

CHICAGO CALLING

**A Spiritual & Cultural Quarterly eZine of the
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
No. 37, 2023**



Table of Contents



	Page
EDITORIAL: YES, ONE, INDEED ONE	3
WHAT DOES CHRIST HAVE TO DO WITH CHRISTMAS? REV. KARA WAGNER SHERER	4
EASTER AND THE LENTEN JOURNEY IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION (PART 1) SUSAN M. PUDELEK	8
BHAGAVATA (17): HOW DEVAHUTI ATTAINED LIBERATION SWAMI ISHATMANANDA	12
INTRODUCTION TO THE COVER PAGE	14
ADVERTISEMENTS	21

**Editor: Swami Ishatmananda
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
14630 Lemont Road, Homer Glen. 60491
email: ezine@chicagovedanta.org
chicagovedanta.org**

**©Copyright:
Swami-in-Charge
Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago**

In the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we find a very interesting conversation between Sri "M" and Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Dev.

'M: "I feel that Christ, Chaitanyadeva, and yourself all three are one and the same. It is the same person that has become all these three."

Master: "Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed One. Don't you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way."

As he said this, Sri Ramakrishna pointed with his finger to his own body.'

One of the human weaknesses is to think "his is the best". Food, culture, Language, Society, and also God and Religion.

Other things are separate, no doubt for different reasons, but God! How can God be different? Every religion believes that God is All-pervading, All-Powerful, All-merciful etc. But how can there be "two" all-pervading Gods!!

Rigveda, the most ancient scripture of the world, clearly mentions that beyond this manifested world, there is Undivided (अद्वय), Unmanifested (अव्यक्त), Eternal (सनातन), Truth (तत्त्वम्) is there. From that Supreme One, everything manifested.

That Eternal One again manifested (as if) as different gods and goddesses at different times, in different places.

"यो देवानां नामधा एक एव .." (Rig-Veda 10.82.3) Truth is One, Sages call it by various names (Rig-Veda 1.164.46)

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad we find the hints about creation - "नैवेह किंचनाग्र आसीत् .."(1.2.1). In the beginning, there was nothing in the Universe. Then that Supreme Being (as if) thought, "May I be possessed of a Mind" - and mind was created (ततः मनः अकुरुत्), where desires "arose". Then, 'Water sprang up' - "आपो-आजायन्त" - and then Fire "अर्कस्य". After that Hard-Surface, the Earth "पृथ्वी" was created.

"ततो मनुष्या अजयन्ता" - Then came different beings of which humans are the best. "God created man out of His own image" is the opinion of different religions.

After Evolution, the process of Involution began. The Creator then gave knowledge and processes to go back to the source to some people who became famous as Rishis.

Evolution began with desire. Desire to live, to know, and to be happy. It was noticed that the Creator's best creation, human being, upon whom the judging, analyzing, and cognizing capacity were bestowed, made the mistake of finding eternity and happiness from the creation, which is temporary, and therefore known as "मिथ्या", false.

First, the Rishis themselves realized that the Truth - the Source from which the universe was created, and then started teaching that to humans, so that from the world of "temporary" they could reach to the place of "Eternity". Rishis taught them to pray

O Lord! Take me from evil to good! Take me from darkness to light! Take me from death to immortality!

The time came when it became necessary for the Creator Himself to come down to show in His life and to teach the perfect process to go back to the source, which is known as Mukti, liberation from the circle of birth and death.

This process of God's coming down to the Earth is known as Avatarana ("अवतरण"). The form of God came to be known as Avatara ("अवतार").

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna indicated that the Same Reality manifests at different times, in different places, and in different names and forms. Though apparently different, the Avatars of different "Yugas" are the same. Indicating Himself, Sri Ramakrishna told to Swami Vivekananda, "He who was Rama and He who was Krishna has become Ramakrishna now."

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna realized Jesus Christ as an Avatara. One of the householder devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, Suresh Chandra Dutta, has written in his book, Sri Sri Ramakrishna Dever Upadesha (advice), that Jesus was none other than Sri Ramakrishna himself. In his words, "The same Avatara dives in the Eternal Ocean and comes up here as Krishna and rises up there as Jesus." All are One and the Same.

Next two articles are prepared based on the "Know & Love Series" Lectures delivered at the of the Home of Harmony.



What does Christ have to do with Christmas?

Rev. Kara Wagner Sherer
Pastor , St. John's Episcopal Church, Old Irving Park

As we begin, I would like to recognize that this home of Harmony stands on the land of native peoples. For thousands of years, this was the territory of the Council of Three Fires - the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa (Ottawa). They welcomed the Ho-Chunk, Fox, Sock, Miami, Kickapoo, and Illinois Confederacy tribes and offered assistance to the first Europeans who traveled here. These nations were forced from this land in 1833 by the Treaty of Chicago. The home of Harmony now stands on this land and, in their seeking to know and honor other religions, they are showing respect and honor for the Ojibwe, Lakota, Dakota, Navajo, Choctaw, Cherokee, Potawatomi, Odawa, Ottawa, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Oneida, Blackfeet, Cree, and Alaskan native peoples who are the majority of native peoples living in Chicago today and who are our neighbors.

So, to talk about Christianity or even Christmas in one hour is a little daunting, so I thought I might start very personally by telling you how it is that I am a Christian, or why I am a Christian because I think it illustrates some of the major issues when we talk about religious tradition and personal faith. I was born in 1969 in Washington State and moved to Minnesota when I was quite young with my parents. I was baptized in an Episcopal Church in Washington State, and that, in the religious tradition, made me a Christian, being baptized as an infant, which was, of course, a choice that my mother made for me because my father was not a practicing Christian at the time. The reason I was an Episcopalian is also very

interesting or, at least, interesting to me. It's really because back in Europe, where my German ancestors lived, you were a Christian by nature of your birth and the place you were born in. When there was a major split between the Western church between Protestants and Catholics, you really became the thing that the king or the landowner or whoever was; you didn't have a lot of choice in it. So, I have ancestors that were Protestants and ancestors that were Roman Catholics. It's really when Christianity enters the United States and a certain era that we start having choices about our religion, or we think of religion more as a choice than an inherited thing. I think it's somewhat significant. I mentioned my birth year not because I think I'll fool anyone, but in 1969, you might remember or have learned in history, was when a human being walked on the moon for the first time. I remember reading once recently that that photo that was sent back from the moon landing from the space shuttle that went up to the Moon rocket, I guess it was, was the first time that humankind looked upon itself. So, suddenly, for centuries and centuries, human beings have looked out to the skies and imagined what it all meant, the stars and the planets, and we had a lot of religious belief around that, and suddenly we had a picture of our planet, and that has made a major shift in who we are as human beings. Obviously, that wasn't a dramatic instantaneous shift, but it started with that photo in many ways, this idea that we are not alone in the universe. I'm getting far away from my own story, but I was

baptized as a Christian, and then I was raised in a very small town in Minnesota where the majority of people were Christians as you know because you live here in the United States.

