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## II. Striving to Realize Brahman-God

### 1. Brahman-God Realization

Indian: “Having realized Atman, the seer becomes satisfied with that Knowledge. Their souls are established in the Supreme Self, they are free from passions and they are tranquil in mind. Such calm souls, ever devoted to the Self, behold everywhere the omnipresent Brahman and in the end enter into It, which is all this. Having well ascertained the Self, the goal of the Vedantic knowledge, and having purified their minds through the practice of sannyas, the seers, never relaxing their efforts, enjoy here supreme Immortality and at the time of the great end attain complete freedom in Brahman” (Mun. Up. 3:2.5-6). “Ever glorifying Me [Lord Krishna] ... remaining firm in their vows, bowing before Me, they worship Me with love and unwavering steadiness” (BG 9:14; cf. 4:11; 6:47; 9:22, 33; 11:54; 12:20). “The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart. With their thought fixed on Me, with their life absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me, and always conversing about Me, they derive satisfaction and delight” (BG 10:8-9; cf. 13:10).

Old and New Testament: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt. 6:5; cf. 6:13. 10:12, 20; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; 1 Sam. 2:1; Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27). “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45; cf. 19:2; 20:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:16). New Testament: “We are all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). “That Christ may dwell in your hearts thorough faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to

comprehend with all the saints and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19; cf. Jn. 4:23). “Be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24; cf. 1 Cor. 15:49; Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:4).

Divine Eye. Indian: “I give you a Divine eye; behold now, My sovereign yoga power” (BG 11:8). New Testament: “If your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt. 6:22).

Spiritual encounters with God are found in the Old Testament. They include: God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17-18) and his experience on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22); Jacob’s dreams at Bethel (Gen. 28, 31); Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3) and on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19, 34); the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11); the angelic visitations of Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15), Israel (Judg. 2:1-5), Gideon (Judg. 6:11-24), and Manoah (Judg. 13:2-25); Elijah and the “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:11-18); God speaking to Job out of a whirlwind (Job 38-42); and the visions of Isaiah (Is. 6), Ezekiel (Eze. 1; 3:16-27), and Daniel (Dan. 10:1-9).

Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) mentioned, “When the mind, thus purged by ceaseless meditation, is merged in Brahman, the state of samadhi is attained. In that state there is no sense of duality. The undivided joy of Brahman is experienced. When a man reaches samadhi, all the knots of his desires are cut through and he is freed from the law of karma. Brahman is revealed to him, internally and externally, everywhere and always, without any further effort on his part.”<sup>2</sup> S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) declares, “Shankara admits the reality of an intuitional consciousness, anubhava, where the distinctions of subject and object are superseded and the truth of the supreme self realized. It is the ineffable experience beyond thought and speech, which transforms our whole life and yields the certainty of a Divine presence. It is the state of consciousness which is induced when the individual strips himself of all finite conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) indicated that the mystics of the various religions teach similar truths. “The end of all religions is the realizing of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. If there is one universal truth in all religions, I place it here—in realizing God. Ideals and methods may differ, but that is the central point. There may be a

thousand different radii, but they all converge to the one centre, and that is the realization of God: something behind this world of sense.”<sup>4</sup> Then all doubts will cease. “Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in intellectual argumentation; it is being and becoming, it is realization. We hear so many talking about God and the soul, and all the mysteries of the universe, but if you take them one by one, and ask them, ‘Have you realized God? Have you seen your Soul?’—how many can say they have? And yet they are all fighting with one another!”<sup>5</sup>

Vivekananda explains, “Religion is not in books, nor in theories, nor in dogmas, nor in talking, not even in reasoning. It is being and becoming.... Until the superconscious opens for you, religion is mere talk, it is nothing but preparation.... The human mind, at certain moments, transcends not only the limitations of the senses, but also the power of reasoning. It then comes face to face with facts which it could never have sensed, could never have reasoned out.”<sup>8</sup> “Realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation--hearing lectures, or reading books, or reasoning is merely preparing the ground; it is not religion.... The end of all religions is the realizing of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. If there is one universal truth in all religions, I place it here—in realizing God.”<sup>9</sup> “He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight.... The pure heart is the best mirror for the reflection of truth ... as soon as it is pure, all truths flash upon it in a minute.”<sup>10</sup> “These are called Rishis, because they come face to face with spiritual truths.... This Rishi-state is not limited by time or place, by sex or race.”<sup>11</sup> It is open to all people just as much today as it was thousands of years in the past.

His brother monastic disciple Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922) affirmed, “Dreams about enlightened souls, gods and goddesses, and Divine Incarnations, are real experiences. They are actual visitations. Many spiritual truths are revealed in religious dreams. The effect and impression of such dreams remain. But one must not speak of them to anybody.” It is possible to be absorbed in the consciousness of God. “Have intense love for God and the mind will remain always tranquil and pure.”<sup>12</sup> “When a man practices this form of worship [meditation], he keeps up a constant flow of thought toward God and becomes absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal [Ishta Devata].” “Meditation means a continuous flow of thought toward God. When meditation ripens, there comes absorption, and samadhi is experienced. The joy that is realized in samadhi remains forever.” “Meditate on your Chosen Ideal, but if He appears before you in

another form, enjoy that Divine vision. Gradually you will find that all aspects are dissolved into your Chosen Ideal.” This state is beyond prayer and japa, yet a sense of duality remains. “The moment you become absorbed in the contemplation of God, you will experience unbounded joy. Days and nights will pass away in the blissful consciousness of God.”<sup>14</sup> Immersed in the living presence of the Lord, the saint is free from anger, delusion, lust, and all other negative feelings.<sup>15</sup>

The Greek Christian philosopher of Alexandria, Egypt, Origen (c. 185-254) articulated, “The man who was made in God’s image is the inner man, the incorporeal, incorruptible, immortal one.”<sup>16</sup> “While the possibility of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning through the honor of the ‘image [of God],’ he should in the end through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect ‘likeness [of God].’<sup>17</sup> “So the mind, purified and passing beyond everything material, so that it perfects its contemplation of God, is made Divine in what it contemplates.” Andrew Louth explains Origen’s position, “In its union with the Logos through contemplation, the soul shares in the Word’s contemplation of God. From this flow a number of consequences that are characteristic of Origen’s doctrine of contemplation. The soul’s contemplation of the Logos is natural; in contemplation of the Logos the soul regains its proper state.... Knowing God is being known by God, and that means that God is united to those who know him, and gives them a share in his Divinity. So, knowing God means Divinization, theopoesis. Knowing God is having the image of God, which we are, reformed after the likeness: the image is perfected so that we are like God. And contemplation is the means of this.”<sup>18</sup>

Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) the German Dominican priest and mystic proclaimed, “God makes us know Himself, and he makes us know Himself by His act of knowing, and His Being is his knowledge. For Him to make me know and for me to know are one and the same thing. Hence, His knowledge is mine, quite as it is one and the same in the master which teaches and in the disciple who is taught. Since his knowledge is mine, and since his substance is his knowledge, his nature, and his being, it follows that his being, his substance, and his nature are mine. Thus since his substance, his being, and his nature are mine, I am the Son of God.” “It should be understood that to know God and to be known by God, to see God and to be seen by God, are one according to the reality of things. In knowing and seeing God, we know and see that he makes us see and

know."<sup>19</sup>

Based on her own spiritual experiences, the Spanish mystic and founder of the Discalced Carmelite Order, Teresa of Avila (1515-82) outlined seven mansions or stages in the soul's journey to God. In the fifth mansion for a limited period of time a spiritual betrothal takes place, whereby the soul perceives the Spirit dwelling in the depth of their heart. "All mean egotism vanishes; the currents of Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."<sup>20</sup> The soul has died to the world, so that it can be more fully alive in God. Far greater than all of the satisfactions of earthly life, are the heavenly joys of spiritual communion. In the sixth mansion the soul is "so completely absorbed and the understanding so completely transported—for as long as a day, or even for several days—that the soul seems incapable of grasping anything that does now awaken the will to love; to this it is fully awake, while asleep as regards all that concerns attachment." Separating from the body in a "flight of the spirit," the soul experiences majestic love for God. "In a single instant he is taught so many things all at once that, if he were to labor for years on end in trying to fit them all into his imagination and thought, he could not succeed with a thousandth part of them." A vision "is seen with the eyes of the soul, very much more clearly than we can ordinarily see things with the eyes of the body; and some of the revelations are communicated to it without words. If, for example, he sees any of the saints, he knows them as well as if he had spent a long time in their company." All this culminates in a spiritual marriage in the seventh and highest mansion where there is "the union of the whole soul with God." In sheer delight the deepest level of the soul unites with God. "This instantaneous [union] of God to the soul is so great a secret and sublime a favor, and such delight is felt by the soul, that I do not know with what to compare it."<sup>21</sup> Feelings produced by rapture "are so excessive by comparison with anything on earth ... that, if the memory of them did not pass away, the souls would always feel a loathing for worldly pleasures."<sup>22</sup>

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) pointed out, "Two forms of mysticism must always be distinguished: concrete mysticism, which is mysticism of love and participating in the Savior-God, and abstract mysticism, or transcending mysticism, which goes beyond everything finite to the ultimate ground of everything that is."<sup>23</sup> In "concrete mysticism, Christ mysticism, love mysticism" the aspirant enters the sphere of holiness, the sacred realm where Divinity manifests. In the religious experience the total self is surrendered to God, who reveals Himself to a mystic inwardly in an

intuitive encounter. Feeling the presence of God through inner union, there is an experience of perfect unity, harmony, and relatedness. Second, there is a transcending mysticism that aspires to advance beyond the finite realm to the infinite. A mystic attempts to “unite the soul directly with the ground of being, to make it enter the mystery of existence.”<sup>24</sup> When the mystic is confronted by and grasps the ground of existence, a new reality is perceived. Mystical experience is not a form of theoretical intellectual reflection, but is the direct existential participation in a higher reality.<sup>25</sup> Religious “experience is not the source from which the contents of systematic theology are taken but the medium through which they are existentially received.”<sup>26</sup>

We seek knowledge resting upon justified belief with some secure foundation of certainty. Foundationalism holds that there are basic beliefs that serve as foundations to anchor the rest of our beliefs. Empirical foundational knowledge is direct and immediate, infallible and indubitable yielding self-evident truths. People meditate because genuine religious experiences are foundational providing a high level of certainty. At the physical level direct noninferential foundational experience is based on: a) external sense perception or b) subjective awareness, i.e., Descartes, “I think therefore, I exist.” We have indubitable knowledge that we think and exist, feel pain, and for most people we have two hands. These ideas are not inferred or justified on the basis of other beliefs but on our own personal experiences. Also, foundational are mathematical truths (such as  $2 + 2 = 4$ , Euclid’s Theorems), the laws of logic, and deductive validity.<sup>28</sup> Ultimate theory seeks ideas that are foundational in that there is no deeper explanation. The clarification is not subsumed by some prior, more fundamental fact or idea. Foundationalism is based on First Principles that cannot be deduced or inferred from any other propositions or assumptions. They are based on self-evident, indubitable, a priori truths.<sup>29</sup> Their truth cannot be doubted and they are the source of all knowledge. For example, we cannot deny our own existence and subjective experiences.

Foundational ideas are primitive not being defined in terms of previously defined concepts. They are necessary to avoid an infinite regress of explanation. At a higher level they are combined into higher-level principles and concepts. In physics they include space, time, motion, mass, and energy. There is only one space and one time, while there are many types of physical energy but they are all reducible to energy.

Examples of other primitive concepts are causation, name, form, substance, quantity, quality, and relation.<sup>30</sup>

Religious scripture is of the highest certainty if it is based on the religious experiences of an Avatara (Divine Incarnation). When Narendra (the young Swami Vivekananda) first met Ramakrishna he asked him, "Sir have you seen God?" The instant reply was, "Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to Him."<sup>32</sup> Meaning that his spiritual experience was clearer than a sense perception. A mystic experience is verified if it leads to a positive transformation in the character of the person. Religion is more than a set of ideas, concepts, traditions, beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and social relationships. It is about manifesting our own spiritual nature.

A mystical experience is a direct contact with the Divine realm that transcends human existence. This exalted level of consciousness is experienced internally. If they experience a Personal Brahman-God they feel the blissful consciousness of His/Her presence. Religious experience may be concentrated on illuminating the mind (rational) or on stimulating the heart and feelings (emotive). This knowledge of Brahman-God is not intellectual, but is existential. One might feel divine love and/or ecstasy, and a sense of being enlightened. The result is an inner transformation of the mystic that goes beyond religious dogma, external rituals, and institutional identity. An inner dimension of religious faith and practice is awakened. The experience is not obtained through the five physical senses or by inference, but in the spiritual center of the individual. If the mystic makes contact with a Personal Brahman-God they must submit completely to the Divine Being who has infused Himself-Herself into the their soul. The authenticity of the mystical experience is based on undergoing a personal transformation in thinking and way of life.<sup>33</sup>

The mystic believes that religion is something that can be directly verified by experience and observation. It is open to all people. Religious Experience is grounded in spiritual sensory experiences. The veracity of sense-experience is self-evident, being foundational in no need of further justification. Following the scientific Verification Principle, while living on earth developing the spiritual senses such as Divine Sight, blissful Divine things can be experienced and Brahman-God can be realized. Mystical experiences occur in all major religious traditions throughout the world. This differs from indirect knowledge known through inference. Theistic mystics relate to Brahman-God as a person and not as an idea like the intellectuals do. Just as the intellect can think abstractly without use of

the five senses, so also the soul can experience Brahman-God in the Divine realm without the use of the discursive reason of the intellect. To realize these high states of consciousness spiritual disciplines must be followed. They cannot be manifested by reason alone. These experiences are best understood thorough the knowledge of realization rather than the knowledge of the intellect.

