

CHICAGO CALLING



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EDITORIAL

An Organization of Gods

It was at the end of the 70's or early 80's. I was visiting Ayodhya, the birthplace of Sri Ramachandra. I took a rickshaw, and the driver was really good. He took me to different temples and ashrams. I asked him to stop so I could get lunch. He said, "Swami, would you like to eat with other holy people? There is a Bhandara (community feedings of holy people)." I thought it would be a good chance to meet other holy people. He said that he would wait outside.

The courtyard was full of people, and I went to make pranams at the temple. When I came out, I met a person with a very serene face, who said that he was the Mohanta (Head of the monastery) of the ashrama. I told him that I was a brahmachari (novice of spiritual life) of the Ramakrishna Order. He showed great respect and took me to the place where all the head swamis of different orders were taking lunch.

I whispered to the Mohanta that I was just a brahmachari and should sit with the other brahmacharis. He then smiled and said, "Oh brahmachari, we consider every member of the Ramakrishna Mission as very holy personalities. Then he said that the Ramakrishna Mission is an organization of gods. I cannot forget the respectful way the senior monk of the Ramayit Sampradaya said these words."

It was in Andaman, where I had a conversation with a retired marine engineer. He was a nice gentleman, and he had a great love for our Ramakrishna Mission in Port Blair. While talking about the Ramakrishna Mission monks, he suddenly commented, "In the olden days the Ramakrishna monks were very spiritual, but I do not think that they are now." I then remembered that one day he mentioned that his father had passed away at a very young age, and he worked two jobs to raise his younger brothers and get them an education, but then they married and

wanted to separate from him. I told him, "Sir, you are angry because your brothers wanted to establish separate families, but that is very natural with males. Two brothers may love each other, but would still like to have their own way of life. There is nothing wrong with it. The male ego prompts us to do like that. Now, look at the Ramakrishna Mission swamis. We are nearly 2,000 in number—all educated and having individual opinions about the life. Moreover, we are from different religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Even then we have remained together for the last 100 years. Do you know how it is possible? Through self-abnegation the Ramakrishna monks try to erase their egos. That is the reason they are united even though they are different in so many other things. The Ramakrishna Mission is a living example of unity in diversity, and that is spirituality. People sometimes consider miraculous powers as spirituality. No! Spirituality is to be free from the ego."



Once I met a minister in a Middle East country. When I was about to introduce myself as a monk of the Ramakrishna Mission, the Arab gentleman held my hand and said, "Oh Swami, I know the Ramakrishna Mission. I have studied about the organization. Yours is the only religious Order,

which has so many educated and very capable people. I don't know any other organization that has it."

Those who have studied the life of Swami Vivekananda must remember that wonderful incident of jealousy-free love. Once a group of Sanskrit scholars came to meet Swami Vivekananda and wanted to discuss religious matters in Sanskrit. Although Swami Vivekananda knew Sanskrit very well, he had lost touch with spoken Sanskrit during his long stay in America and the West. Swami Vivekananda's brother disciple, Swami Ramakrishnananda, became worried about the debate between Swami Vivekananda and the pundits. He then ran to the shrine and started praying to Sri Ramakrishna to save Naren so that he should not be insulted by these scholars because of a small grammar mistake. That proved not only his love for Swami Vivekananda, but the jealousy-free mind of another monk, who was capable of conversing with the scholars.

It happened with me! I was giving a talk at our centre in Barisha center, Kolkata, and the very senior monk, who was in charge of the ashram, noticed that I was coughing and having a lot of trouble with my throat. Noticing that the devotees were liking my discourse, Swamiji himself ran to

the kitchen, boiled some water and brought it to me on the dais. "Please drink it, this will make your throat alright.", he said in a very affectionate voice. "These people are liking your discourse, so please continue for some more time." Not feeling jealousy over someone else's popularity shows spirituality.

Very recently I was talking with one of our senior administrative swami over the phone, and he was highly praising a very junior swami, "Do you know so and so swami has become very popular, and I am very proud of him."

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna's one of the main teachings is, God realization is only possible when one becomes completely free from ego. His own life is a living example of that teaching. He could not even utter 'I' and 'Me' words.

All the great teachers of Hindu tradition beginning from Guru Vasistha, Ashtavakra Muni down to Sri Shankaracharya all have advised to kill the ego, eradicate the I-ness to realize the Ultimate Truth which is One, undivided, all pervading consciousness.

Following the four yogas together, as per the instruction of Swami Vivekananda, the monastics of the Ramakrishna Order do sadhana (spiritual austerity) to erase the ego to realize God.



Swamiji temple at Belur Math

"Even now there are women disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. With their help I shall start this Math. The Holy Mother will be their central figure and the wives and daughters of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna will be its first inmates. For they will easily appreciate the usefulness of such a Math. After that, following their example, many householders will help in their noble work."

-- Swami Vivekananda



Jainism: Its Role & Relevance To Modern Society

Dr. Mukesh Doshi

Chairperson of Interfaith Committee of Jain Associations of North America

Jainism is one of the oldest surviving religions of the world. Jain scriptures mention that Jainism, at least in principle, has existed from eternity. The word, Jain/Jainism, was coined long after the Nirvana of Tirthankar Mahavir (599 BC. – 527 BC.), the 24th and the last Tirthankar of this era. The Jainism, as we know today, was propounded by Tirthankar Mahavir, though the practices of Jainism has changed dramatically over the past several centuries and have been heavily influenced by Hinduism, with which it has co-existed. Tirthankar Mahavir and Siddharth Gautam Buddha, the last Buddha, existed at the same time in the north-eastern state of Magadha, India (Current states of Bihar and Jharkhand), though Tirthankar Mahavir is said to be about 20-year senior to Siddharth Buddha. The word, Jain, is most likely derived from the root word Jina, which means the victor, the one who has totally conquered and overcome his passions, which are the enemies to attaining salvation.

Unlike all other mono-theistic and poly-theistic religions of the world, Jainism believes that there is no creator, sustainer, or the savior of the world. Rather, the universe and the mankind have existed from eternity and will continue to exist until eternity. Every living being represents the body, which is transient, and the soul, which is eternal and bound with Karma from eternity. It is this bondage of Karma, which makes the soul,

suffer, or enjoy the fruit of the Karma when it starts giving its results as in what you saw is what you rip. No superpower, or any entity for that matter, can change this. But these Karma may be shed by the positive hard self-effort of the individual to whom Karma is bound. It is this bondage of Karma, which makes the soul go through endless cycles of birth and death until salvation, which can be achieved only when all Karma is shed, and the soul is free of any Karma bondage. The soul binds Karma incessantly through any activity of mind, speech, and body, spiritually desirable or non-desirable, due to its passions and the only way to prevent this bondage is total eradication of all desires, a prima facie requirement to attain salvation.