For many years, the United States was seen as a Christian nation, not because of our founding documents, but because of the culture of the people who wrote those founding documents. And it was kind of assumed in my growing up that you were a Christian, and there were many obligations and expectations for showing up, but that all began to come apart in my growing up. This idea that you might not only switch between, say, being a Roman Catholic or a Methodist or an Episcopalian or a Baptist but being something else like Jewish or Hindu or Jain was something that began to be explored.

Much of American Christianity, especially in the Protestant and non-denominational as we say, focuses on a personal relationship and often a moment in time when everything changes, like a choice is made, a conversion if you will, or a realization, and there is a distinct difference between what you were before and what you have chosen to become. But that is not my experience of being a Christian. My experience was that I don't remember a time when I wasn't a Christian, and that my parents assumed and taught me what it meant to be a Christian. Now, what my parents taught me was not the same as what every other Christian parents taught. I also learned from my church community. I went to a Roman Catholic school though I was not Roman Catholic, so I learned also from that and certainly from the culture.

So, I've often meditated on what it meant to me to call myself a Christian, and it's really come down to, for me, that I cannot remember a time when I didn't think and know inside of me that I was loved by God, and I can't explain that or tell you. I suspect it has something to do with the fact that my parents loved me and somehow, I knew that. But I also distinctly remember as a child times when I thought my parents did not understand

me, that I didn't think my friends understood me, that I was alone, and I had this sense that God did love and understand me, and I think that is what has sustained me through my childhood, through my time as a teenager when I questioned authority, questioned my parents, questioned Church, questioned all kinds of structures, and continuing as a parent myself and as an adult, knowing more deeply the faults and foibles of institutions, the real problems that institutions can cause.

But the thread, the through line through all that is this deep sense of love and knowingness. So even though I have a choice to be a different kind of religion, I feel that I was blessed and honored to be born into the religion that works for me, that I understand. The other thing that I feel very privileged is the particular Christian denomination that I belong to, the Episcopal Church. It has always stood in the middle between a more doctrinal and traditional religion of Eastern Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and the more Protestant branches of Christianity. It focuses more on a personal faith, and the Anglican or Episcopalian religion is in the middle of those two, trying to balance both. So, as much as I knew from a very young age that I believed in God and that I appreciated the stories of Jesus and the Christian Message.

I never received the message that there was only one way to seek God. In my understanding, the search for God is something desired by both God and us, and there are many paths that lead to it, although I am not sure if it's a mountain. Our culture, gender identity, age, experiences, and personality draw us to specific paths. Personally, I am on a path that works for me, but I know many people who have found other paths that worked better for them. This doesn't lessen my experience of faith.

Do you have any questions? When you mentioned that love and knowing keep you going in life, did you question whether there are many paths to get to know God within the Christian faith or other faiths as well?

When I say different paths, I mean every path that exists in humanity, including ancient indigenous practices and all the major religions. However, when I was younger, around seven years old, one of the things that was discussed at school and home was being a missionary, which is unique to Christianity. I asked my father, who was more evangelical, what happens to those who haven't heard of Jesus, and he said they have an experience before they die. I found this unhelpful and disagreed with him, thinking that if God is love, there must be multiple ways to discover God. I was interested in other religions, but it wasn't encouraged in my school or culture. I explored other religions through reading and taking a Buddhism course in college.

Moving on to the talk's topic, "What does Christ have to do with Christmas?" I have had many thoughts on missionary work since I was seven years old, particularly in the context of the damage done by European colonialism worldwide. Christianity was introduced through violence and greed, although some of it was well-intentioned. This made me rethink the concept of missionary work. Instead of forcing it, I believe that living by Christ's teachings is a way to promote Christianity. Some missionaries lived among people and translated scriptures, which helped them make converts without violence or force. At St. John's, we had members from the Philippines who were missionized by Roman Catholics during the Spanish and American colonial period.

When the Episcopalians arrived, they realized that there were many Roman Catholics in the area and didn't feel the need to compete with them. However, they found a Mountain Village called Sagrada high up in the mountains that didn't have a Roman Catholic Church, and they decided to build schools there. As a result, about 98% of the town's population became Anglican.

Once, while preaching against missionary work, a member of the congregation, who was Filipino, shared that his grandfather used to be a

headhunter but stopped hunting other humans after becoming a Christian. This exchange of ideas made me realize that not all aspects of religious sharing are harmful. From his perspective, the member's experience was a positive one for his family. Therefore, I believe that we should learn from the past, recognize and understand our history, and listen to those who experienced it. By doing so, we can determine what is helpful and what is damaging when sharing our religious views.

The earliest stories of Jesus are found in the Gospel of Mark, one of the Christian scriptures. It begins with Jesus's baptism as a young man of 30 years old and not with his birth. Orthodox Christmas, celebrated around January 6th, celebrates this event. It was later that the stories of Jesus's birth were told. December 25th is celebrated as Christmas, and the simplest explanation for this date is that it's nine months after March 25th, which is when the church celebrated Mary's pregnancy. However, Christianity was formed at a specific time and in a specific culture, so it's not surprising that Roman festivals, particularly the Harvest Festival of Saturnalia, were celebrated in early December. Additionally, the Feast of Mithra, the sun god in the Roman Pantheon, was celebrated on December 25th.

I believe that many paths lead to God, and our religious ideas have always been intertwined, assimilating from and changing other cultures. My favorite season is Advent, the weeks leading up to Christmas, which began on November 27th this year. It's a time of preparation and reflection, often involving fasting and prayer, before the Christmas Feast of presents. Christians use this time not only to prepare for the holiday but also to prepare their hearts. The birth of Christ isn't merely a birthday party or a special holiday but an example of the feast to celebrate what Christians call the Incarnation. This particular Christian theology asserts that Jesus became fully human as a baby

and man but was also divine, which differs from other religions' ideas.

Although Christmas has become commercialized, I believe it's always been true, particularly for Christians who celebrate Christmas in a culture that calls itself Christian, even if it doesn't act that way. Being a minority in a culture requires standing out, the ways in which Jewish Americans have carved out a space to maintain their distinctiveness while still practicing their religion. In contrast, Christians have become so embedded in culture and commercialization that they've lost some of the holiday's meaning. For instance, Christmas songs on the radio are entertaining instead of religious.

One important thing to acknowledge about Christmas and other holidays celebrated by Christians is that the earliest followers of Jesus Christ, known as "the way," were Jewish, and many of them celebrated Jewish holidays and recognized the Sabbath on Saturdays. Those who followed the Christian way would have a special celebration on Sundays, which included a meal called "agape feast" or "love feast," now known as communion with bread and wine. As we know, much of our Christian holidays and scripture are derived from Jewish practices. This fact becomes especially evident to me every Sunday when I read from both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures in church as a priest. When the Torah is read in synagogues, it is processed around for all to see. Many Christian practices are imitations or adaptations of ancient Jewish practices.