Mysticism involves a direct communion with the Divine realm, an experience of Brahman-God or union with the Absolute. When we realize Brahman-God, at the same time we realize our own divinity. The mystic has consciousness of the presence of a Divine Being. What is experienced involves spiritual sense perception of a Divine object and reality, and internal feelings of love and bliss. It is more a transformation in being rather than inferential knowledge. The practice was deliberately undertaken in order to come to some realization or insight, to come to unity with the Divine, or to experience the higher reality directly. The result is a better understanding into the meaning of existence, a personal transformation, and possibly having some positive effect on other people. Of the many vocations only the mystic claims to have experienced Divine bliss for more than a short time. All other ventures fall short of this mark. By opening myself to Brahman-God I realize the deepest meaning of my being. Intellectual knowledge is abstract and indirect, while spiritual experience and realization is concrete direct knowledge of Brahman-God. For humans direct access to non-inferential knowledge includes external perception and internal thoughts and feelings.

Higher mystical experiences might occur unexpectedly, but in most cases the recipient undertook a rigorous preparatory practice. Years were required to sever the effects of improper mental impressions, false desires, and over identification with the physical body that prevented the experience from occurring. Since most of us are made not born yogis, it takes a great deal of hard work to achieve the goal. Water the roots so that the tree will grow. We all set goals, but there is a tendency to lower the ideal if things do not go the way we want them to. The inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931) remarked, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up."<sup>34</sup> So a spiritual aspirant should persist and not give up their practices if they experience a dry period. According to an old English Proverb, "Where there's a will there's a way." Edison also stated, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."



It is possible that samadhi and mysticism encompass new phenomena that have new properties and new forces and are regulated by new scientific principles and new scientific laws concerning the power of thought that have not yet been discovered and formulated.

Public revelations of the great Incarnations, prophets, and sages form the basis of religious scriptures of the world and are extremely rare. Through religious practice one can obtain their own personal private revelations. These spiritual experiences affect us and possibly might extend to influence a few people around us.

Meditation purifies the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious mind at the same time since they are interconnected. Brahman-God realization (and Self-realization) is not only the highest form of religion, it is also the highest form of psychology-psychiatry. In the ultimate state the mind becomes pure, full of love, free of all neurotic attachments and unfulfilled desires. If the unconscious becomes conscious that means the Illumined soul has access to the content of the unconscious mind. The irrational part of the unconscious mind becomes conscious, no longer exerting a hidden negative influence upon us. If one loves Brahman-God then they will be attracted to those things that are good by nature.

Valid mystical experience should be in conformity with reason and scripture. They are profound and pleasant and bring about a permanent spiritual transformation in the person. Their content is not planned.

Spiritual transformation takes place at a deeper level than the physical. Mystical experiences occur in different realms of consciousness. For example, a person who takes LSD might have a religious experience, but it occurs in the psychic not the spiritual world. LSD is a type of physicalism that teaches that spiritual experiences result from taking certain physical substances. Spiritual experiences in the heart, throat, frontal part of the brain, and the upper level of the brain of the subtle body (mind body, thought body) differ considerably from those of taking LSD.

Christians use the terms “born again” and “new birth” (John 3:3) to mean one becomes a new person when they enter spiritual life by living morally and wholeheartedly accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. This way they have a direct and personal relationship with God. The Gallup Poll mentioned in 2004, 63% of black Americans said they are born-again, compared with 39% of white Americans.<sup>35</sup>

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. IX. Brahman-God Realization, Section 1. Worshiping Brahman-God.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. Endeavoring to Realize Brahman-God

Seek and you will find God. Indian: “He who worships Him [Brahman-Atman], and puts his trust in Him, shall surely attain Him” (Ch. Up.\* 3:14.4, p. 103). “Give Me your whole heart, love and adore Me, worship Me always, bow to Me only, and you shall find Me” (BG\* 18:65, p. 172; cf. 9:34, p. 109). New Testament: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8; cf. Mk. 11:24; Lk. 11:9-10; Jn. 15:7; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; 1 Jn. 3:22). “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (KJ, Phil. 2:5).

God in the heart. Indian: “Yet again is that Self [Atman], within the lotus of my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the heavens, yea, greater than all the worlds” (Ch. Up.\* 3:14.3, p. 102). “The Lord dwells in the heart of all beings” (BG 18:6; cf. 10:20; 15:15; Br. Up. 4:4.22; Ch. Up. 8:3.1, 3; Kat. Up. 2:3.17; Mait. Up. 6:27; Mun. Up. 2:2.1; 3:1.7; Svet. Up. 3:11, 13). “There is no purifier as great as this knowledge ... he knows its truth within his heart” (BG\* 4:38, p. 66). “As knowledge, the object of knowledge, and the goal of knowledge, It [Brahman] is set firm in the hearts of all” (BG 13:17). New Testament: God “who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6). “That we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (Gal. 4:5-6). “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17).

To quote Swami Vivekananda, “The greatest help to spiritual life is meditation (Dhyana). In meditation we divest ourselves of all material conditions and feel our Divine nature.” “Each man is only a conduit for the infinite ocean of knowledge and power that lies behind mankind.... The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated they illumine.... To turn the mind, as it were, inside, stop it from going outside, and then to concentrate all its powers, and throw them upon the mind itself, in order that it may know its own nature, analyse itself, is very hard work.... The powers of the mind should be concentrated and turned back upon itself, and as the darkest places reveal their secrets before the penetrating rays of the sun, so will this

concentrated mind penetrate its own innermost secrets.” Success in meditation is due to a high degree of concentration, since a distracted mind fritters away most of its energy. “Raja-Yoga is the science which teaches us how to gain the power of concentration.”<sup>37</sup> To see God your mind must be calm and quiet, not agitated by a multitude of incongruous thought waves. The best form of self-control is to get hold of the thought waves in their fine, subtle and seed state, before they become gross and enter into the conscious mind. Think of God as much as possible and concentrate your mind, so that it assumes the form of the Lord. Sit erect with “the chest, neck and head held in a straight line” and breathe rhythmically. It is best to meditate at “the conjunction time of dawn and twilight, when all nature becomes calm,” where there is an even temperature and sounds do not agitate the mind. “Live alone, live alone. He who is alone never comes into conflict with others—never disturbs others, is never disturbed by others.” “The great error in all ethical systems, without exception, has been the failure of teaching the means by which a man could refrain from doing evil.”<sup>38</sup> Through the practice of yoga the mind can be brought under control, and the meditator can willfully change their own ethical nature for the better.<sup>39</sup> Another virtue, “Strength, strength is what the *Upanishads* speak to me from every page. This is the one great thing to remember, it has been the one great lesson I have been taught in my life; strength, it says, strength, O man, be not weak.... And the *Upanishads* are the great mine of strength. Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world; the whole world can be vivified, made strong, energised through them.”<sup>40</sup>

Vivekananda’s brother disciple Swami Shivananda (1854-1934) made clear that you must sincerely yearn for the love and knowledge of Brahman-God to attain Him. The Lord is the Inner Controller (Antaryamin), who knows how much inner faith and sincere devotion we possess. “A person cannot have supreme devotion and knowledge without God’s grace. The Lord is sure to grant the desire of one who sincerely yearns for devotion and knowledge.”<sup>41</sup> Call upon the Lord daily and pray constantly with humility, sincerity, and earnestness. “Pray to the Lord for strength, knowledge, and dispassionateness. Pray to Him with all your heart for His grace.”<sup>42</sup> “You should fervently pray to Him, saying: ‘O Lord! Give me devotion and faith. Let me not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching Maya!’ Repeat His name and pray to Him with great sincerity for as long as possible.” “It is through constant devotion and meditation that God becomes gracious and reveals Himself in the heart of the devotee. What is

needed is meditation—constant remembrance of Him.” “God is a lover of His devotees; He is satisfied with love and devotion alone. He reveals Himself wherever there are yearning and love.” “When the mind becomes purified by spiritual practice, it feels the living and Divine presence of God.” “As a result of association with the holy, one reaches the state of being freed from all worldly attachments. All wants and desires are then destroyed root and branch, and one feels the nearness of God.”<sup>43</sup>

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) articulated that a spiritual vision yields sudden and direct insight, while through the rational process the intellect progresses slowly in a piecemeal fashion. “The supramental consciousness and force would take up the transformation directly into its own hands, reveal to the terrestrial mind, life, bodily being, their own spiritual truth and Divinity and, finally, pour into the whole nature the perfect knowledge, power, significance of the supramental existence. The soul would pass beyond the borders of the Ignorance and cross its original line of departure from the supreme Knowledge: it would enter into the integrality of the supramental gnosis; the descent of the gnostic Light would effectuate a complete transformation of the Ignorance.” “Therefore the only final goal possible is the emergence of the infinite consciousness in the individual; it is his recovery of the truth of himself by self-knowledge and by self-realization, the truth of the Infinite in being, the Infinite in consciousness, the Infinite in delight repossessed as his own Self and Reality of which the finite is only a mask and an instrument for various expression.”<sup>44</sup> “The Illumined Mind does not work primarily by thought, but by vision; thought is here only a subordinate movement expressive of sight.” “Intuition has a fourfold power. A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance ... [and] a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth.” “Yoga implies not only the realization of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a Divine consciousness and become part of a Divine work.”<sup>45</sup>

As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan expresses it, "If philosophy of religion is to become scientific, it must become empirical and found itself on religious experience." "The Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis." "Every philosophy is the exposition and justification of an experience." "Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality (darsana) or experience of reality (anubhava)."

"While philosophy cannot take anything for granted it cannot ignore the testimony of religious experience to the nature of ultimate reality which it also seeks to apprehend."<sup>46</sup> "The truths of the ṛishis are not evolved as the result of logical reasoning or systematic philosophy but are the products of spiritual intuition, dṛṣṭi or vision. The ṛishis are not so much the authors of the truths recorded in the Vedas as the seers who were able to discern the eternal truths by raising their life-spirit to the plane of universal spirit."<sup>47</sup>

It is best to pray at least three times a day according to Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-254), in a place consecrated for that purpose. To pray properly we must live a moral life, forgive others, and free ourselves from all disturbances of the mind. During the act of prayer the soul turns away from the physical body and the world, and devotes itself to spiritual matters. "Contemplate that image of God that we can be transformed to his likeness.... by beholding the image of God, according to whose likeness he has been made by God, he will receive that form, which was given to him by nature, through the Word and his power."<sup>48</sup> Ordinary people understand the humanity of the Divine Incarnation, but only advanced contemplatives comprehend His Divinity.<sup>49</sup>

Plotinus (c. 205-70) of Alexandria and Rome continually stressed that a person should strive to reach the higher realm. "The perfect life, the true, real life, is in that transcendent intelligible [Divine] reality ... as long as all living things proceed from a single origin, but have not life to the same degree as It, the origin must be the first and most perfect life." Illumination "turns the soul back upon itself and does not allow it to disperse, but makes it satisfied with the glory in itself." A soul "must see that light by which it is enlightened: for we do not see the sun by another light than his own." After preparing oneself for the Divine vision, a person "must not chase after it, but wait quietly till it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it." "The soul also loves the Good, moved by it to love from the beginning."<sup>50</sup> "When he sees the beauty in bodies he must not run after them; we must know that they are images, traces, shadows, and hurry away to that which they image." "Here below too it is best to be detached from human concerns, and so necessarily from human memories."<sup>51</sup>

He continues, "In the soul of the good and wise man the objects known tend to become identical with the knowing subject ... in intellect both are one ... substantially, and because 'thinking and being are the

same.” When the soul is in the Intelligible [Divine] world, it has “become one and the same thing with its Intelligible object.” A person may know “himself according to Intellect [Nous] because he has become that Intellect ... not any longer as man, but having become altogether other and snatching himself up into the higher world.” “Contemplation must be the same as the contemplated, and Intellect the same as the intelligible.” “There were not two, but the seer himself was one with the seen (for it was not really seen, but united to him) ... He was one himself, with no distinction in himself either in relation to himself or to other things.”<sup>52</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) clarifies why, “The contemplative life is absolutely more excellent than the active; and the Philosopher [Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)] proves this by eight reasons. The first is because the contemplative life befits man according to that which is best in him, namely the intellect, and according to its proper objects, namely intelligibles; the active life however is occupied with externals.... The second reason is because the contemplative life can be more continuous ... Thirdly, because the contemplative life is more delightful than the active ... Fourthly, because in the contemplative life man is more self-sufficient, since he needs fewer things for that propose ... Fifthly, because the contemplative life is loved more for its own sake, while the active life is directed to something else.... Sixthly, because the contemplative life consists in leisure and rest ... Seventhly, because the contemplative life is according to Divine things, while active life is according to human things ... Eighthly, because the contemplative life is according to that which is most proper to man, namely his intellect; in the works of the active life however the lower powers also, which are common to us and brutes have their part.”<sup>53</sup> Due to the excellence of the Divine object that is contemplated, the most joyous reflection is on spiritual things. The benefits of deep mystical contemplation unlike those of the active life cannot be taken away from a person. Spiritual contemplation is an end in-itself, since it is the final goal to which all other actions are ultimately ordered.<sup>54</sup> “The ultimate felicity of man does not consist in external things which are called the goods of fortune, nor in the goods of the body ... [Contemplation of God] is the only operation which is proper to him, and in it he shares nothing in common with other animals. So, too, this is ordered to nothing else as an end, for the contemplation of truth is sought for its own sake. Also, through this operation man is united by way of likeness with beings superior to him.”<sup>55</sup>

Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) explains how higher intuition is the source of knowledge in all fields of endeavor. “Glimpses of the super-rational-supersensory forms of the reality are given to us by the true supersensory-superrational intuition, or Divine inspiration, or flash of enlightenment of all creative geniuses: founders of great religions, sages, seers, and prophets, giants of philosophy and ethics, great scientists, artists, moral leaders and other eminent creators in all fields of culture. These geniuses unanimously testify the fact that their discoveries and creation of their masterpieces have been started and then guided by grace of intuition quite different from sensory perception or logico-mathematical reasoning. All the great discoveries and masterpieces in all fields of culture have always been inspired by this intuition.”<sup>56</sup> Intuition comes in a flash, not by step-by-step reasoning. Could we say that a great intellectual thinker like Immanuel Kant was on the border between discursive reason and the higher intuition?