Jain concept of God

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines God as ‘The being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness who is worshipped (as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism) as creator and ruler of the universe’ and Oxford dictionary defines God as ‘the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority, the supreme being. In certain other religions (with lower-case initial), a superhuman being or spirit worshipped as having power over nature or human fortunes; a deity.... ..’. While theism is defined as ‘Belief in the existence of a god or gods, specifically : belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of the human race and the world who transcends yet is immanent in the world’ in Merriam-Webster dictionary and as ‘Belief in the existence of a god or gods, especially belief in one god as creator of the universe,

intervening in it and sustaining a personal relation to his creatures' in Oxford dictionary.

An Agnostic is a person who holds the view that any ultimate reality (such as God) is unknown and probably unknowable. Broadly, one who is not committed to believing in either the existence or the non-existence of The God or a god. So, is Jainism agnostic? I leave the readers to ponder on this. To us, Jainism is the ways of life. It is the way of living (a spiritually desirable life). It is the way of loving. It is the way of laughing. It is the way of leaving (this mortal world) and attain salvation. The 'God' in Jainism is the self-realized individual/s who have attained omniscience, and self-control by personal effort. They are free from the shackles of passions (anger, greed, ego, deceit, attachment, aversion, and hatred). They do not have any bondage of Karma and thus they have ended the endless cycles of birth and death. In addition, in each era twenty-four of such souls, born as ordinary humans just as you and me, have preached and lead the world the way to attain salvation during their lifetime. In Jainism they are the GOD/s. They are known as Tirthankar, Jina, and Arihanta. All these liberated souls, including Tirthankars, now exist as pure souls, known as Siddha, and they do not have any desire, love, or hatred. And therefore, they are also known as Vitaräga (Vit = without, Raga = passions). It is due to their lack of passions that they are unable to help or hurt and, love or hate any living being.

Fundamental Tenets of Jainism and its role and Relevance in Modern Society

Jain scriptures are abundant about the tenets of Jain sadhus and Jain lay people. However, three fundamental tenets form the core of Jain tenets. They are Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness/attachment) and, Anekäntaväda (multiplicity of viewpoints), also popularly known as three 'A's of Jainism.

Ahimsa (Non-violence)

Bhagawän Mahavir said "All of life is just like me. I want to live and so do all souls. The instinct

of self-preservation is universal. Every living being clings to life and fears death. Each one of us wants to be free from pain. So, let me carry out all my activities with great care so that I am not harmful to any living being." Jainism preaches that every living being, no matter how small, has a soul. Jainism has always believed that five fundamental elements of nature (fire, air, water, earth, and vegetation) are living beings. We must not hurt higher evolved (Trasa – those who can move around at will) living beings in thoughts, by speech or by bodily actions while harm to five fundamental elements of nature (Sthävar – those who cannot move at will) should be minimized to bare minimum. As Acharya Uma Swati (CE 350) wrote in Tattvärtha Sutra 'परस्पररोपग्रहोजीवानाम् (Paras paropa graho Jivänäm) meaning all life is bound together by mutual respect and interdependence and therefore, one who neglects and disregards the existence of other living beings, disregards his own existence. Our own existence is for a purpose, for compassion to other living beings, particularly those who are less fortunate, and, most importantly ourselves. We must not hurt ourselves by living a healthy lifestyle, so as to serve the purpose of our own existence. Ahimsa means caring for and sharing with all living beings as well as tending to, protecting, and serving them. Jainism preaches, खामेमि सव्वजीवे, सव्वे जीवा खमंतु मे।, मित्ती मे सव्व भूएसु, वेरम् मज्झं न केणइ॥ (Khämemi savvajive, savve jivä khamantu me, Mitti me savva bhuesu, veram majjham na kenai). This means 'I forgive all living beings and ask for forgiveness from all living beings (if I have hurt them either knowingly or unknowingly) All living beings are my friends and I have no enmity towards any living being.' Thus Jainism strongly advocates universal friendliness, universal forgiveness and universal fearlessness (knowing that nobody is going to hurt me).

Ahimsa and Ecology

Jainism has preached strict vegetarian diet for eons. Today in USA alone, according to data from

USDA, 130,000 cattle, 7,000 calves, 360,000 hogs and whopping twenty-four million chicken are slaughtered per day. And this comes at a great cost. Slaughtering animals requires hundreds of millions of gallons of water every day. The waste it creates is estimated at about two billion tons a year, which mostly ends up in waterways, polluting and killing thousands of fish, and creating a major human health problem. World's 1.3 billion cows annually produce one hundred million tons of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, which traps twenty-five times as much solar heat as CO2.

Livestock (Cattle, Calves, Hogs, Pigs) production accounts for more than half of all the water consumed in USA.

To produce	Water used
1 lb. meat	2500 gallons
1 lb. wheat	108 gallons
1 lb. rice	229 gallons
1 lb. potato	60 gallons

About one-third of the land in North America is either directly or indirectly used for livestock farming. It takes about 40 lbs. of vegetation to produce 1 lb. of meat. Whopping 64% of the US crop is for animal feed while only about 2% is for fruits and vegetables. One acre of prime land can grow 5000 lbs. cherries, or 10,000 lbs. green beans or 50,000 lbs. of potatoes but only 250 lbs. of beef. Two calory of fossil fuel is used to produce one calory of protein from soyabean while seventy-eight calory of fossil fuel is used to produce one calory from beef. 220 million acres of land in the USA has been deforested for livestock production. Eighty-five percent of annual US topsoil loss is directly associated with raising livestock. As of ten years ago twenty-five million acres in Brazil, and half the forests in Central America were destroyed to grow animal feed. The cost of raw materials consumed to produce food from livestock is greater than the value of oil, gas and coal consumed in America. Growing grains, vegetables and fruits uses less than five percent as much raw

materials as does meat and dairy production. About two calories of fossil fuel is used for one calorie of protein of soybeans, while 78 calories of fossil fuel is used for one calorie of beef, and it takes about 6.9 kg of grain and soyabean to make 1 kg of boneless trimmed pork. According to Diet for A New America, if US reduces meat/dairy intake by just 10%, the savings in grains and soybeans could feed 60 million people per year worldwide. About 24,000 people die every day from hunger or hunger-related causes and about three-fourths of the deaths are children under the age of five. These are the heart shattering ecological impacts of non-vegetarian diet. Apart from following non-violence, a vegetarian/vegan diet is the most eco friendly diet, not to mention its associated health benefits.

Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness)

Non-attachment A divine key to happiness

Aparigraha forms the next most important tenet of Jainism. The goal of all living being is to be happy. But do we, the highest evolved living being know what is happiness? Do we know what makes us unhappy? From a philosophical perspective it is the non-attainment of what we want and loosing of what we have, including all tangible and non-tangible things. But..... what if we do not have any wants or we don't have any attachment for what we possess? Wouldn't we all be in a perpetual state of incessant happiness? So, philosophically speaking unhappiness is a state attained after being happy or before becoming happy. The midpoint between these two states is equanimity. And that is what Aparigraha really means. This ultimate state of total equanimity is the true nature of the soul, which is smeared with desire, the root cause of unhappiness. In my humble opinion Parigraha (possessiveness/attachment) is the root cause of all of the problems world is facing now. Yes, I realize that it is humanly impossible to get rid of all of our desires, but we all certainly can curtail our desires to possess. It says 'the nature

has enough for the needs of living beings, but not enough for our wants. Generally speaking, for most of us enough is never enough and truly speaking we the humans are worse than animals when it comes to saying enough. At a macro level, wars, energy crisis, starvation, robbery, rapes, and racism, all of the problems the world is facing now will be things of the past just by saying enough is enough.

Anekāntavāda (Multiplicity of viewpoints)

The third and the last 'A' of Jainism is Anekāntavāda, a unique concept and a gift presented by Bhagawān Mahavir. What Anekāntavāda truly means is, different people have different perspectives, and we must be willing to accept them, if not agree to them. Also, the same statement under the same condition can be true or untrue depending upon the context in which the statement is made. Take for example when it is 60 degrees Fahrenheit day in Chicago during January, it is a nice warm day but if that happens to be in June, it is a nice cool day. Many times, a statement is true and untrue at the same instance. A man is a 'husband' for his wife and father for his daughter and so on, all at the same time. Anekāntavāda says that There could be an element of truth in any statement, depending upon

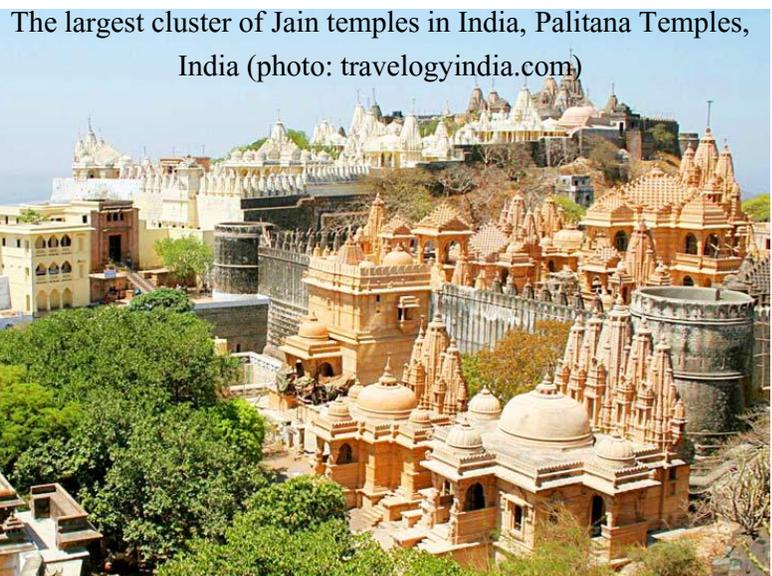
how one looks at it. This helps create mutual respect, expand our knowledge, and helps us visualize other side of the coin. But aren't we all adamant that only 'I am right?'. The truth is that we are not able to realize the ultimate truth, which never ever changes. The truth always remains THE TRUTH, has always been a truth and will remain truth until eternity. The whole truth, the absolute truth is known only to the omniscient Lord, the one who has taught the truth revealed to Him.

Anekāntavāda – Its application in today's world: Understanding Anekāntavāda will help us develop a strong urge to seek truth and believe in many possibilities rather than insisting only on our tunnel vision viewpoint which deprives us a great opportunity to learn. It will help us accept even the partial truth and the statements made by our adversaries. Anekāntavāda will help cultivate mutual love and respect the rights of others. It will help us realize the fact that just as I want to be happy, others also want to be help. Just as I disguise miseries, others also disguise miseries. Just as I want to live, others also want to live. Just as I have my own rights, others also have their own rights. The true realization of Anekāntavāda will make this world a happy place to live and enjoy without encroaching upon the rights of others.



The Buddhists or the Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man. They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son. And he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also.

– Swami Vivekananda



Understanding Islam

Dr. Sabeel Ahmed

Executive Director of the GainPeace Project, an outreach project of Islamic Circle of North America



Islam means submission and peace as a result of submitting to the Will of God. Muslim means the one who willfully submits to the Will of God.

Two billion people around the world practice Islam as a faith. The followers of Islam are called Muslims. There are around 57 countries in which Muslims are the majority. India has the third largest number of Muslims, after Indonesia (229 million) and Pakistan (205 million).

Approximately 3.45 million Muslims reside in the USA (Pew Research 2021) and 500,000 in the Chicago area.

Below are the core teachings of the faith of Islam, as presented by Dr. Sabeel Ahmed, during his visit to the Home of Harmony, on Oct. 8, 2022.

WHO IS GOD?

Muslims believe in God as One entity. God in Arabic is called Allah (Al-Ilah or The Lord) who is seen as the universal God. Included among some 99 attributes of God are: He is One, Eternal, Creator, Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Hearing, Independent, Merciful, Forgiving, and Loving God. Every human can approach God directly, in worship or otherwise, without any mediator or depiction in the form of an image or idols.

GOD’S GUIDANCE FOR HUMANITY

Islam says that for God to guide humanity, He does not become a human nor part of the creation, but from among the humans' God chooses men, identified as prophets and messengers, and reveals His Guidance to them via angels. The Prophets and Messengers were to share God’s message with

their people. According to Islam, thousands of Prophets were sent to all the past nations to invite humans back to worship and obey the Creator (God). Quran however mentions 25 Prophets. Quran recognizes revelations in the book form given to David, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them). Prophets (whose records we don’t have) must have also been sent to the sub-continent of India, Africa, America, Russia, China, etc..

The core message of these Prophets: Humanity should worship, serve, and obey God’s guidance in order to achieve optimal peace and harmony in this world.

WHO IS THE FOUNDER OF ISLAM?

Muslim believe that Islam does not have a founder. Islam (submission to one God), as guidance, was given by God to the first human, Adam. The same fundamental guidance was then given to the rest of the Prophets, including the last Prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him. Thus, Muslims consider Islam the first and only faith God gave to humanity. To identify a person who spoke of Islam among the masses, we could say that Adam was the first human, the first Muslim, and the first prophet of Islam.

