known as Hindu. However, here we also have the real and ancient name of India mentioned, which is Bharata Bhoomi. “Bhoomi” (or Bhumi) means Mother Earth, but Bharata is the land of Bharata or Bharata-varsha, which is the land of India. In numerous Vedic references in the *Puranas*, *Mahabharata* and other Vedic texts, the area of India is referred to as Bharata-varsha or the land of Bharata and not as Hindustan. The name Bharata-varsha certainly helps capture the roots and glorious past of the country and its people.

Another couple of references that are used, though the exact location of which I am not sure, includes the following:

*Himalayam Samaarafya Yaavat Hindu Sarovaram
Tham Devanirmmitham deshamb Hindustanam Prachakshathe*

*Himalayam muthal Indian maha samudhram vareyulla
devanirmmithamaya deshaththe Hindustanam ennu parayunnu*

These again indicate that the region between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean is called Hindustan. Thus, the conclusion of this is that all Indians are Hindus regardless of their caste and religion. Of course, not everyone is going to agree with that.

Others say that in the *Rig Veda*, Bharata is referred to as the country of “Sapta Sindhu”, i.e. the country of seven great rivers. This is, of course, acceptable. However, exactly which book and chapter this verse comes from needs to be clarified. Nonetheless, some say that the word “Sindhu” refers to rivers and sea, and not merely to the specific river called “Sindhu”. Furthermore, it is said that in Vedic Sanskrit, according to ancient dictionaries, “sa” was pronounced as “ha”. Thus “Sapta Sindhu” was pronounced as “Hapta Hindu”. So this is how the word “Hindu” is supposed to have come into being. It is also said that the ancient Persians referred to Bharat as “Hapta Hind”, as recorded in their ancient classic “Bem Riyadh”. So this is another reason why some scholars came to believe that the word “Hindu” had its origin in Persia.

Another theory is that the name “Hindu” does not even come from the name Sindhu. Mr. A. Krishna Kumar of Hyderabad, India explains. “This [Sindhu/Hindu] view is untenable since Indians at that time enviably ranked highest in the world in terms of civilization and wealth would not have been without a name. They were not the unknown aborigines waiting to be discovered, identified and Christened by foreigners.” He cites an argument from the book *Self-Government in India* by N. B. Pavgee, published in 1912. The author tells of an old Swami and Sanskrit scholar Mangal Nathji, who found an ancient *Purana* known as *Brihannaradi* in the Sham village, Hoshiarpur, Punjab. It contained this verse:

*himalayam samarabhya yavat bindusarovaram
hindusthanamiti qyatam hi antaraksharayogatah*

Again the exact location of this verse in the *Purana* is missing, but Kumar translates it as: “The country lying between the Himalayan mountains and Bindu Sarovara (Cape Comorin sea) is known as Hindusthan by combination of the first letter ‘hi’ of ‘Himalaya’ and the last compound letter ‘ndu’ of the word ‘Bindu.’”

This, of course, is supposed to have given rise to the name “Hindu”, indicating an indigenous origin. The conclusion of which is that people living in this area are thus known as “Hindus”.

So again, in any way these theories may present their information, and in any way you look at it, the name “Hindu” started simply as a bodily and regional designation. The name “Hindu” refers to a location and its people and originally had nothing to do with the philosophies, religion or culture of the people, which could certainly change from one thing to another. It is like saying that all people from India are Indians. Sure, that is acceptable as a name referring to a location, but what about their religion, faith and philosophy? These are known by numerous names according to the various outlooks and beliefs. Thus, they are not all Hindus, as many people who do not follow the Vedic system already object to calling themselves by that name. So “Hindu” is not the most appropriate name of a spiritual path, but the Sanskrit term of *sanatana-dharma* is much more accurate. The culture of the ancient Indians and their early history is Vedic culture or Vedic *dharma*. So it is more appropriate to use a name that is based on that culture for those who follow it, rather than a name that merely addresses the location of a people.

Unfortunately, the word “Hindu” has gradually been adopted by most everyone, even the Indians, and is presently applied in a very general way, so much so, in fact, that now “Hinduism” is often used to describe anything from religious activities to even Indian social or nationalistic events. Some of these so-called “Hindu” events are not endorsed in the Vedic literature, and, therefore, must be considered non-Vedic. Thus, not just anyone can call themselves a “Hindu” and still be considered a follower of the Vedic path. Nor can any activity casually be dubbed as a part of Hinduism and thoughtlessly be considered a part of the true Vedic culture.

