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ABSTRACT

BHAKTI: A BRIDGE TO PHILOSOPHICAL HINDUS

by

N. Sharath Babu

Adviser: Nancy J. Vyhmeister

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: BHAKTI: A BRIDGE TO PHILOSOPHICAL HINDUS

Name of researcher: N. Sharath Babu

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Nancy J. Vyhmeister, Ed.D.

Date completed: September 2000

The Problem

The Christian presence has been in India for the last 2000 years and the Adventist presence has been in India for the last 105 years. Yet, the Christian population is only between 2-4 percent in a total population of about one billion in India. Most of the Christian converts are from the low caste and the tribals. Christians are accused of targeting only Dalits (untouchables) and tribals. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, advised Christians to direct conversion to those who can understand their message and not to the illiterate and downtrodden.

The Task

The task of this dissertation was to develop a culturally contextual approach to Philosophical Hindus.

The Method

The Method is to use bhakti as a bridge to Philosophical Hindus. The bhakti path to salvation is the most familiar path and is centered in monotheism. The worship is centered in the incarnate god. There is no need of sacrifices or rituals. Bhakti is open to all the castes, irrespective of gender, age, and language. Unlike the other paths, bhakti provides liberation in this life. Bhakti literature and the Hindu scriptures mention Christ and exalt Him. Hence, bhakti is chosen as a bridge to lead Philosophical Hindus from what they know about Christ in their scriptures to the Bible, which tells more fully about Jesus.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

BHAKTI: A BRIDGE TO PHILOSOPHICAL HINDUS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

N. Sharath Babu

September 2000

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PHILOSOPHICAL HINDUS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem	1
Justification.	1
Statement of the Task.	3
Philosophical Hindus	3
Overview of the Dissertation	4
Definition of Terms	6
2. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF SALVATION	8
Salvation: The Special Provision of God.	8
Definitions	9
The Objects of Salvation	10
The Source of Salvation	11
The One Supreme God	11
The Powerful, Ever-present God	12
The God Who Forgives	14
God's Gracious Initiative	17
Pursued in Love	17
Based on Grace	18
The God who Gave His Life for Human	
Beings	22
Incarnation	22
Sinless Life	23
Resurrection	25
The God Who Comes Again	28
God Desires Fellowship and Response	31
The Human Response to God's Provision of	
Salvation	32
Recognition of Need	32
Repentance	32
Definition	33
The Role of God	34
The Results of Repentance	35
Faith	35

Definition	36
Source of Faith	37
Means of Faith	37
Results of Faith	38
Acts of Love	39
Nurture Closeness	40
Share the Faith	41
Summary	41
 3. THE HINDU PATHS TO SALVATION.	43
 The Concept of Karma	44
Categories of Karma	46
Kinds of Karma	47
The First Three Paths to Salvation	48
Karma Yoga, The Path of Good Works	48
Caste Duty and Karma	50
Karma Yoga and Sacrifices	51
Limitations of Karma Yoga	53
Jnana Yoga, the Path of Knowledge	54
Scripture as Source of Knowledge	56
How Knowledge Works	56
Limitations of Jnana Marga	58
Raja Yoga, the Kingly Path	60
Aids to Raja Yoga	60
Results of Raja Yoga	62
Limitations of Raja Yoga	65
Bhakti Yoga, the Way of Love	65
Definitions of Bhakti	65
The Nine-fold Bhakti	69
Passive Bhakti	69
Active Bhakti	72
Relational Bhakti	74
Atmanivedanam	76
Madhura Bhakti	78
Barriers to Bhakti	80
External Barriers	81
Internal Barriers	84
Superiority of Bhakti	89
Forgiveness and Grace	90
Means of Grace	91
Divine Grace Is for All	92
Grace and Liberation	92
Transformation of the Most Wicked	93
Openness to All	94
Ease of Sacrifice	98
Miracles	99
Visions and Revelation	102

Summary	103
4. HINDU CONCEPTS OF GOD	105
Hindu Polytheism	105
Vedic Monotheism	107
Incarnation	110
Ten Incarnations of Vishnu	112
Animal Incarnations	114
Human Incarnations	116
Worship of the Incarnate God	118
Christ Through Indian Eyes	120
Pratap Chander Mozoomdar	120
Keshub Chunder Sen	121
Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa	122
Vivekananda	124
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi	125
Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan	126
Hindu Objections to Christ	127
Summary	128
5. BRIDGES	130
Bhakti Bridges	130
Madhura Bhakti	132
Sin and the Transformation of the Wicked	133
Openness to All	134
Sacrifice	135
Miracles	135
Prophecy and Visions	135
Other Hindu Bridges	137
Vegetarianism	137
Grace	138
End of the World	139
Monotheism	139
Incarnation as a Bridge	140
General References	141
Specific References to Jesus Incarnated	143
References to the Suffering and Death of Christ	145
6. STRATEGIES.	148
Round Table Conference	149
Philanthropic Work	150
Lifestyle Evangelism in the Community	151
Stage 1: Credibility	153
School Ministry	153
Dispensary	155

Stage 2: Closer Contact	155
Stage 3: Conversation	156
Stage 4: Comparison	157
Stage 5: Conviction	158
 7. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	 161
Summary	161
Conclusion	164
Recommendations	166
 APPENDIX: HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY COMPARED	 168
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 176

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I praise the Lord for His infinite love and marvelous blessings which He has showered upon me. God says through the prophet Isaiah: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9). It is impossible for me, being totally blind, to achieve this academic feat. In spite of my handicap His abundant grace has been sufficient.

I am indebted to my father, Pastor N. Subhakar Rao, and my mother, Kamalarathnam, for their care, encouragement, and support. I am grateful to my wife, Sumathi, my daughter, Seleina, and my sister, Jeevana, for their patience and support. I am grateful to the late Dr. M. E. Cherian who gave me the opportunity to study at Spicer Memorial College and also employed me as a faculty member after completion of my studies. I am thankful to the late Dr. Brian de Alwis who took a keen interest in mentoring me.

I express my deep appreciation to the libraries of Spicer Memorial College, Union Biblical Seminary, Jnanadeep and Ishvani Kendra, all in Pune. My special thanks to a host

of people who rendered immense help, of whom I can name only a few. I highly appreciate Dr. and Mrs. Bruce Bauer, Dr. Jon Dybdahl, Dr. Eric Baumgartner, and Dr. Gerald Whitehouse for their academic and spiritual mentoring during the course work. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Nancy J. Vyhmeister who guided me on this dissertation, refining my ideas and writing skills. A special thanks to Dr. Werner K. Vyhmeister who patiently read my dissertation as the third reader. I cannot forget the help of Dr. and Mrs. Gordon E. Christo in my life; he has been my local guide for this research. He solicited funds from people unacquainted to me to help me purchase a computer, without which this dissertation would have been delayed indefinitely. My special thanks to the Christian Braille Foundation, Larry Pitcher, and Dr. Merlene Ogden who together donated a Computer when I was in desperate need.

I am grateful to Dr. and Mrs. W. G. Jensen for upholding me in my academic life. I thank the administrators of Spicer Memorial College: Dr. Samuel Gaikwad, Noble Pilli, Franklin Samraj, and Dayananda Rao for their support. I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. S. Solomon and Dr. and Mrs. Roy Jemison Injety for their help; also to Dass Kumar, Elwin Gnanasigamony, Arulanandam, and John Wesley who extended their helping hand. I thank Ramella Raghavulu and Joseph Kip who maintained the smooth functioning of my Computer. Lastly, my

cousin K. Manohar Raju, the eldest son of Pastor and Mrs. K. R. Jones, has been a great source of help and inspiration. He has been with me throughout this doctoral program and spent long hours and sleepless nights preparing assignments and position papers during the course work. He has single-handedly typed the entire dissertation and made the necessary corrections. I have supplied only the raw materials; he has formatted them. His patience and dedicated service are unforgettable. Indeed, without his assistance, I could not have completed this dissertation on time. I thank him wholeheartedly.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem

I grew up in villages. All the people in the villages were high-caste Hindus except for a handful of Christians converted from the low castes (untouchables). My father pastored those congregations. No one from the high caste accepted Christ. The question has remained in my mind ever since: Why are the high-caste people not receptive to the gospel?

During my undergraduate and graduate studies I enrolled in courses on Hinduism. I had an opportunity to study Hinduism more under Brahmin professors during my pre-doctoral studies at Pune University. I was the only Christian in the entire class. The rest were staunch Hindus. The urge to reach Hindus grew in my mind.

Justification

I have been teaching in the Department of Theology of Spicer Memorial College helping to educate young people for pastoral work. Hence, it became a challenge and a need to

train the young people and equip them to reach the Philosophical Hindus, the majority community in India who are unreached.¹ The evangelistic success of Christians, which includes Seventh-day Adventists, lies mostly with the low castes and the tribals.²

The three angels' message is to be preached to all the people, "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev 14:6). There is urgency in the message. The second coming of Jesus is nearer than we expect. Teeming millions of Philosophical Hindus are not yet reached.

Hindus believe in four alternate paths to salvation. A common ground between Christianity and Hinduism that leads to salvation must be explored. There is at present no appropriate Christian approach to present salvation in Christ to high-caste Hindus in their cultural context. Hence, a suitable method must be developed to make inroads among Philosophical Hindus with the good news of Jesus, His love, and free salvation.

¹M. Ezra Sargunam, ed., Mission Mandate: A Compendium on the Perspective of Mission in India (Madras: Mission India 2000, 1992), 605.

²Ibid., 605.

Statement of the Task

The task of this dissertation is to design an approach for reaching Philosophical Hindus based on beliefs on salvation held in common by Hindus and Christians. The Hindu scriptures will be used to prove Christ as the only savior. In particular, it will be shown that the bhakti path can be used as a bridge to present Christ as the true savior to the Philosophical Hindus.

Philosophical Hindus

Philosophical Hindus are high-caste educated adults who are the target group for this strategy. Two sources on the Philosophical Hindus, their culture, customs, and ceremonies are quite informative. One is J. A. Dubois' Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies;¹ another is a five-volume set entitled The Cultural Heritage of India.²

Philosophical Hindus are spiritually inclined. They show reverence to Hindu scriptures and follow them. They are open to new spiritual ideas if these are presented from their scriptures. In general, they are Polytheists. They are acquainted with the four paths to salvation presented in the

¹J. A. Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, 3d ed., trans. Henry K. Beauchamp (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1906).

²Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed., The Cultural Heritage of India, 5 vols. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1982).

Bhagavad Gita and have a longing for salvation.

They fear evil spirits; as a result, they appease them. They may also be possessed by the evil spirits; for deliverance from them they go to the witch doctor. They are also prone to sickness like any other human being. They have a good regard for herbal medicines because the Hindu scriptures mention some of these. They are normally vegetarians. They use water for ritual cleansing. They have a comfortable economic situation. Literacy is high among them. They send their children to English medium schools to prepare for professions such as medicine, engineering, and computers, for which the examinations are in English. A number of them send their children to Christian schools because Christian schools have the reputation of imparting a good education.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 presents the biblical concept of salvation in a non-traditional Christian approach unlike the books on Christian theology and dogma. These aspects are applicable and meaningful for Philosophical Hindus to grasp the biblical concept of salvation. Therefore, I have included the following topics: God the source of salvation, God's gracious initiative, the God who gave His life for human beings, the God who forgives, the God who comes again to take us to

heaven, and desires the fellowship of human beings. I have also discussed the appropriate human response to God's provision. These topics can be used as Bible studies for the Philosophical Hindus.

Chapter 3 discusses the Hindu concept of salvation; this chapter presents the four different paths of salvation. They are: (1) Karma Yoga, the path of salvation through good works; (2) Jnana Yoga, the path of salvation through knowledge of God; (3) Raja Yoga, a path of salvation through meditation; and (4) Bhakti Yoga, a path of salvation through a loving god.

Chapter 4 gives the Hindu concept of god, both polytheistic and monotheistic. The Hindu concept of Incarnation is also considered.

Chapter 5 is a bridge to Philosophical Hindus. Commonalities between Christianity and Hinduism will be explained; the God who loves, Madhura Bhakti, vegetarianism, sin, grace, Bhakti and the transformation of the wicked. The concept of Christ from Hindu scriptures will be documented to be used as a bridge to present Christ from the Hindu scriptures to Philosophical Hindus.

Chapter 6 provides the strategy to reach this group. Chapter 7 closes the dissertation with a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this dissertation.

Philosophical Hindus: High-caste educated, acquainted with the Hindu scriptures. They base their beliefs and practices on Hindu scriptures.

Bhakti: This relation unites a person with God in love through belief. The love toward God compensates for all the rituals and the sacrifices (Bhagavad Gita 9.25, 26).

Karma: The deeds done in previous births, both good and bad. These could be through mind, body, or speech. The bad deeds accumulate with each birth. They relegate the soul to rebirth in a lower form of life, which may be as a bird or as an animal or an insect.¹

Jnana: The spiritual knowledge about God and His requirements which can liberate the soul from the bondage of karma and ignorance (Bhagavad Gita 5.17).²

¹Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, Handbook of Today's Religions (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 288.

²Bhagavad Gita is the most popular Hindu scripture. The name Bhagavad Gita is comprised of two Sanskrit words; Bhagavad, divine, and Gita, song. The Bhagavad Gita contains dialogues between Lord Krishna and his disciple Arjuna. It contains the four paths to salvation. The references used from this scripture are taken from Swami Paramananda's translation. See Krishna Dwaipuyana Vyasa, Srimad Bhagavad-Gita, trans. Paramananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1961). Hereafter, Bhagavad Gita is abbreviated as B.G. in this dissertation.

Raja Yoga: A path to salvation through meditation on God, which is also known as Dyana Yoga (B.G. 5.25-28).

Yoga: Yoga is now associated with Transcendental Meditation. However, it is a means to unite with god through a disciplined way of life. Hence, it is used as an ending word for each path to salvation.¹

Moksha: The liberation of the soul from the bondage of the cycle of rebirths, caused by the bad deeds in a series of births and rebirths.²

Avatara: God comes down to put an end to the prevailing evil on the earth. This coming requires a body. Therefore, god takes a human or even a sub-human form to suit his purpose to eliminate evil (B.G. 4.7, 8).

Bridge: A common ground in terms of religious belief to lead the Hindus to Christ as the only Savior.

¹William Watson, A Concise Dictionary of Cults and Religions (1991), s.v. "Yoga."

²McDowell and Stewart, 288.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF SALVATION

This chapter presents the biblical concept of salvation with a special focus on making it meaningful to Philosophical Hindus. Therefore, I will abstain from traditional Christian jargon. I will discuss salvation under two broad divisions: salvation as a special provision of God, focusing on what God has done for human salvation; and the human response to God's provision of salvation, focusing on what the human beings are expected to do in response to God's provision. These aspects are more helpful to a Philosophical Hindu than a traditional Christian presentation.

Salvation: The Special Provision of God

Salvation is the genuine desire of the human race in any age, irrespective of religion, gender, or nationality. Each religion offers a way to attain salvation, though these may differ. I would like to briefly present the biblical concept of salvation. A few definitions highlighting salvation, its source, and its eligible recipients are

discussed in this section.

Definitions

Webster defines salvation as "the saving of men from the power and effects of sin: as (a) his deliverance from the condition of spiritual isolation and estrangement to a reconciled relationship of community with God and fellow men, redemption from spiritual lostness to religious fulfillment and restoration to the fullness of God's favor (b) redemption from ultimate damnation through divine agency."¹

The word "salvation" in the Bible is used with a broad meaning. The concept includes deliverance by God from almost any kind of evil, whether temporal and material or spiritual, from defeat in battle, trouble, enemies, exile, death, and sin. Richard Rice points out that "the word salvation involves spiritual, moral and physical spheres." Above all, "salvation is the restoration of God's reign in human affairs."² The main thrust of biblical teaching on salvation is deliverance from sin and its consequences and from death. Salvation is intended to restore human beings

¹Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961), s.v. "salvation."

²Richard Rice, Reign of God, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997), 157.

to the original state in which Adam and Eve were created.¹

The Objects of Salvation

Salvation is not limited to any group, race, or region. It is for all human beings. God is Lord of all (Rom 10:12). The entire creation is His work (Ps 45:5). Salvation which is in God is extended to all human beings: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6). The Revelator points out: "And this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Rev 7:9).

Salvation includes human beings around the globe, without any barriers. Paul writes: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Since God is the Father of the universe, salvation is the commonwealth which can be shared by anyone. Hence, salvation is not limited; it is unto the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6). Though salvation is extended to the entire human race, only those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved (Acts 16:31).

¹Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 166.

The Source of Salvation

Theistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach that God is the source of salvation. "For Christianity, salvation is not the result of prodigious self-discipline, as with religions of the East, nor is it our reward for living a good moral life, as with Judaism and Islam."¹ According to the Bible, salvation is the gift of God. God grants salvation because it belongs to Him (Ps 3:8). The God who saves is the one supreme God; He is powerful and ever present; above all He is forgiving.

The main theme of the Bible is salvation because Jesus is the center of the Bible. The Bible tells us that God is salvation and He is the Savior. Hence, the incarnated God was appropriately named Jesus, which means the God who saves people from their sins (Matt 1:21). The apostles boldly declared with all religious fervor that salvation is possible to anyone in the name of Christ only (Acts 4:12). The gospel of Jesus is power unto salvation (Rom 1:16). The salvation in Christ is of eternal glory (2 Tim 2:11). Christ is the author of salvation (Heb 5:9).

The One Supreme God

The Bible upholds monotheism. God declares in unequivocal terms that He is one and there is no one else;

¹Rice, 164.

"I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour" (Isa 43:10, 11). The same thought is repeated in Isa 44:6, 8. The monotheistic concept was the prominent statement of belief for Jewish people throughout their generations: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deut 6:4). Paul reiterates the same idea in 1 Cor 8:4-6 and Eph 4:4-6. There is no one equal to or above God. He is the Supreme Being. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer.

The Bible speaks about three persons in the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Paul writes: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14). These three divine beings are one. They work together in unity (Gen 1:26). They have oneness (John 17:11).

The Powerful, Ever-present God

God's presence is beyond measure (Ps 139:7-12). His presence is not limited. The Psalmist says: "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"

(Ps 139:8). Nothing is hidden from God in the universe: "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). God's presence is everywhere in the universe.

The Bible tells of numerous manifestations of God's power to rescue His followers. In the Old Testament, He brought ten plagues upon Egypt (Exod 7-12). In the last one, the firstborn of all the Egyptians died (Exod 12), but the Israelites did not die. God parted the Red Sea and caused the dry land to appear for them to walk across and destroyed the army of Egypt by closing the parted sea (Exod 13). He sent manna for forty years to feed the Israelites (Exod 16). He caused the strong walls of Jericho to fall (Josh 6). He saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Dan 3). He saved Daniel from the lions' den (Dan 6).

The power of God is also manifested in innumerable accounts in the New Testament. Jesus performed powerful miracles. He changed water into wine (John 2). He raised Lazarus from the tomb (John 11). He fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6). He died and rose again on the third day (Matt 27 and 28). There are innumerable, wondrous acts done by God through His power.

The God Who Forgives

Forgiveness is an absolutely necessary dimension of salvation. Without divine forgiveness, sinful humanity cannot hope to obtain salvation. The study of the word "forgiveness" in the original languages helps in its understanding. The Heb. nāśā' means "to take away guilt" or "to lift up;"¹ Sālah means "to pardon."² The Greek Charizomai means "to forgive," "to give graciously as a favor;"³ aphiemi means "to cancel," "to send away."⁴ The believers expressed their thankfulness to God because their sins were forgiven (Ps 32:5).

God's forgiveness

In both Testaments God appears as the source of forgiveness. The psalmist said: "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12). Micah expressed: "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and

¹Walter C. Kaiser, "nāśā'," Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce L. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:601.

²Walter C. Kaiser, "Sālah," TWOT, 2:626.

³Hans Conzelmann and Walther Zimmerli, "Χαρίζομαι," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT), ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9:372-402.

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, "ἀφίημι," TDNT, 1:511.

thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:18, 19). God forgives iniquity and remembers our sin no more (Jer 31:34).

In His incarnate form God the Son also had full power to forgive sin (Matt 9:6). Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). Our sins are forgiven because of Christ's name (1 John 2:12). We the sinners have the assurance of forgiveness because of Christ's sacrifice, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14). Ellen White points out: "The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God." She notes that only Jesus "can forgive our transgressions."¹

Conditions for receiving forgiveness

Forgiveness is the work of God because of His infinite love for sinners. The psalmist expresses this thought in the words: "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Ps 86:5). It is impossible to explain rationally the immeasurable love of God, which grants forgiveness without which we have no way to be reconciled unto God. This wonderful love of God is something that

¹Ellen G. White, Christ's Object Lessons (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 251.

sinners are not worthy to receive in any manner. However, God expects the wicked to shun sin to receive forgiveness. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7).

Forgiveness cannot come to those who claim to follow Him but betray Him and deny Him by their words and actions, particularly by their cherishing of their old lives of sin.¹

According to Christian understanding, "God's love calls out repentance from the human heart as the sun brings new life out of a plant"² which leads to "a new kind of fellowship created by God, individually, personally . . . unmerited and undeserved."³ Ellen White agrees: "Freely will He pardon all who come to Him for forgiveness and restoration."⁴ The only condition that God has is that we should come to Him for forgiveness. God forgave Peter who denied him three times and appointed him to feed His sheep

¹Gordon M. Hyde, Rags to Righteousness (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1978), 69.

²James Atkinson, "Forgiveness," A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 130.

³Ibid.

⁴Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 568.

(John 21:17). God forgave the thief on the cross and assured him eternal life (Luke 23:43).