WHO IS PROPHET MUHAMMAD?

The Prophet was born in Makkah (currently in Saudi Arabia) in 570 CE. His father and mother passed away before Muhammad reached the age of 6. He was then cared for by his grandfather and uncle.

From his youth, Prophet Muhammad was admired by his people and was given the names ‘as-Sadiq and al-Amin’ (Truthful and Honest) based on his strong character. For his good

conduct and excellent business ethics, he received and accepted a proposal for marriage from a wealthy widow, Khadija, 15 years older than him.

THE GLORIOUS QURAN

At the age of 40, during one of Prophet Muhammad's meditations, an angel (Gabriel) visited him and started to reveal the verses from the Quran, which the angel brought from God (Allah).

For the next 23 years, Quranic revelation came until the Prophet passed away in 632 CE at the age of 63 years.

Six core beliefs of a Muslim

1. Belief in one God – God is One
2. Belief in the angels – agents of God to perform assigned tasks
3. Belief in the Prophets – Prophet Muhammad, as the final Prophet for humanity
4. Belief in the divinely revealed books – Psalms, Torah, Bible, and Quran as the final revelation
5. Belief in the day of Judgment – see more details below
6. Belief in the divine decree – everything that happens in the universe is by the power, knowledge, and wisdom of God

The Five pillars of Islam

1. Testifying in the Oneness of God and in the Prophethood of Prophet Muhammad
2. Praying five times a day
3. Giving poor due (charity)
4. Fasting in the month of Ramadan
5. Pilgrimage of Makkah

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Islam tells us that this world will come to an end, all human beings will be resurrected and judged by God based on their intentions, deeds, efforts and capacity. If a person had the correct belief in One God and did the good deeds as required, God, by His mercy, will place that person into paradise.

On the other hand, if a person keeps on worshipping the creation (humans, animals, idols, stars, etc.), does bad deeds, and dies like in that state, the person will be placed into hellfire.

Islam urges people to repent and ask for forgiveness in case of a slip no matter how many times such happens. Quran urges human to keep improving and not lose hope in this world. However, Islam does not believe in reincarnation.

PROPHET SHARED THE QURAN WITH OTHERS

The Prophet shared monotheism and the passages of the Quran with his people in Makkah, who mainly were idol worshippers and a few Jews and Christians. A few people embraced Islam, and many more rebelled against him and started to torture the early believers and the Prophet.

PROPHET'S MIGRATION FROM MAKKAH TO MADINAH

In 622, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, migrated with the early Muslims to the city of Madinah (280 miles to the north) to avoid perpetual torture and hard time given by his opponents. He established a just plural society with everyone rights in place. That was the first 'Islamic' state. In his early days of Prophethood, he encountered many social ills in society: Tribal warfare, female infanticide, slavery, racism, and subjugation of women. He taught monotheism to instill in minds that the creator has the right to guide us and we look to Him for guidance in staying away and steering away from evil and that that possibly leads to evil in the society. He rectified Medinan society through the solutions presented in the Quran.

TEACHINGS OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD – PEACE BE UPON HIM

Respect of Parents

Paradise lies under the feet of your mothers. (Respecting, honoring, and obeying our parents is one of the ways to achieve paradise).

When father makes a prayer for his children, that is like a prophet making a prayer for his nation.

A son carried his disabled mother on his back through the desert to pilgrimage and asked the prophet if he had paid for his mother's favors on him. The prophet replied that he had not paid back for even one contraction she had when delivering him

Respect of Women

The believers who show the perfect Faith are those who have the best behavior, and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives.

Terrorism is forbidden

'(Of the) major sins are to ascribe partners to God, disobey parents, murder someone, and to take a false oath (intentionally).

Story of the Prophet and a lady neighbor

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, he used to have a female neighbor who hated him and rejected Islam. She used to place litter daily on the path from the Prophet's home to the Mosque, and would dump intestines of dead animals on him during his worship. Prophet got used to this litter, remained patient, and did not

say anything to this lady.

One day, as he stepped out to visit the Mosque, he was surprised to find the pathway clean, without any litter. He stopped going to the Mosque and became concerned for his lady neighbor. He went to her home and called out to this lady. He said that he came to find out if she was doing ok. She said that she was ill. He began to serve and treat her. Seeing the noble act from the Prophet, this lady changed her heart, gave up her hate, and embraced the Prophet's message of peace.

No Racism

O people! Your God is one, and your forefather (Adam) is one. An Arab is not better than a non-Arab, and a non-Arab is not better than an Arab, a white person is not better than a black person, and a black person is not better than a white person, except in piety.

Summary:

Islam is a monotheistic faith, with the belief in one God, a set of guidance as present in the Quran, and through the example of the Prophet. Muslims are to be a force of goodness in the community and live in justice, harmony, and peace with others.



Islam makes its followers all equal — so, that, you see, is the peculiar excellence of Mohammedanism. In many places in the Koran you find very sensual ideas of life. Never mind. What Mohammedanism comes to preach to the world is this practical brotherhood of all belonging to their faith. That is the essential part of the Mohammedan religion; and all the other ideas about heaven and of life etc.. are not Mohammedanism. They are accretions.

-- Swami Vivekananda



Imam Husayn Shrine in Karbala, Iraq
(Photo: wikipedia)

Travelogue: China (Part 01)

Swami Ishatmananda along with Debasish, Abhijeet, Arup

China, the middle kingdom, the birthplace of an ancient civilization – is the destination I will talk about in this installment of the travelogue.

It was four years back, myself and Swami Kripamayanda of Vedanta Society of Toronto, arrived at Hong Kong. Together we were a group of 11 people. We started our China visit on May 1, 2016, at Hong Kong and subsequently covered Shanghai, XI'an and Beijing. Dr. Seshagiri who is Toronto resident, organized our tour.

Hong Kong

We arrived at Hong Kong on May 1. Next day morning we were ready to go out and explore. A small tourist bus was arranged for us. Our guide was Mark, who stayed with us the whole day.

Hong Kong was a British colony for a century and became part of China again in 1997 when it was handed over by the British government to China. The history in brief is as follows. Nineteenth century Britain had a big appetite for Chinese tea. But the British did not want to pay for it themselves. They wanted to trade something instead. But the Chinese people did not want any British goods. So the British simply smuggled opium from India to generate cash. At this, the Qin government (pronounced 'chin') seized and destroyed 1200 tons of opium. This gave the British a reason to wage war in order to gain access inside China. The French also joined in and two wars

were fought. Due to naval superiority of the western powers, China lost both wars. They were forced to accept one sided treaty with British rule over Hong Kong and other ports and access to Beijing. The Chinese government later negotiated a 99 year British rule for Hong Kong and then autonomous rule under China for 50 years. Some argue that a century of 'national humiliation' by foreigners ended with the seizure of power by the Communist party in 1949. The British rule ended in 1997 when Hong Kong was turned over to China.