In his writings Abraham Maslow (1908-70) the head of Psychology Department at Brandeis University, a “peak experience” is a moment of transcendence that can be achieved by a self-actualizing individual. Most often transcendents who have mystical experiences: consider these events as “the most important things in their life”; are “profoundly religious or spiritual” and nonmaterialistic; perceive “the sacred within the secular”; are motivated by the values of “perfection, truth, beauty, goodness, unity”; and they “recognize each other” often communicating in a nonverbal manner. They are also “more responsive to beauty”; holistic and universalistic self-actualizers; able to “transcend the ego”; lovable and “more awe-inspiring”; and are “innovators, discoverers of the new.”<sup>57</sup> Peak experiences are transformative bringing about insight into the world and themselves. Their life takes on a sense of purpose.

Maslow continues, pertinent generalized characteristics of the peak experience are: “The experience or the object tends to be seen as a whole, as a complete unit, detached from relations from the possible usefulness, from expediency, and from purpose.” It “is felt as a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it. That is to say it is an end in itself”; “is only good and desirable, and is never experienced as evil or undesirable”; is “also perceived and reacted to as if they were in themselves, ‘out there,’ as if they were perceptions of reality independent of man and persisting beyond his life”; is “much more passive and receptive than active”; and is an emotional reaction with “a special flavor of wonder, of awe, of reverence, of humility and

surrender before the experience as before something great,” where “the whole of the world is seen as unity.” During the peak experience the person is “loving, uncondemning, compassionate”; momentarily without “fear, anxiety, inhibition, defense and control”; “tends to become more integrated, more individual, more spontaneous, more expressive, more easy and effortless, more courageous, more powerful”; “feels himself, more than at other times, to be a responsible, active, creating center of his activities and of his perceptions”; and “is most here-now, most free of the past and of the future in various senses.”<sup>58</sup>

Characteristics of a Peak Experience are the person will experience the highest happiness and a sense of fulfillment, a feeling of certitude free from all doubt, an openness to creative thought and ideas yielding an increase in understanding, and a oneness with other people and the environment. They can be a turning point in a person's life.<sup>59</sup> Maslow's idea is that psychologists should not only focus on mental illness, but also on healthy goals and modes of living to improve people and human society. The great religions of the world originated from a prophet or seer who had a revelation of the higher more sublime world.

John E. Collins specifies two types of causation. Ascending causation flows from brain to mind, from matter toward spirit. Descending causality the determining factor in all mystical experience flows from “spirit to consciousness, from the nonmaterial toward the material, from mind toward brain.”<sup>60</sup> It is becoming in tune with the latter Divine causation that brings Brahman-God realization.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. IX. Brahman-God Realization, Section 2. Striving to Realize Brahman-God (Adoration).<sup>61</sup>

### 3. Love and Worship Brahman-God

Indian: “Ever glorifying Me [Lord Krishna] ... remaining firm in their vows, bowing before Me, they worship Me with love and unwavering steadiness” (BG 9:14; cf. 4:11; 6:47; 9:22, 33; 11:54; 12:20). “The wise know this and worship Me with all their heart. With their thought fixed on Me, with their life absorbed in Me, enlightening one another about Me, and always conversing about Me, they derive satisfaction and delight” (BG 10:8-9; cf. 13:10).

Old and New Testament: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt. 6:5; cf.



6:13. 10:12, 20; 11:1, 13, 22; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; 1 Sam. 2:1; Mt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27). “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps. 42:2; cf. Is. 26:9 cf. Prov. 3:6; Ps. 13:6). New Testament: “That Christ may dwell in your hearts thorough faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God” (Eph. 3: 17-19; cf. Jn. 4:23).

Meditation on the Lord. Indian: “Be devoted to Brahman. Meditate on him unceasingly” (Kai. Up\* 2, p. 207). “Fixing their minds in Him, at one with Him, abiding in Him, realizing Him alone as the Supreme Goal” (BG 5:17). “I [Lord Krishna] am easy of access to that ever steadfast yogi who, O Parthia, constantly meditates on Me” (BG 8:14; 10:17; 12:8-9, 14; Mun. Up. 3:1.8; Tait. Up. 3:10.4). Old Testament: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight” (Ps. 19:14).

Seek and you will find God. Indian: “He who worships Him [Brahman-Atman], and puts his trust in Him, shall surely attain Him” (Ch. Up.\* 3:14.4, p. 103). “Give Me your whole heart, love and adore Me, worship Me always, bow to Me only, and you shall find Me” (BG\* 18:65, p. 172; cf. 9:34, p. 109). Old Testament: “From there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him, if you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Dt. 4:29 cf. Jer. 29:13). New Testament: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7-8; cf. Mk. 11:24; Lk. 11:9-10; Jn. 15:7; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; 1 Jn. 3:22).

Accept God’s teachings and you will be free of evil. Indian: “Since you accept Me and do not question, now I shall tell you that innermost secret: knowledge of God ... Understand this and be free forever from birth and dying with all their evil” (BG\* 9:1, p. 100). Old Testament: “He who listens to Me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of evil” (Prov. 1:33).

Seek God to receive wisdom. Indian: “On those who are ever devoted to Me and worship Me with love, I bestow the yoga of understanding, by which they come to Me” (BG 10:10). “Strive without ceasing to know the Atman, seek this knowledge ... the roots of true wisdom” (BG\* 13:11, p. 135). Old Testament: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov. 9:10; cf. 1:7; Ps.

111:10).

The seer philosopher Shankara achieved spiritual illumination and created a practical religious philosophy, which concentrates on attaining transcendental consciousness and direct spiritual intuition (Anubhava). It is open to all, but realized by only a few.<sup>63</sup> “The Atman is pure consciousness, clearly manifest as underlying the states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. It is inwardly experienced as unbroken consciousness, the consciousness that I am I. It is the unchanging witness that experiences the ego, the intellect and the rest, with their various forms and changes. It is realized within one's own heart as existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute. Realize this Atman within the shrine of your own heart.”<sup>64</sup> “The spiritual seeker who is possessed of tranquility, self-control, mental poise and forbearance, devotes himself to the practice of contemplation, and meditates upon the Atman within himself as the Atman within all beings. Thus he completely destroys the sense of separateness which arises from the darkness of ignorance, and dwells in joy, identifying himself with Brahman, free from distracting thoughts and selfish occupations.... Those who have attained samadhi by merging the external universe, the sense-organs, the mind and the ego in the pure consciousness of the Atman—they alone are free from the world with its bonds and snares.”<sup>65</sup> “Therefore, ‘the Self [Atman], my dear Maitreyi, should be realized, is worthy of realization, or should be made the object of realization. It should first be heard of from a teacher and from the scriptures, then reflected on through reasoning, and then steadfastly meditated upon.’ Thus only is It realized—when these means, viz., hearing, reflection and meditation, have been gone through. When these three are combined, then only true realization of the unity of Brahman is accomplished, not otherwise—by hearing alone.”<sup>66</sup>

According to the *Sri Bhasya* of Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137), a devotee who practices bhakti yoga should seek to have the following seven qualities: discrimination of purity and impurity (viveka), freedom from desires (vimoka), repeated worship of God (abhyasa), performing daily duties (kriya), practice of godly virtues (kalyana), living in the present without brooding about the past (anavasada), and not feeling too elated (anuddharsa).<sup>67</sup>

Swami Vivekananda explains that bhakti “is intense love for God. When a man gets it he loves all, hates none; he becomes satisfied forever. This love cannot be reduced to any worldly benefit.” In the highest state

the yogi is “full of bliss and bereft of all impurities, and one with God.” “To him who has experienced it, this eternal sacrifice of the self unto the Beloved Lord is higher by far than all wealth and power, than even all soaring thoughts of renown and enjoyment. The peace of the Bhakta’s calm resignation is a peace that passeth all understanding and is of incomparable value.” “When the devotee has reached this point, he is no more impelled to ask whether God can be demonstrated or not, whether He is omnipotent and omniscient or not. To him He is only the God of Love; He is the highest ideal of love, and that is sufficient for all his purposes. He, as love, is self-evident. It requires no proofs to demonstrate the existence of the beloved to the lover.” Intense devotion to the Lord is a manifestation of bliss, which involves selfless love of God. “Love for love’s sake is the highest enjoyment.” “The true Bhakta’s love is this burning madness before which everything else vanishes for him. The whole universe is to him full of love and love alone; that is how it seems to the lover. So when a man has this love in him, he becomes eternally blessed, eternally happy.”<sup>73</sup> Bhakti is “its own means and its own end,” which brings eternal satisfaction. All thoughts, words and deeds are surrendered to the Lord, and the least forgetfulness of God makes the devotee feel intensely unhappy. Filled with spiritual bliss, the devotee finds pleasure only in the company of Brahman-God, who is their only refuge. To see, feel, and enjoy the Lord is the easiest and the most natural path to the Divine. Superconscious (samadhi) which is the ultimate goal of religion is an immediate direct perception, a constant remembrance of God in the soul.<sup>74</sup>

Swami Brahmananda indicated, “Higher still is meditation. When a man practices this form of worship, he keeps up a constant flow of thought toward God and becomes absorbed in the living presence of his Chosen Ideal. He goes beyond prayer and japam, but the sense of duality remains.... Remember God constantly. Remember him when you eat, when you sit, when you lie down; remember him whatever you do. By such repeated practice you will find that, when you go to meditate it will be easy to remember God and become absorbed in him. As your mind becomes absorbed in meditation, a fountain of joy will spring up within you.”<sup>75</sup>

Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) founder and leader of the Vedanta Society of Southern California emphasized that religious worship is greatly benefited by purity. “Physical purity refers to an attitude of reverence for the teachers and seers, straightforwardness, and sexual

purity. Mental purity is even more important. The devotee must feel that when he is thinking of God and chanting his name, he is being purified by bathing in the presence of God. Regular practice is necessary in order to maintain this mental purity. Mental purity also refers to the practice of serenity, sympathy for others, meditation upon God, and integrity of motive. Shankara declares that mental purity is freedom from attachment and aversion to the objects of the senses.” Good thoughts should be cultivated to free the mind of negative emotions. Cleaning the mirror of the mind allows the Atman consciousness to reflect on the intellect. Purity of the mind and heart and the vision of Brahman-God occur almost simultaneously.<sup>76</sup>

Prabhavananda’s translation and commentary on *Narada’s Way of Divine Love: The Bhakti Sutras* (1971) received the following evaluations: “Swami Prabhavananda’s vibrant personality and lively delivery that comes through on the tapes.... [It] is a rich experience—one that will open your heart. Swami Prabhavananda’s words of love and truth sparkle like precious gems throughout the commentary, urging us to constantly remember the Divine with every thought, word, and action so that we may awaken divine love within ourselves. This commentary reminds us that the teachings of this ancient text are as relevant today as when Narada first taught them thousands of years ago. Don’t miss this sure-to-be-classic” (Irene Petryszak, Himalayan International Institute). And from an Indian professor, “His exposition, therefore, is not dry or scholastic but at once enchanting and uplifting, lucid and profound. Technicalities inherent in the interpretation of such classical texts have been carefully avoided in order to enable even those who have no knowledge of Sanskrit and cannot read the original text to enter into the spirit of its teachings.... It can help many “to be in love with love” and thereby realize that “bhakti is the easiest of the yogas” (Govinda Mukhopadhyay, Bulletin of the Ramakrishna Mission of Culture, February 1977).<sup>77</sup>

*Narada Bhakti Sutras* with commentary by Prabhavananda of 84 aphorisms (aph.) covers the following topics: “Bhakti is intense love for God” (aph. 2-4, 6, 60, 68, 82), “Dedication of all activities, secular as well as sacred, to God” (aph. 8, 19, 48, 65), “Renunciation means that his whole soul goes toward God, and whatever militates against love for God he rejects” (aph. 9-11, 35, 46, 77), “Giving up every other refuge and taking refuge in God (aph. 10), “Scriptures are to be followed as long as one’s spiritual life is not firmly established in God” (aph. 12, 76), “Bhakti as devotion to hearing and praising the name of God” (aph. 17, 37, 82),