God's Gracious Initiative

It is impossible to know God or His plans through human reasoning (Job 11:7). Yet, God took the initiative to reveal Himself and His plan of salvation in various ways. He spoke to Adam and Eve face to face (Gen 3:1, 2). He used other methods after the entrance of sin. God frequently used dreams and visions (Num 12:6). God also spoke to Moses face to face, though Moses only heard the voice of God. God also spoke to others, such as Saul who was later known as Paul (Acts 9:5).

God spoke to human beings through angels (Judg 6:11-12). God spoke to people through prophets (2 Pet 1:21; Amos 3:7). However, God spoke to the human beings through His Son Jesus, who was the full revelation of God (Heb 1:1, 2). God the Holy Spirit also speaks to human beings directly (John 14:26). God speaks through the Scriptures also (Rom 9:17). Because of His infinite love God used all these methods to communicate His salvation message. God has taken this initiative out of His infinite love, based on His grace.

Pursued in Love

God's love is pivotal for our existence and

salvation. God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus said: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He loves us with everlasting love (Jer 31:3). God loved us because we are precious and honored in His sight (Isa 43:4). God loved the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt (Deut 4: 37); for love He turned Balaam's curse into a blessing (Deut 23:5). God loved us and gave us hope in Christ (2 Thess 2:16). He loved us and washed us of our sin in His own blood (Rev 1:5). Salvation is centered in the infinite love of God.

The act of salvation is purely motivated by the infinite love of God by which unworthy sinners can obtain salvation. The whole process of salvation is God's initiative pursued by His infinite love and based on grace.

Based on Grace

Grace is one of the most significant concepts for the salvation of human beings. Grace means the unmerited love and favor of God toward mankind.¹ In a special Christian sense, grace refers to the free salvation in Jesus Christ. As used by Paul in particular, the word underscores the fact that salvation is freely given by God to undeserving

¹Webster's Universal College Dictionary (1997), s.v. "grace."

sinners: "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)" (Eph 2:5).

The Source of grace

Grace is an unfathomable element in divine dealings with human beings. It is impossible for the sinful human race to attain salvation without the grace of God. When God revealed Himself to Moses He pointed to grace as one of His attributes (Exod 34:6). God was gracious and compassionate to Israel (2 Kgs 13:23). The Lord God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away from His people (2 Chr 30:9). God is gracious and ready to forgive and will not forget His people (Neh 9:17).

Grace is the gift of God: "But unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph 4:7). God is full of grace (John 1:14). Grace and truth came by Jesus (John 1:17). E. G. White affirms that the grace of Christ is a free gift which cannot be purchased.¹ God will give grace and no good thing will be withheld (Ps 84:11). God grants His grace to everyone: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). He giveth grace unto the lowly (Prov

¹Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 129.

3:34). God gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6). Any sinner can obtain adoption into God's family. According to Paul, God predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself (Eph 1:5, 6).

The grace of God revives sinners. By the power of grace sinners can be regenerated: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13). Sinners are totally covered with the righteousness of Christ. This important act is also because of His grace. Paul agrees that we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14; cf. Rom 5:12). The grace of Christ can accomplish for us that which all our efforts will fail to do.¹

The grace of God saves sinners. We are saved through His grace (Eph 2:5, 8). He saved us and called us by His grace and purpose (2 Tim 1:9). The grace of God brings salvation to all men (Heb 4:16). By the grace of Jesus we shall be saved. Even the Gentiles will be saved by the grace of Jesus (Acts 15:7-11).

¹Ellen G. White, Counsels on Health (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1951), 424.

The fruit of grace

The presence of grace in the life of a believer awakens the conscience and moral senses, so that the believer tries to stand firm in avoiding sin. By God's assisting grace, all evil temper, all human depravity, may be overcome.¹ Through grace we receive the gift of righteousness (Rom 5:17). Through His grace we have redemption and forgiveness of sin (Eph 1:7). Ellen White points out that "the only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ."²

Some persons may be under the false impression that they can sin more to obtain more grace. Paul condemns such an attitude by saying: "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom 6:1, 2). No one should take advantage of God by committing sin with a false notion that God will forgive.

The power of grace works from within human beings to make us holy and quicken the faculties of the soul to cling to God for holiness. The grace of God not only cleanses but supplies the power to gain victory over evil habits in order

¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:349.

²White, Desire of Ages, 305.

to be in harmony with God's presence.¹ Thus, the grace of God is all the more important for eternal life. Through grace we may have sufficiency in all things to do the good works (2 Cor 9:8). God told Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

The ultimate purpose of the grace of God is salvation, which God grants to sinners in His infinite love. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

The God Who Gave His Life for Human Beings

God's gift of salvation was made possible through the coming of Jesus to earth. As a member of the Godhead, He is the "express image" of God the Father (Heb 1:3). He was also the Creator (John 1:3; Heb 1:2). His incarnation, sinless life, death, and resurrection were all necessary to God's plan of salvation.

Incarnation

Walter Specht notes that "the incarnation is the

¹Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 115.

glory of God, mediated through the human nature of Christ."¹ God sent His son to save us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God the Son came to this world in human flesh (John 1:14). Paul points out that Christ, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:6-7). He became one like us in every aspect (Heb 2:14-16). God the Son, who was holy and knew no sin, was made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).

Sinless Life

As a human being, Jesus lived a perfect sinless life, "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Christ lived a pure life, He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet 1:22). Christ challenged His opponents by asking, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46).

Jesus set aside the heavenly glory, incarnated as a

¹Walter F. Specht, "Christ's Ascension, Enthronement, and Mediatorial and Intercessory Ministry," in The Sanctuary and the Atonement, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 331.

human being, and died on the cross of Calvary (Phil 2:6-8). He took upon Himself this vicarious death while we were yet sinners to reconcile us unto God (Rom 5:5-9). Christ loved us and offered Himself (Eph 5:2). God loved us and sent His son as a propitiation (1 John 4:10).

When Adam and Eve sinned, God provided them a clothing of skin that required the death of an innocent lamb (Gen 3:21). The sacrifices which were offered in the Old Testament times prefigured Christ (Heb 10:1-10). For this reason, John the Baptist identified Jesus as the lamb of God at his baptism: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John the Revelator also portrays Christ as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8), because He volunteered to die for sinners, recognizing that without bloodshed there is no "remission of sin" (Heb 9:22).

Paul wrote: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:6). He also pointed out that "we were reconciled to God by the death of his son" (Rom 5:10). Ellen White says: "He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."¹ Christ died that we may live.

¹White, Desire of Ages, 25.

Jesus went through immeasurable pain and suffering. All the four Gospel writers give more space to the suffering and the death of Christ than to His life. Matt 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19 give a heart-rending account of Christ's suffering on the cross. Death on the cross "was reserved for the slaves . . . the lowest elements of society."¹ Ellen White affirms: "Christ gave himself to a shameful, agonizing death, showing His great travail of soul to save the perishing."² Paul recognized this in Phil 2:7, 8.

The suffering of Christ brought spiritual healing and blessing to us, as was noted in Isaiah's prophecy: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5). Our redemption was purchased by the blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18). The sacrifice of Christ made salvation possible for any sinner who accepts Him as the Savior.

Resurrection

Without the resurrection, Christ's greatest sacrifice would have been merely a heroic or innocent death in the

¹Rice, 190.

²White, Testimonies for the Church, 6:66.

sight of the world. It was the resurrection which allowed the death of Christ to save sinners. Since resurrection is central to the gospel, all four Gospel writers present a vivid description of the resurrection (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20).

Early the morning of the first day of the week, when the angel of the Lord came and rolled away the tombstone, Christ came out alive (Matt 28:1-4). The Roman soldiers fell as dead men (Matt 28:5). The Jewish leaders, who anticipated a blow to their wicked plot, had posted Roman soldiers (Matt 27:62-66) to guard the tomb. They witnessed the resurrection (Matt 28:3, 4) but at the urging of the priests fabricated the story that Christ's body was stolen by His disciples while they were sleeping (Matt 28:11-15). If the disciples had stolen the body of Christ, the Jewish leaders should have investigated to recover the body. The empty tomb itself was an undeniable proof to the people of Jerusalem.¹

Only fifty days after the resurrection, Peter started preaching about the resurrection of Christ. Had it been a false story fabricated by the disciples they could not have preached the message in the city of Jerusalem itself (Acts 2). Saul (later Paul), who persecuted the early Christians

¹Rice, 169-170.

(Acts 9:1-5), became a follower and championed the cause of Christ, highlighting the resurrection. He firmly declared that if Christ had not risen our faith is in vain (1 Cor 15:12). The early church did not manufacture the resurrection belief; it was the center of their message.

The act of resurrection authenticates Jesus as the God who gave His life for sinners and rose again to ascend to heaven (Acts 1:11), to become our High Priest (Heb 8:1).¹ "The reality of the resurrection of Jesus is the touchstone of Christianity."² If the resurrection is removed or undermined, the Christian message loses its essence.

Christ ascended to heaven forty days after the resurrection (Acts 1:10, 11). There, He sits at the right hand of the Father as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:1-3). He is our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). Christ is our mediator (1 Tim 2:5). Hence, resurrection is essential to the plan of salvation. The resurrection of Christ provides hope that the dead in Christ will rise on the day of the Second Coming (1 Thess 4:13, 14). Hence, Christ's resurrection was and is evidence for countless believers that they will be raised from the graves

¹Reginald H. Fuller and Pheme Perkins, Who Is This Christ? (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 18.

²Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Biblical Foundation for Belief in Jesus' Resurrection," Adventists Affirm 2 (1997): 15.

like Him, to enjoy immortal life (1 Cor 15:51-55). On the day of the Second Coming all the dead who die with faith in Christ as their Redeemer will hear His voice and be raised from their graves (John 5:28, 29). Their resurrection will not be an isolated event but will happen throughout the earth, in every "nation, kindred and tongue."¹

The God Who Comes Again

The Second Coming is the ultimate glorious event. Jesus Christ and all the angelic hosts will come to receive the righteous, who will inherit the New Jerusalem prepared for the believers. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is the only hope of Christians because it inaugurates the age of heavenly bliss. John the Revelator writes that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Christ promised His disciples that He would prepare a place and come back to take all of His followers to be with Him forever in heaven (John 14:1-3). When Christ ascended, the angels repeated the promise made by God that Jesus would return in the same manner as He had ascended to heaven in a

¹White, Great Controversy, 644.

cloud (Acts 1:11). As the disciples spread, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ amid suffering and persecution, the promised appearing of "the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" was the blessed hope (Titus 2:13).¹ Ellen White affirmed that "this great truth had been the consolation of God's faithful ones through all the ages."²

There are clear signs for the people on this earth to know that the coming is near. The signs of His coming are recorded in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 17 and 21. Paul adds a few more, recorded in 2 Tim 3. A few of these are listed below: There shall come false Christs (Matt 24:24), wars and rumors of wars (Matt 24:6); a nation shall rise against another nation (Matt 24:7); there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (Mark 13:8); there shall come persecution for the followers of Christ (Luke 21:12). The gospel shall be preached all over the world as a testimony (Matt 24:14). People will be eating, drinking, and marrying (Luke 17:26-27).

The second coming of Christ is not a secret or isolated event in some corner of our world. The Second Coming will be literal, personal (John 14:3), visible (Matt 24:30), audible (1 Thess 4:16), and bright (2 Thess 2:8).

¹Ibid., 302.

²Ibid., 339.

The second coming of Christ will be seen by all the people on this earth at the same time (Matt 24:27). As Christ comes in a cloud and as the cloud comes near, every eye beholds the prince of life (Rev 1:7).¹ The distinct and most thrilling sign will be the resurrection of the dead. Even those who pierced Christ will be resurrected to see the glorious return of Christ in majesty (Rev 1:7). All the righteous dead will be resurrected; while the living righteous will be changed in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor 15:51-53). The righteous living shall be taken together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, to inherit eternal life and enjoy the presence of God (1 Thess 4:16, 17).

The last two chapters in the Bible, Rev 21 and 22, present a glimpse of eternal life in heaven; "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: For the former things are passed away" (Rev 21:4). Hence, "the plan of God for this world, the purpose of God for the human race, the gospel of God for human salvation, are incomplete, without the return of Jesus."² Therefore, the second coming of Christ is the climax which puts an end to all evil and ensures the age of

¹Ibid., 641.

²Carlyle B. Haynes, The Return of Jesus (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1926), 77.

eternal bliss.

God Desires Fellowship and Response

God created everything by His word (Ps 33:6). He is almighty (Gen 17:1). He knows everything in the past, present, and future (Isa 46:9, 10). Yet, this supreme God desires fellowship with His created beings. Therefore, He set aside the seventh day as a day of rest (Gen 2:1-3), for fellowship with our maker (Exod 20:8-11). Since it is the day for fellowship with the Creator, we should not do anything for our pleasure but do such things as will please God (Isa 58:13).

The entrance of sin on this planet has brought separation between God and man (Isa 59:1, 2). Because of this, God formulated an agreement by which He and human beings could continue in close relationship. Examples of this agreement are the ones He made with Noah (Gen 9:16, 17), with Abraham (Gen 17:2), and with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:5-7).

Later, God made a new covenant or agreement and ratified it with the blood of Jesus (Matt 26:28). This covenant relationship continues even in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:3). This relationship reaches its climax when the God of this universe will dwell with human

beings forever: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev 21:3).

The Human Response to God's Provision of Salvation

Recognition of Need

Salvation is open to all. Yet we need to recognize our personal condition and inability to save ourselves through our own effort or good works. The jailer at Philippi recognized the need for salvation and asked the question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Nicodemus also recognized his need and came to Christ by night, in order to know how to attain eternal life (John 3:1-8).

When a sinner recognizes his or her sinfulness and the need for a Savior, that person must confess the sin to Jesus, who is just and faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). The experience of changing one's mind, of turning away from the old or sinful ways to newness of life in Christ, is known as repentance.

Repentance

The concept of repentance occupies a key place in the

process of salvation. Repentance is a vital step towards God; in it the sinner who lost the way finds the way back to God. The Hebrew word nācham means "to be sorry,"¹ while the Greek word metanoia means "a change of mind," "a turning about,"² implying a radical change in attitude toward sin. The concept of repentance is presented clearly in the Bible.

Definition

Paul writes: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). Repentance is to have a transformation of the mind, from doing sin to doing holy deeds. Paul admonished: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph 4:23). Repentance is to turn away from sin.

Repentance is also the gift of God which brings forgiveness: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). It is the goodness of God which brings repentance as Paul asked: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth

¹Marvin R. Wilson, "nācham," TWOT, 2:571.

²J. Behm and E. Würthwein, "μετάνοια," TDNT, 4:975.

thee to repentance?" (Rom 2:4).

The Role of God

God does not want anyone to perish but wants everyone to repent (2 Pet 3:9). God grants repentance to Israelites (Acts 5:31), He also grants it to Gentiles (Acts 11:18). Hence, it is not human effort which brings repentance, but the goodness of God which leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4).

One of the most important works that Christ came to accomplish was to teach people about repentance. In His ministry He declared: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). Christ commanded His disciples to teach repentance to the whole world (Luke 24:47). Christ's disciples continued the mission given to them by preaching about repentance; for example, the main thrust of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was repentance. As a result, three thousand people were converted (Acts 2:40-41). Paul preached about repentance, even to kings (Acts 20-21).

The call to repentance was a call to persons to make a radical turn from one way of life to another. In effect, "it was a call to conversion from self-love, self-trust, and self-assertion to the way of obedient trust and self-

commitment to God in Christ as sovereign."¹ Hence, whoever accepts the repentance that is freely offered and comes to God with a penitent heart and willingness to walk in the path of God is accepted by God.

The Results of Repentance

The results of repentance are marvelous. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Since repentance is linked to the blotting out of sin, the sinner is forgiven and accepted back into the family of God. As a result, the heavenly family rejoices: "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:7). Hence, repentance is an important link in the process of salvation.

Faith

Faith is an essential element in salvation (Eph 2:8). Faith is trusting God, believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good.² Faith is the active acceptance

¹Frank Staggs, New Testament Theology (Nashville: Broadman, 1962), 119.

²Ellen G. White, Education (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 253.

of God's kingdom for now and for eternity to come.¹ "Faith . . . is the hope which looks forward with utter conviction."² It is so essential that without faith, Christian life is unthinkable.

Definition

According to Heb 1:1, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The biblical faith is not blind. It is, instead, trust in God and what He has done on our behalf and for our salvation.³ Faith is an authentic human action without which there is no union with Christ.⁴ New Testament faith trusts in Jesus Christ as the Savior and relies upon Him for life in this world and the world to come (Acts 16:31). Hence, faith is a confident attachment and willful obedience in the providence of God.

¹W. R. Beach, Dimensions in Salvation (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1963), 42.

²William Barclay, The Letter to the Hebrews, rev. ed., Daily Study Bible (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1976), 128.

³Ibid., 68.

⁴Edward Heppenstall, Salvation Unlimited (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 77.

Source of Faith

The source of faith is God. Faith is one of the spiritual gifts of God, as Paul affirmed (1 Cor 12:9). Since faith is God's gift we can cling to God by faith. Faith is God's grace working in our hearts; without faith we cannot even know God and His wonderful love and salvation.¹ Ellen White wrote: "As the Son of God lived by faith in the Father, so we are to live by faith in Christ."²

Means of Faith

Faith comes by the hearing of the word of God in the power of Christ (Rom 10:16, 17). Faith also involves an active human element (Gen 15:6). Faith requires obedience as was seen in the life of Abraham, who when he was called to go out into "a place which he should after receive for an inheritance," obeyed; "and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:8). Faith is a stepping forward, not into darkness, "but into the light which God has given."³ Only he who has faith is obedient, and only he who is obedient

¹Martin Luther, Sermons I, vol. 51, Luther's Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 110.

²White, Desire of Ages, 389.

³G. W. Martin, "Faith," New Dictionary of Theology (1988), 246.

has faith. Faith is only real when there is obedience.¹

Results of Faith

Faith results in a close relationship with God. It is impossible to please God without faith (Heb 11:6). By faith we are saved through the grace of God, not because of our good works (Eph 2:8-10). Thus, salvation is made possible through faith. Faith in Christ makes it possible for anyone to attain salvation, which is impossible to attain through any other means (Rom 10:9). Individuals can make use of faith to establish an intimate relationship with God. Abraham enjoyed friendship with God (Jas 2:23). Moses also maintained a very close relationship with God; he was faithful in all his house (Heb 3:5).

Heb 11 tells about faith and a host of people who exercised faith in God. Faith is here shown to fill the gap between God and mankind in order to have uninterrupted communication and relationship. Ellen White points out that "through faith in Christ, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed."² The power of Christ makes whole any deficiency in the life of a human

¹Heppenstall, 95.

²White, Education, 257.

because of the faith in Christ; therefore, faith is the most significant element in the Christian concept of salvation.

"It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness."¹ Through faith the righteousness of Christ will be granted to us.

Paul wrote of being "found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil 3:9).

Acts of Love

Salvation is extended to sinners as a free gift of God, because of the infinite love of God. All those who receive this free gift must also exhibit acts of love. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:39). If we cannot love our fellow human beings, we cannot love God either (1 John 4:20). This love towards our fellow human beings should be shown in good deeds. John wrote: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). It is the duty of God's people to help the needy. James admonishes believers to "visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions and keep unspotted from the world" (Jas 1:27). Whatever we do

¹White, Desire of Ages, 428.

to those in need with love is accepted by God as if we had done it to Him (Matt 25:35-40). These acts of charity must be extended even to our enemies: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt 5:44).

We are ordained for good works (Eph 2:10). The good works will spring up naturally in those who are grounded in the love of God. The deeds done to others in love can conquer even our enemies (Rom 12:20).

Two important acts of love are nurturing closeness and sharing the faith.

Nurture Closeness

God is the father of the human race. We are all members of God's family (Gen 1:26-29). There should not be any discrimination among God's people: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). We must care for each other (1 Cor 12:25). Christ told the parable of the good Samaritan to inculcate the attitude of caring for others who are outside the fold (Luke 10:34, 35).

It is the responsibility of every believer to nurture

others in order that we may grow in faith: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16). This aspect of caring for each other keeps the believers together, tied together with the bonds of agape love which preserves the members from falling away from faith (Heb 3:13).

Share the Faith

Believers are obligated to share their joy of salvation with others. The divine commission is to witness Christ to the whole world (Matt 28:19, 20). Paul witnessed to the great as well as the small (Acts 26:22). Believers must be ready at all times to share their faith and also to give a reason for their faith (1 Pet 3:15). God expects from us to finish sharing the good news of salvation to the entire world so that He can come the second time to take the believers to heaven (Matt 24:14). Witnessing for Christ will save many perishing people and hasten the Second Coming to enjoy heavenly bliss.

Summary

According to the Bible God has taken the initiative

to offer salvation freely to all sinners. Salvation is a gift of God to all of those who accept His provision. Biblical salvation is based on Christ, whom the Father sent because of His infinite love and His sacrificial death. The resurrection of Christ provides the strongest evidence that Christ is the true God and will resurrect the believers even if they die before the Second Coming. Resurrection made it possible for Christ to ascend to heaven and to become our mediator. Christ is coming back the second time to take all of His believers to heaven. In the biblical concept of salvation God does everything for us. We only need to respond and accept His provision so that we can live forever with God.

CHAPTER 3

THE HINDU PATHS TO SALVATION

The goal of Hinduism is moksha (salvation). There are four different paths to salvation: (1) Karma Yoga, the path of salvation through good works, which requires a sacrificial system; (2) Jnana Yoga, the path of salvation through a knowledge of god; (3) Raja Yoga, the path of salvation through meditation; and (4) Bhakti Yoga, the path of salvation through a love relationship with god. The first two paths are the most ancient and can be traced clearly from the Rigveda,¹ the first written Hindu scripture. One of the meanings of the Sanskrit word Yoga is "discipline." Each path ends with the word Yoga to show that it is a discipline to pursue.