Regarding the appropriation of religious practices and ideas, as seen in other cultures, we adapt to different cultures, peoples, and times. I recently read a fun article in the New York Times about book-gift giving during Christmas. The article traced the history of Christmas practices, particularly in Europe during the Middle Ages, where it was a raucous, public celebration. Christmas was superimposed on Roman holidays, creating a festival where things turned upside

down. Rich landowners had to give away food, people could beg for free beer, and children dressed up in costumes. Puritan Christians in America banned the celebration of Christmas in the 1700s because they thought it was too pagan and not religious enough.

Over time, Christmas has become a more private, family-oriented holiday, and gift-giving has evolved to include charity. The idea of giving charity at Christmas originated from a time when the poor received extra gifts from the rich. Christmas celebrations in the Christian church are not limited to one day, but include a season of Advent, which is a preparation time, and a focus on the end of the world to remind us of what is truly important. On Christmas day, we read about Jesus's humble birth, where God comes not as a king, prince, or violent leader, but as a vulnerable, poor baby who was also a refugee in Egypt. Eight days after his birth, we celebrate Jesus's circumcision, a Jewish practice. The Feast of the Three Kings or Epiphany celebrates the three wise men or Magi who brought gifts from different parts of the world, representing the whole earth being aware of the birth of Jesus. In many Christian cultures, gift-giving occurs at Epiphany, with the gifts being symbolic of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. frankincense was a king's beautiful ascent and then myrrh was what a person of worth was buried with it was a spice.

It provides a hint of what's going to happen to this baby, so it's not all joy and gladness for Christmas. However, the Christmas season lasts for 12 days, and you might have heard of the 12 Days of Christmas song. In some Christian traditions, you can receive a little gift every day of those 12 days or have parties for 12 days. We're usually too exhausted to have parties for 12 days, but that's how long Christmas lasts in the Christian calendar until the three kings arrive. That's where Christ comes into the Christmas story. This is a brief story of Christmas.



Easter and the Lenten Journey in the Catholic Tradition (Part 1)

Susan M. Pudelek

M.Div., Assistant Director,
Office for Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs,
Archdiocese of Chicago

It is a pleasure to be with you this afternoon. This is my second time visiting here at the Home of Harmony. I was happy to attend your celebratory opening last year. Home of Harmony is an exciting and very welcome addition to the interreligious landscape of Metropolitan Chicago. My thanks to everyone here at the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago for this gracious invitation to join you today. Thank you to Sravani, who I have been in contact with and who has arranged the details for today. Special thanks to my colleagues at the archdiocese, Dr. Daniel Olsen, and Dr. Jon Nilson, for their wisdom and support. And I would like to extend a very special thanks to my friend, Asayo Horibe of the Midwest Buddhist Council, who is here and has always supported me and encouraged my participation in interreligious dialogue. Asayo and I are longtime friends and are members of the archdiocese's Buddhist Catholic Dialogue Chicago. Thank you, Asayo.

I am here with fond memories of Swami Varadananda. I was last with him in person at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service last year at First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple in downtown Chicago. As you know, Swami, with his kind and gentle manner, was a giant in our local interreligious community. I met him many, many years ago at the Parliament of the World's Religions. I then had the great pleasure of collaborating with him when I was on the Parliament staff organizing the 2004 Parliament in Barcelona. I was grateful for his leading with vision, his clear guidance, his assistance in helping

me organize details, and always for his kind and loving heart. I miss him. When I saw him just before Thanksgiving, we were up in the room at FirstUnited Methodist where the prayer leaders were gathering before our entrance into the church. He asked me for my contact information because he wanted to extend an invitation to me to speak at the Home of Harmony. And so, I am here today in a special way with a deeply grateful heart. I am happy to share with you this afternoon and I want to be sure to leave time for some discussion with you. So, if you have questions as I continue, know that we will have time to speak together afterward, and also have some refreshments. Thank you for being here.

Catholic Christianity is a very long and very complicated tradition. I will share here today my understanding, knowing that is it ever evolving. Easter and Lent are a very significant time in our Catholic liturgical year. 'Liturgical' refers to our formal public prayers, music, and rituals throughout the year. Easter will be celebrated on Sunday, April 9 this year. The date is what we call a 'moveable feast' as it changes slightly each year. In Western Christianity we use the Gregorian calendar and so Easter follows the astronomical full moon and is celebrated on a Sunday between March 22 and April 25. Most Eastern Christians follow the Julian calendar and their Easter celebration this year will be on April 16, the Sunday after the first full moon after Passover. And so, we are all interconnected among the heavens.

As Catholic Christians, Easter is the highest and most significant Feast Day of our liturgical year. It marks the foundation of our faith, our belief in the

divinity of Jesus the Christ and his Resurrection from the dead. And so, I am happy to be here today to share this with you.

And before I speak more about Easter, it is important to note the time that we are in right now, the 40 days leading up to Easter, a time that we refer to as Lent. The word 'Lent' comes from an Old English word meaning 'springtime' and points to the lengthening days of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Catholics live these 40 days as a time of preparation for the extraordinary gift of the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

These 40 days focus on the Three Pillars of Lent – **Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving**. These practices are intended to prepare our hearts, our minds, and our spirits, to reflect upon the Resurrection of Jesus and its deep meaning for our lives today. They remind us of our dignity and indeed the dignity of every human person. Lent is a time of deep reflection about our daily lives and our thoughts, words, and deeds. We consider deeply our relationships with others, with those who are in need, and with God. We look at what we have done and what we have failed to do. We engage in *metanoia*, that is, a sincere conversion of heart.

We begin our Lenten journey with the **First Pillar of Lent – Prayer**, and the thousand year old tradition of 'Ash Wednesday.' Perhaps you have seen news reports on television of Catholics lining up to receive a mark of ashes on their foreheads from palm leaves we use at mass on the previous Sunday. It does make a good visual for TV. Ashes are a sign of repentance as we enter into Lent. A visual reminder that, as we hear these words when we receive them, 'Remember, you are dust and unto dust you shall return.' Or 'Repent and believe in the Gospel.' Ashes are a devotional sign reminding us that we are making an intentional choice – to enter into a 40 day period of reflection before we mark the Resurrection of Jesus at Easter. This very popular devotion is a physical sign that many Catholics find meaningful at the beginning of Lent. Ashes are a sign of penitence and remorse

for our 'sins' – which the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls 'a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor ... (that) wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity' (CCC 1849).

Cardinal Cupich says that "by sinning we become less than what God has called us to be, and we injure ourselves and our relationship with God." Lent gives us new opportunities, then, to reflect and repair the damage we have caused and turn our hearts to God once more. ("Lent: A Spiritual Springtime." Chicago Catholic, March 1, 2023)

Our liturgies, our prayers, during the Lenten season are a time when the celebration of the Mass is purposefully kept simple. The color of altar cloths and vestments is purple. Music is simplified and often in minor scale, and we do not sing our usual 'alleluia' before the reading of the Gospel. The focus of prayer both communal and personal during Lent is one that invites us to reflect, to rest, to remain the heart of God. There is a special focus on the personal reading of scripture and encouragement to spend time in reflection on the texts throughout the 40 days of Lent.