“God dislikes egotism and loves humility (aph. 27, 46, 64), “Spiritual realization is its own fruit,” its own end (aph. 30, 67), “Supreme love is attained by uninterrupted and constant worship of God” (aph. 36, 55, 79), “The principle means of attaining bhakti is the grace of a great soul” (aph. 38-40, 42), “Shun evil company, by all means” (aph. 43-45), “Surrendered Himself utterly to the Lord” (aph. 47, 61-62, 82); “Love the Lord, and love him as His eternal servant” (aph. 66, 82), sanctity (aph. 68-71), “While you study the devotional scriptures, meditate upon their meaning and follow them” (aph. 76); “Cultivate harmlessness, truthfulness, purity, compassion, faith, and other such virtues” (aph. 78).<sup>78</sup>

A similar book, *Shandilya Bhakti Sutras* is comprised of one hundred verses yielding insights on the path of Divine devotion. Among other things it stresses it is the easiest path to reach divinity, devotion to Brahman-God and the guru, that this longing may be difficult at first but if properly followed can lead to bliss, and liberation is attained when undivided devotion results in identification with Brahman-God. These books are written in the form of sutras, which are aphoristic statements with the commentator supplying their meaning. At times the earlier commentaries (bhāṣya) are supplied that go back many centuries.<sup>79</sup>

Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 30/20 B.C.-45/50 A.D.) discerned that seeing God is the greatest of all accomplishments. The supreme goal of life is “to gaze beyond and transcend all things, corporeal as well as incorporeal, and to stand fast and find support in God alone with firm reasoning and a conviction.”<sup>80</sup> In order for the mind to rise to that level, it must turn away from the sensible world. This requires that the soul become a sanctuary and a shrine of God. Virtuous and noble souls “have transcended all things created and have been trained to behold the uncreated and Divine, the primary Good.”<sup>81</sup> God reveals Himself through Himself to those souls who seek Him. He grants grace in accordance with the capacity of the believer, but His Essence in Its primary being is never revealed to anyone. A seeker of God must realize that only the Lord acts, since He is the power and cause of all things. Mystic vision is a direct mode of apprehension dependent on God’s sanctifying grace, which requires no mediation. Conversely, inferential discursive reason yields only an indirect understanding of God.<sup>82</sup>

Philo continues, “Seeing the Supreme by the Supreme and not by the light of any other principle, for that which illumines the Soul is that which

it is to see, just as it is by the sun's own light that we see the sun.... One receives the impression of God from the First Cause himself" and not "from a shadow, from created things, by way of inference."<sup>83</sup> "For the limit of happiness is the presence of God, which completely fills the whole soul with his whole incorporeal and eternal light.... For the beginning and end of happiness is to be able to see God. But this cannot happen to him who has not made his soul, as I said before, a sanctuary and altogether a shrine of God.... When the mind is possessed by Divine love, when it exerts itself to reach the innermost shrine, when it moves forward with all effort and zeal, under the impact of the Divine inspiration it forgets everything else, forgets itself, and retains memory and attachment for Him alone whose attendant and servant It is."<sup>84</sup> "For it is the mind that is filled with the Deity and no longer in itself, but is agitated and maddened by a heavenly passion, drawn by the truly Existent and attracted upward to It, preceded by truth."<sup>85</sup>

According to Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) from Spain and Egypt the ultimate purpose of life is to attain spiritual and intellectual perfection, gained from the supreme comprehension of God. All deeds should be performed for the sake of attaining God and not for selfish purposes. A pious individual must revere the Lord, study the *Torah* and practice its teachings, not for ulterior motives but for the sake of realizing the truth and manifesting goodness. After understanding God's ethical norms, a devotee should attempt to reproduce them in their own actions.<sup>86</sup> "One cannot love God except through the knowledge with which one knows Him, and the love is in proportion with the knowledge ... the more of the latter the more of the former.... this love is only possible when we comprehend the real nature of things and understand the Divine wisdom displayed therein."<sup>87</sup> "How does man come to love and fear God? No sooner does man reflect on His deeds and on His great and marvelous creatures, seeing in them His incomparable and limitless wisdom, than he is moved to love and to praise and to glorify and he has an intense desire to know the great Name.... When man reflects on these matters and recognizes all creatures—angels, the spheres and other humans—and when he observes the wisdom of the Holy One, Blessed be He, as manifested in all creatures, his love for God increases so that his soul thirsts and his flesh longs to love God."<sup>88</sup>

Bernard of Siena (1380-1444) an Italian priest indicated, "Love seeks no cause beyond itself and no fruit; it is its own fruit, its own enjoyment. I love because I love; I love in order that I may love.... Of all the

motions and affections of the soul, love is the only one by means of which the creature, though not on equal terms, is able to treat with the Creator and to give back something resembling what has been given to it.... When God loves, he only desires to be loved, knowing that love will render all those who love Him happy.”<sup>89</sup>

The German Protestant theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) articulated this idea, "Here we are shown that the religious 'feeling' properly involves a unique kind of apprehension, *sui generis*, not to be reduced to ordinary intellectual or rational 'knowing' with its terminology of notions and concepts, and yet—and this is the paradox of the matter—itsself a genuine 'knowing,' the growing awareness of ... deity." The Numinous is the Divine Essence, which is the object of religious experience. It is nonrational and “completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts.” It is reflected in the mind in terms of religious feelings of holiness or sacredness. Positively, its majesty is apprehended as *fascinans* evoking feelings of fascination, wonder and amazement, related to the goodness, mercy, love, and grace of God.<sup>90</sup>

An American Carmelite monk, William McNamara (b. 1926), O.C.D. summarized and explained the “Twelve Characteristics of the Mystic Way. They are: “Emancipation from limits (of sense perception and intellectual processes); Conversion from creature to God; Introversion (in touch with the deep center where God touches); Detachment from self (superficial self or empirical ego); Conversion from matter to spirit (from a world of sense to an intuitive world); Increase of delicacy or subtlety (greater sensitivity); Liberation; Unification (human wholeness); Purification; The attainment of peace; Will identification [of humans] with the will of God (empirical ego surrender); Progressive attainment of reality.”<sup>91</sup>

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38). Agape is the love of Brahman-God for humans and of humans for Brahman-God. It is “love for loves sake,” and in its pure form it is essentially Divine. Agape is the highest expression of love pure, selfless, and unconditional. It is devoid of self-interest with no expectations of return and persists regardless of

circumstances. Self-giving love only desires the good of the other





To love Brahman-God means too attempt to assume Its character traits. How can you love Brahman-God and act in a way that runs counter to Its nature? Intense bhakti or the love of God is experiential knowledge that differs from intellectual knowledge. It is a high form of intuitive wisdom though the possessor of it may not be able to verbally explain it in an erudite manner.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. IX. Brahman-God Realization, Section 1. Worshiping Brahman-God.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4. Feeling the Divine

Vivekananda expressed the idea, “It is the heart that is of most importance. It is through the heart that the Lord is seen, and not through the intellect. The intellect is only the street-cleaner, cleansing the path for us, a secondary worker, the policeman; but the policeman is not a positive necessity for the workings of society. He is only to stop disturbances, to check wrongdoing, and that is all the work required of the intellect. When you read intellectual books, you think when you have mastered them, ‘Bless the Lord that I am out of them’, because the intellect is blind and cannot move of itself, it has neither hands nor feet. It is feeling that works, that moves with speed infinitely superior to that of electricity or anything else. Do you feel?--that is the question. If you do, you will see the Lord. It is the feeling that you have today that will be intensified, deified, raised to the highest platform, until it feels everything, the oneness in everything, till it feels God in itself and in others. The intellect can never do that.... Intellect is necessary, for without it we fall into crude errors and make all sorts of mistakes. Intellect checks these; but beyond that, do not try to build anything upon it. It is an inactive, secondary help; the real help is feeling, love. Do you feel for others? If you do, you are growing in oneness. If you do not feel for others, you may be the most intellectual giant ever born, but you will be nothing; you are but dry intellect, and you will remain so. And if you feel, even if you cannot read any book and do not know any language, you are in the right way. The Lord is yours. Do you not know from the history of the world where the power of the prophets lay? Where was it? In the intellect? Did any of them write a fine book on philosophy, on the most intricate ratiocinations of logic? Not one of them. They only spoke a few words. Feel like Christ and you will be a Christ; feel like Buddha and you will be a Buddha. It is feeling

that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God. Intellect is like limbs without the power of locomotion. It is only when feeling enters and gives them motion that they move and work on others.”<sup>94</sup>

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) the German theologian defined religious feeling as, “The immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal.... The sum total of religion is to feel ... that our being and living is being and living in and through God.... The manner in which the Deity is present to a man in feeling is decisive of the worth of his religion, not the manner, always inadequate, in which it is copied in idea.”<sup>95</sup> Frederick Copleston, S.J. explains Schleiermacher’s theology of feeling. “This feeling of dependence is the ‘religious side’ of self-consciousness: it is in fact ‘the religious feeling.’ For the essence of religion is ‘neither thought nor action but intuition and feeling. It seeks to intuit the Universe.’ And the Universe, as Schleiermacher uses the term, is the infinite Divine reality. Hence religion is for him essentially or fundamentally the feeling of dependence on the infinite.... For Schleiermacher the religious consciousness stands closer to the aesthetic consciousness than to theoretical knowledge, the feeling on which the religious consciousness is based, namely the feeling of dependence on the infinite, is peculiar to it.... Now, when Schleiermacher asserts that religious faith is grounded on the feeling of dependence on the infinite, the word ‘feeling’ must obviously be understood as signifying the immediacy of this consciousness of dependence rather than as excluding any intellectual act. For, as we have seen, he also talks about ‘intuition.’ But this intuition is not an apprehension of God as a clearly conceived object: it is a consciousness of self as essentially dependent on infinite being in an indeterminate and unconceptualized sense. Hence the feeling of dependence stands in need of interpretation on the conceptual level. And this is the task of philosophical theology.”<sup>96</sup>

Paul Tillich adds, “‘Feeling’ in Schleiermacher should not really be understood as subjective emotion. Rather, it is the impact of the universe upon us in the depths of our being which transcends subject and object. It is obvious that he means it in this sense. Therefore, instead of speaking of feeling, he could also speak of intuition of the universe, and this intuition he could describe as divination. This term is derived, of course, from ‘Divine’ and means awareness of the Divine immediately. It means that

there is an immediate awareness of that which is beyond subject and object, of the ground of everything within us.”<sup>97</sup>

The commonly held rationalist view was expressed by the philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) of Oxford University, “But, if we leave this error and return once more to feeling, in the sense of that which comes undifferentiated, we are forced to see that it cannot give the knowledge which we seek. It is an apprehension too defective to lay hold on reality. In the first place, its content and its form are not in agreement; and this is manifest when feeling changes from moment to moment.... But the form of feeling is not above, but is below, the level of relations; and it therefore cannot possibly express them or explain them. Hence it is idle to suppose, given relational matter as the object to be understood, that feeling will supply any way of understanding it.... Feeling can be, therefore, no solution of the puzzles which, so far, have proved to be insoluble.... Thus mere feeling has no power to justify the self's reality, and naturally none to solve the problems of the universe at large.”<sup>98</sup>

Tillich’s point is well expressed. Schleiermacher was unjustly criticized for stressing feeling rather than reasoning or moral activity. Intellectuals are not apt to understand the importance of feeling in gaining spiritual knowledge. Also rationalist may not realize that feeling to some extent determines the assumptions, premises, and conclusions they arrive at.

Feelings are of three types: sattvic that illuminate, rajasic that motivate, and tamasic that produce negative thoughts.

## 5. Five Devotional Relationships with the Lord

Brahman-God is our parent. Indian: “I am the Father of this universe, the Mother, the Sustainer, and the Grandsire” (BG 9:17). Old Testament: “You are the sons of the Lord your God” (Dt. 14:1). New Testament: “Our Father who art in heaven” (Mt. 6:9).

A devotee can think of themselves as a servant, friend, or child of the Lord or an Incarnation of Brahman-God; or as a parent (mother or father), or a spotless and chaste consort of a male Incarnation of Brahman-God. Swami Vivekananda relates, “Dasya, i.e. servanthship; it comes when a man thinks he is the servant of the Lord. The attachment of the faithful servant unto the master is his ideal. The next type of love is Sakhya, friendship ... God becomes our friend, the friend who is near, the friend to

whom we may freely tell all the tales of our lives.... The next is what is known as Vatsalya, loving God not as our Father but as our Child.... There is one more human representation of the Divine ideal of love. It is known as Madhura, sweet, and is the highest of all such representations.... In this sweet representation of Divine love God is our husband.... Man takes up all the various relationships of life, as father, as mother, as son, as friend, as master, as lover, and projects them on his ideal of love, on his God. To him God exists as all these, and the last point of his progress is reached when he feels that he has become absolutely merged in the object of his worship.”<sup>99</sup>

Swami Prabhavananda gives some historical examples of these relationships found in the Indian devotional literature. Sri Rama an Incarnation of Brahman (God) was worshiped as a master by his servant (dasya) Hanuman, and as a loving child (vatsalya) by Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Krishna was worshiped as a friend and companion (sakhya) by the shepherd boys of Vrindavan and by Arjuna; a loving child (vatsalya) by his foster-mother Yashoda; and a totally chaste lover (madhura) by Radha and later Mirabai (1547-1614). Sri Ramakrishna worshiped Mother Kali as his mother (apatya).