Therefore, the Vedic spiritual path is more accurately called *sanatana-dharma*, which means the eternal, unchanging occupation of the soul in its relation to the Supreme Being. Just as the *dharma* of sugar is to be sweet, this does not change. And if it is not sweet, then it is not sugar. Or the *dharma* of fire is to give warmth and light. If it does not do that, then it is not fire. In the same way, there is a particular *dharma* or nature of the soul, which is *sanatana*, or eternal. It does not change. So there is the state of *dharma* and the path of *dharma*. Following the principles of *sanatana-dharma* can bring us to the pure state of regaining our forgotten spiritual identity and relationship with God. This is the goal of Vedic knowledge. Thus, the knowledge of the *Vedas* and all Vedic literature, such as Lord Krishna’s message in *Bhagavad-gita*, as well as the teachings of the *Upanishads* and *Puranas*, are not limited to only “Hindus” who are restricted to a certain region of the planet or family

of birth. Such knowledge is actually meant for the whole world. As everyone is a spiritual being and has the same spiritual essence as described according to the principles of *sanatana-dharma*, then everyone should be given the right and privilege to understand this knowledge. It cannot be held for an exclusive group of people.

Sanatana-dharma is also the fully developed spiritual philosophy that fills whatever gaps may be left by the teachings of other less philosophically developed religions. Direct knowledge of the soul is a “universal spiritual truth” which can be applied by all people, in any part of the world, in any time in history, and in any religion. It is eternal. Therefore, being an eternal spiritual truth, it is beyond all time and worldly designations. Knowledge of the soul is the essence of Vedic wisdom and is more than what the name “Hindu” implies, especially after understanding from where the name comes.

Even if the time arrives in this deteriorating age of Kali-yuga after many millennia when Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and even Hinduism (as we call it today) may disappear from the face of the earth, there will still be the Vedic teachings that remain as a spiritual and universal truth, even if such truths may be forgotten and must be re-established again in this world by Lord Krishna Himself. I doubt then that He will use the name “Hindu.” He certainly said nothing of the sort when He last spoke *Bhagavad-gita*.

Thus, although I do not feel that “Hindu” is a proper term to represent the Vedic Aryan culture or spiritual path, I do use the word from time to time book to mean the same thing since it is already so much a part of everyone’s vocabulary. Otherwise, since I follow the Vedic path of *sanatana-dharma*, I call myself a *sanatana-dharmist*. That reduces the need to use the label of “Hindu” and also helps focus on the universal nature of the Vedic path. Therefore, I propose that all Hindus begin to use this term *sanatana-dharmist*, which not only refers to the correct Sanskrit terminology, but also more accurately depicts the true character and spiritual intention of the Vedic path. Others have also used the terms *sanatanis* or even *dharmists*, both of which are closer to the real meaning within Vedic culture.

However, for political and legal purposes it may be convenient to continue using the name Hindu for the time being. Until the terms *Sanatana-dharma* or Vedic *dharm* become more recognized by international law and society in general, “Hindu” may remain the term behind which to rally for Vedic culture. But over the long term, it is a name that is bound to change in meaning to the varying views of it due to its lack of a real linguistic foundation. Being based merely on the values people place in it, its meaning and purpose will vary from person to person, culture to culture, and certainly from generation to generation. We can see how this took place with the British in India. So there will be the perpetuation of the problems with the name and why some people and groups will not want to accept it.

Yet by the continued and increased use of the terms Vedic *dharm* or *Sanatana-dharma*, at least by those who are more aware of the definitive Sanskrit basis of these terms, they will gain recognition as being the more accurate terminology. It merely takes some time to make the proper adjustments.

APPENDIX 2: BECOMING A HINDU OR DEVOTEE IS EASY

By Stephen Knapp (from www.stephen-knapp.com)

Since Sanatana-dharma is a universal process and applicable to everyone, then naturally anyone can practice its principles. Anyone can and should be accepted to participate in the process. Furthermore, anyone who is looking for the ultimate spiritual Truth is already one who is following the path of Sanatana-dharma. So you could say that anyone who is sincerely looking for such Truth with an open mind is already on the spiritual path, at least on some level, and is thus also a Dharmist, a follower of Sanatana-dharma.