As we then contemplate our Sacred Scripture from a sense of quiet and stillness, we become ever more aware of our ourselves as deeply connected to the Sacred Heart of God. A joyful discovery that can come through prayer is the growing realization that God is yearning for us! reaching out to us, welcoming us in warm embrace. We begin to know that God is not 'out there' or 'up there' but 'right here' – with us, in us, and that God longs to encounter us not only each day but in every moment. We are God's joy! The journey of Lent shows us we do not have to travel and seek outwardly to find God. God is within. Right here, right now. We only need to have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart that is open to receive God's ever-present love. This happens when we make time and space in our lives to listen and know the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Jesus says, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No

branch can bear fruit by itself, it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit... As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love." (John 15: 4-5, 9)

And as we begin to awaken to our home in the heart of God, we become more aware of our true interconnectedness with one another. The reality of one humanity, made in the image and likeness of God, as Scripture tells us in Genesis 1:27 – "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" - comes alive in our hearts. We know we are much more than we appear to be. This knowingness of connection that is truly multi-dimensional, is a foundation that helps us discover a sense of unity with one another and with all of God's creation. We begin to understand Jesus' command to 'love your neighbor as yourself' means that we are truly one with one another. In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 22, in response to a question of 'what is greatest commandment? Jesus replies: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Fasting, the Second Pillar of Lent, is also a significant aspect of the Catholic Lenten journey. We find one example of Jesus' fasting in the Gospel of Matthew 4 with this passage: "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Catholics find particular meaning in fasting and it has a special focus

during Lent. Fasting requirements have changed a great deal over the centuries. Today, Catholics who are 18 years old but not yet 59, fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday when we commemorate Jesus' crucifixion and death, eating only one full meal a day. Two smaller meals are permitted if necessary to maintain strength according to one's needs but eating solid foods between meals is not permitted. We also practice abstinence from eating meat on Friday's during Lent.

Today however, there are also diverse ways that Catholic's embrace this discipline of deprivation during Lent – some people fast from eating sweets, chocolate seems to be especially popular, some people now intentionally go on a digital fast and stay away from social media or cut-back on their time on the Internet. The point being returning to the importance of connecting with people in real, embodied life. Some people add a special spiritual practice such as – additional time at prayer, reading Scripture or other texts, or joining prayer groups. Overall, fasting is taking on new meanings today. It is a practice that helps us see who we really are in our daily lives and points a way toward who we want to become. Fasting cleanses our bodies and focuses our minds. It keeps us mindful of our home in the heart of God that is home to us all.

The **Third Pillar of Lent is Almsgiving**. As Catholics reflect with more intention on our life in God through the practices of prayer and fasting, we become increasing aware of many people who are in need, and we then choose to act. In Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 we find reference to the growing numbers of believers and how they were beginning to live their faith.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising

God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”

Being able to truly hear the cries of the poor and to see those who are suffering, those who are near to us, our families, co-workers, communities, country, and around the world, means that we take action to give as best we can. We intentionally give in many ways – our money, certainly, but also of our time, our talents – reaching out to assist others in new, creative ways, not always waiting for someone to ask for help but taking the first step. Many times, when people are suffering and are in great need they find it difficult to ask for help. Our prayer and fasting practices help us realize that we all can do something, and often do so much more to truly encounter, accompany, and befriend one another. By giving alms, we are about something more than our everyday lives.

These Three Pillars of Lent – Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, connect us ever more profoundly within and they turn us out toward one another. Traveling in this way the 40 day journey of Lent we find that as we approach Easter we are refreshed, renewed. We are connected to our inner selves and to others with greater awareness. We are alive with the love of God for us. Lent develops ever more fertile ground for the bursting of the *Christ Consciousness* within – the Resurrection, our celebration of Easter.

What does the word ‘Easter’ mean? It actually comes from Old English and simply means “East.” The sun rises in the east, bringing light and warmth over all the world. The sun is symbol of the rising of the Christ, the Light of the World. When Catholics say “Jesus Christ” we actually are referring to Jesus ‘the Christ’ – Jesus Christ is not really a first and last name but refers to Jesus, who

lived in Nazareth, walked the earth, was crucified, died on a cross, was buried, and resurrected from the dead. He is Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Light of the World. When we say ‘Jesus Christ’ we are naming the divine and the human - Jesus – who lived, suffered, died, and the Christ who resurrected from the dead and is alive with us now. The Resurrection of Jesus and his continuing presence with us is the heart of our Catholic faith and our belief in Jesus’ divinity. And how did we come to believe in his Resurrection? What evidence is there for this extraordinary claim of faith? Well, it is Mystery.

Mystery is that which is not completely understood. It lies beyond facts, reason, and causality. Mystery reaches beyond our senses and taps an inner state that acknowledges the complexities of life. Mystery nods to our human existence as being multi-dimensional. For centuries human beings and spiritual adepts have spoken of seeing and hearing images, voices, of sensing a presence that cannot be seen. Our rational minds, particularly cultivated in the Western world, are sometimes challenged by these claims. And yet, today science is able to show us, through many different technological advances, the many energetic layers of the human body, the world, and the cosmos, through x-rays, MRI, infrared cameras, green light cameras, and all those instruments that detect multiple layers of energy in space that we cannot readily see. Science is showing what spiritual people have always known – that our human existence, beyond what we can easily see or hear, resonates with layers of energies and presences felt, seen, and unseen.

(Concluding part in the next issue)



BHAGAVATA (17): HOW DEVAHUTI ATTAINED LIBERATION

Swami Ishatmananda

Devahuti asked her son the last question: *puruṣam prakṛtir Brahman na vimuñcati karhicit?* Addressing her son Kapila as brahman, the knower of Brahman, Devahuti said, “*Prakṛiti* and *puruṣa* are inseparable. *Prakṛiti* is never disconnected from *puruṣa* due to *anyonyāpāsrayatvāc ca nityatoād anayoḥ prabho* (3/27/17) their interdependence and eternal connection. Then how one can get liberation? *kaivalyam teṣv ataḥ katham?* (3.2.19). Why we are not free? Because we are bound by desire.

Which part of us cause bondage? Our Mind associated with body.

Scripture says, *mana eva manushyanam karanam bandha-mokshayoh* – mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation.

Though mind is the root cause of bondage, but a spiritually clever person, using the same mind can get liberation. How? Kapila gives the example of woods-rubbing together creates fire then get consumed by fire.

In our lives we experience joy and sorrow. What will happen to these experiences after the Liberation?

To give the reply Kapil gives a wonderful Analogy. In a fearful dream we suffer but when we wake up, what happen to those sufferings? Then Kapila said, “To get liberation one must perform *animitta nimittena sva-dharmenāmalātmanā* (3/27/21). Meaning, one should perform one’s own duty, *swadharma*, with great sincerity but without hankering for the result, *animitta-nimittena*, by that one’s mind will become purified, *amala-ātmanā*.