Our first destination was the customary visit to Victoria Peak, currently known simply as Peak. There are restaurants and shopping malls here. Around this mountain is also the world's most expensive real estate. Some recently sold at US \$7500/sq.ft. This is the highest point in Hong Kong. Then we went to Aberdeen Harbor Fishing Village. It is a floating village on the Aberdeen harbor in the south west of Hong Kong Island. It is one of the oldest settlements on the island. People live on these boat for generations and conduct fishing, trading and other activities of life including floating markets and restaurants. The place used to be pirate infested but today it is a glimpse into a contrasting lifestyle between mainly fishermen, living in the traditional boat houses and urban population in modern high rise building nearby. It reminds us of the houseboats in Kashmir or the



View at Victoria Peak



Great Buddha



Abardeen Harbour

floating households in Cambodia I wrote about in South East Asia travelogue. The we visited the Stanley Market in Stanly neighborhood is a traditional busy open air market by a popular beach. It is popular both with locals and the tourists.

Our next destination was the Big Buddha in Ngong Ping village. We took Ngong Ping 360 cable car to go there. It is a 3.7 miles journey over the mountains completed in about 35 minutes. The sceneries from the cable car is breathtaking. At the destination we faced the beautiful giant 112 ft. tall bronze Buddha statue on the peak of a mountain. The Buddha image sits on top of a giant lotus flower. Climbing 268 steps we reached the tip of the lotus flower where the statue sits. The statue is circled by praying statues. There is a prayer hall and a museum-shop below. We check the vicinity and walked around the village at the feet of the statue and had our lunch there. Then we took a bus to come down due to strong wind that cancelled the cable car service.

In the second half of the day, Our firsts destination was a historic fishing community, Lantau island Fishing Village. The village is much is much smaller now compared to its heyday a few decades back. This was a smelly place, since the fishermen still dry and process seafood there. There is a big fish market and cluster of shops. That was our final stop in Hong Kong. We looked forward to our first destination in mainland China, Shanghai city.

Shanghai

Shanghai developed historically as a cluster of fishing villages along Huangpu river joining Lake Ti and Yangtze river before 1000 BC. It was frequented by Japanese pirates (Wokou). Shanghai first became a city in 1291 during the Yuan dynasty joining five adjoining villages forming a new Shanghai County with 300,000 people. Shipping was the major trade. At present the city is spanned with an area of 2400 sq. miles and population of 27 million.

On 4th May, we arrived at Shanghai from Hong Kong by Hong Kong Airlines. We checked in to our hotel and then drove to Nanjing Road, a bustling shopping district. We took a stroll until it was dinnertime at a nearby Indian restaurant. After a sumptuous dinner, the group was happy and we headed for evening boat ride on the Hongpu river to enjoy the night skyline. It was a great treat to our eyes. The light show on the boats and buildings was a government-planned activity. All the skyscrapers were lit up on the sides facing the river. The skyline of Shanghai at night was a grand view to have.

Next day morning, first we went to the Jade Buddha temple. We noticed people kneeling and praying. We also offered our respect to the Great One. We did not notice any monk in the temple. We got to know there were monks in a back building, but they keep themselves away from the public. The image at the main temple is not made of jade. The temple was founded in 1882 when a



At Great Buddha's feet:
Among prayer statues

Shanghai Night River Safari



Jade Buddha Temple

visiting monk brought back two jade Buddha images from current day Myanmar. Those images are kept in separate halls. We could also see many other statues in the main hall including Avalokeshvara (Guanyin) and 18 arhats (apostles) of Buddha. While strolling through the temple shop, we noticed Buddhist Tantric images, very similar to Hindu Tantric figures.

China has a history of silk that is five millenniums old. So a visit to a silk factory was quite apt. One fun fact: once the silk from the cocoon is extracted, the silkworm inside is fried and eaten here. We had a good time understanding the work of the silk factory and then doing a group activity to stretch a wad of raw silk to make comforters. There was a separate shop that sold silk filled comforters and pillows along with fabrics and clothing.

Then we paid a visit to the financial district. We came face to face with many tall buildings. The most notable was the Shanghai Tower, which is more than 2000 ft tall with a curious twisted architectural design to withstand high wind. We took lift –which is supposedly the fastest in the world at 18 meters per second – to the top of the building. It really dwarfed all the other buildings in the vicinity.

Next stop was the Urban Planning and Exhibition Center located at People’s Square. The place was developed in 1990’s on an old racecourse ground. It is the largest open area in Shanghai. The Exhibition Center is a six-story building to display Shanghai’s urban planning and development. The focus of the exhibit is a huge scale model of the city of Shanghai showing all existing, approved and future planned buildings up to 2040. Other exhibits relate to Shanghai’s history and planned development, including smaller scaled models focusing on particular areas of interest such as the Bund, the waterfront area of Shanghai. The Exhibition Center also has space for temporary exhibitions with a wide range of subject matter.

The past, present and future are mingled harmoniously in Shanghai. So the next stop was another gift from the past – Shanghai Yu Garden, the garden of happiness. The garden first built in 1559 during the Ming period by Pan Yunduan for his old father, Minister Pan En. Pan Yunduan began the project after failing one of the imperial exams, but his appointment as governor of Sichuan postponed construction for nearly twenty years until 1577. The garden was the largest and most prestigious of its era in Shanghai, but eventually its expense helped ruin the Pans.



Shanghai Yu Garden



Shanghai: Scaled Model



Xi'an city

The visit to Yu Garden ended at the dinner time. After a hearty dinner we were treated to a spectacular acrobatic show in Magnolia Dream Theater curtsey of our tour company. The performance was by Shanghai Magic Troupe and New Shanghai circus troupe, the first team that performed on Broadway stage of USA from China. This was the final stop for our program in Shanghai.

The next day, May 6th, We decided to take the MAGLEV (Shanghai Transrapid) to the airport. In operation since 2004 this is the only high speed magnetic levitation train in the world covering 19 miles in 8 minutes between the city and the airport. From the Pudong airport we took Juneyo Air for Xi'an.

Xi'an

Xi'an is one of the four ancient imperial capital cities of China. From before 300 BC, Xian had other names with different dynasties. The Ming dynasty named it 'Xian' (Western Peace) in 1369. The name changed again and finally back to 'Xian' in 1943. Today it is home of Chinese space program, it is a major technical and industrial education center, research & development hub, national security hub and center of aircraft and automobile manufacturing. Xi'an is one of many cities that reflect the success of China's interior development

plan of 1990s. Previously Xi'jing (western capital), Xi'an is a blend of past with modern culture with population of 13.5 million, is emerging as a mega city.

