

GOD IS CONSCIOUSNESS

**from The Monotheism of Money
to a new Monism of Awareness**



Text of a discourse delivered by
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The Sanskrit word *Acharya* is translated in English as ‘preceptor’, related to the word ‘precept’. In Hinduism, an *Acharya* is a teacher or guru capable of imparting clear understandings of fundamental philosophical and theological precepts. I have been invited here today by the Eastern Traditions Society on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Holi, and in the role of *Acharya* - preceptor. I come with the aim of introducing the basic *precepts* of a radical new philosophical principle - one with *profound implications* for our understanding of life, science and religion, as well as the most *practical of applications* in fields as diverse as psychology and medicine, politics and

economics, education, ecology and cosmology. I call this principle quite simply: **The Awareness Principle**. Evolved and refined over 35 years, it is my understanding that this new principle and its practice – what I call **The New Yoga of Awareness** or ‘New Millennium Yoga’ - is capable of both renewing and integrating many different schools of Eastern thought, and in doing so, offering new answers to fundamental questions that have for long been falsely understood in the West, except amongst a few rare and great thinkers.

In Hinduism, there is no hard and fast separation between theology and philosophy, reason and revelation, spirituality and science. Hinduism is essentially ‘theosophy’ and *spiritual* science. If there is anything that might deserve the name Hindu ‘fundamentalism’ then, it is not a set of fanatically held beliefs, but rather an unceasing and ever-evolving quest to articulate fundamental *truth* - religious and philosophical, scientific and spiritual. The primary ethical value placed on truth affirmed already in the Rig Veda.

In this sense Hinduism, despite being regarded as one faith or world religion among others, does indeed fit the well-known motto: **‘No religion higher than truth’**.

In the West, truth and falsity have long been regarded as a property of propositions – of assertions, whether religious or scientific. Academics, philosophers, theologians, politicians and people of all sorts present and dispute the truth of countless propositions or assertions, beliefs and convictions. Yet they do so without beginning to question the meaning and truth of the individual words or terms employed in those propositions. Thus theists in the West

debate with secularists and atheists regarding the existence or non-existence of ‘God’, without questioning what the word God means, even if only to them, not to mention the many different ways this word can and has been understood in cultures beyond their own. Instead there is a tacit or covert assumption that we all ‘know what is meant’ when the word God is used - just as we all know what we mean by the terms ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ or even the scientific term ‘energy’. This Greek-rooted term is used by New Age spiritual teachers and even scholars of Eastern thought – even physicists themselves cannot define in words what it essentially is.

In the context of the current debate about the value of religion as such, let me be clear about one fact. We do *not* live in a so-called secular society – *indeed there is no such thing* – but rather one dominated by what Marx called ‘The Monotheism of Money’. Together with this goes the most irreligiously polytheistic culture humanity has ever seen. This culture is characterised by the worship of countless commodities – whether in the form of cars, pop idols and celebrity icons – or even their mere images or idols. Its polytheism has as its essence what Marx called **‘the fetishism of the commodity’** and with it today’s culture of marketing - which turns the most basic of human values – love, freedom, soul, spirituality - into mere buzz words for advertisers. Marx also emphasised something of deep religious significance in Hinduism - which worships all things as sensory expressions of the Divine. This is the fact that we can each ‘own’ and enjoy things with our senses - without having to ‘have’ or ‘own’ them as private property. Yet today even different Eastern traditions of meditation and yoga have become

competitively marketed commodities – replete with superstores of profit-making accessories from instructional videos to yoga mats. In this culture, a culture not just of business but of manic busy-ness, meditation and yoga become merely another thing to do, to fit in to a busy lifestyle. Capitalist culture makes a fetish, icon or idol of everything that its marketeers seek to sell us.

Money is the supreme god of this culture, a culture of the commodity and of the market. And though money itself is a mere *immaterial symbol* (a dollar note would not be worth the paper it is printed on were it not for the curiously religious symbols printed on it) it is supposedly capable of miraculously transmuting itself into material things – commodities. Yet as we now see all too clearly, money itself creates nothing, despite the delusion that it can create something from nothing - even if only more money. The credo of the ‘Monotheism of Money’ is ‘I am that I am’ – or perhaps ‘I am to increase what I am’.

