

## The Hindu Path to Light and Bliss

To perceive this Light of all lights and ultimate bliss, the Hindu tradition has several methods for the attainment of the same. The author of the *Katha Upanishad* says that those who say, "That is this' (i.e., the soul is Brahman), think of the indescribable supreme happiness." The same author then goes on to ask, "How then may I come to know of it?"<sup>55</sup>

In Yoga, the emphasis is on physical and mental preparation. Various exercises have been devised to prepare the physical body for Divine realization. But unlike some of the "Yoga" that is being practised in the West, in the Hindu tradition Yoga is much more than just a "get fit" class. One is expected to do considerably more than just perform a series of stretching exercises. All that is preliminary. The encounter with light and bliss comes through inward meditation. In Hatha Yoga, one of the last steps toward Divine realization is

*With a steady mind and half closed eyes,  
fixed on the tip of the nose...  
He who can see the light which is the all,  
the seed, the entire brilliant,  
...approaches Him, who is the great object.*<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, we find that "the undisturbed flow of the ultra-meditative causes Subjective Luminosity."<sup>57</sup> Through proper techniques, the Yogi is able to obtain "knowledge of the subtle, the veiled, the remote...."<sup>58</sup> Finally, the Yogi is able to attain the goal of the quest, when "the cover of light is destroyed."<sup>59</sup>

The *Bhagavad-Gita* tells us that the path to Divine realization is through appropriate effort, concentration, and the renunciation of material concerns:

*He whose self is unattached  
to external sensations  
Who finds happiness in the self,  
Whose self is united with Brahman  
through Yoga  
Reaches imperishable happiness.*

*Thus, continually disciplining himself,  
The Yogin whose mind is subdued  
Goes to Nirvana, to supreme peace,  
To union with me.*<sup>60</sup>

The Upanishads echo many of the same sentiments. The seeker of Divine Light is asked to "meditate solely on Brahman, which is Self-luminous and all-pervading."<sup>61</sup> A wandering ascetic who has renounced material possessions "is truly rich, for, with the thought, 'I am He,' he transcends both knowledge and ignorance, both pleasure and pain. He shines with his own light."<sup>62</sup> When "worldly wisdom is destroyed... diffusing itself everywhere... He himself shines always within, like a light within a vessel."<sup>63</sup> The devotee is encouraged to "meditate in the middle of the lotus of the heart, Parames'wara (the highest Lord),... who

is the object of supreme love... alone being of the nature of light only."<sup>64</sup>

Hinduism is in fact very versatile on this issue. The path of devotion, such as one would find when a Jew or a Christian prays to and worships God, is a perfectly appropriate way of coming nearer to the Divine. Most Hindus do pray to a God or several gods. Appropriate as well is the path of jnana (knowledge), which is preferred by those of a philosophical persuasion. Which method, or even which tradition one chooses depends on the individual. As Sri Ramakrishna put it, many roads lead to the top of the mountain -- just get yourself onto one of those roads if you hope to make progress.

The ultimate identification of the soul with God might cause some consternation amongst some Westerners. In the traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, such statements are considered blasphemous. But as we shall see when we come to the Western mystical traditions, while no complete identification is made, the "gulf" between God and man is certainly narrowed considerably.

Regardless, these concerns should not obscure the clear and obvious conclusion that, in this chapter, we have been looking at a core human experience with supernatural light and accompanying ecstasy. A number of Hindu scriptures convey expressions of this profound encounter over and over again in a compelling, even awesome fashion. Even within Hinduism, interpretations differ as to exactly what this means, as do the names that are attached to this rapturous illumination. There is no doubt, however, that the experience of the supreme bliss and brilliance of the Divine is firmly rooted in the Hindu tradition.

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