The point is that there is one and only one God and one Absolute Truth. The very first of the Vedic books named the *Rig-Veda* proclaims, *Ekam Sat, Viprah Bahudha Vadanti* (There is only one truth, only men describe it in different ways). So a Jew or a Christian or a Muslim who is in search of the Absolute Truth is automatically on the path of Sanatana-dharma. However, if they get stuck with accepting nothing more than their own local traditions, this may hamper their growth in understanding a broader range of the many aspects of the Supreme that are described in other scriptures, such as those of the Vedic literature. So a person's progress depends on how far he or she really wants to go in this lifetime, and how they approach various levels of knowledge to understand the Absolute Truth.

So those who may be accepted as followers of the Vedic tradition generally accept the following: A) The Vedic literature presents knowledge of the Absolute Truth and are the authority on the Vedic tradition; B) There are various ways to realize different aspects of this spiritual Truth; C) God can appear in different forms; D) We are given more than one life on this road of Self-realization; and E) That ultimately we are responsible for accepting the path we take and the progress we make.

To clarify this last statement, even if you accept the path of Christianity and believe that Jesus will save you, Jesus also said that faith alone is not enough. You must show your faith by your works, and your works will show the true state of your desires and consciousness. Otherwise, if by faith alone you go to heaven yet remain full of material or mundane desires for earthly things, do you think Jesus would force you to stay in heaven? No, he would let you go back to earth, to where your heart is, to try and satisfy all those desires because that is your true state of consciousness. So your spiritual advancement is up to you and is revealed by your own level of consciousness, which will take you to the stage of existence in which you are meant to be.

SHARING THE DHARMA

Since we are all eternal spirit souls, part of the Supreme Truth, we are always a part of Sanatana-dharma, or the eternal path to finding the ultimate spiritual Truth.

We may call ourselves by whatever religious affiliation we like, but in essence we have a spiritual identity, which the path of Sanatana-dharma assists us in finding.

This spiritual identity is the essence of everyone, making us all similar in our spiritual quality and nature. Your soul is the same as the soul of everyone else. This is our similarity which we all share with every being. Therefore, sincere Hindus will share their philosophy and tradition to provide that assistance and goodwill to others who search for Truth and their higher Selves. It is a way of sharing peace and recognizing that we are all a part of a universal family. For within these bodies of ours exist our real and eternal identity, which is the same within everyone. So everyone can participate and share in the path of Sanatana-dharma.

Sanatana-dharma contains a wealth of spiritual philosophies and practices by which one can enter and experience one's own level of spiritual perception and Self-realization. Some of these may at first seem unusual to a beginner only because other religions do not always teach these systems. They are left out. But the Dharmic path includes many traditions that other religions have forgotten. So these can be helpful for anyone of any religious background. Generally, we find that those who understand the spiritual knowledge of the Vedic system begin to have a deeper understanding of the teachings of other religions as well. This is another aspect of the universality of the spiritual wisdom in the Vedic teachings. Thus, everyone should know this information that is provided within the Vedic path. The point is that the Vedic system provides knowledge for people at whatever level of understanding in which they may be situated.

In this way, the Vedic teachings include spiritual knowledge for the needs of people at all levels. Hinduism does not seek superiority over other religions, but only provides whatever level of knowledge people need. With its library of Vedic literature, it is thus one of the most comprehensive spiritual paths in the world. It only seeks and delivers the highest Truths known to man, and the methods by which a person can realize them for him or herself. Thus, the Vedic path encourages everyone to reawaken their connection with God and realization of the Absolute Truth for themselves, and not necessarily through an institution or organization. The highest Truth is for everyone. Anyone can understand the Vedic path with a little investigation.

However, there have been times when I have heard of individuals or even groups of people, after spending much time in research and discussion, who have decided to become Hindus or devotees. Thereafter, they have come to a Hindu temple and asked to be accepted into the Hindu fold. Then the priest, depending on what kind of temple it is, might say something like one does not need to become a Hindu, but simply go on as you are and become perfect in that way, whether it may be Christian, Muslim, or something else. Thus, the people are turned away with little else to do but continue on a path that they may find to be no longer suitable for them, or that does not fulfill their inner spiritual longings or quest for deeper spiritual knowledge and realizations. If a person finds that they are ready to move forward to a deeper spiritual path, then to deny them that right is not proper, especially by one who may be considered to be a Hindu priest. He should allow them full facility to scan the depths of Vedic spiritual knowledge and to participate to the fullest that they may want in

order to increase their devotion and connection with God through this means of expression. So, this confusion must be rectified.