Yet not only commerce but science too has its many gods. Thus physicists treat their own abstract, purely quantitative and wholly immaterial mental abstractions – the energetic quantum for example - as more real and fundamental than the tangibly experienced phenomena they are used to explain. Just as physicists worship an ill-defined entity called ‘energy’, biologists worship a no less ill-defined entity called ‘the gene’, and neurologists a lump of grey matter called the brain. Together they seek to reduce both consciousness and religion to a mere pattern of quantum fluctuations, a phantasm of the brain, or a means of evolutionary survival of the ‘selfish gene’. It is

high time, not to dispel ‘The God Delusion’ but its unquestioned counterpart – ‘The Science Delusion’.

For again, before we can begin to question the truth or falsity of the belief that ‘God exists’ we must ask what exactly is meant by that word ‘God’? Is it a mysterious ‘force’ or ‘energy’ - both ill-defined scientific terms? Is it a supreme creator being or a phantasm of the human brain, a construct of language or a means for the survival of genes? With this question in mind, the level of debate in the West about the existence or non-existence of God and the truth and value of religion is *primitive* in the extreme, centred as it is on an Abrahamic concept of god as a supreme being – one standing over, separate and apart from its creation and all other beings, in the same way that the human ego and intellect sees itself as standing over and apart from the human body and soul, and humanity has sought to stand over and apart from nature.

What all today’s Western countless competing god-concepts have in common however is that their scientific or spiritual high priests seek to reduce God to some particular *thing or being* - whether in the form of a mysterious force or energy, a big bang or supreme being, Spirit with a capital ‘S’, or else person or trinity of persons. In doing so, they ignore the most fundamental question of all. **How we know that any thing or being exists at all?**

The answer is simple. Only out of an *awareness* of it. The most fundamental scientific ‘fact’ or ‘truth’ therefore is not the ‘objective’ existence of a universe of bodies in space and time but a subjective *awareness* of that

universe. We ourselves only know that we are or exist from out of an awareness of being and of other beings.

There is only one possible conclusion we can come to from this fact. Namely that awareness - not just your awareness or mine but awareness as such – is the very essence of the divine - being a more primordial reality than any thing or being, force or energy, person or god, we are or could be aware **of**.

At this point I would like to cite the words of another Acharya - a great 10th century Indian thinker and polymath who has only recently come to be recognised as perhaps the greatest synthesist of Indian religious thought. His name is Abhinavagupta and his words read as follows:

“The Being of all things that are recognised in awareness, in turn depend on awareness.”

In these words Acharya Abhinavagupta first expressed the basic truth of what I call ‘The Awareness Principle’. For the first precept of this Principle is simply this – that awareness as such IS the first principle of all that is, and not any things or beings, phenomena or experiences - whether natural or supernatural, physical or metaphysical, that, to use Abhinava’s words “are recognised in awareness”.

Inseparable from this first precept of The Awareness Principle is a second one, namely that we cannot – *in principle* – reduce awareness to the private property or product of any thing or being we are aware of, whether the human brain or a supreme God-being. That is like

attempting to explain dreaming by something we dream of. The very attempt to do so is absurd.

Let us say you dream of something or someone, anything or anyone – whether a speckled giraffe, a lump of grey matter, an angel or a ‘son of God’. Would it be logical to argue that dreaming *as such* was the product or property of this one thing or being you dreamt of – that it was the cause of all dreams? Yet that is exactly what scientists such as physicists and neurobiologists explicitly do when they attempt to reduce not only dreaming but consciousness as such – what I term awareness - to the property, product or function of some particular thing we are conscious of, whether quantum fluctuations or the brain. It is also what religious believers do when they implicitly reduce consciousness to the private property of beings, whether human or divine.

Why should anyone come to such an illogical explanation of dreaming and of consciousness – one that reduces them to something we dream or are conscious of - and therefore does not in fact explain but already assumes the reality of consciousness? Only if they themselves are rather like sleepers caught in a dream - so unawake or unaware *that* they are dreaming, that they feel forced to seek an explanation for everything they dream of in some particular thing – or else in some intangible and unknown being in another world – the waking self and waking world of which they are unaware.