These paths of salvation are for the liberation of human beings from karma. Karma can be equated with the

¹Rigveda is the oldest written Hindu scripture. It contains 1017 hymns. It is accepted as inspired scripture by all the Hindus. It is divided into ten parts. See Ralph T. H. Griffith, Hymns of the Rigveda (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973).

concept of sin in Christianity. It accumulates during each birth, and it regulates the cycle of rebirths. It prevents a person from attaining salvation; therefore, it is essential to understand briefly what it is.

The Concept of Karma

The concept of karma is a distinct contribution of Hinduism to the religious philosophy of India. Buddhism and Jainism also uphold the concept of karma, with only a few modifications. Karma controls everything in the universe, both visible and invisible. Therefore, it is essential to understand karma--its effects, its role, and its remedy--in order to understand the four paths of liberation.

The word karma comes from the Sanskrit root word kri, which means to act, to do, or to perform. All actions are karma.¹ By further evolution, this word gained meanings of duty, religious rites, and the fruit of one's actions.² The word karma includes the cause as well as the effect in itself. Any action we perform through body or mind can be karma, such as moving, walking, talking, thinking, seeing, or hearing. All or any of these can be karma because all

¹Vivekananda, Karma-Yoga (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), 1.

²Ishanand Vempeny, Krsna and Christ (Pune: Ishvani Kendra, 1988), 200.

are categorized as physical or mental actions. Karma can never die. It is like a scorpion which causes pain.¹ However, it can be made painless through appropriate action (B.G. 3.35). We do karma all the time, even when we are sitting quietly or lying down. The mind does not cease thinking, "No one can rest even for an instant without performing action, for all are impelled by the Gunas [qualities], born of Prakriti [nature], to act incessantly" (B.G. 3.5) As long as we live, karma is inevitable: "Without work, even the bare maintenance of thy body would not be possible" (B.G. 3.8).

The Hindu scriptural sources for understanding karma are many—to name a few, the four Vedas, Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, and the Bhagavad Gita. Every writer on Hinduism cannot help but discuss the concept of karma in some form. Some renowned writers who provided valuable literature on karma are Vivekananda,² Bal Gangadhar Tilak,³ S.

¹Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gita Rahasya, 3^d ed. (Pune: Tilak Brothers, 1975), 912.

²Vivekananda, Karma-Yoga, 1984.

³Tilak, 1975.

Radhakrishnan¹, Surendranath Dasgupta,² and Swami Ranganathananda.³ These sources are but a sample of a great treasure of writings on Hinduism.

Categories of Karma

Our actions, whether physical, mental, or vocal, are classified into four categories. The first is sukla, which means white or virtuous; the second is krsna, which means black or wicked; the third is sukla-krsna, which means white-black or partly virtuous and partly wicked; the fourth is asukla-krsna, which means neither black nor white.⁴

The law of karma has built into it compensation for good deeds or retribution for bad deeds: "As it does and as it does, so it becomes: The doer of good becomes good, and the doer of evil becomes evil: so it becomes virtuous through a virtuous act and vicious through a vicious act" (Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5). Thus "the law of karma teaches that the virtuous reward themselves and the sinners

¹Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (New York: MacMillan, 1956).

²Surendranath Das Gupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, 5 vols. (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975).

³Ranganathananda, ed., Eternal Values for a Changing Society, 4 vols. (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1987).

⁴Gupta, 5:73.

punish themselves by their own thoughts and deeds or words."¹

Kinds of Karma

Though it is a general term which covers everything, karma contains distinct demarcations. Sacchita karma is that which is stored up or accumulated due to actions in the previous births. Prardha karma is the one responsible for our present birth. Kriyamana karma is what we are sowing now through our actions. Agami karma is our future actions. The word karma covers all of these distinct areas.

The karma of an individual follows until that person suffers for the bad deeds or is rewarded for the good deeds. All evil actions will surely have an adverse effect on an individual in any one of the rebirths on this earth. The acts of a former life do not end with the death of the body; instead, they leave an indelible trace on the mind or the soul.² For this reason, we must maintain equilibrium as long as we are under the law of karma (Santi Parva 3.207.19-20). Whatever we see in this world--human beings, animals, vegetables, minerals--is the result of karma. Whatever was

¹Abhadananda, Doctrine of Karma (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1975), 34.

²D. S. Sarma, A Primer of Hinduism (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987), 23.

manifested since time immemorial, whatever is on this globe at present, or whatever will be manifested in the future, is all due to the control and direct results of karma. Insects, animals, plants, kings, or coolies appear on this earth and act their part and disappear.¹ Everything is bound by karma because it is the universal law; even human beings cannot escape this law. The law of karma is so powerful that even the deities are not exempted.² The inevitable result of karma is bondage for the soul which has to undergo a number of rebirths in order to get rid of karma (evil).

The First Three Paths to Salvation

The purpose of this section is to present the first three paths of salvation, together with their weaknesses and their limitations. Though these three paths are listed in Hindu scripture and discussed by scholars, their practice has diminished during the last two centuries.

Karma Yoga, The Path of Good Works

The Bhagavad Gita presents karma yoga, also known as

¹Annie Besant, A Study in Karma (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1917), 6.

²Vivekananda, Complete Works of Vivekananda, 8 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 1:450.

karma marg, with marg meaning path, under the headings caste duty and karma, karma yoga and sacrifices, and limitations of karma yoga.

Karma Yoga was one of the basic paths in the time of the Mahabharata¹ (12:228:1; cf. 239.6; B.G. 3:3;), which speaks of karma yoga as well as jnana yoga (B.G. 4.1-3). In fact, karma yoga is the distinct contribution of the Gita, where it is discussed extensively, especially in chapters 2, 4, and 18. The Bhagavad Gita also refers to a chain of sages to whom karma yoga had been revealed. It is clear from the words of Sri Krishna that karma yoga was diminishing; he emphasized it to renew it (B.G. 9.13). Thus, the Bhagavad Gita built upon an ancient concept of karma yoga.

The Bhagavad Gita provides some fascinating information about those who attain liberation through karma yoga. King Janaka practiced Karma Yoga. He was not attached to his throne or any other luxury. He was liberated through this path (Santi Parva. 275.4; 219.50).

¹Mahabharata is the longest epic in the world. It has eighteen volumes comprising 90,000 stanzas. It is centered around the controversy between five good brothers called Pandavas and one hundred wicked brothers called Kauravas. The Pandavas achieve victory in the end. See Krishna Dwaipuyana Vyasa, The Mahabharata, 2d ed., 18 vols., trans. Pratap Chandra Roy (Calcutta: Datta Bose & Co., n.d).

Since karma yoga leads to liberation and action, it certainly deserves to be understood properly and its validity should not be undermined. In the light of the foregoing discussion, renouncing action immediately by the external organs is a hypocritical act. Even if anyone professed to renounce karma, in daily life it is impractical (B.G. 3.6). Hence, if action is unavoidable, it is essential to know what kind of action is recommended in the Gita.

Caste Duty and Karma

Human birth into any one of the four castes is determined by the karma of the previous life. No one has any choice in this matter. Neglect of caste duties amounts to sin. If one does not perform stipulated duties, evil karma follows (B.G. 3.32-33). For that reason, Arjuna was advised to fight in the war, because he belonged to the warrior caste (B.G. 4.16-18).

In addition to performing one's own duty, one must watch one's own actions, because this is a prescribed work. Thus, one should not boast of one's actions. Since caste duties are expected from all the castes, what type of action should be performed? Nishkama karma, motive-less action, is the only solution because the nishkama karma is the antidote

to the law of karma, the true remedy for karma.

Nishkama means desire-less or motiveless action.¹ It is to do something without expecting any reward or recognition: "To work without motive, to work unattached, brings the highest bliss and freedom."² It does not indicate any sense of non-action or refraining from action; rather it requires selfless action (B.G. 3.19). When people perform a motiveless action, evil karma does not result. Therefore, nishkama karma is an antidote to evil karma.

Karma Yoga and Sacrifices

Karma yoga requires sacrifices. The Sanskrit word is yajna or yaga. In its first phase, Hinduism was a religion whose worship centered not on idols but on sacrifices. The Rigveda, the earliest Hindu scripture, provides evidence for this (Rigveda 10.91.1-7).

The Bhagavad Gita affirms that the sacrifices people offer are the food for gods and goddesses. In return, they send rain, in order that mankind may cultivate and have food (B.G. 3:11-15).

¹I. C. Sharma, "Indian Ethics," in Indian Thought: An Introduction, ed. Donald H. Bishop (New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, 1975), 248.

²Vivekananda, Thoughts on the Gita (Calcutta: Job Press, 1981), 79.

Satapatha Brahmana, a book of Hindu scripture, contains three chapters on sacrifices. Chapter 1 deals with the horse sacrifice which was considered the most valuable; only kings could afford to offer it. Chapter 2 talks about the human sacrifice as the most efficacious one, while the third chapter describes other sacrifices, which include bloodless sacrifices, such as flowers, fruit, and leaves.

Every married man was required to offer five sacrifices each day. They were: (1) Rsi-Yajna: sacrifices to the sages, which included recitation of the sacred scriptures; (2) Pitr-Yajna: sacrifices to the ancestors, which included water and food; (3) Deva-Yajna: sacrifices to the gods, which included flowers, fruits, and cooked rice with milk and sugar; (4) Manusya-Yajna: sacrifices to fellowmen, which included food, clothing, and shelter to the needy; and (5) Bhuta-Yajna: sacrifices to all creatures, which included food, grain, water, and protection.¹

A Hindu man should also observe other sacrifices from time to time, during the festivals or on the death anniversary of ancestors. One might also offer special thanksgiving sacrifices to please or appease gods.

¹C. S. Venkateswaran, "The Ethics of the Puranas," in The Cultural Heritage of India, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, rev. ed. (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1937; Reprint, 1982), 2:293.

All the minute details of the sacrificial system are spelled out clearly in the Brahmanas, a section of sacred Hindu scriptures, and the Yajur Veda.¹ A qualified Brahmin priest is required to offer the blood sacrifices. In most cases, both blood and bloodless sacrifices are offered in a sacrificial fire as burnt offerings.

Limitations of Karma Yoga

This path is open only to high caste men. The untouchables are not eligible to pursue this path. Since this path requires a number of blood and bloodless sacrifices to gain the favor of the gods, it is expensive. Poor people cannot afford them. One has no way to know how much karma debt of previous lives is still accumulated. One is not sure how many rebirths one must undertake to repay for all the accumulated bad deeds. One cannot know in which birth he will be liberated. It is a hard task, humanly speaking, to do good all the time. Any wrong doing adds to the pile of karma which one has to repay by doing good works, if not in this birth, in some rebirth in the future.

Karma yoga can take a person only to the mid-heaven (lower heaven). Here one cannot live permanently. One can

¹There are four Vedas. Yajur Veda is the second one. It is considered as the manual of the Hindu priests. It is extensively used during the sacrifices.

enjoy the heavenly luxuries for a limited time, after which the soul must come down to this earth and be born again to pay for the accumulated bad deeds of previous births. One cannot attain the heaven of heavens through karma yoga.

This path is the longest route to liberation because it requires a series of births and rebirths to atone for the bad deeds of the past. If a soul lives a bad life, that soul will be reborn in the immediate next birth as an animal, such as a dog, a monkey, or a snake. It requires a number of rebirths to reach the stage of human existence. So this path is not the best for anyone to pursue.

Jnana Yoga, the Path of Knowledge

The Hindu writings contain different words in Sanskrit to emphasize specific aspects of knowledge, because the subject of knowledge is vast. For example, the word vidya emphasizes learning something in a systematic manner; prajna deals with knowing spiritual matters; samjna means to know introspectively, with inner feelings; jnana refers to meditative knowledge which leads to liberation. Jnana Yoga, also known as Jnana Marga, is the path of meditative knowledge. Krishna explained it to Arjuna in the Bhagavad

Gita, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, and 18.¹ Jnana Yoga was a very popular path in the time of the Upanishads, the second stage of Hinduism.²

The Bhagavad Gita uses the word buddhi, which means intelligence and refers to the use of positive thinking power and the will to make right decisions. Aurobindo defines buddhi as "to act with right intelligence and, therefore, a right will, fixed in the One, aware of the one self in all and acting out of its equal serenity, not running about in different directions under the thousand impulses of our superficial mental self, is the Yoga of the intelligent will."³

Vallabhacharya put forth a threefold division of knowledge: (1) the knowledge of self, (2) philosophical knowledge, and (3) the knowledge of god. Of these three, the last is said to be best. The knowledge of god liberates a person from samsara (cycle of birth and re-birth) and reunites the jivatma (individual soul) with paramatma

¹There are also scattered references to jnana marga in chapters 7, 8, 13, and 15 of Bhagavad Gita.

²Madhavananda, "A Bird's-Eye View of the Upanishads," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 1:348.

³Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1987), 88.

(god).¹

Scripture as Source of Knowledge

All the bhakti-acharyas (learned Brahmins) accepted the scriptural authority as the basic pramana (standard). The acharyas accepted the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma-Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita as scriptural authority for true knowledge. So scripture and intuition are recommended because god reveals his knowledge through sruti or intuition testimony.

K. V. Gajendragadkar says that "experimental, intuitive and direct knowledge of god alone deserved to be called real knowledge, which therefore is open only to spiritual insight."²

How Knowledge Works

Knowledge is like a boat to cross the river of ignorance (B.G. 4.36). Knowledge purifies any amount of sin. Though a person may be the worst sinner among sinners, that person can be purified by knowledge and cross the sea

¹K. V. Gajendragadkar, Teachings of Vallabhacharya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 159.

²Ibid., 161-162.

of sin safely to the other side.¹

Jnaneshvar says that:

knowledge is most powerful; it cannot be compared to any other because its magnitude is the greatest. Though it is a mine of sins, an ocean of confusion, a mountain of ignorance, all of these are impotent before the power of knowledge. As the grass cannot withstand the mighty power of the fire, any thing will be consumed by the fire of knowledge.²

Knowledge burns up all evil karma (B.G. 4.37).

Furthermore, it leads to liberation.³ Knowledge has power to guide the deluded soul in the right direction and to

bring the soul back into its right orbit, lost through

karma. Knowledge is the best purifier and the guide.

Sankaracharya says that "there is no alternative way than the purification of knowledge."⁴ Jnana is an efficacious

mode in leading a soul which is in bondage into freedom and liberty.

The true knowledge of god restrains the senses and brings bliss. A jnanin (one who attained knowledge) enjoys quiet, peace, and bliss. He directs his senses in a

¹Jnanadeva, Bhavartha Dipika or Jnaneshwari: Commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, trans. Ramchandra Keshav Bhavawat (Madras: Samata, 1989), 116-117.

²Ibid.

³Sankaracharya, Srimad Bhagavad Gita Brasya (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1983), 176.

⁴Ibid., 177.

virtuous manner (B.G. 5.24).

Ramakrishna Paramahansa "perfected his sense of sight so well that all women, including the street walker, were to him various embodiments of the divine mother. Sublimation of the senses was at its zenith in him. Mastery over the senses in this manner makes one competent to gain intuitive knowledge of the imperishable. This knowledge once obtained persists for ever."¹

Only through jnana can the soul attain a state of everlasting bliss.² When a person attains true knowledge, he will be liberated once for all. There is no need for any more rebirth in any form. The person who has attained true knowledge merges with god. As the river water flows into the sea and becomes part of the sea, so the liberated ones lose their identity and become one with god. The path of knowledge is the shortest path to liberation, if one finds true knowledge. It is only "jnana that directly leads to salvation."³

Limitations of Jnana Marga

This path is only for the high caste male members,

¹Chidbhavananda, The Bhagavad Gita: Commentary (Tirupparaitturai, India: Sri Ramakrishna Tapovanam, 1984), 202.

²C. Kunhan Raja, "Vedic Culture," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 1:209.

³Nalini Kanta Brahma, Philosophy of Hindu Sadhana (New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1988), 173.

specially the Brahmins. The low caste cannot pursue this path as they are prohibited from reading or hearing the sacred scriptures. Women are prohibited from studying the scriptures. This Yoga appeals to those intellectuals who are rationalistic by nature.¹ This path is largely confined to men who have inherited the privilege of studying the scriptures. The right teacher who can teach and guide is essential to progress in this path. This path is not open to children and the aged. Further, it is not clearly specified what the true knowledge that liberates is.

If all high caste males pursued the path of knowledge, life would come to a standstill, because everyone would be intensely involved in the search for only the true knowledge. They would not be able to attend to any other activity of life. If a teacher is incompetent or misleads, due to some personal bias, the aspirant will slide into the valley of ignorance. The best teachers of Hinduism can be the sages who live in meditation in forests and the mountains. All aspirants to true knowledge would have to go there in search of a true guru or spiritual teacher.

¹Nirvedananda, Hinduism at a Glance (Calcutta: S. Antool, 1984), 77.

Raja Yoga, the Kingly Path

The Sanskrit word Raja means King. Yoga means path. This path is viewed as the kingly path among the other paths to salvation. Sri Krishna spoke to Arjuna regarding the third alternate path to liberation that is Raja yoga (B.G. 5.21-28). The Gita uses the phrase Dyana yoga in chapters 5 and 6. Some scattered references are made in other chapters of Gita. The discourse on Raja yoga is summed up in the final chapter of the Gita, and Dyana yoga is presented as an alternate path for liberation (B.G. 6.33, 34).

Aurobindo defines Raja yoga as "selfless devotion of all the inner as well as the outer activities as a sacrifice."¹ Vereswarananda defined Raja yoga as the union of the embodied self with the supreme self.² Vivekananda says "Rajayoga is restraining the mind stuffs (chitta) from taking various forms (vyrttis)."³

Aids to Raja Yoga

Abstinence, observance, postures, breath control, withdrawal of sense, fixed attention, meditation, and

¹Aurobindo, Essays on Gita, 64.

²Vireswarananda, Srimad Bhagavad Gita (Madras: Sri Murugan, 1987), 193.

³Vivekananda, Raja Yoga (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982), 115.

contemplation are the eight aids to yoga.¹

The environment plays a significant role in Raja Yoga. The Gita suggests having an appropriate seat for meditation (B.G. 6.11), because contemplation involves long periods of time.² B.G. 6.11 contains a number of details regarding the seat.

Yoga recognizes the interdependence of the body and the mind.³ The postures help the mind to concentrate. Though there are many postures, all of them do not suit every person. Each has to choose the postures that will enable the best possible meditation. By the use of postures, consciousness becomes free from bondage and weaknesses, and realizes a boundless existence of infinite bliss.⁴

The Gita recommends an erect posture in which the back, neck, and head are in a vertical line (B.G. 6.13). Hatha Yoga (a sacred Hindu Treatise) devotes an entire chapter to postures. Badarayana says that contemplation is

¹M. R. Yardi, The Yoga of Patanjali (Pune: Bhandarkar Institute, 1979), 185.

²Chidbhavananda, 370.

³Kuvalayananda, Āsanās (Lonavala, India: Kaivalyadhama, 1933), 32.

⁴Ramamurti S. Mishra, The Fundamentals of Yoga (New York: Jultuen, 1960), 156.

possible only in a sitting posture, with legs crossed.¹

Sankara also affirms that sitting with crossed legs is the best posture.²

Anyone who practices Raja yoga must observe certain guidelines even in physical and daily activities. Yogis must select their food carefully because certain foods increase passions and cloud the mind. A person should be able to select the kind of food which helps in concentration (B.G. 6.16, 17).

Results of Raja Yoga

Gita allots a proper place to self-realization. It can be either friend or enemy through whom a person knows his own self.³ Any evil or disturbing thought must be put off, otherwise those thoughts will make the mind wander.⁴

When a mind is merged in god, the person's thoughts and actions are sanctified automatically. Persons of self-knowledge do not see into the assumed differences in human beings, animals, birds, and other creatures (B.G. 5.18). A

¹Brahma Sutras of Badarayana 4.1.7

²Sankaracharya, 245.

³Chidbhavananda, 377.

⁴Ramacharaka, Gnani Yoga (Mumbai: D. B. Taraporevala Sons, 1976), 34.

true yogi attains liberation by merging with Brahma, not only after death but also while living.¹ Thus, Raja yoga is a majestic way to liberate a person.

The entire outlook of those who follow the Raja yoga changes. They no longer strive with vested interests (B.G. 6.7-9). The attitude of universal oneness develops. The riches of this world do not matter. A beggar or a king, friend or enemy, a sinner or saint, gold or a stone, or anything which has the greatest value or the least value, all things are alike. This state of the yogi can be described as desire less. The person is able to discipline mind and senses, to focus only on god and meditation. This highest union between yogi and god is known as samadhi.²

Samadhi is the final stage of yoga in which the concentration of the mind reaches its peak. All the distractions and the wanderings of the mind are fully controlled.³ The yogi attains liberation in this state, called Jeevan Mukta.

By the dint of yoga, union with the supreme
I shall rise from the material earth
and sublimate myself

¹Chidbhavananda, 343.

²Robert N. Minor, Bhagavad Gita: An Exegetical Commentary (New Delhi: Heritage, 1982), 212.