We find these same relationships to God mentioned in the *Bible*. Moses (Heb. 3:5), Paul, Timothy, James, and Jude (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; Jam. 1:1; Jude 1) and later Brother Lawrence (c. 1611-91) are described as servants of God. Abraham was a friend of God (Jam. 2:23; cf. 2 Chron. 20:7; Is. 41:8), and Jesus refers to his followers as his friends (Jn. 15:14-15; cf. Lk. 12:4). Jesus as the Son worshiped the Father in Heaven and urged his followers to pray to Him (Mt. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:6, 9, 14, 18, 26, 32). Baby Jesus was worshiped by the wise men (Mt. 2:11) and is still venerated today. Virgins were betrothed to Christ by the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 11:2) and some chaste Catholic nuns wear wedding bands, considering themselves to be the bride of Christ. Some theologians believe that the Song of Solomon depicts romantic spiritual love for God. Of the various forms of Reverence, Catholics bestow worship (latria) on God alone, and adoration (hyperdulia) on Mother Mary the Blessed Virgin, which exceeds the veneration (dulia) offered to the saints.<sup>101</sup>

Possibly a Ramakrishna Vedantists would offer worship to their Chosen Ideal, adoration to Sri Ramakrishna or Holy Mother if they are not their Chosen Ideal, and veneration to the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and possibly inner circle disciples of Holy Mother. What form of reverence they offer to their guru varies from person to person.

## 6. Higher Knowledge Brings Peace

Indian: “He who is full of faith and zeal and has subdued his senses obtains Knowledge; having obtained Knowledge, he soon attains the Supreme Peace” (BG 4:39).

Old Testament: “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Prov. 3:13, 17).

The sword of knowledge. Indian: “With the sword of Knowledge cut asunder this doubt about the Self [Atman]” (BG 4:42). New Testament: “Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

It was affirmed by Shankara, “Know the Atman, transcend all sorrows, and reach the fountain of joy. Be illumined by this knowledge, and you have nothing to fear.” Higher knowledge (para vidya) is utilized to describe and to attain illumined comprehension of the truth and the liberated state of the direct realization of Brahman. The four qualifications for practicing the yoga of knowledge (jnana yoga) are: “Discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal. Next comes renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of action, here and hereafter. Then come the six treasures of virtue, beginning with tranquility. And last, certainly, is the longing for liberation.” First, one hears of the spiritual reality, then reflects on it to gain conviction, and finally meditates on it.<sup>104</sup> Jnana yoga involves using epistemological methods to obtain a higher ontological level. A big advantage of the dualism-theism of Madhva is that it is the religious system easiest for the majority of people to understand. It motivates people in a way in which they can relate both to Brahman-God and to other people through a system of ethics. For this reason many of the religious scriptures of the world are of a dualistic-theistic nature.

Swami Vivekananda describes the higher knowledge, “The central idea of the Yogis is that just as we come in direct contact with objects of the senses, so religion even can be directly perceived in a far more intense sense.... The Yogis say that man can go beyond his direct sense perception, and beyond his reason also. Man has in him the faculty, the power, of transcending his intellect even, a power which is in every being, every creature. By the practice of Yoga that power is aroused, and then man transcends the ordinary limits of reason, and directly perceives things

which are beyond all reason.”<sup>106</sup> The higher religion is based on the direct perception of spiritual facts, while reason is only of secondary value. This knowledge verified by spiritual experience does not contradict reason. “The *Upanishads* distinguish between a higher knowledge and a lower knowledge; and to the Bhakta there is really no difference between this higher knowledge and his higher love (Para-Bhakti). The *Mundaka Upanishad* says: “The knower’s of the Brahman declare that there are two kinds of knowledge worthy to be known, namely, the Higher (Para) and the lower (Apara).... the higher (knowledge) is that by which that Unchangeable is known. The higher knowledge is thus clearly shown to be the knowledge of the Brahman.”<sup>107</sup>

His brother disciple Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) clarified that, “The knowledge of this oneness of the Atman or subjective reality with Brahman, the universal truth, is described in Jnana Yoga.... The light of the knowledge of the Atman [Immanent Self], and of its unity with Brahman alone, will dispel the darkness of ignorance which prevents us from reaching the abode of absolute existence, intelligence, and bliss.... the Atman is immortal, unchangeable, all-knowing, and free by its own nature.... Jnana Yoga teaches that right discrimination and proper analysis are indispensable for the acquisition of knowledge of the true Self [Atman] and of the Reality which underlies phenomenal objects.... A traveler along this path should be philosophical in tendency, should have a sharp intellect and a keen power of analyzing the true nature of things.... His mind must possess the power of perfect concentration and meditation; and his soul must be filled with the longing for absolute freedom from all relative conditions and from the laws which govern phenomena.... A Jnana Yogi never forgets that his true Self is Brahman. Having attained to this supreme God consciousness, he lives in the world like an eternal witness of all mental and physical changes. Ever happy and undisturbed.” Utilizing the faculty of right discrimination between the Self and the nonself the realized soul should be free from the influence of negative external and internal forces.<sup>108</sup>

When describing Jnana Yoga most writers place the emphasis on discrimination and knowledge. But a strong willpower is also a very important element in Jnana Yoga. One may have the discerning knowledge and understanding to know what is best for them. But without willpower they will not be able to change their ways and adopt the right path of action. This is why Vivekananda considered strength of mind to be a necessary virtue for spiritual growth. The extreme view is that we are

already saved. To be liberated it is necessary to realize this. It is a matter of believing, not receiving something we did not previously have.

In India, **Jnana Yoga** is often defined in terms of nondualistic knowledge that entails discrimination between the real and the unreal that leads from the Relative to the Absolute plane of existence (Advaita Jnana). Yet Madhva (1190/1238-1276/1317) a dualist taught, “Knowledge of God, as the most perfect and greatest creates love for Him in everyone always and everywhere.” Madhva’s conception is clarified by Surendranath Dasgupta, “The performance of the Vedic observances can entitle us only to the inferior grace of the Lord, listening to the scriptural texts to a little higher degree of grace; but the highest grace of the Lord, leading to mukti [liberation], can be secured only through knowledge. Right knowledge can be secured only through listening to scriptural texts, reflection, meditation, and devotion (Dvaita Jnana). In India and the West a vast amount of religious knowledge has been produced by the Dualists (Theists). Jnana Yoga can be defined more broadly to include dualism, qualified nondualism, and nondualism, since they are three forms of religious knowledge. When a devotee reads the literature or attends a lecture to gain a better understanding of religious principles they are practicing the path of jnana (knowledge).

For Moses Maimonides, “Know that this stage is an exceedingly elevated and difficult one, only to be attained by the very few and then only after great training. If a man does manage to reach this stage, I would not say that he is inferior to the prophets. The stage I am thinking of is that all man's psychological motivation and all his final aim are only for the knowledge of God. Such a man performs no act, whether great or small, and speaks no word, unless it brings him directly or indirectly to his ideal. He examines every one of his acts to see whether it leads him towards his aim or away from it.”<sup>109</sup> “If however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between us and Him—that is, the intellect.... Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation.”<sup>110</sup>

Thomas Aquinas disclosed, “An intellectual substance tends to Divine knowledge as an ultimate end.... any one of these operations must be more perfect when its object is more perfect. And so, to understand the



most perfect intelligible object, which is God, is the most perfect thing in the genus of this operation of understanding. Therefore, to know God by an act of understanding is the ultimate end of every intellectual substance.... the highest created intellectual substance may have what is absolutely best as its best intelligible object, and, consequently, its felicity will consist in understanding God.... Besides, there is naturally present in all men the desire to know the causes, of whatever things are observed.... therefore, man naturally desires, as his ultimate end, to know the first cause. But the first cause of all things is God. Therefore, the ultimate end of man is to know God.... Now, the ultimate end of man, and of every intellectual substance, is called felicity or happiness, because this is what every intellectual substance desires as an ultimate end, and for its own sake alone. Therefore, the ultimate happiness and felicity of every intellectual substance is to know God.”<sup>111</sup> “Now, the ultimate end of an intellectual substance is God. So, that operation of man is substantially his happiness, or his felicity, whereby he primarily attains to God. This is the act of understanding, for we cannot will what we do not understand. Therefore, the ultimate felicity of man lies substantially in knowing God through his intellect, and not in an act of the will.... The intellect moves the will; indeed, the will, as such, is moved by its object which is the known good.... the will would never desire the act of understanding unless, first of all, the intellect were to apprehend the act of understanding as a good.”<sup>112</sup>

In his book titled *Ethics*, Benedict Spinoza (1632-77) from Holland denoted a type of jnana yoga, “Part IV, Prop. XXVIII. The greatest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the greatest virtue of the mind is to know God. Proof—The greatest thing that the mind can understand is God, that is, a being absolutely infinite, and without which nothing can either be or be conceived. Therefore the thing of the greatest use or good to the mind is the knowledge of God. Again, the mind, in so far as it understands, thus far only is active, and thus far can it be absolutely said that it acts according to virtue. To understand, therefore, is the absolute virtue of the mind. But the greatest thing that the mind can understand is God. Therefore the greatest virtue of the mind is to understand or know God.... Prop. XXXII. Corollary—From the third kind of knowledge arises necessarily the intellectual love of God. For from this kind of knowledge arises pleasure accompanied by the idea of God as the cause, that is, the love of God, not in so far as we imagine him present, but in so far as we understand God to be eternal: this is what I call intellectual love towards

God. Prop. XXXIII. The intellectual love towards God that arises from the third kind of knowledge is eternal. Proof—The third kind of knowledge [intellectual intuition] is eternal: and therefore love which arises from it is also necessarily eternal.... Prop. XXXVI. Corollary—Hence it follows that God, in so far as he loves Himself, loves men, and consequently that the

love of God for men and the mind's intellectual love towards God is one



Shankara explains, “Here, within this body, in the pure mind, in the secret chamber of intelligence, in the infinite universe within the heart, the Atman shines in its captivating splendor, like a noonday sun. By its light, the universe is revealed. It is the knower of the activities of the mind and of the individual man. It is the witness of all the actions of the body, the sense-organs and the vital energy.”<sup>114</sup> “That reality is the knower in all states of consciousness.” Brahman-Atman as the Witness Self is the precondition of all understanding, the knower who underlies the changing cognitive empirical self. The supersensuous ‘I’ that is the background substratum of all human experience, is the permanent foundational subject of consciousness. It unifies the manifold ideas and disperse data of perception, synthesizing them into a coherent unity. Functioning as a “transcendental unity of pure apperception,” “it maintains our unbroken awareness of identity.” “Unless there be some principle running through everything and abiding through all the three periods of time or some unchanging witness of all, there can be no human dealing involving remembrance, recognition, etc.” Kaumudi a theist taught that the witness Self Who illuminates the individual soul is Ishvara the Personal God and not Nirguna Brahman. He is conscious of the individual self’s (jiva) activities whom He illuminates, but He is in no way moved by them.<sup>115</sup>

According to S. Radhakrishnan, Vidyananda (fl. 1350) a member of the Shankarian School “defines the Witness Self [Saksin] as the unchanging consciousness which is the substratum of the phenomena of gross and subtle bodies, observing their effects without being affected by them in any way.... The constant presence of the Witness Self helps to maintain the identity of the seer in a series of mental ideas with respect to something other than the ego.... [It is like] the lamp on the stage which illumines” all.<sup>116</sup> Brahman-Atman is the immanent indwelling Spirit (Antaryamin), the soul of all. As the inner controller, it operates on the individual soul from within.