In fact, to consider foreigners to be outside the Vedic purview by virtue of their origin or upbringing is inaccurate and against basic Vedic Shastra. As is stated in our *Hari-bhakti-vilaasa* 10.91, “*na me ‘bhaktash chaturvedee mad-bhaktah shvapachah priyah, tasmai deyam tato graahyam sa cha pujyo yathaa hyaham*”, which means “A brahmin who is expert in the study of all four Vedas is not dear to Me (Bhagavan), but My devotee, even if he comes from a family of outcastes, is dear to Me. Whatever he touches becomes pure. That devotee, although born in a family of outcastes, is as worshipable as I am.”

Therefore, the goal of the Vedic system is to provide the means that anyone can use to raise their consciousness and know God. This point has been advocated by such prominent teachers as Swami A. C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, and many others. In this way, for many years the Vedic path has been assimilating those who are willing to adopt the basic principles of Sanatana-dharma, even if they are foreigners. The Vedic temples and the Hindu community must open their doors to those who are seekers of higher Truths, which are abundantly found in Sanatana-dharma. The doors cannot be kept closed for such people who may be looking for the benefits of such spiritual knowledge. Thus, sharing Vedic Dharma with all others who are interested for their benefit has been encouraged by spiritual authorities and should be considered a Dharmic principle.

BECOMING A DHARMIST OR DEVOTEE IS EASY

Does one have to convert to be a Hindu, or undergo a change of names or outward identity? No. If one likes the Vedic philosophy, then one can easily adopt any portion that they find helpful for them. However, if one prefers to use the Vedic culture as a strong basis of one’s life and feels devotion toward the path, then there is also nothing wrong with undergoing the formality of a Shuddhi or purification ritual to formally become a Hindu or Sanatana-Dharmist. However, once we adopt the Vedic tradition, this does not mean that we lose our freedom or whatever other roots we had, nor do we need to disrespect whatever other religious tradition we had previously followed. It does not work like that, but this is up to one’s own preference. In this way, Sanatana-dharma is inclusive. It allows anyone to find and follow Truth wherever one finds it. Thus, one needs to merely live in a Dharmic lifestyle as outlined by the Vedic principles, which is meant to accelerate one’s spiritual advancement and purity in consciousness.

I have often heard that there is a little confusion about what a person should do when they decide to partake of the Hindu religion or become a devotee. This is especially the case if one is a westerner or born as a non-Hindu. Even when the priests at Hindu temples are approached by someone who wants to become a Hindu who is not Indian born, they often do not know what to do. Sometimes it is thought that one must first undergo some kind of formality to make their dedication to their new spiritual path official, like partaking in a ritual or name change or something. A person can do that if one wishes but to merely accept the Vedic path does not require

that. To be a Hindu does not require any formality. All it takes is to understand and begin following the Vedic principles to the degree to which one can do so. Of course, one may take initiation from a spiritual master later on, which then may require a formal ritual, depending on the decisions of the guru in this regard. But that is usually a later development.

Sometimes people say that to be a Hindu one has to be born a Hindu. But this is completely wrong. Nowhere in the Vedic *shastra* does it say such a thing. Also, merely being born in a Hindu family does not mean that such a person will have a natural proclivity toward spiritual truth. They may or may not be interested, depending on their level of awareness. Plus, a person may be born in a Hindu family and convert to some other religion. Besides, if Sanatana-Dharma is based on Universal Truth, and what is universal includes everyone, then how can anyone not be included within Sanatana-Dharma if they choose to do so? Thus, the only requirement for being a part of the Vedic path is to accept the basic principles and codes of conduct of Vedic Dharma, as has been outlined in this book. It does not depend on the circumstances of one's birth, such as family, ethnic group, cultural heritage or geographical location. Birth is not more important than one's conduct and character.

The point is that if we are all spirit souls, then the bodily consideration plays no part in the importance to regain the understanding and realization of our spiritual identity. In fact, the more spiritual we become, we find that the less emphasis there will be on the body. Thus, everyone should find and participate in that path which allows one to best rise above bodily identifications. Thus, it does not take a special ceremony or conversion rite to allow anyone to become a participant of the Vedic path. We are all spiritual beings. The human body is merely a machine and covering of the soul. That is the essence of the Vedic teachings. So how does the machine determine which spiritual path we can or cannot take? And as spiritual beings, we have a right and obligation to reach the highest spiritual knowledge and attain the clearest spiritual realizations that we can. If we find that the Vedic teachings can do this and assist us in living the path that allows us to enter such a lofty understanding, then it does not take any special ritual for us to begin the path. All we need to do is to start.