³Mishra, 158.

to the loftiest region of heaven;
and from there ascend and rise
to the celestial realm of peace
for achieving perennial bliss, light and life. (Yajur
Veda 17.67)

The practice of yoga is meritorious. A yogi goes to the world of the gods and enjoys heavenly bliss. A yogi who fails to attain final liberation returns to this earth and takes rebirth in a house of a virtuous, pure, and wealthy person (B.G. 6.40-42).¹ However, as Sankara says, the one who fails to attain the goal of yoga attains merit equivalent to a horse sacrifice.²

The yogi is regarded as greater than the ascetic, greater than even men of knowledge, and greater also than those devoted to work. Therefore, one should strive to be a yogi (B.G. 6.35, 36). Raja yoga is elevated as a better path than jnana and Karma yoga because it leads the yogi towards divinity.³

¹According to the law of karma, souls reincarnate in the environments befitting their attainments (see Chidbhavananda, 404).

²Sankaracharya, 247. The horse sacrifice was a perfect and highest sacrifice in vedic times. Only kings could offer such an expensive sacrifice. The king who offered it attained the world of gods (B.G. 6.40-44).

³Mishra, 96.

Limitations of Raja Yoga

This path is limited to only a few who have the determination to sit and meditate for a long time. This path is not open to all castes, nor to all age groups. Children and teenagers are not eligible to pursue this path. This path is exclusively for high caste men. If all take up this path, the world will come to a halt as all will be engaged in meditation. There would be no one to cultivate the land or manufacture anything. The human race would perish because there would be no procreation.

On the other hand, this path has the potential risk that the yogi may not attain liberation if something is lacking in meditation. It is not a certain path.

Bhakti Yoga, the Way of Love

Bhakti gives a higher and more powerful direction.¹ The word bhakti comes from Sanskrit root baj, meaning to bind or to unite with god.

Definitions of Bhakti

The basic meaning of bhakti remains the same, whereas different aspects of bhakti appeal to different bhaktas

¹Vivekananda, What Religion Is, ed. Vidyatmananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, reprint 1978), 245.

(devotees). Each teacher comes to emphasize one or the other of its different aspects in his declared definition, hence we have many apparently different definitions.

The Hindu scripture Bhagavata also speaks of bhakti. In the definition of the Maitreya, "Bhakti consists in the mind naturally setting upon the Highest Truths, the root of all existence as well as of the senses" (Bhagavata 3.25.32, 33). "Bhakti is a supreme love and a form of renunciation."¹ For Kapila, bhakti is the "uninterrupted thought flowing towards god seated in the hearts of all creatures, like the flow of the waters of the Ganges towards the sea" (Bhagavata 3.29.11, 12).

For Garga, bhakti consists of fondness for hearing and chanting the virtues and glories of God.² The bhakta tells the wonderful stories of the lord Krishna, composes hymns, engages in sankirtana, and pronounces discourses on the divine nature. Since the person loves the lord so much, he or she utilizes each opportunity to present god in whatever way possible and suitable to the moment.³

¹Tyagisananda, The Gospel of Divine Love or Narada Bhakti Sutras (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1983), 3.

²Hanuman Prasad Poddar, The Philosophy of Love (Gorokpur: Ghanshyamdas, 1940), 59-60.

³Tyagisananda, 107.

For Prahlada, bhakti makes "the love which the indiscriminating have for the objects of the senses, be turned into bhakti by being directed towards god."¹ He adds: "That deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of the senses--as I keep meditations on thee--may not that love slip away from my heart."²

For Sandilya, a Hindu saint who wrote aphorisms on bhakti, bhakti is infinite attachment to god (Sandilya Bhakti Sutras 1.1.2). "Bhakti is supreme attachment to god, which is not opposed to love of self."³ God exists in each being as a soul; therefore, attachment to the soul of the universe is bhakti.

According to Narada, bhakti is infinite love for god.⁴ Also "bhakti consists in offering all activities to god and feeling supremely restless and miserable at the slightest lapse in remembrance of god."⁵ The bhakta consecrates all activities to god and remembers god constantly, because god is very dear to him. Even a moment

¹Ibid., 104.

²Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 9-10.

³Poddar, 62, 63.

⁴Tyagisananda, 2.

⁵Ibid.

of separation from god causes great anguish and real loss, for the bhakta finds himself in a pathetic condition. Narada's definition is comprehensive and focuses on the very essence of bhakti (Narada Bhakti Sutras 1.3). Total self-surrender is the peak in a bhakti relation, thus each act done in this spirit is virtuous.¹

Veda Vyasa says: "Bhakti consists in attachment to god and other allied practices."² The bhakta feels that body, mind, and intellect are the objects in the worship of god, whether it is external, internal, or mental.

According to Sri Sankara, "bhakti is constant thought on the real nature of one's own self" (Vivekacudamani 17). He also says: "We have bhakti when the thoughts approach the feet of the lord and stick to them permanently, as the seed approaches the angola tree; an iron needle, the magnet; a virtuous wife, her husband; or a creeper, a tree" (Sivanandalahari 61).

Swami Vivekananda defines bhakti yoga as a real and genuine search after the lord, a search beginning and ending in love.³ Sri Aurobindo explains bhakti as absolute self-

¹Ibid., 108, 109.

²Podar, 58, 59.

³Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, 3

giving and one-minded surrender.¹ For Nikhilananda, bhakti "on the spiritual level is that which unites man with god."²

The Nine-fold Bhakti

The Nine-fold bhakti is described in the seventh canto of Bhagavata Purana³ (7.5.23), as presented by Prahlada, a devotee of god from his childhood.

These nine types of bhakti can be classified under three subgroups.

Passive Bhakti

The first set of three--listening, singing, and remembering--are voluntary activities of any individual. They are a great help to cultivate the attitude of bhakti in one's mind.

¹Aurobindo, Essays on Gita, 304.

²Nikhilananda, Hinduism: Its Meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 105.

³There are 18 Puranas which are part of Hindu scriptures. Bhagavata Purana is one of the widely known in bhakti literature. It contains the incarnations of Vishnu. The lord Krishna's life as a cow-herd boy is narrated. It highlights the bhakti relationship with fascinating accounts of bhaktas. See Sindhu S. Dange, The Bhagavata Purana: Mytho-Social Study (Delhi: Ajanta, 1984).

Sravanam

Listening to the glories of god has tremendous benefits, not to be gained through any other means. Purification of mind comes through this listening (B.P. 11.6.9). Hence, listening to the glories of god is highly recommended.¹

Sravanam has a great impact on the masses, especially the illiterate and the peasants. Hearing about the glories of god enriches their lives with joy, establishing an intimate relationship with god. Without this method of listening to god's glory the illiterate would not have any opportunity to know about god. Since this method is suitable to all classes of people, the sanyasis (sages) fully utilize this method to tell the stories of god, even in the remote villages, night after night. The fourth canto of the Bhagavatam says that one should stay at a place where devotees narrate the glories of god. It also notes that those who listen to them would not have hunger, thirst, fear, or sorrow, and would be freed from all materialism (Srimad Bhagavatam² 4.29.40).

¹Vishnu Puri, Bhakti Ratnavali or A Necklace of Devotional Gems: An Anthology from Bhagavata, trans. Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1979), 153.

²Srimad Bhagavatam is also one of the portions of Hindu scripture. It contains the life of lord Krishna. A number of prominent bhaktas and their lives with a special emphasis on

Kirtanam

Srimad Bhagvatam (2.1.11) emphasizes kirtanam, the use of music. According to Bhagavat Purana, when the cows heard the flute music of Krishna in Brindavana, their production of milk increased abundantly. Since music and singing have such an effect, the sages sang about god. For example, Prahlada sang loudly for he could not control himself (B.P. 7.4.396).

Suka attaches the most desired liberation to singing: "O king this chanting of the name of Hari (god) has been prescribed as the sure means of attaining liberation for those deserving emancipation, and wishing freedom from fear and for yogins" (B.P. 2.1.2).

Narada, a great sage, sang about god frequently. Singing the glories of god is an excellent method of cultivating and practicing bhakti (Srimad Bhagavatam 2.1.11).

Throughout India, the stories of gods are narrated in ballad form. The stories are told through a number of songs with a brief description between songs. This popular method is so effective that people stay awake and listen late into

bhakti are highlighted. See Krishana Dwaipayana Vyasa, The Srimad Bhagavatam, 2d ed., trans. J. M. Sanyal, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Munshi Manoharlal, 1973).

the night.¹

Smaranam

Remembering god's glories, as well as listening to them and singing them, is an essential aspect of human existence. "The remembrance of god and repetitions of his name effect the purification of the seeker's initial love of god."²

Active Bhakti

Active bhakti involves the second set of thanksgiving, anointing, and prostrating oneself. These involve faith as well as works. The devotee not only believes, but also expresses gratitude by offering material means involving some expense. The second stage shows the devotee has progressed beyond belief to the willingness to spend money and time to worship god.

Padasevanam

Padasevanam means serving the feet of god. The devotees wash the feet of an idol with coconut water.

¹Chandra Kumari Handoo, Tulasīdāsa (Mumbai: Orient Longmans, 1964), 30.

²Ranganathananda, 1:165.

Hence, breaking the coconut is a part of worship. Some devotees wash the feet of an idol with cow's milk.

Since elders and parents are considered next to god, it is common in India for the younger person to touch the feet of the older one or teacher to express deepest respect or ask for forgiveness.¹ Hindus believe that by touching the feet of a sage or temple priest, they will be purified from sins and receive a blessing.

Feet are often considered lowly since we walk with our feet and they are the lowest part of the body. However, worship of the feet of god, considered the lowest part of god, will bring the greatest blessing. The worshiper who worships the feet of god shows humility.

Archanam

Archanam means anointing. In Hinduism, people anoint the idols for blessing. This form of bhakti is connected with image worship. Archanam is also popularly known as Pooja.² No one can anoint the invisible god, so there should be something concrete which a devotee can anoint. The work of anointing the image with sandalwood paste, incense, flowers, perfumed oil, or any other substance used

¹Tyagisananda, 213.

²Ibid., 230.

for worship gives satisfaction to a devotee as though the act were done directly to god. In this act, devotion, reverence for sacredness, and the longing to do something as a mark of love and gratitude are shown.

Vandanam

Vandanam means prostrating before god.¹ Thanksgiving is essential to a devotee for life and day-to-day survival, and even for liberation one would attain by the grace of god. No ungrateful person can have bhakti. Vandanam stands for humility and surrender, without which bhakti is not at all possible.

Relational Bhakti

The third set of serving, establishing friendship, and taking refuge in god is a more advanced form of bhakti because it involves not only belief or offering something but establishing a long-lasting relationship with god.

Dasyam

Dasyam implies serving god with humility. K. C. Vardhachari says that dasyam means the service of god without any commercial motive or payment, but purely out of

¹Ibid., 239.

love.¹ Sri Rupa Gauswami emphasizes that servitude is constantly engaging oneself in the service of god. So, when the bhaktas serve god they become pure bhaktas or bhagavatas.² Prabhupada quotes the following statement from a Narada purana: "A person who is constantly engaged in devotional service, who is not practically engaged but simply desiring to be so, is considered to be liberated."³ This statement expresses the reward of those who serve or have a true desire to serve god.

Sakhyam

Sakhyam means friendship with god.⁴ A true friend can make any sacrifice to help a friend. Thus, Arjuna the friend of Sri Krishna alone had the distinctive privilege of viewing the cosmic form of Sri Krishna. As a friend, Arjuna dared to pose a number of personal questions which Krishna did not hesitate to answer. Sakhyam or friendship is a very intimate and superior aspect in the bhakti relationship. It

¹K. C. Vardhachari, Alvars of South India (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966), 39.

²A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Chaitanya (New York: International Society for Krishna Consciousness, 1968), 109-110), 44.

³A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, The Nectar of Devotion: Complete Science of Bhakti Yoga (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1982), 96.

⁴Tyagisananda, 245.

involves absolute confidence in god as a true friend and the best guide in all affairs of our life.

Atmanivedanam

Atamanivedanam implies surrendering oneself completely to god and taking refuge in god. Krishna recommended self-surrender (B.G. 18.57) and also promised to free the bhakta from all sins (B.G. 18.66) on taking refuge in him, because "the first essential for an aspirant after true unadulterated devotion to god is self-surrender."¹

Neither brother, nor father, nor mother, nor wife, nor son, neither pride of birth nor enormous strength I have, nor do I see anyone to help me: therefore, O wielder of the Conch, I take refuge in you.²

Total surrender is the highest means to develop bhakti, as can be seen in the following words of Krishna:

A person who has completely surrendered unto me and completely given up all other activities is protected by me personally, both in this life and in the next. In other words, I wish to help him become more and more advanced in spiritual life, such a person is to be understood as having already achieved mukti [salvation]. (Srimad Bhagavatam 11.29.34)

When a bhakta surrenders, he need not worry about anything because god cares for him. The immortal words from

¹Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aphorisms (Calcutta: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1977), 10.

²Chinmayananda, Prayers unto Him, 2d ed. (Madras: Chinmaya Publication Trust, 1985), 116.

Haribhakti-viveka, quoted by Prabhupada, shed more light on this point: "My dear lord, as a sold animal has no need to think about his maintenance and sustenance, so, because I have given up my body and soul unto you, I am no longer concerned with my maintenance and sustenance."¹ This paves the way for total liberation. Thus, atmanivedanam is recommended as the surest bhakti aspect to attain liberation.

All nine kinds of Bhakti are related, yet each has the potential to liberate. A good number of scholars think that all the nine steps are to be observed for liberation, but each aspect is capable of uniting the bhakta with god. Hence, all nine need not be followed by a devotee for liberation. Any one aspect is sufficient to attain liberation. Since all nine are related to each other, we may find more than one aspect, sometimes almost all of them, being practiced by bhaktas. In his nineteenth aphorism Narada emphasized this very fact. A bhakta must surrender all activities, secular and sacred, as an act of love.²

¹Prabhupada, The Nectar of Devotion: Complete Science of Bhakti Yoga, 98.

²Chinmayananda, 33.

Madhura Bhakti

Madhura means conjugal love, the form of love which exists between wife and husband. This is also known as viraha bhakti. Its influence and effect are strong and deep throughout India.

However, viraha bhakti aroused bitter criticism from within and without Hinduism due to the depiction of vulgar scenes of gods and goddesses at many temples throughout India. Viraha bhakti is attacked as the immorality of Krishna, who was entangled in a sex scandal. Krishna's affair with the milkmaids was an open blow to morality.¹ This subject is sensational, yet it occupies a significant place in bhakti religion.

The poetic style in which Bhagavat Purana portrays the erotic scenes of Sri Krishna indicates that it is not to be taken as a literal event but symbolically to draw out a religious meaning. Thus, an allegorical interpretation of the erotic scenes of the Bhagavat Purana seem to be justifiable. Sheridan explains that Bhagavata Purana is full of symbolism.² Thus, an allegorical interpretation is possible.

¹M. G. Matthew, Geetha Simplified with Expositions from the Bible (Perumbavoor, Kerala: Truth and Life, 1993), 311.

²Ibid., 112.

Knowing the supreme ideals of a true Hindu wife, emotional bhakti writers used the symbol of a woman to express the highest devotion to God. A woman is said to be dependent from birth till death. In her childhood a female must be subject to her father; in youth to her husband; when her lord is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be independent.¹ Though this situation is being reversed now, it prevailed in the past. This analogy fits well in the bhakti relationship.

The devotee, like a woman, totally depends on god at every stage. Sheridan beautifully portrays this, "The Hindu wife is the ideal of co-genital fidelity, total devotion, and self-surrender extending even to heroic sacrifice of self."² People in the past accepted this form of bhakti without any resentment because they were accustomed to this type of symbolism.³ The viraha bhakti literature should not be treated as vulgar or controversial; instead, looking

¹F. Max Müller, ed., The Laws of Manu, trans. G. Bühler, The Sacred Books of the East, 25 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 195.

²Daniel P. Sheridan, The Advaitic Theism of the Bhagavata Purana (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 115.

³Bhagabat Kumar Goswami Shastri, The Bhakti Cult in Ancient India, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies, 52 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1965), 257-260.

at it from the angle of Alvars¹ and later emotional bhakti writers, it should be considered as important. In like manner, the devotees "develop uninterrupted attachment to krsna."² Dinamani says that the milkmaids left everything and came to Krishna.³ They did not fear anyone, including their parents, brothers, or husbands because of their intense desire for Krishna.⁴

Barriers to Bhakti

Bhakti is the best path to take a devotee safely to heaven. The bhaktas can be fully confident in attaining the ultimate goal through bhakti in this life, irrespective of the caste into which they were born or their gender. Bhakti is the easiest path because the number of risks are fewer than in the other paths (B.G. 9.32). However, bhakti marga is not completely free of impediments. Bhakti contains risks of which a bhakta must be aware. If the devotee knows that there will be some barriers, even in the path of

¹The Alvars were South-Indian Hindu writers on bhakti literature, particularly on emotional bhakti, which contains sex symbols.

²Thomas Dabre, The God-Experience of Tukaram: A Study on Religious Symbolism (Pune: Jaydeep, 1987), 175.

³E. R. Dinamani, Krishna: The Darling of Brindavan (Madras: Freedom, 1974), 45.

⁴Ibid., 46.

bhakti, then he or she can be careful to see and take the necessary precautions to overcome the obstacles.

It is possible to list innumerable obstacles that could hinder one's progress in bhakti yoga. The sage Narada discussed this thorny issue in aphorisms 61-65 contained in his bhakti sutras. The brief section from Narada on this topic will suffice to warn any devotee of the inevitable road-blocks which a bhakta confronts.

External Barriers

Women

If the thoughts of a bhakta linger on a woman, it is impossible to concentrate on god because such thoughts arouse passion.¹ Thus, passion is a dangerous obstacle to a bhakti. A devotee needs to get away from any avenue by which he may be entangled in thoughts about a woman.

On the other hand, a householder is not denied from pursuing bhakti yoga. However, a bhakta who lives a life of householder should stick to his wife alone. Many bhaktas attained the summit of bhakti though they had a wife and children; among those was Tukarama, a Hindu saint from Dehu

¹Poddar, 211-212.

Gaon, on the outskirts of Pune.¹ But if a bhakta chooses to practice celibacy, he should maintain chastity throughout his lifetime. If the lustful thought about a woman enters the mind, it greatly disturbs. Therefore such thoughts should never be entertained.

Wrong company

It is futile to be in the company of atheists. Association with such people greatly disturbs the mind of a devotee. It is wise to "avoid discussions with those who say 'I don't believe in God.' Their persuasions may make you suspect your own spiritual efforts, and force you to doubt the efficacy of your Bhakti to God."² The questions and the counter questions of unbelievers, the proof which they require about god, moksha, and other topics, may confuse the mind of bhakta, because he is still a beginner. This may result in slipping from the path because unbelief engulfs that person.

Evil company should be renounced, that is, human beings who walk in evil paths, do evil deeds, and think evil thoughts. These destroy the tender love of the devotee for

¹R D. Ranade, Mysticism in Maharashtra (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1933, reprint, 1982), 272.

²Chinmayananda, 118.

god.¹

Evil company also can include exposure to bad books, scenes, words, and songs. The printed page has tremendous power to turn people from good to bad or bad to good. Whatever we feed into the brain, the same comes out.² Descriptions and illustrations from a bad book stay in the mind and often multiply and corrupt the mind, as well as the entire being, if not checked.³ Whatever is dominating the mind can be seen outwardly in a person's words, actions, and looks.

The following preventive guidelines would protect a bhakta from pitfalls in their journey to heaven.

One should avoid the association of unholy non-devotees. One should not attempt to have many disciples. One should be equipoised both in gain and in loss. One should not be subject to any kind of lamentation. One should not disrespect demigods or other scriptures. One should not tolerate blaspheming the supreme lord and his devotees. One should avoid ordinary topics of novels and fiction, but there is no injunction that one should avoid hearing ordinary news. One should not give any trouble to any living creature, including a small being.⁴

These external obstacles can keep a devotee from

¹Ibid., 73.

²Aswini Kumara Dutta, Bhakti Yoga, 3d rev. ed., trans. Gunada Charan Sen (Mumbai: Baharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981), 28.

³Ibid., 33.

⁴Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Chaitanya, 109-110.

progressing forward in bhakti. Hence, one must guard carefully all the time until liberation is attained.

A bhakta should never be content in avoiding and overcoming the outward obstacles. He must be more careful about internal obstacles which are equally harmful.

Internal Barriers

A person's own emotions can provide formidable barriers to reaching bhakti.

Lust

Lust is a by-product of evil thoughts. Thus, it originates in the mind. Lust has the capacity to turn a man or a woman into a brute.¹

Working like a strong poison, lust pushes a bhakta who may be in the middle or even at the peak into the deepest valley, thus requiring great amounts of time and energy to re-climb the mountain. This can be avoided by staying away from the possibility of temptation. Devotees are no exception.

Anger

Anger is one of the most damaging forces in human

¹Dutta, 61.

beings. Though the causes of anger may differ, the result of anger is always unpleasant and damaging. When anger is not controlled and suppressed, it makes us inhuman to the extent of even losing affinity with loved ones. The undesirable effects of anger are aptly described in the Mahabharata (Mahabharata Vanaparva 29.3-6, 18).

Anger is the cause of human ruin. Under its influence human beings commit sins, kill even their elders,¹ abuse whatever is good and deserves respect, and cannot discriminate between proper and improper language. There is nothing they would not say or do when angry. They would kill those who do not merit death and honor those who deserve it. Anger leads human beings even to commit suicide. Blinded by anger, a person does not see an action in its true light, and is lost to all sense of duty and propriety (Mahabharata, Vana Parva, 292.8).