One action two results: *sva-dharma* through *karma yoga* helps the mind to disassociate from the worldly things (*prakṛiti*) and gets associated with supreme God.

My experiences must be supported by the

experiences of my earlier practitioners *jnanena drishta tattvena* result of my experiments must tally with the results of the experiments done earlier.

Least we think that Liberation from the clutches is not very difficult, the great Kapila makes us aware with these words:

yadaivam adhyātma-rataḥ kālena bahu-janmanā sarvatra jāta-vairāgya ābrahma-bhuvanān munih. (3/27/27)

Through such intense practices for a very long time- even several births (*bahu-janmanā*), one develops extreme dispassion (*vairāgya*) for everything *brahma-loka*.

Kapila Muni then teaches his mother, Devahuti, the spiritual disciplines, practicing which she will get liberation. Addressing his mother as *nṛpātmaje*, (3/28/1) princess, daughter of a king, Prajapati.

Why did Kapila address him mother as Princess? The commentators think that it could be for two reasons:

1. Devahuti was born and brought up in a comfortable life. Would she be able to practice these austerities!! – Questioning her capability in taking to hardships of an austere life, as she got used to the comforts of a Royal life.

Or

2. She was a Kshatriya. People who are determined to finish the task once taken up. Asserting her capability, in order to encourage her. Kapila proceeds, *yogasya lakṣaṇam vakṣye*, I shall narrate you the system of yoga. But he begins with:

sva-dharmācaraṇam śaktyā vidharmāc ca nivartanam daivāḥ labdhena santoṣa ātmavit-caraṇa archanam. (3/28/2)

•Perform your duties and responsibilities as best as you can (*sva-dharmācaraṇam śaktyā*)

•You must abstain from performing that work which will harm others (evil deeds, *vidharmāc ca*

nivartanam)

• You must feel happy and contented with what you have got as the blessings of the God (*daivāl labdhena santoṣa*)

• You must serve holy people (*ātmavit-caraṇa archanam*)

In the following 3 verses Kapila gives the lists of disciplines that any spiritual seekers should practice.

grāmya-dharma-nivṛttiś ca mokṣa-dharma-ratis tathā mita-medhyādanam śaśvad vivikta-kṣema-sevanam (3/28/3)

One who wants liberation, *mukti*

- ✓ Should not practice *grāmya-dharma* = Dharma-Artha-Kama
 - ✓ Must practice *mokṣa-dharma* = paths that lead to liberation.
 - ✓ Should eat moderately and pure food, *mita-medhyādanam śaśvad*
 - ✓ Must reside in a solitary place free from disturbances, *vivikta-kṣema-sevanam*
- The seeker of liberation must adopt
1. *ahiṃsā*, banishing of ill-will towards all creatures
 2. *satyam* = Holding on to truthfulness. (as Sri Ramakrishna says, “satya kathā kalir tapasyā”, Truthfulness is the austerity in kali yuga)
 3. *asteyam* = Refraining from exploiting others
 4. *yāvad-artha-parigrahaḥ*, Accepting only required quantity
 5. *brahmacaryam* = Practicing self-restrain
 6. *tapah* = Practicing austerity- physical and psychological
 7. *śaucam* = Maintaining Purity- Externally and Internally
 8. *svādhyāyah* = Regular study of scripture, holy books
 9. *puruṣa-arcanam* = Worshipping of God (3/28/4)

10. *maunam* = Moderate in speech

11. *sad-āsana-jayaḥ sthairyam* = practice a steady-posture for meditation

12. *prāṇa-jayaḥ śanaiḥ* = gradually control of vital air (mind)

13. *pratyāhāraś ca indriyāṇām* = Withdrawing the senses from the sense objects and

14. *vishayān manasā hridi* = directing the mind towards the heart (3/28/5)

In chapter 28th of 3rd book (bhakti yoga), Kapila explained in details the process of meditation and then he described how the mind must be fixed on *Sri Vishnu leela dhāyanam*, imagining the divine play of Sri Vishnu within the heart and then Kapila mentioned,

*muktāśrayam yarhi nirviṣayam viraktam
nirvāṇam ṛcchati manah sahasā yathārciḥ
ātmānam atra puruṣo 'vyavadhānam ekam
anvīkṣate pratiniṛtta-guṇa-pravāhaḥ* (3/28/35)

When the mind gets free from any objects, it merges in Supreme Brahman automatically like a lamp without oil is extinguished.

The great Rishi Kapila instructed how to get liberation by practicing

- Karma Yoga
- Jnana Yoga
- Dhyana Yoga
- Bhakti Yoga

Devahuti the blessed mother listened (*śravaṇa*), analyzed (*manana*) and meditated (*nididhyasna*) and achieved liberation from Duality.

She experienced *sarva-bhūteṣu cātmanām sarva-bhūtāni cātmani* (3/28/42) Atman in all beings and all beings in the Atman.

Having thus conquered *prakṛiti*, the primal energy of Lord Vishnu, Devahuti realized Brahman.



Introduction to the Cover Page :: *Return to Mother, the Light Eternal*

Brahmacharini Jagaddhatri
Sarada Convent
Vedanta Society of Southern California

It is now blooming spring in Chicago. We just had vernal equinox. April showers have brought May flowers. During winter all signs of life in nature were dead as it were. In the snowy, cold, and windy weather neither were there colors of flowers nor were there songs from any birds. Life is now being manifested, like in the image (courtesy: Shutterstock) . This return to life in one way can be seen as resurrection.

The word “resurrection” is distinct from reincarnation or transmigration.

Reincarnation usually means a rebirth of a mental capacity, such as a soul, in a physical life form, such as a body. There is a specific belief, which some call the *law of karma*, about how such a rebirth occurs into a new body and a new form of existence mostly entirely different from one’s previous life. For example, a human could get reincarnated as an animal or as a different man or woman. The physical body of the previous person stays dead.

Transmigration may also denote departure from one’s homeland to live in another country or any type of migration including the movement of a soul from one body to another after death or metempsychosis.

The biblical resurrection takes place in Physical Body through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). In resurrection, the human remains a human. Indeed, they remain the same human they were before. The Judeo-Christian notion of resurrection is a transformation of the body into an immortal form of the same body. There is a direct relationship between the physical body that dies and the exact same body that physically rises to immortality. It is made new in the sense that it is perfected and no longer subject to frailty and death, but it is still the

same body.

After his resurrection, Jesus said: “*See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*” (Luke 24:39). Here Jesus clearly affirmed that His body was identical to the body that had been crucified.

Jesus returned to Mother Mary. Before his death, he explained to those who would later kill Him: “*Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*” (John 2:19-21).

