

An Outline Review

of

Huston Smith's

The World's Religions

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

Chapter II. Hinduism

Gandhi wrote: "Such power as I possess for working in the political field has derived from my experiments in the spiritual field." In that spiritual field, he went on to say, "truth is the sovereign principle, and the *Bhagavad-Gita* is the book *par excellence* for knowledge of Truth."

Part One: Hinduism in terms of its practical import, focusing on practice

A. You can have what you want - The Path of Desire

1. We begin by wanting pleasure. This is natural, but it too trivial to satisfy one's total nature.

2. The time comes when the individual's interest shift to the second major goal of life, which is worldly success with its three prongs of wealth, fame, and power. This too is a worthy goal but individuals whose development is not arrested will move through delighting in success and the senses to the point where their attractions have been largely outgrown.

3. Hinduism does not say that everyone in their present life

will find the Path of Desire wanting, but at some point in their reincarnations they will renounce the ego's claim to finality and transfer all allegiance to a religion of duty. This marks the first great step in religion.

4. But in the end all worldly rewards prove insufficient and in some reincarnation we turn to the Path of Renunciation. This is the moment Hinduism has been waiting for.

B. What People Really Want - The Path of Renunciation - The Beyond Within:

Hinduism sees the mind's hidden continents as stretching to infinity. Infinite in being, infinite in awareness, there is nothing beyond them that remains unknown. Infinite in joy, too, for there is nothing alien to them to mar their beatitude.

What the realization of our total being is like can no more be described than can a sunset to one born blind: it must be experienced.

1. Four Paths to the Goal. - The realization of our total being:

Hinduism's specific directions for actualizing the human potential come under the heading of yoga.

What is distinctive in Hinduism is the amount of attention it has devoted to identifying basic spiritual personality types and the disciplines that are most likely to work for each.

The number of the basic spiritual personality types, by Hindu count, is four.

The first step on every yoga involves the cultivation of such habits as non injury, truthfulness, non stealing, self

control, contentment, self discipline, and a compelling desire to reach the goal.

The four Paths are:

a. The Way to God through Knowledge.

Jnana yoga, intended for spiritual aspirants who have a strong reflected bent, is the path to oneness with the Godhead through knowledge. Such knowledge has nothing to do with factual information; it is not encyclopedic. It is, rather, an intuitive discernment that transforms, turning the knower eventually into that which she knows.

The yoga of knowledge is said to be the shortest path to divine realization. It is also the steepest. Requiring as it does a rare combination of rationality and spirituality, it is for a select few.

b. The Way to God through Love.

Bhakti yoga has countless followers, being, indeed, the most popular of the four.

The basic principles of bhakti yoga are richly exemplified in Christianity. Indeed, from the Hindu Point of view, Christianity is one great brilliantly lit bhakti highway toward God.

c. The Way to God through Work.

The third path toward God, intended for persons of active bent is *karma yoga*, the path to God through work.

To such people Hinduism's says, you don't have to retire to a cloister to realize God. You can find God in the world of everyday affairs as readily as anywhere. Throw yourself into your work with everything you have; but do so wisely, in a way that will bring the highest rewards, not just trivia.

d. The Way to God through Psychophysical Exercises.

Raja yoga is designed for people who are of scientific bent. It is the way to god through psychophysical experiments.

Hinduism encourages people to test all four yogas and combined them as best suits their needs.

2. The Stages of Life.

The preceding sections traced Hinduism's insistence that differences in human nature call for a variety of paths toward life's fulfillment. Not only do individuals differ from one another each individual moves through different stages, each of which calls for its own appropriate

conduct. The stages are:

- a. That of the student
- b. Beginning with marriage, that of the householder
- c. Eventually decline leads to the third stage - retirement -the time to leave family and home and plunge into the forest solitudes to launch a program of self-discovery.
- d. Beyond retirement, the final stage wherein the goal is actually reached, the state of the *sannyasin* where "one neither hates nor loves anything"

3. The Stations of Life. - The caste system

What is called for here is recognition that with respect to the ways they can best contribute to society and develop their own potentialities, people fall into four groups; at the top being the *brahmins* (intellectual and spiritual leaders) down to *shudras* (followers or servants).