The battles and wars which are being fought are large manifestations of anger between nations.² Anger is a bitter enemy because it seriously affects the health of human beings. Aswini Kumar Dutta points to amazing effects of anger on health: epilepsy, insanity, hysteria, hemorrhage, and loss of appetite. These affect the brain and disturb

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

the digestive system. Since body and mind are interrelated and interconnected, physical or mental sickness or weakness seriously affects the bhakta's concentration on god, thus making it impossible to think clearly or comprehend the glories of God.¹

A bhakta must have internal peace and peace with fellow human beings in order to avoid this wildfire. Since a bhakta is also a normal human being, even if he gets angry, he must resolve the problem and be reconciled. A bhakta who gets angry must settle that issue on that day, before the sun sets, so that the bhakta can end the day without any mental disturbance in order to experience serenity (Mahabharata, Vana Parva, 28.31). Bhaktas ought to cultivate a meek and a mild temperament which can be a safeguard against anger.²

The Mahabharata says that a mild temperament wins even a hard heart. Therefore, a mild temperament is efficacious. Overcoming hidden anger is necessary to maintain health and a good connection with god.³

¹Ibid., 62-63.

²Ibid., 70.

³Ibid., 64.

Greed

Greed is another attribute present in human beings. It can be seen in all stages of life from a young child to a very old person. It is observed that greed is inborn and multiplies as we grow.

The Mahabharata says, "Greed owes its origin to ignorance. It subsides as soon as you realize the transitory nature of the pleasures it seeks" (Mahabharata, Santi Parva, 163.20). Hitopadesam warns that "greed begets wrath, lust, illusion, and eventually ruin. It is the source of all sin."¹ Anyone who is caught up in greed falls into endless misery. The best option is to avoid greed.

Srimad Bhagavatham advises that enjoyment cannot pacify desire and thus everything on this earth will not be sufficient to be satisfied. Because of this one should shun the longing for material things (Srimad Bhagavatam, 9.19).

Sri Krishna presented satvika bhakta as the best class of bhakta because the satvika nature looks not only at other human beings, but also to all other beings as co-travelers on the path of moksha (B.G. 18.20). Satvika in us would be the best safeguard to avoid greed. Since selfless

¹Ibid., 74.

love is central to bhakti, a true bhakta by all means must eliminate greed and grow in selfless love day by day till he attains the goal.

Attachment

It is observed that we are attached to many objects, people, and comforts. Often we feel that those things to which we are attached are our own forever.

Padmapurana says, "This is my father, this is my mother, this is my wife and this is my house--that which causes this feeling of 'mine', is infatuation."¹ This kind of feeling or understanding originates in ignorance. Attachment pushes people into a cycle of births and rebirths.² Hence attachment to mundane aspects must be avoided.

Additional emotions such as jealousy and hypocrisy also seriously cripple bhakta, since these obstacles are devastating. The only protection for any devotee is complete self-surrender to god. If everything is offered at the feet of god, there remains nothing but the love for god in the mind of a bhakta, who does everything for the glorification of god. In such a state, even negative

¹Ibid., 81.

²S. D. Gupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, 3:51.

feelings such as desire (karma), anger (krodha), delusion (moha), misery (lobha), arrogance (mada), and unhealthy competitiveness (matsarya) can be successfully directed to god, to be transformed into a positive love relationship with god, though they are negative feelings. So a devotee can successfully attain the state of liberation by carefully avoiding these pitfalls and total self-surrender.¹

Superiority of Bhakti

Bhakti has a number of advantages over the other three ways of liberation. In fact, it seems to be superior to the other paths to salvation. Brown affirms this by saying that "the way of Salvation is the way of devotion."² To establish the superiority of bhakti, Narada and Sandilya, in their bhakti sutras, lord Krishna in his discourse in the ninth chapter of Bhagavad Gita, and a galaxy of Bhaktas praise its unique place. Swami Chinmayananda writes: "Among all the means for Liberation pre-eminent is devotion; and the quest for one's own Reality is called Devotion."³ Mahendranath Gupta emphasizes the role of bhakti which can remove sins by saying: "our sins disappear at the chanting

¹Puri, 247.

²David A. Brown, A Guide to Religions (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1991), 73.

³Chinmayananda, 240.

of God's name and glories,"¹ especially in the last days:
 "for the Kaliyuga (these last days which are wicked) the
 path of Bhakti is especially good."²

Forgiveness and Grace

Only bhakti offers forgiveness from God for sin. The other paths do not contain this element. The most wicked person who worships god through bhakti will be accepted by god (B.G. 9.30). If one chants the name of god through bhakti, all the sins of that person will disappear.³

The grace of god is vital in bhakti, whereas there is no mention of the grace of god in the other three paths. Grace is given a prominent place in bhakti.⁴

The grace of god in Hinduism contains a number of benefits for the devotees. Nothing can be achieved without god's grace.⁵ The grace of god is beyond human comprehension. It "makes the dumb eloquent and the lame to

¹Mahendranath Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), 115.

²Ibid., 114.

³Ibid., 115.

⁴Ranganathananda, Divine Grace (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1980), 60.

⁵Ibid., 42.

cross the mountains."¹ Through one atom of the grace of god, pure bhakti is attained. This grace brings liberation.² Liberation is through bhakti which is through the lord's grace.³ Fallon writes that "grace here plays the predominant role, this bhakti is pure grace, not the result of man's striving or systematic pursuit."⁴

By the grace of the Supreme God, self-existent,
Ominiscient All-bliss, Source of Life,
The Dispeller of all sufferings and All-pervading.
We meditate on the most excellent glory
Of the supreme God
That He may lead us to noble works. (Yajur 36.3)

"May the divine fountain of eternal grace and joy enter your soul"(Rigveda 1.91.11).

Means of Grace

The grace of god, which is profitable in various ways to people can be obtained in association with devotees and spiritual teachers. The help of a teacher on spiritual

¹Ibid., 52.

²Ibid., 36.

³Gavin Flood, An Introduction to Hinduism (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 246.

⁴P. Fallon, "Doctrinal Background of the Bhakti Spirituality," in Religious Hinduism, ed. R. De Smet and J. Neuner (Mumbai: St. Paul's, 1996), 308.

matters is considered as a gift of divine grace.¹ Divine grace can be obtained through holy men and gurus, for they stand in the place of god. "The company of holy men and true devotees . . . which is itself regarded as divine favour, is another important channel of divine grace."²

Divine Grace Is for All

Chinmayananda says that "with an ever-cheerful face and eyes, the Lord is always disposed to shower His Grace upon his devotees."³ The grace of god is like wind. It is not limited to any individual or place. It is for all people in the whole world. God's grace is compared to a wind blowing forever and ever. Only those who spread their sail are benefitted by it. Those who do anything with wholehearted concentration will receive the grace of God.⁴

Grace and Liberation

Even the soul, according to its karma, journeys from one body to another and is finally liberated through the efforts of yoga and the grace (prasada) of the lord with

¹Ranganathananda, Divine Grace, 32.

²Fallon, 309.

³Chinmayananda, 140.

⁴Vivekananda, Complete Works, 5:394.

whom it is united.¹ According to Hardy, the Srivaisnava theologians hold the view that "divine grace requires at least a token of human co-operation," whereas the theologians predominantly rooted in the Sanskritic Vedanta hold the view that "grace alone can save."² The pivotal significance given to grace makes the bhakti path superior.

Transformation of the Most Wicked

The bhakti relationship with god transforms even the most wicked person in this life itself. "Even if the very wicked person worships Me with undivided devotion, he should be regarded as righteous, for he is rightly resolved" (B.G. 9.30)

Chidbhavananda highlights the efficacy of bhakti: "Many a sinner has within the span of a single life time after conversion changed into the divine. The oldest case known to us is that of the sage Valmiki."³ Valmiki was a dacoit who robbed and killed people. He then entered into a bhakti relationship with god. His life was transformed and he became a saint. He wrote the entire Ramayana epic in

¹Flood, 135.

²Friedhelm Hardy, The Religious Culture of India (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 477-478.

³Chidbhavananda, 519.

Sanskrit.

The change from sinner to saint cannot take place in one lifespan through other paths, because "as it does and as it acts, so it becomes: The doer of good becomes good, and the doer of evil becomes evil: it becomes virtuous through a virtuous act and vicious through a vicious act"

(Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5) However, bhakti is the superior path. It can transform a sinner into saint through the relationship of love between the devotee and god in this life itself.

Openness to All

Untouchables

In his opening aphorism, Narada made it clear that bhakti has no barrier for anyone. The same idea is reiterated in aphorism 72. Anyone can pursue this path. For the other three paths to moksha, there are many stipulations and impediments; only high caste people are eligible for religious rites.¹ However, anyone who is

¹"A Sudra should not listen to the Hindu scriptures while they are being recited. If they do, molten tin liquid should be poured into their ears" (Apasthamba Brahma 2.75). The Sudras could not be expected to study the Vedas and if they read the Hindu scriptures, their tongue should be cut (Manu Smriti 4.53). (See H. C. Chakladar, "Some Aspects of Social Life in Ancient India," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 2:559).

genuinely interested in loving God can tread the bhakti path and reach the destination.

Only in bhakti is the spiritual equality of all devotees recognized, irrespective of caste.¹ "Castes have no significance for God-realization. . . . Pride of caste has never made any man holy. . . . The untouchables have crossed the ocean of life by God-devotion . . . [like] Chokhamela, the outcaste, . . . Janabai, the maid."² Bhakti liberates even the Sudras (untouchables), who are not eligible for any spiritual ceremonies or allowed into the Hindu temples.

According to Klaus,

Bhakti had a wide appeal from the very beginning, not only because it recognized the emotional approach to God as fully valid but also because it broke down all the barriers of privilege, which had kept large groups of the population from Karma Marga and Jnana Marga. Bhakti became the way of salvation for everyone: women and children, low castes and outcastes could become fully recognized members of the bhakti movement.³

The god Krishna promises liberation even to the Sudras if they practice bhakti. "For those who take refuge in Me, O Partha, though they be of inferior birth--women,

¹T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, "The Smrtis: Their Outlook and Character," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 2:320.

²Ranade, .

³Klaus K. Klostermaier, A Survey of Hinduism (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989), 212.

Vaisyas and Sudras--even they attain the supreme goal" (B.G. 9.32). "Though low-born, a sinner and despised, if one should but once say, 'I am Yours,' You grant him a seat in Your own Abode."¹

Women

Women are not given equal status physically or spiritually. They are considered inferior to man by birth (B.G. 9.32). In 1888, Pandita Ramabai presented the plight of Hindu women in her book, The High Caste Hindu Woman.²

During the Vedic period, about 1500 B.C., Hinduism closed its "doors to women and the Sudras."³ According to Vivekananda, "though a wife is absolutely necessary in the sacrifice of the domestic fire, which is a vedic rite, she may not touch the Salagama Shila, or the household-idol."⁴

During the epic period (tenth to sixth centuries B.C.) women were "regarded as intrinsically evil, spiritually contaminated, poisoning by their very presence

¹Chinmayananda, 117.

²Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, The High Caste Hindu Woman (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888).

³P. L. Vaidya and A. D. Pusalker, "The Mahabharata: Its History and Character," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 2:68.

⁴Vivekananda, Complete Works, 5:229.

and obstacles to salvation."¹ Pandita Ramabai recognized this position when she noted that women were considered worse than demons and unworthy of salvation: "women of high and low caste, as a class were bad, very bad, worse than demons, as unholy as untruth; and that they could not get Moksha as men."²

Unless a woman is reborn as a man, she cannot attain salvation or be liberated according to the other paths.³ It is the "teaching of some sects that women cannot obtain final emancipation, the highest bliss of heaven, until in later lives they have been born as men."⁴

However, the bhakti relationship offers liberation to women in this life itself. Since bhakti is superior it offers salvation to those who are not eligible through any of the other three paths (B.G. 9.32).

Children

All, regardless of age, can practice bhakti. Even

¹Benjamin Walker, Hindu World (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1986), 2:603-604.

²Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, A Testimony of Our Inexhaustible Treasure, 11th ed. (Kedgaon, Pune: Pandita Ramabai Mukti Mission, 1992), 19.

³Ibid., 19.

⁴W. J. Wilkins, Modern Hinduism (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), 181.

children can practice bhakti. Prahlada was the son of a demon king. He practiced bhakti from his childhood. He says,

Wise people should cultivate the devotional-mode of life from boyhood itself. For, human birth, in which alone God-realization--the supreme end of man's existence --can be had, is rare and difficult to get; and besides life is short and precarious. (B.P. 7.6.19)

There is no age limitation to establish a bhakti relationship with god. The other three paths to salvation do not have any provision for the children but bhakti considers children as capable of pursuing the path of devotion. They are also worthy to inherit salvation.

It is not difficult to please Achyuta [the Immutable One]. He is the innermost self of all beings and is therefore close to everyone. He is also easy to propitiate, and therefore attainable to anyone, anywhere. O Children! there is no difficulty in practicing devotion to Sri Hari, as He infills the hearts of one and all alike the Akasa [sky]. (B.P. 7.7.38)

Ease of Sacrifice

Those who have the bhakti relationship can offer even a little to god, which he accepts as a full sacrifice. Krishna says, "He who, with devotion, offereth to Me a leaf, a flower, a fruit and water, that love-offering I accept, made by the pure-hearted" (B.G. 9.25).

The Hindu sacrificial system contains a number of ingredients that make it expensive. A Brahmin priest is

essential to offer any sacrifice, whereas the bhakti relationship has simplified the entire sacrificial system. A leaf, a flower, or a sip of water can be offered by even the poorest (B.G. 9.26). They are freely available in nature. Hence, bhakti is superior to all other paths to salvation.

Miracles

Miracles are often reported in bhakti. The phenomenon of miracles is not found in any other paths to salvation. They are unique to the bhakti path in Hinduism. A number of men, as well as women, perform miracles through bhakti. They acknowledge doing this through the power of a god or a goddess. I am listing only three notable devotees who performed miracles through bhakti.

According to Ramadasa, "It is not they who perform the miracles: It is rather God who performs them for the Saints."¹

Tukaram

At Lohegaon (outskirts of Pune), Tukaram, a bhakta (devotee) raised a dead child to life.² One day Tukaram had

¹Ranade, 396.

²Ibid., 278.

nothing at home. He went to harvest the wheat field for a daily wage. While he was away, Lord Krishna came in the form of Tukaram and brought everything needed for the feast for the death anniversary of his parents. He personally went and invited the guests for the feast. He borrowed vessels from neighbors. He even served ghee to all the guests. When the real Tukaram came home in the evening he was amazed to see that the feast was conducted by god who came in Tukaram's own form.¹ When Tukaram's son was at the point of death, he was taken to the temple of the god where he was healed instantaneously.² An iron metal bar was turned to gold by Tukaram to help a poor Brahmin.³

Narayan Baba

Narayan Baba, a bhakta from Sanjiva Reddy Nagar, in Hyderabad, South India, on one occasion fed 300 people to their satisfaction with only 1 kg 400 gm of rice, "multiplying the food by merely touching the vessel."⁴ He also removed stones from the gall bladder of a patient with

¹Mahipati, Tukaram, The Poet Saints of Maharashtra, 7, trans. Justin E. Abbot (N.P., n.d), 140-141.

²Ibid., 172.

³Ibid., 241-243.

⁴Mayah Balse, Mystics and Men of Miracles in India (New Delhi: Heritage, 1976), 26.

just a superficial touch.¹ He also cured a deaf boy.²

Shri Sai Baba

Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, a bhakta, turned water into oil and kept the lamps burning the whole night.³ Baba cured Bhimaji Patil of tuberculosis.⁴ Baba cured Dattopant who had suffered constant stomach-ache for fourteen years.⁵ He restored sight to Vithalrao Yeshwantrao Deshpande who was blind.⁶ He resurrected the daughter of the maternal aunt of Vasudeo Sitaram Ratanjanker.⁷ At Dhoopgaon, he healed a lame boy.⁸ Miracles performed through bhakti are an attraction for many to pursue the path of bhakti as the superior path in Hinduism.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 27.

³Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji, Shri Sai Satcharita or The Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba, 7th ed. (Mumbai: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1974), 27-28.

⁴Ibid., 73-74.

⁵Ibid., 76-77.

⁶M. V. Kamath and V. B. Kher, Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Unique Saint (Delhi: Jaico, 1991), 161.

⁷Ibid., 140-141.

⁸G. R. Sholapurkar, Foot-prints at Shirdi and Puttaparthi (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1985), 42.

Visions and Revelation

Tulasidas had a vision in which he saw the god Rama.¹ "Tulasi was in a deep trance, . . . but was unable to return to ordinary consciousness till the night."² Ramadasa had a vision of the god Rama.³ Though he was a Hindu, Ramakrishna had mystical visions of Christ.⁴

The Vedas clearly present that:

The divine words are repositories of wisdom;
they unequivocally draw themselves to God (Rigveda
4.58.8)

May all sons of the immortal ones hear our words (Rigveda
6.52.9)

It is from the divine fountain the scriptures spring up
(Rigveda 1.164.42)

The imperishable God unfolds Himself (Rigveda 1.164.42)

Listen to divine words, O Sons of the immortal Spirit
(Yajur 11.5)

The Bhagavad Gita contains the dialogue between Lord Krishna and his human friend and follower, Arjun. It is abundantly clear that the god revealed himself and his ways

¹Handoo, 30.

²Ibid., 31.

³V. H. Date, Spiritual Treasure of Saint Rāmadāsa (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), 2.

⁴Arvind Sharma, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda: New Perspectives (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), 10.

to human beings. According to B.G. 1.2 and 9.2, without the divine revelation human beings would not have known these spiritual aspects. Therefore, the revelation of God occupies a significant place in bhakti because the devotees use the Hindu scriptures for their belief and practices, unlike the followers of other paths to salvation.

Summary

The Hindu concept of salvation presents four paths:

(1) Karma Yoga, the path of attaining salvation through good works, which requires sacrifices, rituals, and ceremonies; (2) Jnana Yoga, the path of attaining salvation through the knowledge of god which requires intensive study of Hindu scriptures; (3) Raja Yoga, a path of salvation through meditation which requires secluded life in a forest; and (4) Bhakti Yoga, the path of attaining salvation through loving god, which does not require anything but to love god intensely. Only one of these paths needs to be pursued to attain salvation. All forms need not be practiced.

The first three paths contain a number of requirements and are limited to certain kinds of people, whereas the fourth path, Bhakti Yoga, is open to all, irrespective of caste, age, and gender. Hence, Bhakti Yoga is a better path to attain salvation according to Hinduism.

The fourth chapter deals with the Hindu concept of God. While Hinduism is a polytheistic religion, monotheism is clearly taught in Hindu scriptures.

CHAPTER 4

HINDU CONCEPTS OF GOD

The concept of god is of utmost value in any theistic religion, including Hinduism. Since this study focuses on bhakti (devotion), the concept of god is at its heart, because bhakti is directed to god by the devotee and centers in god. Without god, bhakti is irrelevant because its basic thrust is intense love for god. It is clear from the Rigveda that people accepted and worshiped a host of gods, yet Hindu scriptures point to one god (B.G. 3.11; 7.23). Further, they affirm the incarnations of a god (B.G. 4:7, 8). This chapter provides a survey of polytheism and a discussion of monotheism as understood by Hindus. Incarnation as a manifestation of divinity and the place of Christ as god in Hindu thinking also form part of the Hindu concept of god.

Hindu Polytheism

The word polytheism comes from the Greek Πολυς (many) and Θεος (god). In polytheism the belief in many gods prevails. Polytheism is not unique to Hinduism (B.G. 11.3).

It is found in many major civilizations. To trace the polytheistic concept of god in the religions of the world is beyond the scope of this study. Thus, I will confine myself to Hinduism.

Polytheism appears in the Rigveda, the Vedic hymns, and in common practice. The Rigveda contains thirty-three gods and goddesses. Eleven of them belongs to the earth, another set of eleven belong to the mid-sky, and one more set of eleven belongs to the heaven.¹

In fact, for one Vedic hymn to contain several names of gods and goddesses is common. For example, Hymn number 10 contains the names of Agni, Indra, Varuna, and Soma (Rigveda 10.1-5).

Hindus view gods and goddesses as anthropomorphic. They are born, grow up, marry, have children, but never become old or die. These thirty-three gods and goddesses of the Rigveda have multiplied over the years into millions. The children of gods and goddesses also attain prominence and are worshiped, resulting in countless gods and goddesses. It is common in Hindu homes to have as many gods and goddesses as possible in the form of images or pictures. People believe that if they have as many gods and goddesses as possible in the home, one of them will protect and bring

¹W. J. Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 2d ed. (Calcutta: Rupa and Co., 1986), 9.

prosperity.

Because of polytheism, many Hindus are happy to possess pictures of Jesus. Some have no problem in accepting Jesus as one of the gods. They burn incense, offer fruits, and break coconuts to Jesus, as well as to the pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Vedic Monotheism

Monotheism comes from the Greek *μνος* (one) and *θεος* (god). The term monotheism refers to the religious experience and the philosophical perception that emphasizes god as one. Alain Danielou says that "monotheism is the projection of the human individuality into the cosmic sphere, the shaping of God to the image of man."¹

The Vedic people worshiped many gods. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observed that the crowding of gods and goddesses in Vedic polytheism confused and brought weariness to the minds of intellectuals, leading them to start worshipping one god in whom all the attributes of all the deities centered.² The Vedas provide abundant evidence that a monotheistic concept of god existed from the time of the Rigveda, which is the first written scripture of Hinduism.

¹Alain Danielou, The God of India (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1985), 10.

²Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (Mumbai: Oxford University Press, 1957), 17.

Some of the passages from Rigveda and other Vedas speak of monotheism (Rigveda 1.164). This monotheistic concept of god was present in Hinduism. It continued throughout the history of Hinduism and reached its peak in the Bhagavad Gita, where Krishna presented himself as the only and supreme god.

As Vedic minds sought the ultimate divine power that was working through the deities, they came to the conclusion that there was only one supreme supernatural power in the whole universe. All the individual names of deities were attributed to that supreme supernatural being.