As stated by Swami Vivekananda, “Just as the Greek mind or the modern European mind wants to find the solution of life and of all the sacred problems of Being by searching into the eternal world, so also did our forefathers, and just as the Europeans failed, they failed also. But the Western people never made a move more, they remained there, they

failed in the search for the solution of the great problems of life and death in the external world, and there they remained, stranded; our forefathers also found it impossible, but were bolder in declaring the utter helplessness of the senses to find the solution.... There are various sentences which declare the utter helplessness of the senses, but they did not stop there; they fell back upon the internal nature of man, they went to get the answer from their own soul, they became introspective; they gave up external nature as a failure, as nothing could be done there, as no hope, no answer could be found; they discovered that dull, dead matter would not give them truth, and they fell back upon the shining soul of man, and there the answer was found.”<sup>117</sup>

He adds, “God is more than known. This chair is known, but God is intensely more than that, because in and through Him we have to know this chair itself. He is the Witness, the eternal Witness of all knowledge. Whatever we know we have to know in and through Him. He is the Essence of our own Self. He is the Essence of this ego, this I and we cannot know anything excepting in and through that I. Therefore you have to know everything in and through the Brahman. To know the chair you have to know it in and through God.”<sup>118</sup> “He is not only God in heaven, but on earth too. He is the God in us.” “The light which shines through the mind is not its own. Whose is it then? It must belong to that which has it as its own Essence, and as such, can never decay or die, never become stronger or weaker; it is self-luminous, it is luminosity itself. It cannot be that the Soul [Atman] knows, it is knowledge. It cannot be that the Soul has existence, but it is existence.”<sup>119</sup> “The Brahman, the God of the Vedanta, has nothing outside of Himself; nothing at all. All this indeed is He: He is in the universe: He is the universe Himself.”<sup>120</sup> Religion deals with the truths of the metaphysical world just as chemistry and the other natural sciences deal with the truths of the physical world. The book one must read to learn chemistry is the book of nature. The book from which to learn religion is your own mind and heart. The sage might not understand physical science, because he reads the wrong book--the book within; and the scientist does not understand religion, because he too reads the wrong book--the book without.<sup>121</sup>

It was intuited by the Italian St. Bonaventure (1217/21-74) that knowledge of God’s existence is innate and implanted in the soul, which is an image of God. Most people have a dim awareness of God, which they cannot fully deny. Bonaventure states, Yet, “He is most truly present to

the soul and immediately knowable.” “The knowledge of this truth (God’s existence) is innate in the rational mind, inasmuch as the mind is an image of God, by reason of which it has a natural appetite and knowledge and memory of Him in whose image it has been made and towards whom it naturally tends, that it may find its beatitude in Him.”<sup>122</sup> “Christ is the interior teacher and no truth is known except, through Him, not by His speaking as we speak, but by His enlightening us interiorly.... He is intimately present to every soul and by His most clear ideas He shines upon the dark ideas of our minds.” “Such light is beyond reach and is yet the closest to the soul, even more than it is to itself. It is also unconfined, and yet supremely intimate. This can be seen by none but a man suspended in a lofty vision.”<sup>123</sup>

As the English Frederick Copleston, S.J. (1907-94) explains Bonaventure’s teachings, “‘God is not known by means of a likeness drawn from sense,’ but rather by the soul’s reflection on itself. It has no intuitive vision of God, of the Divine Essence, in this life, but it is made in the image of God and is orientated towards God in desire and will, so that reflection on its own nature and on the direction of the will enables the soul to form the idea of God without recourse to the external sensible world. In this sense the idea of God is ‘innate,’ though not in the sense that every man has from the beginning a clear, explicit and accurate knowledge of God.... the human mind is aided by God and that the object of its certain knowledge is seen in some way as rooted in God, as existing in the *rationibus aeternis* or Divine ideas. But we do not apprehend these Divine ideas directly, in themselves ... The *rationes aeternae*, then, must have a direct regulative action on the human mind, though remaining themselves unseen. It is they which move the mind and rule the mind in its certain judgments, enabling it to apprehend the certain and eternal truths in the speculative and moral orders and to make certain and true judgments even concerning sensible objects: it is their action (which is the Divine illumination) which enables the mind to apprehend the unchanging and stable essences in the fleeting and changing objects of experience.”<sup>124</sup>

Paul Tillich’s interpretation of Bonaventure’s ideas is in basic agreement with what Vivekananda said, “‘He [God] is’, says Bonaventura, ‘most truly present to the soul and immediately knowable.’ ... This knowledge is the Divine light in our soul. Only on the basis of this immediate knowledge of the ultimate principles of reality can we find truth in the empirical world. These principles are present in every act of knowing. Whenever we say what something is, whenever we make a logical

judgment about something, the ideas of the true, of the good, of being itself, are present. Bonaventura can say: 'Being Itself is what first appears in the intellect,' and Being Itself is the basic statement about God. This means that every act of cognition is made in the power of the Divine light. The Franciscans said that this Divine light and these principles within us are uncreated, and we participate in them. Somehow this means that there is no such thing as secular knowledge. All knowledge is in some way rooted in the knowledge of the Divine within us. There is a point of identity in our soul, and this point precedes every special act of knowledge.... A mathematical proposition as well as a medical discovery is implicitly religious because it is possible only in the power of these ultimate principles which are the uncreated Divine light in the human soul."<sup>125</sup>

John Calvin (1509-64) wrote, "That there exists in the human mind and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity [*Sensus Divinitatis*], we hold to be beyond dispute, since God Himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endured all men with some idea of his Godhead.... this is not a doctrine which is first learned in school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master; one which nature herself allows no individual to forget." Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) pointed out that this sense does not manifest in a human unless they have an attitude of "true benevolence," and according to Alvin Plantinga if the mind is under the influence of sin."<sup>126</sup>

A similar idea is that of the "religious *a priori*," defined as a separate innate category of human consciousness that brings about religious insight and certainties concerning God and a Divine presence. For Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) *a priori* (what comes before) concepts are those without which no object can be thought. They are not derived from experience, but are pure concepts of understanding and logical forms that are used to interpret experience.<sup>127</sup> They are the predispositions of theoretical knowledge (pure reason), moral experience (practical reason), and aesthetic judgments.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) a German liberal theologian extended Kant's idea to the "religious *a priori*" (1911), since religion also arises out of an inner ground, structure, or predisposition of consciousness. Originally, religious consciousness exists in a state of potentiality until it is actualized. For Troeltsch this intuitive apprehension of the Divine is the source of religion. The *a priori* quality of the mind is both a conscious rational intuition and an immediate empirical experience. Troeltsch wrote,



“Consciousness as a finite concretion of universal cosmic consciousness, and taken together with the necessary presuppositions which are *a priori* and potentially contained in it is the source of religion.... the individual relates himself to an Absolute [God] immanent in the soul, is the kernel of religious phenomena, which are everywhere identical, in spite of external diversities.” “Without this mysticism there is not really any religion, and the psychology of religion points out most clearly how in the mystical experience the true pulse of religion beats.” Religion is first a direct and dynamic power generated by an individual relationship to the Divine Spirit. What follows is the employment of rational thought and reflection to explain this experience and its contents. Later it becomes a social-cultural phenomenon related to a particular religious community and tradition. A mystical experience in its purest and original form is universal and independent of the content of any special religion such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism. In developing these ideas Troeltsch was influenced by Kant and William James, *Variety of Religious Experience* (1902), who in turn was inspired to some degree by Swami Vivekananda’s ideas on *Raja Yoga* (1896) that James quoted.<sup>128</sup>

The intuitive argument for the origin of religion and the existence of Brahman-God is based on a faint trace of the presence of the Divine, universally found in the human mind. These traces that are universally a part of the constitution and structure of the human mind, form the basis of the “religious *a priori*.” Traces are expressed in innate, prerational, undeveloped, and momentary forms of religious understanding. This presence is at first only implicit, veiled, dimly and obscurely intuited or felt in a pre-conceptual awareness. Archetypes, the image of Brahman-God in the mind, and reflections of the Divine that manifest as faint traces of the Divine, should be enhanced and not suppressed or repressed. If these traces or seeds are ignored, denied or misinterpreted, the person is apt to be an atheist, agnostic or apathetic toward religion. It is important that the individual properly interpret these sublime experiences as religious in nature, and not ascribe a lesser secular meaning to them. Then the seeker might catch a momentary glimpse of the higher reality, either internally, or externally as in the case of nature worship. These experiences will then inspire the aspirant to strive for a higher degree of the spiritual presence.

John W. Cooper writes that the leading Catholic Jesuit theologian Karl “Rahner [1904-84] adds a ‘supernatural existential’ that bridges being-in-the-world with God. Although ontologically constitutive of human existence, the supernatural existential is not part of human nature but is

supernaturally added to it. It is God's presence as the infinite Ground in the existence of all humans. Thus it affords 'a capacity of dynamic self-movement of the spirit, given *a priori* with human nature directed toward all possible objects.' With the supernatural existential, all people have implicit awareness of God as the transcendental Ground of all things, and they also have an openness to specific Divine revelation and genuine freedom to respond. Rahner's supernatural existential suggests panentheism because it implies that the real presence of God is a constitutive part of the ontological structure of human existence and thus that all humans participate in God ontologically."<sup>129</sup>

W. Norris Clarke, SJ. (1915-2008) of Fordham University as a representative of the modern "Transcendental Thomist" (Aquinas) movement explains that according to Thomas Aquinas every active potency, "has its goal already inscribed in it in some way, in the mode of final cause, as that toward which it naturally tends, as that which naturally attracts or draws it to itself, and therefore as that which is somehow already present to it." Clarke continues, "God who is actually present from the beginning in the depths of our knowing and willing activities ... is actually and efficaciously drawing us all the time toward Himself." His presence originates as a "background consciousness," implicit, preconceptual, unthematized, obscure, indistinct, anticipatory, veiled, dimly and obscurely intuited. It is not a Cartesian innate idea, since originally it is not present as a clear and distinct conception. Much effort is required to make this awareness explicit and rationally grounded in our



Religion is “*Sui Generis*” (“of its own kind”) meaning in its original transcendental form it has an independent existence, and is a reality that cannot be reduced to a lower level secular concept such as being a projection of society. Only after it has been institutionalized does a religion become part of a cultural network interacting with political, social, economic, and other events. When a religion synthesizes with culture it takes on these characteristics. This raises the question, how can that which is otherworldly be related to this world? Transcendent *sui generis* aspects of religion include: the “eternal principles” which the Indians call the *Vedas*; Divine Beings such as Avatars-Divine Incarnations who make these principles and how to aspire to the Kingdom of Heaven-Brahmaloka known to us; and our own potential inherent Divinity that will manifest to a greater degree sometime in the future. Partially *sui generis* characteristics include: a special belief system, ritual, moral code, feelings, acts of prayer-meditation, and a religious organization.

What can be implied from these statements is that reason, sense experience, and scriptural authority are not the only epistemological sources of knowledge, and legitimate epistemological proofs for the existence of Brahman-God and living a moral and religious life. Many people receive to some degree (perhaps rarely) a higher intuition, an innate Divine awareness of Brahman-God’s presence. Receiving this Divinely implanted disposition, one is justified in believing in the existence of Brahman-God. Properly performed meditation, prayer, and living a religious and moral life will create a pure mind that will open a person up to these higher thoughts. This is a better source of spiritual awareness than only intellectual study based on reason alone.

Concentric circles are circles with a common center. Following the Concentric Circle Model we are situated on the periphery of the circle and the Highest Reality is located at the center. As we make spiritual progress the radius from where we are to the center lessens. Jesus stated the “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Lk. 17:21, KJ). The farther away from the center the grosser things become.

## 8. Jesus’ Miracles and Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*

The third chapter of the *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* (YS) acknowledges the existence of many psychic powers, which give us some explanation of the miracles described in the *Bible*.<sup>131</sup> Following the logic of

Patanjali (c. 100 B.C.-300 A.D.) and the various commentaries on his *Yoga Sutras* all the miracles performed by Jesus as described in the *New Testament* are possible, though of course exceedingly rare. Brahman-God the First Cause works through secondary causes that include the laws of nature. Hence, all miracles are not violations of the laws of nature but are explainable through these laws. Since they work through subtle mass and energy (manifesting as thought), their explanation is not known to contemporary science that deals with grosser forms of matter and energy. Subtle forms operate at a higher level of vibration than gross ones, which are not perceivable to the human senses. An alternative idea is that since Brahman-God creates the laws of nature It has the power to override them. Vivekananda mentioned, “The Lord, however is beyond all natural laws—is not under any rules and regulations.”<sup>132</sup>

The level of vibration constitutes the fourth spatial dimension of matter and energy. Only when a three dimensional object vibrates with a certain range can it be perceived by humans. Other three-dimension objects exist at this location, but they are not perceived by us if they operate at a different vibrational level from ours (fourth dimension).

It is possible that on rare occasions Brahman-God or a Divine Being by a special act of direct intervention, can work through the physical laws of nature and bring about an event that would not have otherwise occurred. In the past some yogis have undergone special training to develop such powers as the ability to become invisible at will, etc. Following the logic of Scientism, some scientists deny miracles simply because they do not understand what causes them to occur. They do not realize that as successful as the physical sciences are their understanding operates within a certain limited area of nature and knowledge. For example, scientists cannot explain how a group of preliterate people can walk on hot coals without getting burned.

Jesus proclaimed, “before Abraham was, I am” (Jn. 8:58) and “the glory which I had with thee [the Father] before the world was made” (Jn. 17:5, 24). These statements indicate that he had knowledge of his own pre-earthly life, which occurred before he took human birth. According to the science of yoga psychology, conscious mental thought waves, even of prior lives are never totally annihilated, but have become extremely fine remaining in minute form, deep in the unconscious mind. Vivekananda states, “If the yogi can make Samyama (yogic concentration) on these past impressions in the mind, he will begin to remember all his past lives” (YS 2:39; 3:18).<sup>133</sup>

When Jesus went to the wilderness “he fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry” (Mt. 4:1-2; Lk. 4:2).

Vivekananda explains: “When a man is very hungry, if he can make Samyama on the hollow of the throat, hunger ceases” (YS 3:31).<sup>134</sup>

Through the power of speech, Jesus accomplished many miracles. He often commanded unclean spirits to leave a person’s body (Mk. 1:23-28; 9:16-29; Lk. 4:33-39; 8:29; 9:38-42). During a tumultuous storm, Jesus “awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm” (Mk. 4:37-41; Mt. 8:24-27; Lk. 8:22-25). Jesus told a dead twelve-year old, “‘Little girl, I say to you arise.’ And immediately the girl got up and walked” (Mk. 5:35-42; cf. Lk. 8:49-55). Concerning the power of truthfulness Vivekananda wrote, “When this power of truth will be established with you, then even in dream you will never tell an untruth. You will be true in thought, word, and deed. Whatever you say will be truth. You may say to a man, ‘Be blessed,’ and that man will be blessed. If a man is diseased, and you say to him, ‘Be thou cured,’ he will be cured immediately” (YS 2:36).<sup>135</sup> The question arises, when Jesus made a person whole and healed their physical body, did he transmit and infuse spiritual power to them and transform them?