Caste has decayed and is as offensive as any other corrupted corpse.

Part Two: Hinduism focusing on theory, the principal philosophical concepts that rib the Hindu religion

A. "Thou Before Whom All Words Recoil." - The concept of God

Concepts of God contain so much alloy to begin with that two contradictory ones may be true, each from a different angle, as both wave and particles may be equally accurate heuristic devices for describing the nature of light.

On the whole India has been content to encourage the devotee of *Brahman* as either personal or transpersonal, depending on which carries the most exalted meaning for the mind in question.

B. Coming of Age in the Universe. - Reincarnation

The process by which an individual soul (*jiva*) passes through a sequence of bodies is known as reincarnation or transmigration of the soul - Sanskrit *samsara*, a word that signifies endless passage through cycles of life, death, and rebirth.

On the subhuman level the passage is through a series of increasingly complex bodies until at last a human one is attained.

With the soul's graduation into a human body, this automatic escalator-like mode of ascent comes to an end. the soul has reached self-consciousness, and with this estate come freedom, responsibility, and effort.

Each thought and deed delivers an unseen chisel blow that sculpts one's destiny. Everybody gets exactly what is deserved.

Never during its pilgrimage is the human spirit completely adrift and alone. From start to finish its nucleus is the Atman, the God within, exerting pressure to "out" like a jack-in-the-box. Never seen but is the Witness; never heard but is the Hearer; never thought but is the Thinker; never known but is the Knower.

In the end it is God's radiating warmth that melts the soul's icecap, turning it into a pure capacity for God.

What happens then? Some say the individual soul passes into complete identification with God and loses every trace of its former separateness. Other that some slight differentiation between the soul and God will still remain - a thin line upon the ocean that provides nevertheless a remnant of personal identity that some consider indispensable for the beatific vision.

C. The World Welcome and Farewell.

What kind of world do we have? Hinduism answers:

1. A multitude of worlds that includes innumerable galaxies horizontally, innumerable tiers vertically, innumerable cycles temporally.
2. A moral world in which the law of *karma* is never suspended.
3. A middling world that will never replace paradise as the spirits destination.
4. A world that is *maya*, deceptively tricky in passing off its multiplicity, materiality, and dualities as ultimate when they are actually provisional.
5. A training ground on which people can develop their highest capacities.
6. A world that is *lila*, the play of the divine in its cosmic dance - untiring, unending, resistless, yet ultimately beneficent with a grace born of infinite vitality.

D. Many Paths to the Same Summit.

That Hinduism has shared her land for centuries with Jains,

Buddhists, Parsees, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians may help explain the final idea that comes out more clearly through her than through the other great religions; namely, her conviction that the various major religions are alternate paths to the same goal.

To claim salvation as the monopoly of any one religion is like claiming that God can be found in this room but not the next, in this attire but not another.

In practice India's sects have often been fanatically intolerant, but in principle most have been open.

Part Three: Appendix on Sikhism.

Hindus are inclined to regard Sikhs as somewhat wayward members of their own extended family. Sikhs see their faith as having issued from an original divine revelation that inaugurated a new religion.

The revelation affirms the ultimacy of a supreme and formless God who is beyond human conceiving. It rejects the notion of divine incarnations, caste distinctions, images as aids to worship, and the sanctity of the Vedas. The Sikh revelations endorse the doctrine of reincarnation.

Sikhs seek salvation through union with God by realizing, through love, the Person of God, who dwells in depths of their own being. Union with God is the ultimate goal. Apart from God life has no meaning; it is separation from God that causes human suffering.

World renunciation does not figure in this faith. The Sikhs have no tradition of renunciation, asceticism, celibacy, or mendicancy.