In this way, Sanatana-dharma, which essentially means the eternal nature of the spiritual being or soul, is the path for us to attain that realization of our true spiritual identity and the means to awaken to our real spiritual nature. As spiritual beings, everyone has the right to engage in that process. All one needs to do is add the various Vedic principles to one's life.

Therefore, it should be clear that as we are all spiritual beings in a material body, what difference does the body make in allowing one to participate in the Vedic spiritual process? Anyone can become a member of the Vedic community, and if one temple does not recognize him or her due to their own limited conceptions of who can be a Hindu, then there are other temples wherein a person can be welcomed and participate to a fuller extent. So any interested person should find those temples. Otherwise, all that is required for one to be a Hindu or devotee is faith and practice. And as one progresses, he or she may take up particular forms of yoga, adopt a vegetarian diet, learn to chant certain uplifting prayers or mantras at home, and rise early to do meditation or worship. One may also make an altar at home so that his or

her dwelling becomes a temple or has a shrine room. And, of course, one is always encouraged to read the various spiritual texts at home to increase his or her own understanding and awareness, and to focus one's consciousness on the higher purpose of life.

If one wants to make a significant event in which one marks his or her new dedication to the Vedic path, there are different ways in which to do that. There are simple ways, and those that are more formal. For example, a person may simply go to the temple and stand in front of the deity and say, "My dear Lord, from this day on I am Yours. Now kindly accept and guide me." One may even do that in front of a photo or picture of the deity. Then one's progress or entrance into the Vedic process is between you and God, which is the real case anyway. The Vedic texts say that once you surrender yourself to the Lord in this way, you now become His ward. He will give you protection and guidance to the degree to which you depend on Him and wish to serve Him and rekindle your relationship.

If, however, a person wants to increase his or her participation and join an ashrama, then of course there may be particular rules or regulations that one must follow, or adopt certain forms of dress to enhance one's spiritual consciousness, depending on the spiritual discipline involved. But this is not the case if one simply wants to live at home, practice the Vedic principles and be part of the temple congregation. At home, especially if one has a job or career, or a family, a person may accept those practices that best fit into one's life. But then as you progress, you can adjust your life accordingly to make it increasingly spiritual and to accommodate more of the practices that are suggested for your advancement.

There are, however, certain ceremonies one may undergo as a formality, such as the Shuddhi purification rite or the *namakarana samskara* in which one gets a Vedic name, or the initiation by a guru into a particular *sampradaya* or lineage in spiritual practice. Yet, merely adopting the Vedic customs is enough to be considered a follower of the Vedic Dharma. It is the heartfelt faith that is the most important, which is purely an individual prerogative. If someone chooses to be a follower of Vedic Dharma and acknowledges the basic tenets of the Hindu faith, then he is one. He or she does not need to first undergo the formalities to receive the higher spiritual insights in the Vedic practices, such as yoga, meditation, or the study of the Vedic teachings.

In any case, whether living at home or in a temple ashrama, if a person does later find that they would like to continue one's involvement in the Vedic path or join a particular *sampradaya*, or are attracted to take initiation from a particular spiritual master or guru, then they may undergo the initiatory process. Then, depending on the standards of the guru, there may be an initiation ceremony. This is often when a person will get a spiritual name to indicate their new life or spiritual beginning. If one lives in an ashrama at the time, such an initiation ceremony may or may not include that one shave his head, or adopt a certain standard of clothes, and begin chanting a certain mantra in accordance with the process of that level of initiation.

In fact, in taking to the Vedic spiritual life, finding a proper teacher is one of the few injunctions that are presented in the Vedic texts, such as the *Bhagavad-gita*. Therein it relates that in order to make further progress on the path of spiritual

realization, one should take instruction from a proper spiritual master. Lord Krishna says: “Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.” (Bg.4.34)

You will notice that the verse does not say that the guru should only accept a person from a certain nationality, religion or culture. The person needs only to be sincere and respectful. The disciple also needs to make sure the guru is genuine and able to deliver the spiritual message of the Lord properly. Thus, it is a reciprocal relationship between the guru and the disciple. But anyone can approach a master for understanding the higher spiritual truths. Once the relationship between the guru and disciple is firmly established, then the guru may then give the initiation ceremony to the disciple for continued spiritual progress.