Hence the Eastern notion of spiritual enlightenment as a type of awakening – not from a dream but within a dream – the dream that we take as the rock-solid reality of our

waking self and world. For as anyone with experience of *Nidra Yoga* knows – this being the yoga of dreaming and sleeping consciousness that is the theme of the next part of this afternoon’s event – when we become aware that we are dreaming, an experience called lucid dreaming, that dream literally becomes more lucid - more clear and light-filled. That is because it is now permeated by the radiant light of *awareness* as such – that light without which nothing at all - not even what we perceive as physical light – would be visible at all. For all that we see and experience only comes to light in awareness - as a reflection and expression of the *light of awareness*. That is why when we speak of things ‘coming to light’ or of seeing or understanding them ‘in a new light’ these are no mere metaphors. That all this was recognised long ago in Indian thought is revealed by the words of Kshemaraja, a disciple of Abhinavagupta:

“Every appearance owes its existence to the light of awareness.

Nothing can have its own being without the light of awareness.”

Again, the expression ‘light of awareness’ is no mere metaphor transferring our experience of so-called physical light to the realm of the psychical. When we sense the brightness or radiance of someone’s eyes what we perceive is the radiance, light or lucidity of *awareness* that shines through their eyes. This is nothing that can be measured in lumens with physical instruments. Indeed, as soon as we merely look at someone’s eyes like an optician - as mere objects – we immediately cease to sense the qualities of awareness, light or dark, clear or confused,

dead or alive, that communicate through the look *in* their eyes – for that ‘look’ is nothing objective but a mode of awareness – their way of looking out on and experiencing the world.

Different words shape and colour our awareness, and with it our way of looking out on and seeing the world – our ‘world view’. This applies also to Eastern world views. Thus Buddhism speaks of enlightenment as ‘awakening’ – from the Sanskrit root *Budh*. Hinduism on the other hand, emphasis ‘liberation’ or *Moksha*. Both have tended to emphasise the importance and challenge of individual spiritual awakening and liberation, whilst giving less attention to explaining the social and historical obstacles in the path of attaining it. The Awareness Principle on the other hand, allows us to identify clearly the biggest historical obstacle to both individual and *social* awakening and liberation. This is the core assumption – and accompanying experience - that consciousness is the *private property* of beings, human or divine. This idea has been entrenched in the human mind since the first types of society arose that were based on private property and ruled by property owning classes. Along with the idea of consciousness as the property of individual beings or ‘subjects’ went the notion that it is necessarily bound to particular ‘objects’. Marx again:

“... the representation of private interests ... abolishes all natural and *spiritual distinctions* by enthroning in their stead the immoral, irrational and *soulless abstraction* of a particular *material object*, and a particular consciousness which is slavishly subordinated to this object.”

(So much for so-called Marxist ‘materialism’!)

In contrast to the whole idea of consciousness as the private property of individual beings or subjects – and bound to particular objects – is the quite different understanding that can be found in Indian religious thought. This is the comprehension that all *individual* consciousness is but the individualised expression of a singular, *indivisible* and universal consciousness – one that not only takes the form of individual being or ‘subjects’ of consciousness but also of all possible things or ‘objects’ of consciousness.

This universal consciousness is simply consciousness *as such*. It is because consciousness *as such* is both inseparable and yet at the same time wholly distinct from all specific *contents* of consciousness – from each and every thing we are aware *of* - that I prefer to use a different word for it - ‘awareness’ or ‘pure awareness’. For to be ‘conscious’ in the ordinary sense is by no means the same as to be aware, let alone to *be* that very awareness. If people are engaged in thought or activities of any sort, whether making a cup of tea, talking to another person or listening to a lecture such as this, they may be conscious but they are not necessarily aware. To be aware is to be able, at each and every moment – to distinguish between anything we are conscious of thinking, feeling, saying or doing on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the pure awareness of thinking, feeling or doing it. It is this awareness alone that *frees* us from bondage - from what is effectively a quite *unconscious* identification with whatever it is we happen to be thinking, saying or doing, or however it is we happen to be feeling. That is why the

great Acharyas of Kashmiri Shaivism identified awareness with one value above all – *freedom*. This is also why understanding what I call ‘The Awareness Principle’ can lead – in itself - to a new awakening and liberating experience of pure awareness.

A word here about the word ‘meditation’. We do not need to empty or clear our minds of thoughts and things to attain an experience of pure thought- and thing-free awareness through meditation. For what The Awareness Principle teaches is the simple understanding that the pure awareness of any thought or thing, since it is *not itself* a thought or thing, is already and *innately* thought-free and thing-free, just as it is also distinct from and free of any sensation, emotion or state of mind we might be aware of.