We started our tour of Xi'an with a visit to the Big Pagoda, which is intertwined with two famous Chinese monks who visited indian ancient times. Fa-hsien (also known as Fa-Hien), a Buddhist monk went to India in 402 on pilgrimage, visited many historic places, studied Sanskrit and brought back many Buddhist texts (sutras). Record of his journey contains many valuable information about pre-muslim India. Later he took the spiritual name 'Faxion' and wrote about the holy land of Buddhism and translated the sutras. Born in 602 in a scholarly family, another Monk named Xuanzang studied Buddhist scriptures in Sichuan to escape the political turmoil in China at that time. He was soon troubled by numerous discrepancies and contradictions in the texts. Not finding solutions from his Chinese masters, he decided to go to India. Returning 16 years later found himself quite famous and the Tang Emperor built a pagoda for his work and collection of sutras. He spent rest of his life writing about the Buddhist holy places on India and translating the scriptures. The Big Wild Goose Pagoda originally built by the Tang Emperor and later rebuilt serves mostly as a museum for Buddhist artifacts.



Wild Goose Pagoda



Shanxi Grand Opera:
Tang Dynasty Show



Chicago Calling

Terracotta
Army



Terracotta
Archer



No man's land!



Real estate in the
middle of nowhere

Post dinner, we visited Shanxi Grand Opera House. It was a depiction of Tang Dynasty palace intrigue. The actors wore historic costumes and showed dramatic movements enacting the period correct rituals. It was colorful one-and-half hours' performance.

On May 7th, the day started with the visit to the tomb of the first Qin Emperor of a unified China. Qin Shi Huang, born as Ying Zheng in 259 BC. At the age of thirteen, he succeeded his father. He was very aggressive and ambitious at an early age and assumed full power at 22. He wanted to unify and subjugate all the states like Han, Zhao, Wei, Chu, Yan and Qi by the powerful political, economic and military strength of the Qin State. Ying Zheng realized his ambition and built the first feudal and centralized empire in Chinese history in 221 BC. This was the Qin Dynasty (221 BC - 206 BC) and Ying Zheng was the first emperor of a united China, so he proclaimed himself Qin Shi Huang. He also is credited for repairing and extending the Great Wall of China. A ruthless man, he wanted to assure his afterlife. Full size human and animals in terracotta figures have been found in surrounding tombs. Over 8000 soldiers with complete battle facilities, officials, acrobats, musicians, strongmen and more. Only a small portion has been excavated

till date. The two millennial old history comes face to face at this tomb.

The next day we left Xi'an for Beijing on a CHR bullet train. The train has max speed of close to 260 mph and covers Xi'an to Beijing in 4 hours and 40 minutes. On our way to Beijing, we came across some fabled sights of China – like large swaths of land without any sign of human being or any machinery equipment, like an open barren land. We also notices some large buildings in the midst of nowhere (ghost city?). In China, many of the curiosities of mind remain unanswered in fear of politically uncomfortable truths.

Beijing

In 221 BC Beijing was the capital of united China ruled by the first Emperor Qin Shi Huang. In 1213 Genghis Khan invaded the area. In 1261 his grandson Kublai Khan named it Dadu and made it his seat of power declaring him the Emperor of new Yuan dynasty. In 1420 the 3rd emperor Yongle of Ming Dynasty drove the Mongols out of Dadu, renamed it Beijing and moved his capital here. He ordered building of forbidden city. It was also the capital of Ming dynasty and the Qing dynasty, which continued the status after the republic of China was established.

BHAGAVATA (15): SAT-KARYA-VAAD OF SRI KAPILA

Swami Ishatmananda

The great saint, Kapila, was narrating to his mother, Devahuti, the process of creation. He mentioned two entities, Purusha and Prakriti. To produce anything two things are necessary. Here we found two, who are the root cause of creation.

Purusha Is the beginningless Atman (3/26/3). Purusha, though free and unattached, activated the forces to create. Purusha's own subtle Divine Power is Prakriti or Universal Nature, constituted of the three states (gunas)—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.

Question: Why only Prakriti? Purusha can also be the cause of creation.

Answer: No, Purusha cannot, since Purusha or the Self is neither a cause nor an effect of anything. So, the cause of creation must be different from Spirit, Self or Consciousness.

The existence of Prakriti as the ultimate subtle cause of the world is known by inference.

1) All objects in the world, from the intellect (subtle) to the earth (gross), are limited and dependent on one another. So, there must be an unlimited and independent cause of their existence. Prakriti is that cause.

2) Things in the world possess certain common characteristics— they all can produce Pleasure, Pain & Indifference.

Victory in war gives Pleasure/Joy for the victor.
Pain/Depression for the vanquished
Indifference for a third party

Therefore, they must have a common cause. Prakriti is that cause.

We should not imagine a cause of this Ultimate Cause for that will lead us into the fallacy of infinite regression. If there is a cause of Prakriti, then there must be a cause of that cause, and so on, ad infinitum.

Prakriti is the Supreme Root Cause of the world.

But Prakriti is unconscious—How can it create?

Prakriti gets activated in the presence of Consciousness (Purusha). Purusha's very presence upsets the equilibrium of the Gunas in Prakriti.

The union of Purusha and Prakriti takes place in a very unique way:

- 1) Magnet and Iron
- 2) Lame man with vision mounted on the shoulders of a blind man with strong legs.

While explaining the 4th verse of Chapter 26,

Sridhar Swami says, Tatra cha Avarana Vikshapa Shakti vedena Prakriti Dwidha. ("Prakriti has two functions, Concealing and Superimposing.")

Individual souls are in reality Pure Consciousness, but due to the covering power of Prakriti the individual soul thinks that it is separated and limited. This covering power is known as Avidya, and that Superimposing Power is known as Maya.

Because of Avidya the individual self (Jiva) rotates in Samsara, the circle of life and death.

Another Self, who controls the Prakriti, does the work of Creation and is known as Parameshwara, the Supreme Lord.

The Samkhya doctrine of Prakriti is based on the "Theory of Causation"—in Sanskrit Sat-Karya-Vada.

Sat-Karya-Vada has two forms:

- 1) Parinama Vada: Real Transformation (pot-clay/Yogurt-milk)
- 2) Vivarta Vada: Apparent Transformation (rope-snake)

In the Bhagavata (Book 3, Chapter 26, Slokas 11-14) Sri Kapila narrated the process of creation of this universe.