The Rigveda and Yajur Veda point out that whatever name people use for god, thinking that each name stands for a different god, all of those names apply to only one god. They are different names for the same god, but "they worship . . . One reality."¹

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is the heavenly noble-winged Garutman. These are all different names for only one supreme god. Some may also call the same god Yoma Matorsvan. (Rigveda 1.164)

He is one and one forever remaineth alone; believe it
There is no second in God.
May it be called Agni, Aditya, Vayu, or Chandrama
All are the names of the supreme spirit.
He is Brahma and Prajapati, the supreme Lord of all
He is the ultimate power, protector of all beings. (Yajur Veda 23.1)

¹Ram Swarup, The World as Revelation: Names of God (New Delhi: Impex India, 1980), 124.

The truth that god is one is clearly presented in
Atharva Veda and Rigveda.

He knows truth, who knows this god as one.
Neither second nor third.
Nor fourth is he called;
Neither fifth nor sixth.
Nor seventh is he called;
Neither eighth nor ninth
Nor tenth is he called.
He surveys all that breathes
And that breathes not
He possesses the power supreme.
He is the one, the one alone.
In him all divine powers
Become the one alone. (Atharva Veda 13.5.14-21)

He is the one lord of all holy service.
God is one the lord of many, exceeding far and wide we
observe his holy laws (Rigveda 8.25.16).

There is no one equal to or above god. He is the one
and only supreme being, worthy of adoration.

There is no parallel to Him.
Whose glory is truly great.
He is one.
Come together, you all, which power of spirit, to the
Lord of heaven
Who is the only one, the greatest of the people;
He the ancient desireth to come to the new,
To him all pathways turn, really, He is one. (Sama Veda
172)

These references from the Vedas clearly point out
that the monotheistic concept of god was fully developed and
widely held as early as the time of Rig Veda itself. Though
the Hindus in the fifteenth century B.C. called the supreme
god by different names and attributed different functions to
different deities, they seem to have understood that god is
one. Everything that exists comes into being and is

dissolved by him: in him the supreme god never ceases to exist (B.G. 9:4-11). The entire universe is his lila (sport). These concepts are reflected in the Vedic hymns of adoration.

Hindu scholars such as S. Radhakrishnan,¹ Pandit Satyakam Vidyalankar,² and others have promoted monotheism in Hinduism.

Incarnation

The concept of incarnation is not unique to Hinduism. Other religions also contain this concept. It is the descent of god, who becomes incarnate according to his will. The time, form, and place of the avatars are of divine choice.

The Sanskrit word avatara, translated "incarnation," means divine descent.³ Since human beings are the beneficiaries of each avatara, the avatars provide a direct blessing for mankind. Swami Sivananda says that avatara is

¹Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Introduction to Indian Philosophy (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1957), 2:17.

²Satyakam Vidyalankar, The Holy Vedas (Delhi: Clarion, n.d.), 7.

³John Dowson, A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History, and Literature (Mumbai: Rupa & Co, 1984), s.v. "Avatāra."

the descent of god for the ascent of man.¹ The Bhagavad Purana says that "with the purpose of protecting the earth, priests, gods, saints, and the scripture, and righteousness and property, the lord takes a body" (B.P. 8.24.5).

Aurobindo says the real purpose of the avatara is much higher: it points out the way by which man can rise to divine nature and consciousness.² An "incarnation is one who descends from the higher spiritual sky."³

Hinduism presents different dimensions of avataras: Purna-avatara (full incarnation), amas-avatara (half-incarnation), and avesha-avatara (quarter-incarnation). The purna-avatara refers to Krishna the lord, "who is an ocean of grace incarnated out of compassion for the humanity to do them supreme good."⁴

The Bhagavad Gita contains clear references to the avatara. Whenever dharma (righteousness) fades and adharma (wickedness) prevails, the supreme lord manifests himself in his incarnated form, establishing dharma (righteousness) by putting an end to evil and evil doers (B.G. 4.7).

Vishnu protects the righteous, for this is the duty

¹Sivananda, Bhakti and Sankirtan (Shivanandanagar: The Divine Life Society, 1984), 64.

²Aurobindo, Thoughts and Aforisms, 15.

³Prabhupada, Teachings of Lord Chaitanya, 73.

⁴Sivananda, 65.

of the supreme lord, because he is the originator, ruler, Sustainer,¹ and the cause of the universe. His primary responsibility is to care for the universe. It is his duty to check evil and to run the universe according to his moral standards. Having this responsibility, the lord explains that he would descend time after time, whenever wickedness increases (B.G. 4.8).

Vaishnavism, which is a dominant branch of Hinduism, holds the theory of ten incarnations of Vishnu.² There is, however, a discrepancy in their numbering and even in the names of the incarnations of Vishnu.³

Ten Incarnations of Vishnu

Mastya Purana, a book of Hindu scriptures, gives a list of ten incarnations (17.237-48). A secular historical source, the Mamallapuram inscription,⁴ dated about the eighth century A.D. also mentions ten avatars.⁵ The names

¹Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 116.

²Dowson, 35-38.

³Ibid., 38.

⁴Dines Chandra Sircar, "Early History of Vaisnavism," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 4:133.

⁵The Bhagavat Purana, one of the books of Hindu scripture, contains six different lists of incarnation (1) 1.3.28 in which 22 avatars are listed; (2) 2.7.1 in which 24 incarnations are listed; (3) 7.9.38 in which 7 incarnations are listed; (5) 10.2-4 in which there are 8 incarnations; (5) 40.17-20 in which 14 incarnations are

of Rama, Parasurama, and Balarama are included but Krishna's is not mentioned.

God becomes incarnate in a form to suit the need, in order to maintain or restore cosmic order. Because of this, the incarnations of Vishnu are different one from another. However a careful study of the incarnations of Vishnu and the task of each incarnation clearly shows that the supreme lord has become incarnate each time when there was total chaos on the earth and in the context of the strong presence of evil. God became incarnate to set the world and the cosmos in order by putting an end to that prevailing evil force (B.G. 4.7, 8).

Some scholars hold the evolutionary view of incarnation from fish to man.¹ Since the shape, form, size, and time of incarnation are at the disposal of god's free will to suit the need and the occasion, the ten incarnations do not need to be viewed in the light of evolution.

listed; and (6) 11.4.18-23 in which 21 incarnations are listed. Garuda Purana, another book of Hindu scriptures, mentions 19 incarnations (1.202). The Narayaniya section of the Mahabharata, a major section of Hindu scripture (3:349.37), mentions only 4 avatars: boar, dwarf, man-lion, and man. Another passage in the same section (339.77-99) adds Ramabhargava and Rama Dasarathi, which makes a total of 6 incarnations.

¹Karan Singh, "Hinduism," in Religions of India (New Delhi: Clarion, 1983), 28.

Animal Incarnations

The god was incarnated as an animal in the first four incarnations. It was necessary for god to incarnate in this manner because the animal form would be suitable to put an end to wickedness.

First incarnation: fish

The demon Hayagriva stole the Vedas and hid them at the bottom of the ocean. God took the form of a big fish, slew the demon Hayagriva, and recovered the sacred books. A flood similar to that of Noah became necessary to allow the huge fish to swim. The Vedas were restored to Manu, the obedient follower of Vishnu.¹

Second incarnation: Tortoise

Gods and demons churned an ocean of milk to get amruta, the nectar that would remove wrinkles, gray hair, and death. They used a huge mountain named Mandhara as a churning stick, and a long snake by the name of Vasuki as the rope. When they began to churn, the mountain began to sink in the ocean of milk. Then, Vishnu took the form of a huge tortoise and carried the mountain on his back until they finished churning. They got the nectar out of the milk

¹Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 134.

ocean, but only the gods drank it and became immortal.¹

Third incarnation: Boar

Hiranyaksha was a demon who violently disturbed the sea and took the whole earth hostage to the depth of the sea. Vishnu appeared as a wild boar, went under the water, fought, and killed Hiranyaksha. He rescued the earth and brought it to its original place.²

Fourth incarnation: Man-lion

Hiranyakasipu was a demon who terrorized the whole heaven and earth. The gods and goddesses fled and hid from him. Hiranyakasipu obtained a gift from god that neither god, nor demon, nor human being, nor animal, nor bird, nor any creature should kill him. Since Vishnu could not kill this universal terrorist in his divine form, he took the form of half-man and half-lion. "With a roar the Man-Lion caught hold of Hiranyakasipu, in spite of all his attempts to escape, tore his belly, opened his heart and drank the blood," and killed him.³ Peace was restored in heaven and on earth.

¹Dange, 239.

²Matthew, 117.

³Vivekananda, Bhakti-Yoga, 13.

Human Incarnations

Fifth incarnation: Dwarf Brahmin

King Bali was ruling South India. He was a good king, more popular than gods and goddesses. Vishnu incarnated as a dwarf Brahmin named Vamana and crushed the king with his foot into the depths of the earth.¹

Sixth incarnation: Parasurama

Karthyavirarjuna was a selfish king who took by force a kamadhenu (magical cow) from the sage Jamadagni. This cow could magically provide whatever was requested, especially food. Parasurama, the son of sage Jamadagni, fought and killed king Karthyavirarjuna and brought home the magical cow. The sons of the slain king took revenge by killing Jamadagni. His son Parasurama, a Brahmin, went throughout India twenty-one times, killing all the kings. Then, Vishnu in the form of Parasurama, killed all the selfish, proud, and wicked kings.²

Seventh incarnation: Rama

Ravana was a demon king who terrorized the whole universe so that even gods went into hiding from him. Vishnu appeared "as the son of king Dasaratha" in the form

¹Dowson, 37.

²Ibid.

of Rama. Ravana the demon king kidnapped Rama's wife Sita. With this as a pretext, Rama fought and killed Ravana the universal terrorist. Peace was restored in the entire universe.¹

Eighth incarnation: Krishna

Kansa and Sisupala were most wicked kings. Kansa imprisoned his own sister and her husband, and killed all their children as soon as they were born. For this reason, Vishnu took the form of Krishna. He was born on "the eighth day of the month of Sravan (August) while it was raining and lightning," grew up miraculously, killed Kansa the wicked King, and established peace and righteousness.²

Ninth incarnation: Buddha

The purpose of this incarnation was to mislead all the demons who were praying to gods for gifts. Whenever the gods granted gifts to the demons, they used them against the gods. So Vishnu took the form of Buddha, who taught that there is no god and no heaven. All the demons stopped praying to the gods because of Buddha's teaching that there is no god. Thus, demons could not get any advantages to use

¹Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1983), 21.

²K. M. Munshi, Krishnavatara (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan, 1962), 44.

against the gods, so the gods continued in peace.¹

Tenth incarnation: Kalki

At the end of the Kali Yuga (wicked age), all people will become atheists. Bribery will be rampant. There will be a mixing of castes. People will become thieves and hypocrites who will put up an appearance of piety, but will be evil minded. People will even begin to eat others. In those times, Vishnu will be reborn as Kalki and kill all the evil ones.² The people will be resettled under the four-fold caste system and in the way of righteousness. Thereafter, Vishnu will return to Vaikunta.³

Worship of the Incarnate God

The Gita indicates that by accepting and worshiping an incarnated form, the worshiper attains liberation after his death (B.G. 9.11-12). There is no need for any worshiper of Krishna to be reborn, for in this life he can attain liberation. Thus it is necessary for worshipers to adore the supreme lord in his incarnated form (B.G. 4.9). The references to incarnation (avatara) are evidences of monotheism in the Krishna cult in the Gita. Humans cannot

¹Dowson, 38.

²Dange, 247.

³Matthew, 124.

help but worship the incarnations. Indeed the incarnations are the only ones they are bound to worship.¹

Viewed from the angle of bhakti marga, incarnation is vital. Because of the god's incarnated form, human beings can cultivate a love relationship with him. It is easier to develop a love relationship with a personal god than with an impersonal god. The Gita leads open-minded thinkers to establish an intimate relationship with god. The concept of incarnation in the Gita promotes such a relationship, because through the incarnated form of god and his way of life, teachings, and moral standards, one understands more about him. Finite minds are able to grasp something of the infinite god through incarnation, without which we would have had nothing but endless speculations (B.G. 12.1-2).

Sri Rama Krishna says that "when a huge tidal wave comes, all the little brooks and ditches become full to the brim without any effort or consciousness on their own part. So when an incarnation comes, a tidal wave of spirituality breaks upon the world, and people feel spirituality almost full in the air."²

¹Vivekananda, Teachings of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981), 145.

²Ibid., 145-146.

Christ Through Indian Eyes

Though a host of Hindus have upheld Christ in their writings, many of them never converted to Christianity. On the other hand, a number of orthodox Hindus have acknowledged Christ as divine. Some of them even embraced Christianity and became witnesses for Christ. On the other hand, objections to Christ as the only true god have been expressed.

The following favorable expressions regarding Christ come from well-known and respected Indians.

Pratap Chander Mozoomdar

Pratap Chander Mozoomdar (1803-1876) was a leader of the Brahma Samaj and was a disciple of Keshub Chunder Sen. In 1883, he wrote a book on Christ entitled The Oriental Christ¹ in which he affirmed: "Christ lived in God, loved in God, taught in God, suffered in God, that we too might live and love, suffer and teach as he did. Christ's whole nature was swimming in the ocean of Divinity, as this visible universe of ours swims in the might and majesty of God."²

Mozoomdar affirmed the uniqueness of Jesus Christ

¹Keshub Chunder Sen, The Oriental Christ (Boston: G. H. Ellis, 1883).

²Ibid., 85.

because he completes all other partial and local incarnations and makes for a truly spiritual and universal incarnation of the Spirit. Christ also provided an everlasting model of the divine order of humanity.¹

Other incarnations stand for certain isolated principles of God's nature: a prophet is for one country; the incarnations of one age are partial, local, imperfect, and bound by time, nationality, and circumstance. But Christ is the perfect incarnation. He established a perfect relationship between God and man. Mozoomdar therefore expressed his belief in the resurrection and second coming of Jesus.²

Keshub Chunder Sen

Keshub Chunder Sen (1811-1893) was the head of the Brahma Samaj and an important figure in the freedom movement of India. He studied Christianity to find faults in it, wanting to defend Hinduism as the best religion. He approached Christianity from the background of the Hindu bhakti movement. In 1866 he gave a lecture in which he said the following about the Christ who by His power saved a dark and wicked world: "Was not he who has left us such a

¹Ibid., 90-91.

²Ibid., 91.

priceless legacy of divine truth, and whose blood has wrought such wonders for eighteen hundred years--was not he above ordinary humanity? . . . A life of self-denial, I hold up to you the cross on which Jesus died."¹

In an 1880 lecture to the members of the Brahma Samaj, he acknowledged: "I am proud to be one of them, for I do verily believe and am prepared to testify that Christ has risen from his earthly grave. . . . And returned to the Father. . . . Surely thou livest. . . . Thou art in heaven with thy Father. . . . O Jesus, I again say, Christ has risen."²

Sen expressed his belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ and maintained that those who believe in Christ and die will be resurrected.³ On the second coming of Christ, he said, "Believe and remember what Christ has said, and be ready to receive Him. He is coming, . . . he will come to you. . . . The bridegroom is coming. . . . Let India be ready in due season."⁴

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

Millions of Hindus worship Sri Ramakrishna

¹Ibid., 57.

²Ibid., 62-63.

³Ibid., 62-63.

⁴Ibid., 62.

Paramahansa (1834-1886), founder of the Ramakrishna cult, as an incarnate god.¹ In November 1874, Ramakrishna was seized with a desire to see where the path of Christianity led. A rich and enlightened Hindu, Shambhu Charan Muthick of Calcutta, came occasionally to his spacious garden house. At Ramakrishna's request Shambhu Charan began to read the Bible to him and he eagerly imbibed all that he heard about Christ.²

Shortly afterwards, while sitting in the parlor of another neighboring garden-house belonging to Jadu Nath Mullick, Ramakrishna discovered a picture representing the Madonna with the baby Christ in her arms. Instantly the holy figures appeared to be warmed into life; he observed that they were radiating rays of light that pierced his flesh and went straight to his heart.³

Immediately Ramakrishna, a worshiper of the goddess Kali (the divine Mother), became a devotee of Jesus. Christian thought and Christian love appeared for three successive days to be the sole content of his thoughts.⁴

On the fourth day, while strolling by the river

¹Vivekananda, Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, 233.

²Haridas Bhattacharya, "Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance," in The Cultural Heritage of India, 4:673.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Panchavati in the afternoon, he caught sight of a strange person who drew near him, and a voice came up from the depths of Ramakrishna's heart: "This is the Christ who poured out His heart's blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake. It is none else but that master-yogin Jesus, the embodiment of love."¹

Vivekananda

A renowned Hindu philosopher, Vivekananda (1863-1902) popularized Hinduism and gave it a missionary thrust. Because of his efforts, Hinduism is at present in more than one hundred countries. Vivekananda founded the Rama Krishna Mission to propagate the teachings of his teacher, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda had a high regard for Jesus and acknowledged Christ as God, but equated him with other incarnations. "It is one and the same avatara that, having plunged into the ocean of life, rises up in one place and is known as Krishna and dying again rises in another place and is known as Christ."²

Vivekananda affirmed:

Christ, the special manifestation of the absolute, is known and knowable. The Absolute cannot be known; we cannot know the Father, only the Son. We can only see the absolute through the 'tint of humanity' through

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., 122.

Christ.¹

He also pointed out that Christ could be clearly understood in the light of the Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism. On the other hand he held that "Christ was God incarnate; they could not kill Him. That which was crucified was only a semblance, a mirage."²

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), father of the nation of India, was the moving force in gaining freedom for India. Some Hindus regard him as a minor incarnation of god. He is called Mahatma (a great soul) by all. Gandhi read the Bible in England while he was studying law and found in the New Testament comfort and boundless joy. The Sermon on the Mount impressed him as the highest form of religion. In fact, he acknowledged that reading it was the beginning of his awakening to the rightness and value of passive resistance (non-violence).³

Jesus and His teaching inspired Gandhi to choose the path of non-violence in fighting racism in South Africa, and obtaining freedom for India. Gandhi wrote: "The gentle

¹M. M. Thomas, The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1991), 123.

²Ibid., 127.

³Ibid., 201-202.

figure of Christ, so patient, so kind, loving, so full of forgiveness that He taught His followers not to retaliate when abused or struck, but to turn the other cheek--it was a beautiful example, I thought, of the perfect man."¹

He considered Christ as one of the begotten sons of god,² as an embodiment of sacrifice, and the cross as a great example to the world. He accepted Jesus as a martyr, whose death released the forces of good in society.³ Though he did not become a Christian, Gandhi claimed many times that he was a follower of Jesus.⁴

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1897-1984), the second president of independent India, and a renowned scholar of Hinduism, was a professor of philosophy at Oxford University. He accepted Christ as one of the incarnate gods: "Jesus is an avatar, since His love for the sinful which came out most markedly in His appeal on the Cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,' is of

¹Ibid., 201.

²Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, The Science of Satyagraha, Pocket Gandhi Series 4, ed. Anand T. Hingorani (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962), 126.

³Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Christian Missions: Their Place in India, 2d rev. ed. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1941; Reprint 1960), 39.

⁴Ibid., 201.

a piece with God's love for his children."¹ Radhakrishnan had a high regard for the cross: "The Cross means physical suffering, earthly defeat but spiritual victory."²

Hindu Objections to Christ

In spite of their willingness to accept Christ as a supernatural or even divine being, Hindus often object to vital aspects of the biblical teaching regarding Christ. They find it difficult to accept that "there is no other name under heaven . . . whereby we can be saved" (Acts 4:12).

A Brahmin came to Stanley Jones and expressed his appreciation to the missionary for presenting Christ. The Brahmin's words, as reported by Stanley Jones, were:

We had high ideas of God before Jesus came, but Jesus is the highest expression of God that we have seen. He is conquering us by the sheer force of His own person even against our wills. Jesus wins, not because of any religious trick or cleverness, but because He is winsome; he compels, not because he calls in Caesar's help, but because he is compelling; he is Saviour just because men find in him what a Saviour ought to be--he saves; he draws the world just by being lifted up. Christ is confronting men everywhere.³

This Brahmin further questioned the missionary as to why he preached that Christ is the only way for salvation.

¹Radhakrishnan, Indian Religions, 139.

²Ibid., 42.

³Stanley Jones, Christ of the Indian Road (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1964), 214.

The Brahmin advised: "If you will preach Christ as a way, all right, but, say that there may be other ways as well. If you do this, India will be at your feet."¹ He said this because Hindus uphold the notion that all paths lead to god and Christ is one of the incarnated gods.

A second objection has to do with the death of Christ. Hindus wonder how Jesus could be divine, since He was crucified. He should have easily overcome His murderers if He had been divine, because God cannot be defeated by man. Hindus who accept the doctrine of karma think that Christ's suffering and death on the cross are proof that the Guru might have been a great sinner in his previous birth because He was put to death on the cross.

Summary

Hinduism is dominated by polytheism. Yet it also contains a significant place for monotheism. The bhakti concept is centered around monotheism. This supreme god becomes incarnate on earth to put an end to wickedness. God is going to take the final incarnation for the tenth time. A number of influential Hindus have a great regard for Christ. They uphold him as one of the incarnated gods.

¹Ibid., 45.

Chapter 5 presents some key concepts present in Christianity as well as Hinduism to serve as a bridge between these two religions to reach Philosophical Hindus with the gospel.

CHAPTER 5

BRIDGES

This chapter presents ways of thinking common to Philosophical Hindus and Christians. These can be used as bridges to interest Hindus in Christianity. A large group of these "bridges" is found in bhakti; some are part of the broader scope of Hinduism. References in Hindu scriptures to an incarnated god provide another bridge. Similarities between Christian and Hindu understandings of salvation, which could also serve as bridges, appear in the appendix.