Jesus realized that one of his twelve disciples; Judas would betray him (Mt. 26:21-25; Lk. 22:48; Jn. 13:21, 26-27). He also knew “the thoughts” of the scribes and the Pharisees he encountered (Mt. 9:3-4; 12:24-25; Lk. 6:7-8; 9:47; 11:17). Jesus “knew all men and needed one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man” (Jn. 2:25). Vivekananda relates, “Each man has particular signs on his body, which differentiate him from others; when the Yogi makes a Samyama on these signs he knows the nature of the mind of that person. He would not know the contents of the mind by making a Samyama on the body. There would be required a twofold Samyama, first on the signs in the body, and then on the mind itself. The Yogi would then know everything that is in that mind” (YS 3:19-20).<sup>136</sup> In order to explain thought reading and transference Vivekananda clarified, “This mind is part of the Universal Mind. Each mind is connected with every other mind. And each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world.... Your mind, my mind, all these little minds, are fragments of that Universal Mind, little waves in the ocean; and on account of this continuity, we can convey our thoughts directly to one another.”<sup>137</sup>

Lazarus had been in a tomb for four days and Jesus was able to bring him back to life (Jn. 11:14, 17, 38-44). Vivekananda maintained, “The

Yogi can enter a dead body and make it get up and move, even while he himself is working in another body. Or he can enter a living body and hold that man's mind and organs in check, and for the time being act through the body of that man. That is done by the Yogi coming to this discrimination of Purusha [individual soul] and nature. If he wants to enter another's body, he makes a Samyama (yogic concentration) on that body and enters it, because, not only is his soul omnipresent, but his mind also, as the Yogi teaches. It is one bit of the Universal Mind" (YS 3:39).<sup>138</sup> The yogi is able to free their mind from the attachment to their body, and to project their consciousness into other bodies.

With five loafs of bread and two fish he fed over five thousand people (Mt. 14:16-21; Mk. 6:37-44; Lk. 9:13-17; Jn. 6:5-13; cf. Mt. 15:32-38; Mk. 8:2-9). Vivekananda indicates, "They take a lump of clay and make Samyama on that, and gradually they begin to see the fine materials of which it is composed, and when they have known all the fine materials in it, they get power over that element. So with all the elements" (YS 3:45).<sup>139</sup>

When Jesus saw his disciples in a boat were in distress, he was able to "walk on the sea" to save them (Mk. 6:48-50; Mt. 14:25-27; Jn. 6:18-20). Vivekananda clarifies, "This Akasha is the material of this body; it is only Akasha in a certain form that has become the body. If the Yogi makes a Samyama on this Akasha material of his body, it acquires the lightness of Akasha, and he can go anywhere through the air" (YS 3:43).<sup>140</sup> The physical body is Akasha in gross form, while the subtle body is Akasha in fine form, which is very light in weight. Laghimā is the ability to become weightless or lighter than air.

At times Jesus possessed the faculty of precognition of future events, and of clairvoyance whereby he could observe distant objects or events not immediately perceivable to the senses. Jesus told his two disciples, "Go to the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me" (Mt. 21:1-3; Mk. 11:1-4; Lk. 19:30-32). He made repeated statements about a future period of war, destruction, and the persecution of his followers (Mk. 13:2, 7-8; Mt. 24:2, 6-14; Lk. 19:43-44; 21: 6, 9-12). Vivekananda's commentary reads, "When the mind has attained to that state when it identifies itself with the internal impression of the object, leaving the external, and when, by long practice, that is retained by the mind and the mind can get into that state in a moment, that is Samyama (yogic concentration). If a man in that state wants to know the past and future,

he has to make a Samyama on the changes in the Samskaras [subtle mental impressions]. Some are working now at present, some have worked out, and some are waiting to work. So by making a Samyama on these he knows the past and future” (YS 3:16).<sup>141</sup> “The past and future, though not existing in a manifested form, yet exist in a fine form.”<sup>142</sup> The yogi perceives objects in their subtle potential seed states, prior to their manifestation on the gross material plane. In this way they are able to discern the future materialized states of the entity and its future pattern of events.

Jesus told his disciples that he would be killed after the Passover and “after three days he will rise” (Mk. 8:31; 9:30-31; 10:33-34; Mt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; 26:2; 27:63; Lk. 9:22; 18:32-33; 24:7, 46). Vivekananda indicated, “He knows exactly by those [karmas] that are waiting when his body will fall. He knows when he will die, at what hour, even at what minute” (YS 3:23).<sup>143</sup>

After Jesus was crucified and arose, he walked through a closed door though he had a physical body (Jn. 20:26). Once the person has control over the subtle materials (matter and energy), Vivekananda states, “He can make himself as minute as a particle ... or as light as the air” (YS 3:45-46).<sup>144</sup>

The *New Testament* mentions that due to the potency of the Holy Spirit, people would “speak in other tongues” and understand foreign languages of which they had no prior knowledge of (Acts 2:4; 10:45-46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:8-10; 14:2-4). Vivekananda clarifies, “By making Samyama on word, meaning and knowledge, which are ordinarily confused, comes the knowledge of all animal sounds. The word represents the external cause, the meaning represents the internal vibration that travels to the brain through the channels of the Indriyas [sense organs], conveying the external impression to the mind, and knowledge represents the reaction of the mind, with which comes perception. These three, confused, make our sense-objects. Suppose I hear a word; there is first the external vibration, next the internal sensation carried to the mind by the organ of hearing, then the mind reacts, and I know the word. The word I know is a mixture of the three—vibration, sensation, and reaction. Ordinarily these three are inseparable; but by practice the Yogi can separate them. When a man has attained to this, if he makes a Samyama on any sound, he understands the meaning which that sound was intended to express, whether it was made by man or by any other animal” (YS 3:17).<sup>145</sup>



Concerning psychic powers Swami Vivekananda wrote, “These powers, however, are obstructions to the attainment of the highest goal, the knowledge of the pure Self, and freedom. These are, as it were, to be met in the way; and if the Yogi rejects them, he attains the highest. If he is tempted to acquire these, his further progress is barred.”<sup>146</sup> “The great danger of psychic powers is that man stumbles, as it were, into them, and knows not how to use them rightly. He is without training and without knowledge of what has happened to him. The danger is that in using these psychic powers, the sexual feelings are abnormally roused as these powers are in fact manufactured out of the sexual centre. The best and safest way is to avoid psychic manifestations, for they play the most horrible pranks on their ignorant and untrained owners.”<sup>147</sup> Patanjali (YS 3:38, 51), Jesus (Mt. 7:21-23; 12:38-39; 16:4; 24:24; Mk. 8:11-12; 13:22; Lk. 11:29), and Paul (1 Cor. 13:1-2) did not endorse the seeking of miracles, which can produce hidden and unexpected negative repercussions.

Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) cautioned, “The great spiritual teachers do not care for them [psychic powers, miracles]. On the contrary, they consider them as great obstacles in the path of spirituality. They do not deny their existence; they admit it, but at the same time they say that, if you pay attention to these powers, you will not rise on the higher plane of God consciousness, you will remain confined within the psychic realm.”<sup>148</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda (1888-1979) leader of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, pointed out that the five sense organs of the physical body “are not the actual organs of sight, hearing, smell, etc. The real sense organs (indriyas) are their subtle counterparts that belong to the subtle body, of which mind (antahkarana) is the main component factor. They are composed of the same type of subtle substance as mind is, and can expand and contract as freely as mind.... In extraordinary cases, such as clairvoyance, the sense-organs and the mind operate independently of the bodily organs.”<sup>149</sup>

Explaining miracles Thomas Aquinas ascertained they occur when God works outside of the causal order of nature. In producing an effect, God performs miracles by operating directly without the mediation of secondary causes. “A higher cause is not subject to a cause of a lower order, but conversely.... if we consider the order of things according as it depends on any secondary cause, thus God can do something outside this order. For He is not subject to the order of secondary causes, but, on the

contrary, this order is subject to Him, as proceeding from Him, not by a natural necessity, but by the choice of His own will; for He could have created another order of things. Therefore God can do something outside this order created by Him, when he chooses.”<sup>150</sup>

Paul Tillich wisely criticized the attempt “to discover gaps in our scientific and historical knowledge in order to find a place for God and his actions.... Whenever our knowledge advanced, another defense position had to be given up.”<sup>151</sup> Similarly, when the level of knowledge advanced and what appeared to be a miracle was explained in a scientific manner as the work of the laws of nature and not the special intervention of God, religious apologists were forced to give up their position.

Thomas Kuhn (1922-96) mentioned that one reason major scientific discoveries are rare, is for the psychological reason that people tend to see what they want to see. To some extent the presiding paradigm is prescriptive in that it tells the researcher what to study. Their expectations cloud their vision and so most scientist are apt to deny miracles because they do not go along with their established beliefs.<sup>152</sup>

Indians use the term “psychic powers” rather than “miracles” because they follow the subtle laws of nature and are not due to the suspension of the laws of nature. Modern science cannot explain how a person can levitate such as Francis of Assisi or Joseph of Cupertino (witnessed by Pope Urbain VIII and others), or how a person can become invisible at will.<sup>153</sup> Because physical scientists do not understand how miracles operate, is no reason to doubt them if they have been empirically verified. Granted these talents are extremely rare and there may be some fraud. Possibly we are better off having a limited knowledge of the subject since psychic powers can be used to do harm to others.

Theoretical explanations of psychical research have lagged behind the empirical evidence discovered by parapsychologists. Consequently, their findings are not accepted by many educated people. To overcome this deficiency experts in the field like Carroll Nash (1914-98) a Professor of Biology at St. Joseph University discusses a multitude of possible theories to explain psychic events. They include Monistic theories to account for extrasensory perception and psychokinesis such as: a) Idealism: there is a Universal Mind of which our minds are a part; b) Materialism: psychic powers are conveyed by electromagnetic waves, elementary particles (electrons, neutrino, neutrons, gravitons, or protons), antimatter, bioplasma, hologram, standing wave, or resonance; and c)

Neutral Monism in which matter and mind are dual aspects of a neutral substance. Dualistic theories include: a) Parallelism where matter and mind work together but do not interact: inanimate mind, acausality, and conformance behavior; and b) Interactionism: involving a sixth sense, cybernetic model, psi fields, universe a unity, warps and tunnels in space, world lines, action at a distance, observational theory, and a branching universe. Precognition Theories include: prediction by contemporaneous ESP, predicted event caused to occur, specious present, advanced wave, positrons, psitrons, and tachyons, and extra dimensions. Psychokinesis is accounted for by: precognition, no bridging mechanism, probability a physical property, mental energy, cosmic energy, gravitation, reordering physical energy, quantum mechanics, biological force, fourth dimension, electrostatic energy, backward causation, free will, evolution or the anthropic principle.<sup>154</sup>

Possible solutions are that telepathy the ability to transmit or receive thoughts supernaturally is due to the fact that our minds are each a part of the Universal Mind. Precognition of future events is possible since the future already exists not in manifested form, but in the subtle realm in fine form.<sup>155</sup> Psychokinesis (PK) or telekinesis the ability to move objects at a distance by one's mind is possible if mental force can be transformed into physical force since they are the subtle and gross aspects of the same entity. They differ only in level of vibration. As Vivekananda wrote "This body is just the external crust of the mind. They are not two different things; they are just as the oyster and its shell. They are but two aspects of one thing ... It is not that some forces are physical, and some mental; the physical forces are but the gross manifestations of the fine forces, just as the physical world is but the gross manifestation of the fine world."<sup>156</sup>

Ideas have social status and that of miracles has been low in the intellectual world. Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) in Russia very much admired Vivekananda's writings. Yet he could not understand why a person as intelligent as Vivekananda in his book on *Raja Yoga* supported the idea of miracles, which he thought are superstitions. Tolstoy probably associated the belief in miracles with the serfs, the agricultural village society. He did not realize that because miracles do not fit into his limited conceptual paradigm (that he considered to be rational and scientific), this does not mean they do not occur. Max Müller (1823-1900) told Vivekananda that mentioning the miraculous events in the life of Ramakrishna would not be accepted by the modern Europeans.

Indians refer to miracles as psychic powers, but we do not have a good idea what the psychic realm is all about. Where is it located and what are its functions? Is it inhabited by certain types of beings and what are their natures? What is the difference between a psychic experience and a genuine spiritual experience?

Some people may temporarily receive a psychic power like knowing about a future event that will occur, but this is different than being able to deliberately will the use of this power when desired. Possibly these powers are less common today because most people live in a technological secular environment that is not conducive for their development.

## 9. Conditional Grace

Indian: “He who chooses [i.e., longs for the] Atman-by him alone is Atman attained. It is Atman that reveals to the seeker its true nature” (Mun. Up. 3:2.3). “A man who has taken refuge in Me reaches, by My grace, the eternal and imperishable Abode.... Fixing your heart on Me, you will overcome every difficulty by My grace; but if from self-conceit you do not listen to Me, you shall perish utterly” (BG 18:56, 58; cf. 9:29; 12:6-7).