Five Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Akasha

Five Tanmatras: Smell, Taste, Color, Touch, Sound

Four Psychological Categories: Mind (function of thought)

Buddhi (Function of Determination), Chitta (Function of Preserving Impressions), Ahamkara (Ego Sense)

Ten Organs: 5 Organs of Knowledge (Ear, Skin, Eye, Tongue, Nose) + 5 Organs of Action (Speech, Hands, Feet, Organs of Generation and Organs of Excretion)

Total twenty-four: 5 + 5 + 4 + 10 = 24

Purusha

Prakriti = Mahat + Buddhi + Ahamkar ("I" Sense) + Manas + 5 Tanmatras + 5 Gross Elements + 5 Organs of Perception + 5 Organs of Action

Verse 18 states, Antah Purusha-rupena kala-rupena yo Bahih ("The Supreme Being, by virtue of His Divine Power pervades everything internally as the indwelling Spirit and also externally as Time.)

The doubt may arise that if the Purusha, the Supreme Being, is everything, does it mean that He is bound by Prakriti?

We find the answer in the 1st verse of Chapter 27—jala-arka-bat ("It is like the reflection of the sun in the water.")

Introduction to the Cover Page :: Philosophy Of Fireworks

Brahmacharini Jagaddhatri
Sarada Convent
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This issue of our eZine came out later than its due date, but it seems that it appeared at an appropriate time. This is the time of Deepavali. Millions of Indians celebrate this festival by decorating every place with lamps and play with fireworks. Fireworks are those things, which we can hear and see – things which appears as so real, but as soon as the show is over, there remains only clear untainted sky! Just like magic. The sky is the reality, fireworks are not. In Sri Ramakrishna's words "The magician alone is real; his magic is illusory."

The two words, on which Vedanta or more precisely the Advaita Vedanta philosophy structured, are -- "real" and "unreal or illusory". One of the pioneer personalities of this philosophy is Archarya Shankara. In a quarter of a verse he said what is real and what is unreal – Brahman is real and this world is unreal. And in the another quarter of the same verse he said, but all these created beings -- through whom this world is manifested, are nothing but Brahman alone. Created beings of unreal world are real?! To explain reality here, naturally come a set of expressions -- three types of existence – *prātibhāsika* (mere appearance), *vyavahārika* (empirical) and *pāramārthika* (absolute).

We all more or less know about these existences. *prātibhāsika* is like water in a mirage and can be nullified by practical or *vyavahārika* knowledge. When our thirst does not get quenched we automatically know it's not real – mere appearance. However, practical knowledge is also ever changing and it can be nullified only by *pāramārthika* existence or through the knowledge of Brahman.

All of us, who are listening to Vedanta, have

some idea, at least intellectually, what the knowledge of Brahman is. These concepts may differ from each other though. One of the simplest definitions that came from Sri Ramakrishna through an example is "It is like a person with jaundice, who sees everything yellow." The spiritual aspirant sees Brahman everywhere and "Then one feels, 'I am verily He'."

An example of this is Swami Vivekananda himself. He first felt It inside a temple. Then he lost his body consciousness during his stay at the Cossipore garden house and realized within himself. He "saw" It many times while he was traveling the length and breadth of India as a wondering monk. He continued to feel that same Consciousness in Chicago while sitting by the lake Michigan, under the pine tree of New York, under the Oak tree of California and many other places while he was preaching the message of Vedanta in West. He saw the same Consciousness within himself and in all other beings. The circle of his attainment of Knowledge got completed. He found the way out from this *vyavahārika* world.

Swamiji later recalled that at his early age when he met the Master, "He (Sri Ramakrishna) asked me, 'What do you want?' I replied, 'I want to remain immersed in samadhi.' He said: 'What a small mind you have! Go beyond samadhi! Samadhi is a very trifling thing.'"

Swami Vivekananda attained that state beyond samadhi and described it in his unique poetic style:

"... in the great void of space... Floats shadow-like the image-universe." And then "Slowly, slowly, the shadow-multitude" also gets dissolved leaving the only ceaseless current, the "I am", "I am". When that also stops, there remains on That, which is

beyond speech and mind.

It is important to note two expressions “*great void of space*” and the state “*beyond speech and mind*”.

What is the way out of this state which appears as void but is actually not? Acharya Gaudapada established that path through reasoning. His doctrine of *ajāta-vāda* is discussed by the Vedantins greatly. Here we neither have scope nor room to discuss it in detail. There are mainly four types of perception regarding the absolute existence (or consciousness or the knowledge of Brahman).

1. There is Self: A perception of Nyaya and Vaisheshika philosophers. They believe this self is not the Knowledge itself rather the knower or experiencer. When this self comes in contact with the senses it perceives knowledge, which is subject to destruction. Knowledge, bliss etc. are the qualities of the self, it is of inert nature and subject to transformation.
2. There is no Self: *Vijnāna vādi* Buddhists believe that there is no separate self other than intellect. Every moment it is being created and destroyed. It is of one form and has no transformation.
3. There is Self also there is no Self: This is basically Jain philosophy. According to them nothing gets manifested completely. Therefore, by seeing its manifested part we can say, it exists and by not perceiving its other part it is said nonexistent.
4. There is nothing: Out of two main Buddhist philosophies, *vijnāna vāda* is already discussed. The other one is *shunya vāda* -- a step forward to the *vijnana vāda*. They say since there is no permanent object that can be called “Self”, therefore voidness is the ultimate reality and it is verily the essence of all.

Acharya Gaudapada’s theory is not in contradiction with any of these. In theory, it accepts the illusory creation and destruction of all the objects of *vyavahārika* level. As the *pāramārthika* reality or as Atman or Brahman – all objects are

uncreated and therefore not subject to destruction. This birthless deathless Self is the only reality. He says as long as one remains a subscriber of any of the four doctrines mentioned – the Self will remain covered forever to that aspirant. The one who knows this Self beyond existence and non-existence -- is the real “seer” of Self.

In Mandukya Karika, a book by Gaudapada, the word “*alāta chakra*” -- whirling firebrand -- is used. *alāta chakra* is nothing but beginningless delusion of this creation. In the chapter titled “*alāta shānti prakarana*” he said *alāta shanti* is the state of Brahman. The Buddhists used the word *alāta chakra* vastly. As mentioned earlier according to them there is no proof of permanency of any object. Every single object is a collection of constant changes only. A mind is nothing but a flow of thoughts that is ever changing. As a rotating torch is in the direction of a procession of lights. But that whirling firebrand – *alāta chakra* -- is only an illusion. The cover photo is an attempt to capture such a whirling light, which many of us will see during Deepavali fireworks. While this image was being composed from picsart.com the firebrand became more spectacular with more contrast against the background, just as the illusory play of creation amuses us as long as we see it different from the background of substratum Self.