Bhakti Bridges

Bhakti yoga provides more bridges to Christianity than other Hindu forms of belief. As a superior path to salvation, it has loving devotion at its heart. It also understands sin and the transformation of the wicked. Bhakti teaches that all may take its path, without making costly sacrifices. Finally, bhakti is open to miracles, prophecy, and visions.

Bhakti is wholehearted loving devotion to god. This way to salvation does not depend on spending years in search

of liberating knowledge or meditating on god. Understanding bhakti can prepare Hindus to love the true God. Biblical bhakti teaches us to love Him wholeheartedly and accept Him as a personal liberator (Savior).

Moses exhorted Israel: "Love your God with all of your heart, mind and might" (Deut 6:5). The bhakti relationship is wholehearted devotion which the Bible presents in a unique form. God does not require any sacrifices from us. Rather, our loving obedience is needed (Mic 6:8). We must continue to love Him by keeping His commandments in order to maintain this bhakti relationship (John 15:10).

Clearly the Bible affirms that God loves us: "He gave His only son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16); He loved us first (1 John 4:19), unlike bhakti where we love God first. God loves with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3). This God of love took the initiative in loving sinners (Heb 1:8, 9). He came to die on our behalf while we are still in sin (Rom 5:7-9). Since God took the first step to love us, it is our duty to love Him, which is the real bhakti.

God is symbolized as an eagle that carries the young ones on her wings (Exod 19:4). He is also described as a hen who gathers the chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37). Both figures show that God loves and cares for us.

Madhura Bhakti

The love relationship of a husband and wife is intimate and inseparable. Each longs for the other. Each works for the pleasure of the other. Though man and woman are strangers before marriage, love locks their relationship permanently throughout life. Thus, Madhura bhakti, the conjugal relationship between husband and wife, properly designates the close relationship with God.

The Bible presents this love relationship in a simple and pure manner. God is the husband; the church is the wife (Eph 5:22-28). The Song of Solomon explains in allegorical language this intimate relationship between God and His devotees. King Solomon had all the comforts, many beautiful, rich, and noble ladies as his wives, yet he loved and married the Shulamite, who was from a remote village. She was dark and poor (Cant 5:1-5). He made her queen (Cant 3:1-10). He kept her in the finest palace of which she could not have dreamed. The God of the Bible loves in spite of weaknesses, failures, and sins. He will come to take and marry us; this will be the wedding feast of the lamb (Rev 19:7, 8). We will live forever with God; He will dwell with us (Rev 21:5, 6). Rev 21 and 22 tell us about the heavenly home, where we will live forever with God. This unimaginable and eternal life is made possible because of God's infinite love, to which we can respond with

wholehearted love.

The Bible makes an addition to the concept of marital love. It adds the need for individuals to love others as they love themselves (Lev 19:18; Matt 22:39). The Bible stipulates that if we do not love our brother whom we can see, we cannot love God whom we cannot see (1 John 4:20).

Sin and the Transformation of the Wicked

The concept of sin is present in bhakti (B.G. 3.12, 13; 5.10; 5.17). Sin is eradicated and sinners are transformed (B.G. 9.30). The author of the epic Ramayana, Valmiki, was a dacoit. He murdered many travelers and looted their valuables. However, his life was transformed through devotion. He became a great saint and wrote the Ramayana epic.

The concept of sin is clearly presented in the Bible. John says that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). The Bible clearly says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). David acknowledges that he was conceived in sin (Ps 51:5). Paul affirms that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Sin is real.

The Bible contains information on how God forgives and transforms the wicked who accept God as their personal Savior (Isa 1:18). Rahab was a prostitute (Josh 2:1); she accepted the true God (Josh 2:9-12). Her life was

transformed, so she was listed among the faithful ones (Heb 11:31).

Openness to All

The first three paths of salvation restrict salvation only to the high castes. But the bhakti path offers salvation to all, including the untouchables, women, and children. Christianity offers salvation to all human beings, men and women, rich and poor. It is God's wish that everybody should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). There will be people saved by Christ from all nations, tribes, and languages (Rev 7:9, 10). Christianity is a universal religion offering salvation to all the people. It is up to the hearer to accept or reject it.

Since it is for the whole world, God commanded His followers to proclaim this message of a loving God and His free salvation in Christ to the whole world (Matt 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8; Rev 14:6). God invites all those who are in bondage to karma to come to Him. He will give them rest (Matt 11:28, 29).

In bhakti literature children are accepted by God if they have bhakti. However, salvation is not clearly spelled out. In the Bible, children are eligible for salvation. God loves children also. Jesus rebuked His disciples who prevented children from being brought to Him, saying "for of

such is the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16).

Sacrifice

The bhakti system is simpler than that of the other paths. Krishna requested only a flower, a leaf, or a sip of water, which would be accepted as a full sacrifice. These are within the reach even of a beggar. Even more generously, Christianity teaches that Christ became a sacrifice on our behalf. He died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:7-9). If anyone accepts by faith that Christ died for his or her sin, they will be saved (Rom 10:9). God does not require any sacrifice but desires our obedience to him (1 Sam 15:22).

Miracles

A number of miracles are reported in the lives of people who practiced bhakti. This phenomenon is foreign to other Hindu paths of salvation. The Bible is full of miracles. An outstanding miracle was the resurrection of Lazarus, who had been in the grave for four days (John 11:25). Christ not only resurrected the dead (John 11:43-45) but was victorious over His own death and grave, which has no parallel in any other religion (Luke 24:5, 6).

Prophecy and Visions

Bhakti literature contains some prophecies. There is

evidence that the devotees prophesied about certain events which were fulfilled accurately.¹ Prophecies in the Bible are unique. There are time prophecies in the Bible which were fulfilled accurately hundreds of years later; for instance, the death of Christ (Dan 9:24-27). These time prophecies are not present in any other religion, not even in bhakti, which makes Christianity unique.

There are some accounts of supernatural visions reported in bhakti literature. God appeared to the devotees and spoke to them.² Sadhu Sunder Singh had a vision of Christ while he was a Hindu teenager, antagonistic to Christianity. Consequently, he gave his life to Jesus and became one of the most outstanding Christians who witnessed for Christ at the beginning of the twentieth century. Narayan Rao Vaman Tilak, who was a young orthodox Hindu, also gave his life to Jesus because of a vision he had.³ God is using this method even in this age to reach the true seekers of God in various parts of the world including India.

¹Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 201.

²Handoo, 30.

³H. L. Richard, Christ Bhakti: Narayana Vaman Tilak and Christian Work Among Hindus, 2d ed. (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1998), 30.

Other Hindu Bridges

In Hinduism certain concepts agree with those taught by Seventh-day Adventists. Among those bridges are vegetarianism, the idea of grace, and the expectation of the end of the world.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is closely associated with bhakti. It is in accordance with the Hindu scriptural injunctions (Rig Veda Samhita, 10.87.16; Atharva Veda 6.70.1 and Satapatha Brahmana 14.1.1.29). Vegetarianism in bhakti is divine instruction for humanity. It also shows ahimsa (non-violence) to lower forms of life (Mahabharata, Anu. 115.40).

The Bible teaches that the original diet of human beings was vegetarian (Gen 1:29). Meat was not permitted as part of the human diet until after the flood (Gen 9:3). Seventh-day Adventists have additional counsel on vegetarianism in the writings of Ellen G. White. In the second half of the eighteenth century she wrote:

God gave our first parents the food He designed that the race should eat. It was contrary to His plan to have the life of any creature taken. There was to be no death in Eden. The fruit of the trees in the garden, was the food man's wants required. God gave man no permission to eat animal food until after the flood. Everything had been destroyed upon which man could subsist, and therefore the Lord in their necessity gave Noah permission to eat of the clean animals which he had taken with him into the ark. But animal food was not the most

healthful article of food for man.¹

White pointed that "grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator."²

Christians are looked down upon by Hindus, especially those of the Brahmin and Vaishya castes who are pure vegetarians, because they eat meat. The eating of beef is especially offensive, for the cow is considered sacred.³ Rabindranath R. Maharaj put it this way: "They ate my god the cow. I counted them lower than the lowest caste."⁴

Grace

The concept of grace is present in a rudimentary form in Hindu scriptures. It has developed fully only in the last millennium due to the reflections of various devotees who practiced bhakti. Christian Scriptures present the grace of God in its fullness. The grace of God makes salvation possible to all sinners (Eph 1:5). Thus, the grace of God is unique in Christianity.

¹Ellen G. White, Counsels on Diet and Foods (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 373.

²Ibid., 310.

³Dubois, 190.

⁴Rabindranath R. Maharaj and Dave Hunt, Death of a Guru (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), 82.

End of the World

Hinduism believes in the imminent end of the world. The god Vishnu is to return to this world in his tenth incarnation, which is called Kalki, to put an end to sin and sinners.¹ Vishnu Purana contains a list of the signs before the end of this wicked world.² The followers of the bhakti path are eagerly awaiting the return of Vishnu. He will inaugurate an age of sinlessness, peace, and prosperity.³ The Bible says clearly that Christ will come the second time and take His followers to heaven (John 14:1-3). Sin and sinners will be eliminated (Mal 4:1). Sin shall not rise the second time, a concept absent from Hindu scriptures (Nahum 1:9). The return of God will be a good bridge to Philosophical Hindus because they are also exposed to a certain extent to this vital teaching.

Monotheism

While Hindus are born and brought up in polytheism, Bhakti is centered around monotheism. Hindu scriptures clearly teach monotheism. Hence, this monotheistic concept will be presented to the Philosophical Hindus from their scriptures showing that there is only one god, a supreme god

¹Dubois, 617.

²Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 245-248.

³Matthew, 124.

who must be worshiped. It will require time for the Philosophical Hindus to accept this concept, though it is presented in their scriptures, because they are accustomed to worshipping a number of gods.

The belief in monotheism is vital before proceeding with any other presentation of biblical doctrines. Once the bridge has been made clear, presentation of these core issues would not cause antagonism.

The Bible tells about one supreme God who is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod 34:6). He is holy (Lev 11:44); He is love (1 John 4:8); He forgives sin (Micah 7:18, 19); He grants salvation (Pss 3:8; 9:49).

Hence, the God of the Bible is untainted and unique. Since He is love, He tells us, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy might" (Deut 6:5). Therefore, the God of the Bible is the true supreme God, worthy of a Bhakti relationship. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16).

Incarnation as a Bridge

Bhakti is centered around an incarnate god. Bhagavad Gita (4:7, 8) says that god comes to this earth in an incarnate form to eliminate evil and to establish righteousness. Rama and Krishna are the two famous

incarnate gods, whom the followers of bhakti worship.

Hindu scriptures speak of a savior who is holy and blameless. The quotations from Hindu scriptures that follow, describe the incarnate god who is the true savior. Some references are general, others are more specifically applicable to Jesus.

General References

The Hindu scriptures contain a number of passages expressing the heartfelt desire of people for truth and liberation from this sinful life. The following are translations of the Sanskrit texts.

God I was born in sin.
I am in sin, I am a sinner
so I take refuge in you.
Have mercy on me. (Manu smriti 2)

Lead me from the unreal to the real, to the truth.
Lead me from darkness to the light.
Lead me from death to immortality, eternal life.
(Bruhadaranyakopanishad 1.3.28)

Oh! Priests the sacrifices You do, are wrong doings.
They are broken boats. You who do and cause to do those
are blind guides of the blind. (Mundakopanishad 2.7)

Most of the sages who wrote the Hindu scriptures never heard the name of Jesus. However, some of their statements cannot apply to any Hindu god or goddess. Several examples follow.

I take refuge in that Lord who is innocent, unblemished, inactive, sinless and who is the strong bridge between life and eternal life and who is as calm as the flames of the fully consumed logs. (Swethaswatharopanishad 6.19)

O most revered and resplendent
 And loving adorable Lord;
 Surely thou bestowest on thy devotees
 All the attributes that vest in Thee.
 May Thy love fill our body and soul.
 Thou alone fillest man's empty life
 Turning it into an ocean of fullness.
 Let us dedicate the best in us at Thy feet.
 And surrender us in Thy service. (Rigveda 1.1.6)

The Supreme Lord is too near
 To be abandoned,
 Too close to be witnessed.
 Behold Nature's splendor
 And the Lord's divine poetry
 Both are beyond decay and death. (Atharva Veda 10. 8.32)
 Be Thou our Savior;

Looking after and showing mercy to the worshipers
 Friend, Father, Fatherliest of fathers,
 Who for the loving worshiper provides all comforts.
 (Rigveda 4.17.17)

O Adorable Supreme Lord!
 Thou art the Protector of the unprotected
 Cosmic sacrifice of the creation.
 May Thy blessings from all sides
 Assuredly reach the seeker of truth. (Rigveda 1.1.4)

O adorable God!
 Thou liftest up mortal man
 To superb immortality

By providing sustenance.
 Thou bestowest happiness and sustenance
 On the wise
 In both the lives,
 The present and the one to come. (Rigveda 1.31.7)

O Savior, make me immortal
 Liberate me from the cycle of birth and rebirth. (Rigveda
 7.89.1)

Spiritual and material splendors symbolize the two
 Principal attributes of the Supreme Being,
 While day and night symbolically relate to His two
 Opposing sides.
 The outer space illuminated with suns and galaxies

proclaims His cosmic existence.
This outer space and the earth correspond to the
Two open jaws of His mouth.

With the strength of His divine fervor the Universe
Is created.
Realizing His power we pray:
O Supreme Being, inspire us and guide us to
Attain Sublime Bliss.
May we progress in every respect in this Universe
And may we always be blessed with the nectar of Thy love!
May this Universe be gloriously beautiful
And finally, may we be blessed with everlasting
peace and happiness in every way. (Rigveda 10.90.22)

The Creator is perfect
He possesses perfect power.
Whence is created perfect Nature?
The perfect universe derives life
From the perfect Creator.
Let us comprehend this perfect power
that bestows life on all beings. (Atharva 10.8.29)

To Him, the most exalted Supreme Lord, offer reverence,
To Him, who rules the past, the present and the future,
Who presides over the entire universe,
Who is the overall sovereign of the world and cosmos,
Who is above the reach of Time and Death,
Who is immutable and absolute bliss. (Atharva Veda
10.8.1)

These are only a sample among numerous Hindu
scriptures that contain clear-cut references to a savior.
Since Hindu writers look at these passages from a Hindu
point of view, they may attribute these to Hindu gods and
goddesses. A thorough examination of each passage quoted
clearly indicates that Jesus Christ could be in view.

Specific References to Jesus Incarnated

The following quotations speak clearly about Jesus
Christ. The second quotation even mentions the name of

Jesus.

After creating the sky, waters, and the earth, the supreme spirit of the Lord almighty thought "I created the worlds. Now to provide for and to save these worlds I have to create a savior." Thinking thus He gave birth to a man from himself. (Ithareya Upanishad 1:1:3)

The Puranas explain the Vedic truths in the form of stories. The Bhavishya Purana¹ is the ninth in this set of eighteen sacred books. Its third part is entitled Bharath khand, and the second chapter in the third part is entitled Pratisarg. This chapter has thirty-four verses that clearly tell the story of Jesus Christ and His incarnation. The following verses show the main parts.

Verse 31:

Yeesh moorti parapta nitya shuddha shivakari:
Yeesha masih itticha mam nama prathishtatham

Translation:

The revelation of God who is eternal, Holy, Compassionate and giver of salvation; who dwells within our heart is manifested. His name is yeesha Masih [Jesus Christ].

Speaking of this Savior and God incarnate, the sages call Him Purusha shubham (blameless and Holy person),
Balwaan raja gaurang shweta vastrakam (sovereign king in a holy person robed in white) Yeesh putra (Son of God),

¹Bhavishya purana is one of the eighteen puranans. Bhavishya means future. It contains a number of future events, including the information about the virgin birth of Christ and his name. It is the only scripture book which contains the name of Jesus. See Krishna Dwaipuyana Vyasa, Bhavishya Purana (Mumbai: Kemraj Shrikrishnadas, 1959).

Kumari garbha sambhavam (one who is born of a virgin), and Satya Varatha Paraayanam (one who is the sustainer of the path of truth).

Rigveda, the first scripture, also presents Christ without mentioning His name, but refers to Him as the Word who is God.

This man is all that has been, all that is and all that has to be. He controls the eternal life and it is for the redemption of mankind. He surpasses His immortal sphere and descends to the mortal sphere. He comes to give every one reward as per their deeds.

Venerable words from the Vedic scriptures affirm:

"The word is the indestructible God" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 4:1, 2).

The Supreme Leader who is the cause and governor of all creation who to protect and save sinful mankind, Himself appeared upon the earth. wrapped in a body that is Holy and without sin. (Rigveda 10:125)

References to the Suffering and Death of Christ

Christ underwent immeasurable physical and mental pain when He was crucified. The Hindu scriptures highlight His physical suffering. Some of these statements seems to refer to Christ because there was no Hindu god or goddess who bore such suffering on behalf of sinners.

The crown of thorns was placed on his head: "The sacrificial victim is to be crowned with a crown made of thorny vines" (Rigveda 10.90.7, 15).

His clothes were divided among those who offered him. "After death, His clothes are to be divided among the offerors" (Ithareya Brahmanam).

The person tied to a wooden cross: "His hands and legs are to be bound to a yopa (a wooden pole) causing blood shed" (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, 3.9.28).

While the victim was at his greatest agony on the cross, he was given a herbal drink which had an intoxicating effect: "Before death, He should be given a drink of somarasa" [an intoxicating herbal juice] (Yajur Veda 31).

Though the victim was hung on the wooden cross, none of his bones were broken: "None of His bones be broken" (Ithareya Brahmanam 2.6).

The Hindu scriptures point to the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses from sin.

If you want to be delivered from the sin which you commit through eyes, mouth, ears and mind, bloodshed is necessary. Without shedding the blood, there is no remission for sin. That must be the blood of the Holy one. God is our creator. He is our King. When we were perishing, He came to save us by offering even his own body on our behalf. (Maha Brahmanam 4.15)

God is the ruler of people. He will offer His body as a sacrifice, for His people; for the remission of their sins (Sama Veda, part 2, Thandiya Maha Brahmanam).

These statements clearly describe the suffering and the death of Christ. No one else qualifies. These Hindu scriptural references will be a great help to present Jesus

to the orthodox Hindus. As a second step Jesus can be presented as the true incarnated God, meeting their full expectations.

CHAPTER 6

STRATEGIES

Because of Christ's commission to His followers, "Go and make disciples" (Matt 28:1-20), Seventh-day Adventist Christians must put forth efforts to reach Philosophical Hindus with the gospel message. To a certain extent the task is made easier by the bridges described in chapter 5. On the other hand, it has been observed that the Philosophical Hindus have misconceptions regarding Christians, such as that Christianity is a foreign religion, and that Christians are anti-nation and anti-Hindu. They believe that Christians do not respect the culture, customs, traditions, or native music. It has been observed from Hindus, though these changes are not in writing, that Christians live a low moral life, eat beef, and are drunkards. Hence, a strategy must be devised to address their needs and to remove prejudices.

Three strategies are proposed to accomplish the Gospel Commission: round table conferences, philanthropic work, and lifestyle evangelism. Before describing each of these strategies, a description of Philosophical Hindus is

appropriate.

Round Table Conference

The Philosophical Hindus are open to the idea of attending all religious meetings if they are invited. E. Stanley Jones utilized round table conferences to present Jesus Christ to prominent Hindus.¹ Hindu thinkers, as well as Christian thinkers who participated, were given opportunity to present topics from their religion. There was frank exchange of ideas and discussion, not a debate but a cordial discussion. A number of prominent Philosophical Hindus accepted Christ through this method. Jones did not develop any specific strategy or series of studies to be used at the round table conference.²

I would like to make use of this method for a frank exchange of ideas, using the material presented in chapter 5. This will be a series of ten meetings scheduled for an hour every Sunday at a convenient time at a school. The participants will be chosen from those who are inclined to religious discussions in the community. The ten topics for discussion will be: (1) vegetarian diet, (2) sin and its effects, (3) the monotheistic concept of God, (4) the love

¹Violet Paranjoti, An Evangelist on the Indian Scene: Dr. E. Stanley Jones (Mumbai: Bombay Tract & Book Society, 1970), 91.

²Jones, 127.

and grace of God, (5) the incarnation of god, (6) the identity of the savior, (7) how to attain salvation, (8) salvation for all, (9) the signs of the end of the world, and (10) the end of the world.

I would like to utilize the Hindu scriptures as well as the Christian scriptures to present the biblical concept on each topic, to build a bridge to Philosophical Hindus. This method will attract educated men because it is uncommon for women to attend such a conference on religious matters. Those who express their willingness and interest to study more will receive individual Bible studies, because individually they are more secure and can express their doubts boldly. This attempt is to lead them to understand Jesus and the salvation which He offers freely. The same topics and the procedure will be followed also for a ladies' discussion group. Since round table conferences do not incur any additional expense, there is no need for any financial concern to implement this method.

Philanthropic Work

Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, a Brahmin convert to Christianity, established a home for high caste Hindu widows. It was uncommon for Hindu widows to remarry. They were considered a curse, so they were left at Mukti Mission by their in-laws. A number of them accepted Christ in this

institution through the lifestyle evangelism of Pandita Ramabai. The home is known as Mukti Mission, in Kedgaon, on the outskirts of Pune. It is rendering a commendable philanthropic Christian service to women and girls.