In Western thinking however, consciousness has long been identified, indeed defined by philosophers, as consciousness *of* something – a so-called ‘object’ of consciousness. Western philosophy has no concept of a type of pure awareness or consciousness distinct and independent from all contents or ‘objects’ *of* consciousness. This is rather like defining space as something that necessarily has contents - objects in it that we are conscious of - but not recognising the empty space around those objects and contents. Yet just as empty space is both inseparable from anything in it - and yet at the same also absolutely distinct from everything in it - so too is awareness both inseparable and absolutely *distinct* from all its contents, from everything we are conscious or aware of. Space surrounds and pervades things, and yet it is not itself any thing in itself. Like space, awareness is also no ‘thing’. And yet it is not ‘nothing’ - a mere spatial vacuum

or void in which things happen to be. It is the other way round. What we perceive as mere empty physical space itself is nothing but the larger field or space of subjective *awareness* within which things first come to be and come to light.

Like both space and awareness, God too, is no thing. Yet nor is God merely one *being* among others, a being that just happens to have, own or possess awareness as its private property. The most fundamental religious truth that The Awareness Principle teaches is that God is not a being *with* awareness or consciousness. Instead, and quite simply; God IS awareness – not an awareness that is yours or mine, but one that is the very essence of the divine; not an awareness that is the private property of individual beings or persons, but an *absolute, trans-personal and universal consciousness*. Every single thing, from an atom or rock to a tree, planet or galaxy, and every type of being - animal, human or spiritual – is but an *individualised portion and expression of this divine-universal consciousness*. Note that I call this consciousness that IS God ‘trans-personal’ rather than *impersonal*. For, even though it is not a person, how can it be regarded as purely *impersonal* when it is the very source of our personhood - that which personifies itself as both gods and human beings?

An ancient and venerable analogy for this understanding of the Divine is the analogy of an ocean. An ocean is the *source* of all countless different life forms that arise and dwell within it – all of which are formed from the very substance of the ocean. Yet this does not mean that the ocean itself and as a whole has the nature of any of the life

forms it gives birth to. It does not mean that the ocean is one enormous God-fish for example. Yet that is just what so many different schools of religious belief imply. These schools of religion can be compared to different types and schools of fish, each of which conceive their own ultimate or divine source – the ocean – as just one great big God-fish, albeit a fish of their own particular type of course - a great God-shark for example. They disagree only on what type of Great God-Fish the ocean is. Thus one religion may, on this analogy declare the ocean to be a Great God-Shark – but certainly not a Great God-Swordfish.

Clearly an ocean, just because it is the source of all fish, is *not* and need not be thought of as the ‘mother of all fish’ – a type of God-fish. Similarly however, though *all beings* arise from and within a divine ocean of *awareness*, this does not mean that *this* ocean, though the ‘mother of all beings’ needs to be conceived of as a single supreme God-being.

Today, religious belief in a such a Big God **Being** clashes with the belief of physicists that the entire universe of Matter, Energy, Space and Time began with a Big Cosmological **Bang**. Yet ‘Big Bang’ cosmology is as logically flawed as Big Being or Big Fish religion or theism. For how can time itself be said to have begun with a dateable event *in* time. This elementary logical paradox seems to have passed our scientists entirely by. This only goes to show that science and physics, though it evolved from philosophy and metaphysics, has not only completely replaced philosophical and metaphysical thinking but lost all capacity for the most elementary logical questioning of its own language and concepts. That

is why as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger noted: “Science IS the new *religion*.”

A reporter once asked me (ignoring the reality of reincarnation) how I myself came to be a Hindu. My answer was not faith, belief or mere fascination with its symbols and rituals but something quite different – deep philosophical questioning, force of logic and direct religious experience. It was these that led me to both an understanding and an on-going experience of God *as* awareness – and as its manifestation in and as all things. I became a Hindu because I found this understanding that God IS Consciousness and that Consciousness is Everything - recognised only in Hindu religious thought and practice, in particular that of Acharya Abhinavagupta and the religious philosophical tradition he renewed. In this tradition, refined and evolved in 9-12th century Kashmir, the divine universal consciousness was called by the name of a well-known Hindu god – Shiva. As a central scripture of this tradition, the *Shiva-Sutra* taught:

“Awareness – Shiva - is the soul of the world.”