Anyway, though this example of *alāta chakra* is the same for both Buddhists and *Ajāta vādins*, they differ when it comes to the question of the source of this illusion. *Shunya vādins* say without knowledge one cannot know the object of knowledge. Meaning, without knowledge any object of knowledge is non-existing or in other words it is the object of knowledge that gives knowledge a shape. As it is impossible to acquire knowledge if it is bereft of an object, therefore an object-less knowledge is also unreal and impossible. As an object is unreal, therefore the knowledge, which is merely manifestation of an object is unreal. This is the conclusion of the *shunya*

vāda. It is nothing but a step forward from the *vijnāna vāda*.

Ajāta vāda says that knowledge and the object of knowledge are neither separate nor identical. Their relation is inexpressible. In Sri Ramakrishna's words, "The Vedas speak of Satchidananda Brahman. Brahman is neither one nor two; It is between one and two. It cannot be described either as existence or as non-existence; It is between existence and non-existence."

Through an imaginary relation the property of one cannot be transferred to the other. To the aspirant who analyzes the relation between knowledge and the object of knowledge, their properties, which appear as apparently identical can be clearly understood as imaginary or delusory.

To a *vijnāna vādi* this relation is not imaginary but the absolute one. That is why they end up with *shunya vāda*. The word which makes the difference seems to be "imagination". All the created objects we "see" and Brahman are related through a superimposition.

To develop the firm understanding that though seen clearly, like a trailing firebrand, it is merely imagination, two theories -- *srishti-drishti* (Doctrine of creation and perception) and *drishti-srishti* (Doctrine of perception and creation) – are used. The word *drishti* means seeing in general but more profoundly it is used here as knowledge. In the path of analysis an aspirant discriminates among three states of consciousness (waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep), five sheaths of appearance (gross, vital energy, mind, intellect, and causal energy bodies) etc.. Constant contemplation on these discernments helps one to realize creation (*srishti*) that we see (*drishti*) are same in waking and dream states. Nothing is ever created nor will be destroyed. An object emerges only when it is perceived. It does not have any reality at any other time.

In the context of dreamlike unreality it is worthwhile mentioning a conversation from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. One of Sri

Ramakrishna's devotees, Mahimacharan, had many duties in the world and on top of that started a school to help others. So he approached Sri Ramakrishna and asked, "We have so many duties in the world. Where is the time for sadhana?" Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Why should you say such a thing? It is you who describe the world as illusory, like a dream. Rama and Lakshmana wanted to go to Ceylon. But the ocean was before them. Lakshmana was angry. Taking his bow and arrow, he said: 'I shall kill Varuna. This ocean prevents our going to Ceylon.' Rama explained the matter to him, saying: 'Lakshmana, all that you are seeing is unreal, like a dream. The ocean is unreal. Your anger is also unreal. It is equally unreal to think of destroying one unreal thing by means of another.'" Mahimacharan kept quiet.

While Sri Ramakrishna is saying in simple words, "It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone", Shankaracharya is saying it poetically, as the absolute self "I am all pervasive. I am without any attributes, and without any form. I have neither attachment to the world, nor to liberation."

At the very beginning of this story to discuss on the term "real" three types of existence were mentioned. In *srishti-drishti vāda* -- all three -- *prātibhāshika*, *vyavahārika* and *pāramārthika* realities are accepted. *Drishti-srishti* is again of two types: *drishti-samayā-srishti* (perception at the time of creation) and *drishtireva srishti* (perception itself is creation). The first type accepts two existences – *prātibhāshika* and *pāramārthika* – therefore can be called *dvisatta vāda* (theory of dual existence) or *eka-jeeva vāda*. Īśvara, God is also imagined by that very same one-being (*eka-jīva*). In Sri Ramakrishna's words, "jār jā ishta, sei tār ātma" meaning one's chosen ideal is verily that Self – *Ishta* and Self are identical. "One attains this state after realizing Reality in both aspects: Personal and Impersonal. The Personal is the embodiment of Chit, Consciousness; and the Impersonal is the Indivisible Satchidananda." When one realizes *Ishta* one automatically attains the Knowledge of the Self, or

through the attainment of Self- realization one can see *Ishta* everywhere.

According to the concept, “perception itself is creation”, there is only one reality, that is *paramarthikan* – all else are never created, *ajata*. In the Shanti Gita Sri Krishna says to Arjuna:

*sṛṣṭiḥ nāsti jagat nāsti jīvo nāsti tathēśvaraḥ .
māyayā dr̥śyate sarvaṃ bhāsyate brahmasattayā.*

There is no creation, there are no created beings, there is no such concept of the creator God, only *maya* appears through the existence of Brahman.

Similar words came from Totapuri when he was teaching Sri Ramakrishna who later shared the lessons: "Again, he (Totapuri) used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt-not even a trace of ash."

In return, what Sri Ramakrishna helped him to understand is: "You may feel a thousand times that it is all magic; but you are still under the control of the Divine Mother. You cannot escape Her. You are not free. You must do what She makes you do. A man attains *Brahmajnana* only when it is given to him by the *Adyasakti*, the Divine Mother. Then alone does he see the whole thing as magic; otherwise not."

Sri Ramakrishna realized, that the whole world was “filled with” Consciousness alone and said, “One should attain *Sarchidananda* by negating the universe and its living beings. But after the attainment of *Satchidananda* one finds that *Satchidananda* Itself has become the universe and the living beings”.

He confirmed, "In *samadhi* one attains the Knowledge of Brahman - one realizes Brahman. In that state reasoning stops altogether, and man becomes mute. He has no power to describe the nature of Brahman." The author of Panchadashi expressed it as:

*sabodhoviṣayādbhinno na bodhātsvapnabodhavat
evaṃ sthānatraye'pyekā samvit-tadvat-dināntare . 6*

This consciousness (in the deep sleep state) is indeed distinct from the object (that is ignorance) but not from itself, as the consciousness in the dream-state.

*māsa-abda-yuga-kalpeṣu gata-āgamyēṣu-anekadhā .
na-udeti na-astametyekā samvit-eṣā svayamprabhā . 7*

Thus in all three states the consciousness is the same – in each and everyday. Through the months, years, ages, and cycles of creation, past and future – consciousness remains the same. It neither rises nor sets – it is self-revealing.

*atastimita-gambhīraṃ na tejo na tamastatam .
anākhyam-anabhivyaktam sat-kiṃcit-avaśiṣyate . 35*

What remains after dissolution is unmoving and ungraspable, unnamed and unnamable, unmanifest, indefinite something, beyond light and darkness, and all pervading.

During this time of Deepavali while many of us will be enjoying the fireworks and whirling firebrands, may we then remember that there is a source of light behind this creation – a collective flow of conceptions. We are that light forever – nothing new to attain but just to realize!



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