I would like to use bhakti as a bridge to reach the high caste Hindu women by establishing a home for widows. I would like to train some Christian ladies to work with the women to present the material found in chapter 5 with a combination of Hindu and Christian scriptures. The ultimate goal is to recruit women converted from Hinduism to minister to women, because high caste ladies are not accessible to men other than their immediate family members. I would like to solicit the required financial resources from the Asian Aid Organization from Australia. Asian Aid is generously sponsoring a number of students at Spicer Memorial College and at a number of high schools in India. They are also running two orphanages: one in Hyderabad and the other in Bangalore, cities in South India. The location, the number of widows, and the number of staff members will be decided after consulting the Asian Aid Organization. The salaries for the staff will be paid according to the Seventh-day Adventist wage scale.

Lifestyle Evangelism in the Community

Two families will be chosen to live among the

Philosophical Hindus. One family with medical training and another with training in elementary education will be chosen. These two families will be chosen from the high caste Hindu converts who joined the Adventist Church after studying the beliefs of the church. They will be trained in natural medicine, hydrotherapy, deliverance ministry, and church planting. They will be given adequate Bible knowledge and will be grounded in Adventist doctrines.

Special emphasis will be given to prayer and its significance in personal life, church planting, and nurturing. The biblical characters who lived a prayerful life, other notable people of God down through the centuries who lived a successful life through prayer (for example, George Müller), and some native Christians in whose lives prayer played an important role (Sadhu Sunder Singh, Pandita Ramabai) will be introduced. These two families can utilize the power of prayer in their lives and ministry. This strategy is designed for a period of three years, which is divided into five stages.

The financial support for the medical work of the dispensary and the elementary school will be solicited from ADRA or the Rajiv Gandhi Welfare Foundation until they become self-supporting. The two families will be paid a monthly stipend of Rs. 2,000 each during this experimental period. After four years they will be posted to another

target area among Philosophical Hindus to do the same work.

This entire strategy will be implemented in consultation with the local Seventh-day Adventist conference. The strategy calls for the establishment of a church for high caste people. This is not customary, for most Adventists in India are from the lower classes. There will be continued prayer support for this target group.

Five stages make up the strategy. The first establishes credibility. The second provides for closer contact. The third leads to conversation. The fourth leads to comparison, and the fifth leads to conviction, which leads to baptism.

Stage 1: Credibility

This stage will take place during the first year. A target area of Philosophical Hindus will be selected to start an elementary school and dispensary. There will be no religious discussion or any public or private meetings during this period, because the two families must first be accepted by the community. The success of the strategy depends on the credibility which these two families can establish through the school and the dispensary.

School Ministry

One couple, who will be qualified elementary school teachers, will start an English-medium elementary school

where Sanskrit and the local language are compulsory, because Philosophical Hindus want their children to study Sanskrit. Such a school will be an attraction. A nominal fee will be charged to those who can afford to pay. The school should be given the name of the state where it is located. This will remove any prejudice people may have. The language teachers will be recruited from the local community of Philosophical Hindus to make them a part of this program.

All national holidays, such as Independence Day on August 15, Republic Day on January 26, and Gandhi Jayanthi (birthday of the Father of the nation) on October 2, will be celebrated with the involvement of all the parents and the members of the community. Speech and poster contests regarding topics such as the freedom movement, Indian heritage, and the moral values of the Hindu religion will be conducted on these national holidays. Prizes will be awarded to the students who perform well. Local community leaders will be invited as guests for these programs.

Health as a subject will be introduced into the curriculum. Simple health principles such as cleanliness and vegetarianism will be introduced to the children. They will carry the message to their parents in the first year.

There will be an annual program on the last day of the school to which parents, community leaders, and the

local government educational officers will be invited. Morning and evening sports training will be conducted for the children and the youth during the summer vacation.

Dispensary

The other family, perhaps the husband with public health training and his wife a nurse, will establish a dispensary to give free medical care. They will also promote natural medicine and healthful living. Their task is to establish credibility as genuine philanthropists. In whichever city or town this strategy is implemented, the name of that city or town will be given to the dispensary. There will be no spiritual or health lectures during the first year of the dispensary.

There will be an anniversary foundation-day program of the dispensary to which the people in the community and the leaders will be invited. Resource persons in the community or relatives of the people of the community, such as medical doctors and other government health officers, will be invited. At this time a five-day program to stop smoking will be launched.

Stage 2: Closer Contact

The first six months of the second year will be utilized to build close relationships with members in the community through various social welfare programs. These

will be co-ordinated by the school and the dispensary together. There will not be any religious discussion or presentation during the second stage. There will be weekly lectures on health, AIDS, cancer, and communicable diseases. Resource personnel from the community or related to the community can cooperate.

The lectures will last thirty minutes and be followed by a short video on the life and work of a Hindu saint or national or state leader. These will be arranged every Sunday at a convenient time for the community members, with their consent. This stage is intended to deepen relationships and confidence between the two families and the local people.

Stage 3: Conversation

This stage covers six months during the second half of the second year. Since credibility has been established during the first year, a closer contact has been established. Now it is safe to establish a temperance club for the members of the community. The person in charge of the dispensary will be the founder and the president. A secretary, treasurer, and other officers will be chosen from the community, by the community. The purpose of the club is to promote temperance, vegetarianism, cleanliness, and healthful living.

The weekly health-awareness meetings that started during the second stage will continue with a video each time, to promote nationalism and to provide entertainment. There will be an evening sports and games opportunity for the adults in the community from 6 p.m to 8 p.m. The venue will be the elementary school.

There will be individual discussions on mutually interesting topics, including religion. This stage provides for a frank exchange of ideas and opinions in which both families associate with whomever they establish close contact.

Stage 4: Comparison

During this fourth stage of six months, which will be the first half of the third year, some key Hindu doctrines will be studied. These will include salvation, the four paths to salvation, bhakti and its role, monotheism, incarnation and its purpose, the need for spiritual relationship with god, death and life after death, and other relevant doctrines of Hinduism. These topics will be discussed from the Hindu scriptures to permit the distinction between the true teaching of Hindu scriptures and the distorted ideas on these doctrines within Hinduism. Since the Christian families are former Hindus, they have adequate knowledge to discuss these subjects from Hindu

scripture. The Bible will not be used at this stage because the comparison is between the right and wrong understanding of Hindu doctrines from Hindu scriptures.

Philosophical Hindus have high regard for Sanskrit and Hindu scriptures. These will be used extensively, not because they are inspired or at the same level as the Bible, but to lead them from the known to the unknown during this stage. The purpose is to lead them from the Hindu scriptures to believe in one god and to worship the incarnate god and to love god wholeheartedly, which is bhakti and can compensate for all the sacrifices, rituals, and pilgrimages. This stage of comparison of various key Hindu doctrines will be vital for the final stage.

Stage 5: Conviction

Since the members have been led gradually from stage to stage, they have come to believe in one god who incarnated to put an end to sin. They love him wholeheartedly, which is called a bhakti relationship. The individuals who have progressed to this level will be introduced to the general and specific statements of Hindu scriptures regarding Jesus Christ. At this point, Jesus can be presented as the Savior who was born to a virgin, and shed His holy blood for the remission of sins.

Christ will be presented to Philosophical Hindus from

Hindu scriptures. The views of some leading Hindu spiritual and political leaders and thinkers who exalted Christ will also be presented. Other Adventist doctrines will be presented during this stage, using Hindu scriptures and the Bible to lead them to make a decision. The lives of prominent high caste Hindu converts like Sadhu Sunder Singh, Pandita Ramabai, Chandraleela, Narayana Rao Vaman Tilak, Pitambar Singh, Rabindranath Maharaj, Sushila, and others will be shared to instill confidence that they are not alone, but many others from Hinduism have accepted Christ as their personal Savior.

Those who make a decision for Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit will not be baptized individually but will wait for the entire family to accept Christ so that the family as a unit can withstand pressure from the fanatical Hindus. If any individual is desperate to be baptized, a private baptism will be arranged in accordance with Acts 8, where the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized by Philip.

I sincerely hope that there will be a group of people to stand for the Lord, for Jesus Christ, by the end of the third year. Sowing the seeds of the gospel is human work, but God will lead the people into the truth. The converts will be organized as a caste church, not to promote casteism but to create a suitable climate for them to grow in Christ in their own setting until they grow spiritually mature

enough to join the rest of the Seventh-day Adventist members. An indigenous worship style with local music will be used. The concept of self-support and self-propagation will be introduced to the church.

The two families will continue their school and dispensary ministry for one more year, until the end of the fourth year. After this a Hindu convert who has been trained for pastoral work will be appointed. The school and the dispensary work will be carried on by the members of the community.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Salvation is central to the Bible. It is unique because God has made a provision and initiated it. God grants it as a free gift to all. There is no color, caste, national, or gender distinction.

Salvation is unthinkable without God the Son, who has voluntarily incarnated Himself as an ordinary poor man. His exemplary life and teachings remain a great inspiration and help to all the believers in Christ. His vicarious death on the cross, on our behalf, stands as the crowning act of salvation to redeem sinners.

The resurrection of Christ, which is not present in any other religion, provides the greatest hope for each believer in the future resurrection of the righteous dead. The resurrection is the proof that Christ is the true God and that Christianity is the true religion. The resurrection was a stepping stone for Christ to ascend to heaven to function on our behalf.

Christ is working in the heavenly sanctuary as our

High Priest and advocate. He is our brother seated at the right hand of the Father. He will complete His heavenly ministry within a short time. He is going to come back the second time to take all of His faithful children to be with Him in heaven throughout eternity.

The biblical concept of salvation is marvelous. We can attain it freely by faith in Christ. All that we have to do is accept this wonderful plan of salvation which God offers in His infinite love.

The concept of salvation is also central in Hinduism. The Bhagavad Gita presents four different paths to salvation to liberate the soul from the bondage of Karma (the accumulated bad deeds for a number of rebirths).

The first path to salvation is Karma Yoga, which requires abundant good works to repay for the bad deeds done in the previous births. Appropriate sacrifices, both bloody and bloodless, are essential. The observance of festivals, pilgrimages to the holy places, and bathing in the holy waters of various sacred rivers are also required. This path is expensive and open only to the high caste.

Jnana Yoga requires the right knowledge of God. This path involves a tedious study of all the Hindu scriptures and the writings of Hindu saints in search of the knowledge of God. It takes a lifetime for the search of the knowledge of God which liberates. This path is only

suitable to the Brahmin caste, since other castes are not supposed to study the sacred scriptures.

Raja Yoga requires self-control and intense meditation in a secluded place. It takes years of unwavering mental concentration. This path is also limited to the Brahmin caste, for others must earn a living.

Bhakti Yoga requires loving god wholeheartedly. There is no caste, gender, or age barrier. This path is open to all. The requirements listed in the other three paths are not needed. Anyone can love god irrespective of his or her place and background. Liberation is assured in this life itself to anyone who loves god intensely. This path is suitable to all Hindus. It is easy and inexpensive. As a result, Bhakti Yoga is the most attractive path to salvation with the masses of Hinduism.

Hinduism is dominated by polytheism. Yet it also has a significant place for monotheism, especially in bhakti. The supreme god incarnates on earth to put an end to wickedness. He has already incarnated nine times. God is going to take the final and tenth incarnation within a short time.

A number of influential Hindus have a great regard for Christ. They uphold him as one of the incarnated gods. Yet, they do not accept Him as the only way to salvation.

Chapter 5 contains a few concepts which are common to

Hinduism and Christianity, which will be used as bridges to reach Philosophical Hindus. They are loving devotion, transformation of the wicked, openness to all, sacrifice, miracles, prophecy and visions, monotheism, vegetarianism, grace, the end of the world, and incarnation. The Hindu scriptural references regarding Christ are presented to use them as a bridge to lead the Philosophical Hindus to the Bible and to Jesus.

Strategies to reach the Philosophical Hindus with the love of Jesus and His salvation have been designed: (1) Round table conferences for the Philosophical Hindu men; (2) homes for high caste widows to train them to reach the high caste ladies; and (3) lifestyle evangelism in a high caste locality during four years.

In this strategy, two trained high caste Hindu converts will run a school and dispensary. The educational and the medical work will eradicate the prejudice towards Christianity and Christians. The educational and the medical work will be utilized to present Christ's love and His salvation to the high caste people. Financial support will be solicited for these strategies from ADRA, Asian Aid Organization, and the Rajiv Gandhi Welfare Foundation.

Conclusion

Bhakti provides a bridge to Philosophical Hindus.

Using bhakti to approach this target group is a culturally contextualized method. It has room for adaptation without compromising the truth and the doctrines of the church. Hence, this method has the potential of bringing extended families into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The entire clan can be attracted to Christ if this method is carefully implemented.

Since this method uses Hindu scriptural references and bhakti literature to present Christ and other doctrines, the Hindu converts can defend their newly found faith in Christ from Hindu scriptures. As a result, the Hindu converts can continue to live in their society and witness to others.

Philosophical Hindus are usually economically sound. Being spiritually minded, they support the temples and pilgrimage centers with large donations. Their conversion can help make the Adventist Church in India self-supporting, because until now most of the Adventist converts are from the low castes and the tribals who are economically weak.

Philosophical Hindus are socially and politically influential in India. Their conversion can make the Adventist Church more influential.

Philosophical Hindus propagate Hinduism by themselves because there is no organizational structure to propagate Hinduism. Their conversion can make the Adventist Church

self-propagating with native persons, money, and means. This method of using bhakti as a bridge to Philosophical Hindus must be experimented. All other methods and strategies thus far have not yielded significant results.

Recommendations

1. A research should be done on the Hindu concept of salvation according to bhakti because my research has focused basically on how to attain salvation.

2. I would like to recommend that this method of bhakti as a bridge to Philosophical Hindus be tried in the field to reach the Philosophical Hindus.

3. I would like to recommend to the Hinduism Studies Centre of Seventh-day Adventists, which is under the Ministerial Association of the Southern Asia Division, to offer a two-day seminar in each Mission Field/Conference in the Division to present this strategy to the pastors and evangelists.

4. I would like to recommend the preparation and publication of necessary reading materials (in simplified form and in layman's language) to be used as source material to reach the Philosophical Hindus.

5. I would like to recommend that the study of Hinduism be strengthened in Seventh-day Adventist theological education to provide special training for those

who would like to work among Hindus. This is essential because the Hindu population in the world is about one billion and not yet reached.

APPENDIX

HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY COMPARED

A number of doctrines and teachings in Hinduism have resemblance to Christian teachings and doctrines. Since the focus of the study is the Hindu concept of salvation, only those similarities which deal with salvation will be presented. Twenty similarities are noted, with supporting evidence from both religions.

1. Both Hinduism and Christianity offer a magnificent salvation. The goal of both is everlasting life.

Hinduism:

O son of Kunti, proclaim (to the world) that my devotee never perishes.

Even they who are of sinful birth, women, Vaishyas, as also Sudras, taking refuge in me, verily attain the highest goal (B.G. 9.31, 32).

Christianity:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

2. Both religions teach that the human beings must do good works.

Hinduism:

Therefore always perform action which has to be done, unattached, verily, man attains the highest by performing action unattached.

By action alone Janaka and others realized perfection. Even considering the incentive to people, you should perform action (B.G. 3.19, 20).

Christianity:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10).

3. Both religions teach that the good works a person performs must be selfless acts.

Hinduism:

Renunciation and the performance of (selfless) action both lead to liberation. But of the two the performance of (selfless) action is superior to renunciation of action (B.G. 5.2).

Christianity:

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth (Matt 6:3).

4. Both religions teach that a person will receive retribution for what he or she does.

Hinduism:

As it does and as it does, so it becomes: The doer of good becomes good, and the doer of evil becomes evil: it becomes virtuous through a virtuous act and vicious through a vicious act (Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5).

Christianity:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (Gal 6:7).

5. Both religions teach that the knowledge of God is essential; without it human beings cannot attain salvation.

Hinduism:

Endowed with wisdom, giving up the fruit resulting from action, attaining self-realization and freed from the bondage of birth, verily, they got that abode which is free from evil (B.G. 2.51).

Christianity:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet 1:3, 4).

6. *Both religions teach that meditation on God brings a great spiritual blessing.*

Hinduism:

To this yogin whose activity has subsided, who is of a tranquil mind, sinless and identified with Brahman, comes supreme bliss. The yogi entirely free from taint, constantly controlling the mind thus, attains easily the infinite bliss of union with Brahman (B.G. 6.27, 28).

Christianity:

And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hast sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized (Acts 9:9,17-18).

7. *Both religions teach that meditation on God transforms the life and attitude of a person.*

Hinduism:

The yogi whose self is satisfied through knowledge and realization, who is steady and has the senses under control and to whom a clod of earth, a stone and gold are of equal value, is said to be manifest. He excels, who looks equally on a well-wisher, a friend, an enemy, an arbiter, a hateful person, a relative and also on the good and the sinful (B.G. 6.8, 9).

Christianity:

Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days (Gal 1:17, 18).

There was a distinct change in the life and ministry of Paul after spending time in meditation in Arabia.

8. *Both religions teach that devotion (faith) is most important.*

Hinduism:

Persons wanting in faith in this teaching, O scorcher of foes. Return to the path of this mortal world without attaining me.

But the great-souled ones taking to the divine nature, O Partha, worship me with one-pointed devotion, knowing me to be the cause of all beings and immutable.

Always praising me, striving with austere vows, and bowing down to me with devotion, always steadfast, they worship me (B.G. 9.3.13.14).

Christianity:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb 11:6).

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8).

9. *Both religions teach that we must love God intensely.*

Hinduism:

Loving devotion to Me enables all things to attain to Immortality (Moksha). It is therefore fortunate that you have that type of devotion leading to me (Bhagavata 10.82.45).

Christianity:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment (Matt 22:37-38).

10. *Both religions teach that the love relationship with God is multifaceted.*

Hinduism:

Bhakti can be developed in nine different ways: They are through listening, singing, remembering, worshiping the feet of an idol, anointing an idol, thanksgiving, serving god as a servant, friendship with god, and total surrender to god (Bhagavata Purana 7.5.23).

Christianity:

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: he was called the Friend of God (Jas 2:23).

And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after (Heb 3:5).

The relationship of the Church with Christ is like that of a wife with her husband (Eph 5:22-26).

11. *Both religions teach that our love relationship with God can develop unto passionate, intimate relationship.*

Hinduism:

The ladies of Brindavan forgot whatever work they were doing. They could not see their husbands, parents, babies, cows, or calves in front of them. They unconsciously ran to the presence of Sri Krishna. With their minds they embraced the Lord. They felt that He was the Lord of their Hearts. Thus even in the end, by their intense love for the supreme, they had burnt down their mortal entanglements and got liberated (Bhagavata Purana 3.16).

Christianity:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:35-39).

12. *Both religions teach that God accepts the worst sinners.*

Hinduism:

Even if the most wicked worships Me with undivided devotion, he should be regarded as good, for he is rightly resolved (B.G. 9.30).

Christianity:

Zaccheus was a tax-collector. People regarded him as a sinner, because he exploited their money. Christ accepted him (Luke 19:7-10).

13. *Both religions are theistic and teach a divine origin*

for all things.

Hinduism:

Rigveda 10, 129, 1-7 says that there was nothing in the beginning. Every thing was covered with darkness. Only water was there. God wanted to create. He created everything by His power.

Christianity:

Gen 1:1-2 says that nothing was there in the beginning. God created everything.

14. Both religions teach monotheism; God is only one, the supreme Being.

Hinduism:

He knows truth who knows
This God as one.
Neither Second nor third
Nor fourth is He called;
Neither fifth nor sixth
Nor seventh is he called;
Neither eighth nor ninth
Nor tenth is he called.
He surveys all that breathes
And that breathes not
He possesses the power supreme
He is the one,
The one Alone.
In Him All divine powers
Become the one Alone (Atharva Veda 13.5. 14-21).

Christianity:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, is one Lord (Deut 6:4).

15. Both religions teach that God became incarnate in human flesh on this earth.

Hinduism:

Whenever, O descendant of Bharata, righteousness declines and unrighteousness prevails, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of religion, I come into being from age to age (B.G. 4.7, 8).

Christianity:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and

took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross
(Phil 2:6 -8).

16. *Both religions teach that the incarnate God must be worshiped in order for a person to be saved.*

Hinduism:

Even if a very wicked person worships me to the exclusion of anybody else, he should be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved.

He soon becomes righteous-minded and attains eternal peace : O son of Kunti, proclaim (to the world) that my devotee never perishes (B. G 9.30,31).

Christianity :

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:31).

17. *Both religions present a clear account of the birth of Christ through a virgin.*

Hinduism:

Bhavishya Purana Vol. 3. Ch 2. tells in unequivocal terms about the Birth of Christ through a virgin. His name is also clearly mentioned Yesu Masih (Jesus Christ).

Christianity:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isa 7:14)

And she shall bring forth a son, and you shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21).

18. *Both religious scriptures contain clear references to the suffering and vicarious death of Christ.*

Hinduism:

His hands and legs are to be bound to a yoopa (cross) causing bloodshed (Ithareya Brahmanam 2:6).

The Sacrificial victim is to be crowned with a crown made of thorny vines (Rigveda 10:90:7, 15).

Christianity:

who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Phil 2:6-7). Isa 53 and Matt 27 clearly tell about the suffering and the death of Christ.

19. *Both religions teach that there will be signs before the end of the world.*

Hinduism:

The signs of the last days are listed in the Vishnu Purana.¹

Christianity:

Matt 24 gives the signs of the last days.

20. *Both religions teach that God will come to put an end to sin on this earth.*

Hinduism:

God will come in the form of Kalki (a man with a sword seated on a white horse), will come to eliminate sinners on this earth. (Mahabharata. Vana.190.93-97)

Christianity:

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not god, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power (2 Thess 1:7-9; cf. Rev 19:11-16).

¹Wilkins, Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Puranic, 245-248.

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