And in the words of Abhinavagupta’s own guru
Somananda:

“Shiva is ... all pervasive, quiescent awareness”

Hence the name of this tradition – Kashmiri ‘Shiva-ism’ or ‘Shaivism’. The traditional name for *Shiva’s* innate power of expression or manifestation as all things and beings is *Shakti*, which is also the name for the goddess or female consort of *Shiva*. *Shiva* and *Shakti*, masculine and

feminine aspects of divinity were understood in Kashmiri Shaivism as distinct but inseparable aspects of the same singular reality, the same singular *awareness*. Since this awareness is irreducible to any thing we are aware of it is *transcendent* of all things. Since every thing is an expression of that, it is also *immanent in all things* – as their very *being*. This ‘theology’ of an awareness both transcendent and immanent is neither atheism nor theism, monotheism or polytheism, pantheism or panentheism. The only way of naming it in Western terms would be through a new term such as *nootheism* – from the Greek ‘*noos*’ – meaning awareness.

‘Nootheism’ replaces monotheistic belief in a single supreme being with a monistic understanding of ultimate reality as a singular awareness. And yet it embraces both monotheism and polytheism, for that singular awareness comes to an awareness of its own being or selfhood through all the countless beings – human and trans-human - that arise within it. The gods truly exist, all of them and countless of them, each an individualised portion or personification of that singular or monistic awareness that is God.

As distinct expressions, personifications, portions or parts of that singular and divine awareness we ourselves are divine – we are gods. Being at the same time inseparable from that singular awareness *as a whole* – from God – we ourselves also are God. God is no-thing and no-being. Yet there is nothing and no being that is not divine – not a god and not God. Hence the *mantram* of Kashmir Shaivism – *Shivoham*. Translated this does not mean, ‘I am God’ –

Shiva – but rather that ‘God’ - awareness – *Shiva* - is everything and everyone, including you, and me. *Aham*

From this point of view of all that I have said and indicated in this talk, I must admit to finding it deeply saddening that the leader and representative of a major Christian faith - one centred in this very city - should have referred to only one or two direct personal experiences of the divine. That is because for a truly devout Hindu, the divine is an ever-present, all-surrounding and all-pervading reality. It is that pure awareness (*Shiva*) whose power of manifestation (*Shakti*) is constantly coming to expression as all things and all beings – including the very walls of this room and all the people in it.

In this context, I would like to offer some words on what I call The Practice or Yoga of Awareness. Yet let me return to a basic precept of The Awareness **Principle** itself. Awareness, though distinct from anything we are aware of, also has the nature of an expansive and unconstructed field of consciousness, one that embraces far more than our normal consciousness. Ordinary consciousness, in contrast, is a highly focussed and therefore also constricted awareness. It is useful to consider this contrast in the light of Freud, who compared consciousness to a searchlight, like a torchlight. A torchlight of course, is capable only of illuminating one thing or group of things at a time. Ordinary consciousness is like such a torchlight, one that we move around in a more or less dimly lit room – focussing its beam now on this, now on that. In contrast, awakening to the spacious field of pure awareness is like switching on a light which illuminates the *entire* room, thus allowing us to be aware of far more things in the

room at the same time - even whilst focussing our attention on particular things.

Right now and for the duration of this talk, unless and except for those times when your awareness might have drifted away in other directions, your awareness has probably been focussed on me and my words. You looked at me with your eyes and listened to me with your ears. Yet how aware were you at the same time of your breathing, of *your* body as well as mine, of your body as a whole and thereby also of yourself as a whole. And how aware were you at the same time of the entire *space* surrounding your body in all directions, the entire space of this room - and thereby also the bodies of all the things and people in it? Maintaining awareness of all-round space puts us in touch again with an expansive field or space *of* awareness. Identifying with that spacious awareness field is what allows us to transcend the narrow awareness spaces of our heads. The result is that we can literally 'take more in' - yet without feeling that our heads are getting filled up, our minds distracted or our bodies tiring - and without our awareness getting lost in any one thing, in any one focus or activity. Sensing all-round space also allows us to begin to *breathe* freely not through our noses but through our entire *body surface* - absorbing that all-pervading 'aether' of space (*Akash*) known as its vital air (*Prana*).

What I term 'The New Yoga', understood as **The Practice of Awareness** is essentially a movement from **Being Aware** - more aware and aware of more - to breathing the divine **Bliss** of **Being** that very **Awareness**. It is these three words, conjoined in the Sanskrit compound *Sat-Chit-*

Ananda - **Being-Awareness-Bliss** - that lie at the heart of Hindu religious thought, understood in a new and renewing way through the central precepts of **The Awareness Principle**.