THE FUTURE

As a result of this increasing search for Truth, humanity is increasingly approaching and exploring the older traditions again to view the deeper levels of spiritual understanding that they contain. As people of the world gain interest in the mystical, the spiritual, yogic and deeper sides of all religions, the movements that recognize these various teachings will grow. This is already happening with the new interest in such topics as yoga, Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, Native American traditions, Pagan practices, and other indigenous cultures. The Sanskrit jargon such as yoga, karma, mantras, chakras, and gurus are now commonplace and are utilized as the basis of new insights. This is a sign that the universality that is inherent in the Vedic traditions are especially becoming more apparent, as its name, Sanatana-dharma, the eternal tradition of Truth, makes so clear.

Sanatana-dharma remains the oldest and most dynamic of all the world's religions and living indigenous cultures. It also remains in the forefront of those paths that emphasize experiential spirituality and shows great freedom in its approach to personal spiritual life. Thus, Vedic culture is experiencing a revival and displays a growing influence all over the world. This is only one of the reasons why it has survived for many thousands of years, in spite of the pressure it and its followers have undergone in the attempt to end its existence by those religions that are more dogmatic and belief oriented.

The more people understand the openness of Sanatana-dharma, the more likely there could be an end to religious war and misunderstandings. In fact, the more likely religion as we know it will give way for the real and personal search for God and Truth, which are principles encapsulated by the Vedic tradition. Religion must be founded on eternal Truth and not merely on humanity's ever-changing opinion and conventions. Otherwise, it is not wholesome or progressive but is artificial and dictatorial and will lead to more religious conflicts in the battle over who is right and who is wrong, and the ways to eliminate all who believe differently than the dominating system. This does little but to preserve the chaos that we see so much of in society today. And the cure from this is what Sanatana-dharma can provide if we investigate it seriously.

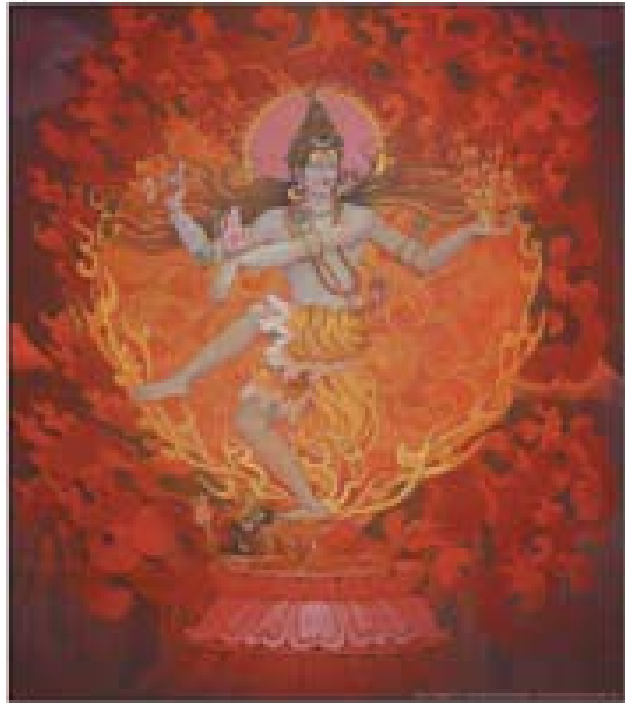
APPENDIX 3: TANTRA AND VEDA - ONE TRADITION