In other words, Jesus’ body would be destroyed and then raised. After Jesus, the apostle Paul taught the physical resurrection of the body in the Corinthians: “*So also is the resurrection of the dead It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*” The resurrected, yet transformed, radically changed physical body that is raised -- the “it” that is sown is the “it” that is raised.

All around the planet Easter was celebrated last month. The celebration arose this thought: The change in nature is the transformation of the Fall color to the spring colors passing through the dead cold winter, as it were.

According to the Christians body is destined for resurrection, transformation, and reunion with the spirit at Christ’s return. At resurrection it will not make any difference whether a person’s body has been buried or cremated. God knows how to raise the body, either in the resurrection of life or in the

resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28-29). Therefore, the Bible does not give specific directions for the disposal of the body following death.

In the Genesis portion of the Bible narratives of the burial of Sarah, Rachel, and Rebekah's nurse are found. In the beginning cremation was not common among the Hebrews except in unusual cases of emergency, as in the case of Saul and his sons (Samuel 31:11-13).

Hebrews, in later time, also practiced cremation. So did the Babylonians, who burned their dead and deposited the ashes in ornate funerary urns, as did Greeks and Romans.

It matters little whether the body is cremated or buried -- human minds always crave for the return of their near and dear ones. They wait lovingly, they pray patiently. During this period, amidst this eternal coming and going, some may feel as if we are staying by a street that has an obstetrics building at one end and a crematorium at the other.

Love and reverence are expressed when society says "goodbye" to the body their near and dear ones. Immense amount of research has been done on the burial art and architecture where the lifestyles of this world are reflected. In ancient Egypt people used to believe that the deceased will continue the same lifestyle in afterlife as well. That's why mummies used to be prepared with the cloths and food of ones choice. Regarding the last rites, among the tribals, especially the Bedouins, two factors were important. First, to maintain social unity as their society had a natural tendency to fall apart, and second, as an easy process of obsequies. City of Petra was built 200 years before Christ and of 800 years before the birth of Islam and it served both purposes. Image worship was not forbidden at that time. There were temples of Nabataean gods and goddesses. The famous goddess Al-Uzza and the local god Dushara were all there. Cities like Petra, Mada'in Salih were basically a mass grave and were of economic

importance and tied these tribals with a strong feeling of togetherness. The famous Ad Deir of Petra was built on a grave during 1st century BC . After Christian invasion when Nabataeans were converted to Christianity, this site was used as a Christian monastery. All these cities lost importance due to 3rd century recession and damage from the earthquakes and Mecca became the main gathering place for the Bedouins until Islamic invasion.

Another ancient religion is Tengrism, which is rooted in cosmology and beliefs about the afterlife. It is a shamanistic and animistic belief system practiced by various Turkic and Mongolic ethnic groups, particularly in Central Asia.

Tengrists believe that the world is inhabited by spirits, and the central deity is Tengri, the eternal blue sky or sky god. In Tengrism, death is seen as a transition from the physical world to the spiritual realm. Therefore, in their burial practices, there is often an emphasis on returning the deceased individual's physical body to nature and ensuring a smooth transition to the afterlife. Burial sites are typically chosen with care and may be situated in natural landscapes such as hills, mountains, or open spaces. This reflects the belief that the deceased will continue to exist in the spiritual interconnectedness of the nature.

Pyramids surely have important positions in the discussion of burial practices. Pyramids can be categorized by historical periods: old (until 2550 BC; stone pyramids), middle (2040 to 1780 BC; brick pyramids) and new (only temples). Though they do not have much external similarity, Buddhist stupas and Egyptian pyramids essentially belong to the same category.

Though the Hindus in general practice cremation services, yet some Vaisnava sects follow burial service. It is believed that at Srirangapattam, a city in the southern part of India, the mummified body of Sri Ramanuja the propounder of the philosophy of qualified non-dualism in Vedanta is preserved for centuries. Rather than chemicals,

which were used commonly for the Egyptian mummies, here sandalwood paste and saffron are used for protection. A coat of camphor mixed with vermilion is applied twice a year which gives it an ochre/orange tint. This tradition has been followed for more than 880 years. The Egyptian mummies are placed in a sleeping position, unlike Ramanujarcharya's body, which is kept in a seated position.

The Mughal king of India, Akbar founded a religion and named it *din-i-ilahi*. In Persian it means, "Religion of God". He had respect for all religions and the faith system he established was the culmination of all religions he was aware of. One of his wives, Mariyam, the mother of the next King Jahangir, was Hindu. She followed Hindu rituals all through her life, though her Hindu name remained unknown and her body was buried after death.

Islamic burial sites was not always built as relics monument. Often these were used for religious purposes. In India during the Mughal era, Akbar's descendant Shahajahan built an ivory-white marble mausoleum, Taj Mahal, that houses the tomb of his wife. In the architecture of Taj Mahal there are influences not only of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic art, but even Eskatan and Roman technologies were also used. It is a culmination of all -- religion, art, and technology.

One of the causes behind the origins of religious systems is the faith in the afterlife. This tradition of burying is associated with the history of the world's largest religion – its development from terminal to central. From spiritual perspective it is a story of a journey of each individual soul from the darkness of bondage within the mortal frame to the light of eternity.

To follow that journey let us walk a little down the time line. The modern human appeared in the form of homo-habilis species 2.5 million years ago, in the Paleolithic era. The Neolithic period began three hundred thousand years before the arrival of Homo Sapiens and ten to twelve thousand years before the agricultural era began. This age when

the emergence of behaviorally modern man took place is known as the era of Cognitive revolution when the human intelligence was developing rapidly. The term Behavioral modernity means the capacity of abstract thinking and interest in symbolism. Abstract thinking and symbolism gave birth to an inclination towards art and technology, language and music. Symbolism is especially associated with religion. For example red or ochre colored clay was usually put in the grave – beginning from Australia to Europe. The color represents next life, color of blood in mother's womb. All faith systems carry the concept of another life – may it be in heaven or rebirth in this planet -- after the death of this body.

The concept of family or inheritance was kind of absent among before the homo sapiens started agricultural cultivation. The concept of family or inheritance gave birth to the idea of land ownership. Again this in turn caused the origin of discrimination between "our" vs "others". The proof is: some burials are found in yards near habitats and some bodies are found in the mass graves and in the absence of the concept of 'our home', it is impossible to have a grave for one's family members in one's own yard! From the idea of inheritance, economy and technology spread very fast.

In Rome there were various types of funeral rituals but there are at least two possible reasons for why burial culture became predominant. Firstly, building decorative graves were expensive and naturally upper economic class could afford it. Emerging middle class and people with slave lineage also wanted to follow to show off their social status. Majority of these people were non-Roman and did not have any inclination to follow Roman culture. Secondly, it was the influence of Christianity in which burying was religious tradition from the very beginning. Until the 1st century Christianity was accepted mainly by people belonging to the lower class of the society. Thus, the elite class was habituated to burial culture even before they accepted it. There are

three types of burying: after cremation ashes would be collected in the pitcher and then it would be buried, the family grave (Mausoleum), and the cheaper option of mass grave (Columbarium) for poor people.