Old Testament: “For those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsake them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13). New Testament: “Blessed are they who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14, KJ; cf. Mt. 5:45).

Worship God and He will save you. Indian: “Those who take refuge in Me alone, shall cross over this maya” (BG. 7:14). Old Testament: “But I call upon God; and the Lord will save me” (Ps. 55:16-17). “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation” (Ps. 62:1; cf. 91:14).

God’s former love of His devotees. Indian: “What has become of those ancient friendships, when without enmity we [Varuna] walked together?” (RV 7:88.5). Old Testament: “Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?” (Ps. 77:7-9). “Lord where is thy steadfast love of old” (Ps. 89:49).

Ramanuja (1017-1137) stressed, “The Lord wishing to do a favor to those who are resolved on acting so as fully to please the highest Person [Brahman-God], engenders in their minds a tendency towards highly virtuous actions, such as are the means to attain to him ... Thus the Lord Himself says, ‘I am the origin of all, everything proceeds from Me; knowing this the wise worship Me with love. To them ever devoted worshipping Me in love, I give that means of wisdom by which they attain to Me. In mercy only to them, dwelling in their hearts, do I destroy the darkness born of ignorance, with the brilliant light of knowledge’” (BG 10: 8, 10-11).<sup>159</sup> “With equal certainty we know from scripture that this Supreme Lord, when pleased by the faithful worship of his devotees, which worship consists in daily repeated meditation on Him, assisted by the performance of all the practices prescribed for each caste and ashrama—frees them from the influence of nescience which consists of karma accumulated in the infinite progress of time and hence hard to overcome: allows them to attain to that supreme bliss which consists in the direct intuition of his own true nature: and after that does not turn them back into the miseries of Samsara. The text distinctly teaching this is, ‘He who behaves thus all through his life reaches the world of Brahman and does not return’ (Ch. Up. 8:15-16).”<sup>160</sup>

Along these lines, Madhva (1190/1238-1276/1317) taught, “Brahman is of the essence of knowledge and bliss. He bestows fruits on the person, who has his mind fixed on Him and who offers the oblations in the fire.... a person serious of Moksha [Liberation] should study all the *Vedas* and reflecting on their meaning and import must desire to know Him.”<sup>161</sup> “Pleased with the initial Bhakti [loving devotion of the Lord] of the Jivas [individual souls], the Lord bestows on them firm knowledge of His nature and attributes. He then reveals Himself.”<sup>162</sup> “If the eternal Lord is pleased what could not be possible? By receiving the grace of the Lord one gets the deliverance, of this there is no doubt.”<sup>163</sup> “It should not be supposed that since the Jiva’s resemblance to God (as His pratibimba [reflection]) and his essential nature of consciousness, bliss etc., are all intrinsic to him, there is no need for bhakti [love of God], jnana [knowledge of God] and other sadhanas [spiritual practices] to manifest them. It is to remove this misconception that the Sutrakara observes: i.e., Intrinsic as it is, the soul’s Essential nature does not become fully manifested unless the jnana and other sadhanas practiced by him are united with a tenacious and clinging attachment (to the Lord).”<sup>164</sup>

These insights were expressed by Swami Shivananda, “Low thoughts will come and go. Don't mind them. Through His grace, as a result of constant practice, you will get through.”<sup>165</sup> “The grace of God is ever present but one must make an effort to deserve that grace.... He is ever ready to shower His grace. Take His name, worship Him, remember Him constantly and call upon Him very earnestly. You will see how gracious He is. So much grace will descend upon you that you will be overwhelmed; your life will be blessed. Nothing can be accomplished without His grace.... It is very difficult to snap the bonds of Maya without the grace of God; but it is also true that if a person sincerely prays to Him, He listens to that prayer and lifts the veil.... Never have any doubt about His grace; never allow even such a thought to cross your mind. Go on calling on Him with love; His grace will make your heart and mind full.... God sees one's mind. He becomes gracious where He sees sincere craving. There is no injustice in His domain.”<sup>166</sup> “You cannot realize God through Tapasya [austerity], sacrifice, charity, or study of the scriptures. He alone realizes Him on whom descends His grace. But then you have on the other hand, 'This Atman cannot be realized by the weak.' One who is weak and effortless cannot realize Him.... God helps those who help themselves.”<sup>167</sup> “Nothing will help you unless you have His grace. It is true, if a person wants the Lord badly, He graciously reveals Himself to him.... It is through constant devotion and meditation that God becomes gracious and reveals Himself in the heart of the devotee. What is needed is meditation—constant remembrance of Him.... Do you know what the most essential thing is, my boy? It is grace, grace. Men can see Him only when He grants His vision out of His own compassion. Spiritual practices and such other things are meant merely for turning the mind to God.”<sup>168</sup>

Vivekananda indicated, “The Lord is very merciful to him who He sees struggling heart and soul for Realization. But remain idle, without any struggle, and you will see that His grace will never come.... God bestows His mercy when this struggle is maintained.”<sup>169</sup> “So that this beloved may attain the Atman, the Lord Himself helps. For it has been said by the Lord: 'Those who are constantly attached to Me and worship Me with love—I give that direction to their will by which they come to Me'.... There is a cloud shedding its rain on all fields alike. But it is only the field that is well cultivated, which gets the advantage of the shower; another field, which has not been tilled or taken care of cannot get that advantage. It is not the fault of the cloud. The mercy of God is eternal and unchangeable; it is we that make the differentiation.”<sup>170</sup> In response to the statement made

by a disciple that, “There could be no condition in God's mercy; there could be no law for it!” he stated, “There must be some higher law at work” in God’s mercy.<sup>171</sup> Brahman’s-God’s grace is based on some higher form of reason unknown to humans. That Higher Law is a manifestation of Brahman’s-God’s internal nature and not something separate from Him. According to Gottfried Leibniz’s (1646-1716) “Principle of Sufficient Reason,” everything must have a reason or a cause. Should this not also apply to Brahman-God’s actions?

The Swamis make an interesting distinction between the grace of Brahman-God and the ability of our mind to receive it. If Brahman-God comes to us to offer His spiritual grace, would we turn away from Him? If one is not totally prepared to receive His grace, how long can they retain it before it defuses away?

John Cassian (c. 360-435) a mystical writer and Desert Father wrote, “And therefore the aforesaid teacher of the Gentiles (the Apostle Paul), though he bears his witness that he had obtained the grade of the Apostolate by the grace of God, saying: ‘By the grace of God I am what I am,’ yet also declares that he himself had corresponded to Divine Grace, where he says: ‘And His Grace in me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: and yet not I, but the Grace of God with me’ (I Cor. 15:10). For when he says: ‘I laboured,’ he shows the effort of his own will; when he says: ‘yet not I, but the grace of God,’ he points out the value of Divine protection; when he says: ‘with me,’ he affirms that it cooperates with him when he was not idle or careless, but working and making an effort.”<sup>172</sup>

The emphasis on the necessity of preparation to receive grace is mentioned by Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327). “It is not possible for God to do his will in every heart, for even though He is almighty, He cannot act except where He finds preparations made or He makes them Himself. I say ‘or He makes them’ on account of St. Paul, for God did not find him ready; He prepared St. Paul by an infusion of grace. Otherwise, I say that God acts where He finds that preparations have been made.... God does not work in all hearts alike but according to the preparation and sensitivity He finds in each. In a given heart, containing this or that, there may be an item which prevents God’s highest activity.... For He gives all things to all, but not all receive all things; He gives equally but we receive unequally, as has often been said.”<sup>173</sup> God is bound to act, to pour Himself into thee as soon as He finds thee ready.”<sup>174</sup>

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) the Bishop of Geneva emphasized, “Our free will can hinder the course of inspiration, and when the favourable gale of God's grace swells the sails of our soul, it is in our power to refuse consent and thereby hinder the effect of the wind's favour; but when our spirit sails along and makes its voyage prosperously, it is not we who make the gale of inspiration blow for us, nor we who make our sails swell with it, nor we who give motion to the ship of our heart; but we simply receive the gale, consent to its motion and let our ship sail under it, not hindering it by our resistance.”<sup>175</sup>

The saintly German Lutheran theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer who passed away in a concentration camp (1906-45) differentiated between: 1) Cheap Grace that “is represented as the Church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits.... An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sin. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, *ipso facto* a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.” 2) Costly Grace “is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.”<sup>176</sup>

According to the *Bible* to be saved a person must: repent of their sins (Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38), have faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10; Eph. 2:8), believe in him (Mk. 15:16; Jn. 3:16), obey him (Heb. 5:8-9), be baptized (initiated) (Mk. 15:16); and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9).<sup>177</sup>

Indians emphasize conditional grace so that the aspiring devotees will not become lazy and simply expect the Lord to come to them and do all their work for them. An individual who believes in reincarnation is more likely to place the emphasis on conditional grace, which would be far more evident if we knew the person’s prior life history. For example, for many Christians the apostle Paul was originally a sinner, who for some unknown reason received the unmerited grace to become the leading missionary of Jesus Christ. According to reincarnationists, Paul earned that Divine favor



by his meritorious spiritual behavior in a prior life. Many believe like Origen that the apostle Paul descended to earth as a guide and teacher to aid Jesus in his spiritual mission.<sup>178</sup> In addition prior to his conversion, Paul lived a high moral life, and most important he had the unique potentiality to successfully carry out his future mission that other people did not have. To receive grace the devotee must cooperate with it else it is a waste of time and energy for the giver.

Grace is unconditional from the standpoint of an omnipotent Deity who is the first cause of every event (Unconditional First Cause). There are others who teach though Brahman-God is the first cause who works through or over time, the judgments of the Temporal Brahman-God (i.e. Brahman-God within time) are based on human behavior which are secondary causes. In this case, Its first causes would be a reaction to human secondary causes (Qualified First Cause). Then grace would be conditional from the relative standpoint of secondary causes. If a religious aspirant fulfills the conditions of undergoing certain spiritual disciplines with the right attitude, they are bound to receive the Lord's grace. Yet, it is Brahman-God who as first cause makes the person undertake these disciplines in the right spirit. In determining human behavior, some believe unconditional grace is often but not always the case (Partial Conditional Grace). Grace can be conditional based on meritorious deeds performed in a prior life or in a higher plane of existence. For example, the Apostle Paul received the grace of Jesus Christ, and the young children in Portugal (1916-17) receive the visitation of Mother Mary.

Intense religious practice is a necessary but not sufficient cause to receive grace. Grace is conditional in the sense that while Brahman-God's power of itself is unlimited, in application it is limited by the capacity and potentiality of the recipient.

There is also an "Atheist-agnostic path to Brahman-God," but it is more difficult than the Theistic path. As Martin Luther pointed out, he wanted to worship a Personal God who loves him and cares about him. He did not care for the abstract Impersonal God of the philosophers. Objectively Brahman-God manifests as knowledge and thus, if an intellectual is devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, to a limited extent he/she is worshipping It though they may not realize it. It is Brahman-God's power that is manifesting through the intellect of the atheist-agnostic, though because of universal egoism, i.e., the sense of "I-ness" they like other people think of themselves as the origin of this power.

Whenever a person improves himself or herself, they are one step

closer to realizing their own inherent Divine Self. A brilliant atheistic intellectual who develops powers of concentration through devotion to knowledge can make more progress toward Brahman-God and realizing their inner Divinity than the average religious person, but not as much as the superior religious devotee. Atheism-agnosticism is a form of denial, which has no effect on the existence or manifested power of Brahman-God. Brahman's-God's influence over us, being the source of our existence is something an atheist-agnostic (or anyone else) cannot escape. They will have to realize this if not in this lifetime, in some future lifetime. Why? Because it is their inherent Divine nature that will eventually manifest.

The Catholics, Methodist (under the influence of the Dutch Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609)), and Eastern Orthodox agree that we turn to God only if the Lord has first drawn us to Him.<sup>179</sup> When attempting to change oneself the devotee must realize the importance of Divine grace. The fact that we are attempting to improve ourselves is the result of the grace. When receiving grace we must do our part in cooperating with the Lord. If we are finding it difficult to change we should seek Brahman-God's help and pray that our will be altered in the right direction.

We might think of prescriptive moral laws, descriptive operational laws, and law of karma as the general will of Brahman-God that applies to all people, and grace as the special will of Brahman-God that pertains only to a limited number of individuals. This grace manifests through the "Invisible Hand of God." Also, law is the will of Brahman-God in dealing with the natural world, and grace is the Divine Will in relation to spiritual matters. Swami Vivekananda mentioned that in Lord's mercy, "There must be some higher law at work." Brahman-God's grace is based on some higher form of reason unknown to humans because the Lord is omniscient while we judge things from a limited intellectual standpoint. Otherwise, the Lord's thinking and activity would be chaotic, random, and apparently purposeless, which is nonsense.

In most cases we must cooperate with the Lord/Mother to receive their grace. We do not want our mind to be full of worldly desires, which would cause the grace to quickly dissipate.

For more on this subject see: *Sri Ramakrishna and Western Thought*, Ch. VI. Divine Grace, Section 2. Conditional Grace.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> CW, III:253; II:61.

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<sup>12</sup> Prabhavananda<sup>3</sup>, pp. 191, 238.

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<sup>37</sup> CW, II:37; I:122, 129-31, 157.

<sup>38</sup> CW, I:138; VI:130, 359; II:33.

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