Dr. David Frawley

A number of writers and teachers, particularly in Western academia, have tried to divide the two great traditions of India of Veda and Tantra as different or even contrary. Some Yoga teachers have uncritically taken up this view as well. They see the Vedic tradition as Aryan and patriarchal and the Tantric tradition as non-Aryan and matriarchal. They identify the Vedic tradition with invading Aryans and the Tantric tradition with indigenous Dravidians. They see the Tantric as worshipping the Mother Goddess and the Vedic as rejecting her. They imply that Vedic and Tantric ideas and practices are very different. Now that the Aryan Invasion theory is severely in question, and the Sarasvati River of Vedic fame, discovered as the main homeland of civilization in ancient India, we should reexamine these views. In my own more than thirty years of studying Vedic and Tantric texts in the original Sanskrit, I have also found remarkable connections between the two traditions. Vedic and Tantric traditions are one, though with different orientations. The Vedic tradition is an earlier form of the Tantric, which itself is a later development of Vedic practices. Tantric teachings abound in the use of Vedic mantras and the mysticism of the Sanskrit alphabet. They use Vedic fire altars and practices and honor Vedic deities at an inner level. Inner Tantric Yoga reflects the four main Vedic deities of Agni, Soma, Vayu and Surya (the forces of fire, moon, wind and sun). The Vedic view emphasizes the Shiva principle, though often under the abstract forms of Brahman, Purusha and Atman, and in the form of different Vedic deities (like Agni and Soma) which reflect the cosmic masculine energy and light form identified with Shiva. Yet the Vedas also recognize the Shakti principle as Vak or the power of the Divine Word, which is said to be the Veda-Mata or 'Mother of the Vedas'. The Goddess pervades the Vedas, not so much as a particular deity but as the Vedic mantra itself, though many feminine deities also exist and each Vedic God has his corresponding Goddess! The Tantric view emphasizes the Shakti principle as the great Goddess but recognizes the light principle with Shiva as *Prakasha* or pure illumination. Tantric Yoga also aims at the realization of Atman and Brahman, defined both as the light and energy of consciousness, Chid-jyoti and Chit-Shakti ... Another difference of orientation

between Vedic and Tantric Yoga is that the Vedic deities are first of all powers of nature like Fire, Wind, Sun and Moon. Their human forms or anthropomorphic sides remain vague. They are seldom portrayed in the form of a human figure. Tantric Deities, on the other hand, like Shiva and Shakti, are first of all anthropomorphic figures, with a human body, gestures and ornaments defined and delineated quite clearly and frequently. Yet Tantric deities have a deep nature symbolism with the Goddess and the mountain stream and Shiva as the mountain, for example, so this distinction is only general. The Vedas centre around four great Devatas (principles of light) as Agni (fire), Soma (water and moon), Indra-Vayu (lightning) and Surya (the Sun), as the inner and outer forms of light in the universe ... Tantric Yoga revolves around these same forces as Sun, Moon, Lightning and Fire. These forces appear as Goddesses in Tantra with Soma, the lunar reflective force, as the Goddess Lalita or Tripura Sundari and the crown chakra and the cosmic mind. Vedic Indra relates to Tantric Chinnamasta as the power of lightning perception in the eyes, the third eye. Surya is the solar power of life and awareness, the Self in the heart, which is Bhadra Kali among the Goddesses. Agni is the Kundalini fire in the root chakra, which is the Goddess Bhairavi and the ultimate power of speech. Vayu or Wind is the general Kriya Shakti force that is Kali in the broader sense as the cosmic Prana ... The great system of Kashmir Shaivism with its deities, mantras, pranas, and tattvas reflecting the Sanskrit alphabet is a formulation of the older Vedic model. Shiva, if we look deeply, is the Supreme Deity of the Rig Veda and its four main light forms as Agni, Soma, Surya and Indra (Vidyut). This statement may seem unusual, if not absurd, for those used to thinking that Vedas and Agamas are different or that Shiva is not a Vedic deity, because his name and form is not much present there. The problem is that such views only look superficially at the names and forms not to the inner content and energy of the Vedas. Shiva is often called 'Agni-Somatmakam', meaning that he has the nature of 'Agni and Soma' as fire and water and all the other dualities that the two represent. Agni is his fierce or Rudra form. Soma is his blissful and linga form. Shiva is also regarded as Surya or the Sun, the pure light, Prakasha. As Prana, Shiva is also Vayu. He is Indra as the lord of perception and the power of mantra. Shiva is the background deity of the Rigveda of which the other four main deities are but forms or manifestations. On the one hand, they are facets of Shiva. On the other hand, they are like the sons of Shiva, which are his manifestations, with Rudra as the great father God in the Rigveda. The Vedic Yajna is itself the Tantric Yoga as an outer

ritual worship of the outer fire. Tantric Yoga is the Vedic Yajna internalized, worship of the inner fire of the Kundalini. The worship of Shiva maintains many Vedic forms of fire worship, use of Vedic mantras and communion with nature. Shaivites mark themselves with the sacred ash or Vibhuti from the fire. The Rudram, the most famous chant to Shiva, which is found in the Yajurveda, makes Shiva's identity with the Vedic sacrifice very clear.



AGNI-SHIVA