In Greece common people used to get cremated in a secular manner. The ashes would get buried in artistic pitchers. Mass burial was common after death in wars. In the grave of children usually toys were kept. This again shows that faith in the afterlife is one of the sources of the origin of religion. Often beautiful statues were placed on the top of the grave. Sometimes symbols used to be engraved. Among these common rituals the interesting part was the delivery of Epitaphios (logos) that brought a new dimension in Greek literature. Burial plates are one of the important resources to study history of any era. In other words, people of that time come back to us through those writings. However, at the earlier period majority were illiterate and not much was written on the burial plates. In case of important people like Darius or Cyrus detailed description of their achievement are found though.

One of the ancient burial art is mask. These are created during Pre-Pottery Neolithic- B era 8000 to 7000 BC. The people of Ain Ghazal were oldest group of farmers who used to live in the fertile crescent at the end of Neolithic period. They used to plaster the face of the dead with limestone and the dried mask would fulfill the purpose of a memento. It is not known if they used to serve religious purpose as well. From excavation work some human size statues are also found as if they are buried placing heads towards the west. This indicates a type of symbolism as well as orderly thoughts. It may be that the transformation in the thought process of human beings led them to transit from a hunter society to an agricultural one.

The culture of burying, which basically started 35000 years ago, shows a step moving towards civilization and to preserving the mask of a dead person indicates the beginning of the concept of family. These masks have a special position in

anthropological studies as they represent an important phase of symbolism and the development of the concept of inheritance. The descendants of a family wish to keep signs of their forefathers. Now we can take photographs. But even at the beginning of the last century when camera was not easy available to the economically challenged common people of India, they used to keep the foot prints of the deceased member of the family using some red-dye.

Buddha personally was not against image worship but he had objections in drawing or building his own image. He permitted his disciples to build images of Bodhisattwa. That is why until the pre-Gandhara era, to display Buddha's life stories the images of Bodhisattwa were used. It is somewhat similar to portraying the life of Jesus as a good shepherd during the first 400 years of Christianity.

As painted image worship is prohibited in Judaism, in the beginning of Christianity, the human form of Jesus was not portrayed. It took almost a hundred years and Roman and Greek influence to receive the image of Jesus. No one of Jesus's time was alive by then. The followers used to represent Jesus with fish or something else.

When any Bedouin died during travel, that person's bones or body remains would be collected and buried later. The tradition of burying body remains was found among the Jews, Parsis or Zoroastrians and as well as Buddhists. Most of the Buddhist *stupas* are not graves of the whole body but of the body remains after cremation. In Buddhist India the *stupa* of Sanchi had Buddha's relics. King Ashoka built innumerable *stupas* all over India and distributed Buddha's relics in 84000 parts and it again spread all over the world. There are relics even in California!

Around 34,000 years ago (later stone age), the roaming hunters of the Russian plains started to bury the dead-bodies at the site of Sunghir, about 200 kilometers east of what is today Moscow. At the end of later stone age or copper age, the concept of land, family and hierarchy started to

form and graveyard is one of the areas from which discrimination started as well. Many jewelries are found in Sunghir grave, though the use of utensils were yet to be started. May it be the grave of Indus Valley or Egypt it was the common practice to put food and utensils. Even a recipe book is found in the grave of a pharaoh. In Egypt live slaves and maids were also put in the grave. Somehow the display of discrimination was less common in Indus valley than in Egyptian civilization. This culture of putting gifts started to decrease in the West with the propagation of Christianity and Islam. In India and in the East in general grave culture started to reduce with the increase in cremation practices. It is to be remembered that making of statues, burying, painting on the cave walls are the expressions of symbolism. Language and music were invented way before humans learned cultivating crops.

According to the Hindu scriptures human body is constituted of five natural elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. It goes back to nature no matter whether it is buried or cremated. However, ancient times before burial excarnation had been practiced throughout the world for hundreds of thousands of years. In archaeology and anthropology, the term excarnation (also known as defleshing) refers to the practice of removing the flesh and organs of the dead before burial. Excarnation may be achieved through natural means, such as leaving a dead body exposed to the elements or for animals to scavenge; or by butchering the corpse by hand. Following excarnation, some societies retrieved the bones for burial. The earliest archaeological evidence of excarnation is from Ethiopia, 160,000 years ago. Neolithic farmers of Italy, practiced ritual defleshing of the dead.

In Europe during the Middle Ages and early modern period, defleshing was a mortuary procedure used mainly to prepare human remains for transport over long distances. The practice was used only by nobility.

The Parsis of India maintain several Towers of

Silence for sky burial. Due to a decline in vultures in the country the traditional excarnation practice has faced pressure to evolve while still serving the same purpose, so solar concentrators at the towers were introduced. Other scavenger birds play a part but are not as efficient as vultures. In Tibetan sky burials people typically leave the body exposed on a woven litter or altar. Ancient Japanese society also used to follow similar process prior to the introduction of Buddhism and the funerary practice of cremation. In Britain and Ireland during the Neolithic period, bodies would be left to decompose in an open-air mortuary enclosure, on an excarnation platform, or in a sealed cave, before the bones were deposited elsewhere.

The Kalash people of Pakistan until mid 1980s practiced above ground burial in large wooden coffins called Bahg'a where the dead were laid with all their best belongings in cemeteries called Madokjal or place of many coffins. This tradition had been dying off.

Before the arrival of Hinduism in Bali the mountain Balinese followed Animistic traditions, which is to leave the bodies on the ground to decompose, with a cloth cover or a bamboo cage. Once the decomposition is complete, the bones are placed on a stair shaped altar 500 feet to the north facing the Pacific. This process is somewhat similar to the process that was followed by native American tribes throughout the great plains of North America. The only difference is after an extended period of time (months to years) the remains are excarnated and buried underground.

Air burials were practiced for both spiritual and practical reasons. Some tribes, like the Sioux and the Lakota, believed that elevating remains would better facilitate a spirit's journey outside of their body. Additionally, elevating remains protected the bodies from being eaten by wolves and allowed a way to manage disease when burial was not possible, like in the winter when the ground was too hard. After colonization, the U.S. government made air burial illegal, as it conflicted with the

nation's Christian ideals. However, in recent years, air burial has been allowed on reservations, leading to a small number of people returning to the practice of air burial.

Pre-contact Hawaiians ritually defleshed the bones of high-ranking nobles, like Captain Cook, so that they could be interred in reliquaries for later veneration.

Ocean and sand play important part in the burial practices of the societies who lived near the ocean. For example, for some tribes of the Pacific Northwest canoe burials were a primary form of burial. Bodies would be wrapped in blankets and placed inside a canoe with personal items. Wealthier families would sometimes top the burial canoe with a second, larger canoe to keep out the rain. The canoe(s) would then be placed in a tree. The Moriori people of New Zealand placed their dead in a sitting position in the sand dunes looking out to sea; others were strapped to young trees in the forest. In time, the tree grew into and through the bones, making them one.

It is painful to get separated from the name and form of loved ones. However, nothing actually gets lost in mother nature. One form disappears from the sight and many others return in varied ways.

I lose thee, to find thee back again and again, My beloved.

Thou leavest me, that I may receive thee all the more, when thou returnest.

Thou canst vanish behind the moment's screen

Only because thou art mine for evermore, My beloved.

When I go in search of thee, my heart trembles, spreading ripples across my love.

Thou smilest through thy disguise of utter absence, and my tears sweeten thy smile. --Rabindranath Tagore, Collected Poems and Plays, MacMillan, London 1936 (The Cycle of Spring. Translated by C. F. Andrews and Nishikanta Sen)

Not only did art, architecture, language, music technology, etc. emerge from burial tradition, but they also gave birth cults. The Roman king Hadrian was passionate about Greek culture. The

king was homosexual and his beloved was Antinous. When he passed away, Hadrian arranged to mummify him following Egyptian ritual and then he built the city of Antinoöpolis, the first Greek city in the midst of Nile canyon. It was near the temple of Ramosis and the place already was of religious importance. Hadrian founded and dedicated the temple in the name of Osiris Antinous. This initiated the Antinous-cult. So far, all societies had been following the burial rituals according their cult or religion. This was the first time it happened the other way around -- a cult formed after the burial. Even before, there were homosexual gods, like Hercules, etc.; but Antinous became god from man.

Christianity was against the concept of homosexuality from its very beginning, but not the pagans. In pre-Christian era, though both Greeks and Romans were open about this concept, yet traditional Romans or Pagans were against developing the cult of Antinous. However, during the time of Constantine, when Christianity started to become strong, the pagans developed a friendly relationship with the Antinous cult. Greek *divus* (god), *diva* (goddess), *deus* (neither male nor female) phonetically resemble with Sanskrit *deva*. Anyway, formation of a cult or religion following a burial ritual was indeed rare.

In 6th century BC another popular couple Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who worked for democracy had their statues in Greece, Persia, and Rome. This is probably the first case when public funds were used to make a burial monument with temples and statues.

It is fascinating to note that though burial culture is associated with death or end of life, its practice helped the human society to grow in all respects. In a greater sense resurrection is not only physical, but this brighter return is possible through the whole spectrum of human civilization.

This story started with return of life in nature after snow-white winter, return of Jesus to Mother Mary in a glorified form. Here it worth mentioning

the return of Sri Ramakrishna in his eternal body to Ma Sarada in his eternal body. It was two minutes past one (early, Monday, August 16th, 1886), Sri Ramakrishna while lying on his bed suddenly felt ecstatic with a gentle smile on his face, thrice he took the name of Divine Mother Kali, his chosen ideal and signs of life never returned to his physical body. On hearing this news, Sarada Ma ran to Sri Ramakrishna's room and cried saying, "Ma Kali where you have gone". On the same evening as she was trying to take off her gold bangles the signs of her married life, Sri Ramakrishna appeared in front of her and asked "Where did I go? I am here and I just went from one room to another, that is all".

In fact there is never going, only returning, in exalted form. Let us remember the story of Ma Sarada's disciple, a devoted Parsi young man, Sorab Modi. He came all the way from Bombay to Calcutta seeking spiritual initiation from Sri Sarada Devi. Though physically she was unwell, yet out of compassion she blessed him with mantra. Later he related his experience to Swami Niramayananda: [during the meeting] "... she did not understand my language and I also did not know Bengali, we communicated well without any difficulty. The Mother spoke in Bengali and I answered in Hindi. While taking leave from her, I said, "Mother, I am going." The Mother said: "My son, don't say 'I am going,' rather say, 'I am coming.'" When the Mother's attendant translated her words to me into English, I was amazed. I was unaware of the Bengali custom that one should speak that way while leaving. However, I returned to Bombay with a sweet memory of the Mother. She was wonderful and beautiful.

"Thus many years have passed and now I am an old man. I almost forgot the Mother all these years (as I was busy with the movie industry). Now I am waiting for the call from above and that call can come any time. I have no attraction for this world anymore. Now the forgotten Mother is coming to my mind again and

again. Now those words of her – "My son, don't say 'I am going,' rather say, 'I am coming.'" – are ringing in my ears. Now I realize what was then inscrutable to me: I wanted to go away from the Mother but could not succeed. No one can go away from the Mother. Everyone will have to return to the Mother. This is the last realization of my life: I am coming to my Mother." (Sri Sri Mayer Padaprante, Udbodhan (Vol. 3 p: 591-92)

This return is not automatic – but a long dedicated journey with innovative hard work. As the story showed how human society got transformed over the ages with the strong intention to have the earthly body returned; as nature uses all its potentials to bloom over the dead-cold winter; so is the spiritual or inner journey from darkness to light. The transformed great human souls are like the spring as Acharya Shankara described in the Vivekachudamani.

*śāntā mahānto nivasanti santo
vasanta-vat loka-hitam carantaḥ,
tīrṇāḥ svayaṁ bhīma-bhavārṇavaṁ janān
ahetunānyān api tārayantaḥ. (37)*

There are peaceful and magnanimous saints who – like the spring season – are ever doing good to the humanity. They have crossed the dreadful ocean of (embodied) existence through their own efforts and without any (personal) motives, they help others to cross it.

And, what happens when the ultimate transformation comes? Swami Vivekananda says, "Last of all will come self-surrender. Then we shall be able to give ourselves up to the Mother. If misery comes, welcome; if happiness comes, welcome. Then, when we come up to this love, all crooked things shall be straight. There will be the same sight for the Brahmin, the Pariah, and the dog. Until we love the universe with samesightedness, with impartial, undying love, we are missing again and again. But then all will have vanished, and we shall see in all the same infinite eternal Mother."



Advertisements

Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago (VVSC) : Book Store

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda & Vedanta Literature available

Order can be placed online: <http://www.vedantabooks.com/>

Eternal Literature : The Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagavatam, Brahma Sutra, Upanishads in original Sanskrit with English translations. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta scriptures, Sanskrit texts. We are on **amazon smile** too!



Bookshop Hours:

Homer Glen & Vivekananda Retreat, Ganges: Daily from 9 am to 7 pm.

Home of Harmony: Saturdays, Sundays 9 am to 7 pm & by appointment.

A collection of approximately ten USB drives in various colors (blue, orange, green, red, purple, teal) arranged in a circular pattern. Each drive has a white label with text and a logo.	<p>Daily Prayers (Suprabhatam) Spiritual Retreats</p>
	<p>Discourses on the: Panchama Veda, Bhagavatam, Why Should We Meditate, Bhagavad Gita, Fragrance of Vedanta & more All are available in USB drive. \$15 (each)</p>

'Chicago Calling'

A Quarterly eZine of Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago
Printed copies of eZine are available from VVSC bookstore.

eZine@chicagovedanta.org

Read Offline!

Read Online!