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Conscious Light, and Signs of the Divine

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Though man has always been a rational being, one of the directions which marks the thinking of 17th c. European philosophy, inaugurating the modern era of science, is a systematic rational outlook on nature. Among these philosophers, one whose contribution to the way we think of ourselves today is decisive, was Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes' legacy to the field of science and philosophy was to distinguish mind and body, making him one of the first in the West responsible for separating the two selves. He was able to define the mind, unlike matter, as non-local (it does not have any location in space), not divisible, and existing independently of matter. Matter, unlike mind, is divisible and has a location. This separation of body and mind has been described in Eastern traditions thousands of years back even more clearly.

But Descartes also made a profound over-simplification in claiming consciousness as the property of mind. The implication here is that he believed in upward causation, meaning matter was a primary reality, followed by mind which was equated with consciousness. Eastern traditions believe in downward causation where consciousness, that is Brahman (God), is the highest state of being, followed by the mind and the body that is matter.

The Upanishads describe Brahman as Satchidananda—the true Absolute reality, which not separately but simultaneously is Sat, or Truth, Chit or Consciousness or Light, and Ananda or Bliss. They describe it as non-dual: That which is One-without-a second; That from which nothing is separate; That which is limitless; That which is brilliantly radiant; That which is changeless; That which is not conditioned by time; space and causation; That which is self-existent; That which is devoid of attributes; and That which is without a beginning or an end. It does not have any limits because it is beyond space, for limits of something or someone can only be cognized within the contours of space. It is changeless because change can only be conceived within the parameters of time. It is without a beginning or an end because the beginning or end can only be perceived within the confines of time and space. It is self-effulgent for It is Consciousness itself; its effulgence is not dependent on anything, for It is beyond causation. Because nothing in the cosmos is separate from the Brahman, It has manifested this universe from its own body,

first engendering time and space and then entering into them, just as a spider creates its web from its own saliva.

In manifestation, Brahman manifests as a principle of Purusha and Prakriti, as enumerated in detail by the Sankhya philosophy. Purusha is the static principle and Prakriti or Nature is the dynamic principle. Purusha is the witness and static or unchanging principle which supports and gives assent or negates the workings of Prakriti, which carries its dynamic processes through three *gunas*: *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. *Sattva* psychologically manifests in human beings as the force of truth, harmony, peace, right poise, equilibrium, intelligence, happiness etc. *Rajas* psychologically translates as the quality of action, energy, domination, possession, creation, will to fight, will to resist, and will to conquer. *Tamas* signifies indolence, inertia, unintelligence, sloth, and resistance towards change. All these *gunas* are present in each individual and are in flux—however the predominance of one or two determines the general character of an individual in that whether he or she will be *sattvic*, *rājasic* or *tamasic*. When an individual is under the influence of the modes of Prakriti or Nature, then his or her soul or Purusha is involved in the play; it is not free and it suffers or enjoys the play of the Prakriti as the case may be. Therefore the first step towards liberation or moksha involves separating the Purusha from the modes of Prakriti, and letting the witness and unchanging consciousness of Purusha, which is its natural characteristic, to emerge. The Purusha, then, instead of being involved in the constant subjection to Prakriti, is able to watch the movement of her different modes and can give sanction to the continuance or cessation of the play. Finding its union with the transcendental Brahman it can then find its complete liberation or moksha.

Thus in manifestation, the transcendental Brahman through Purusha and Prakriti reveals changeless or constant characteristics and changing or dynamic characteristics respectively. However, it is due to the greater similarities that the Purusha has with transcendental Brahman that it is considered Divine in the universe while Prakriti is not—the crucial difference being that Purusha is unchanging and constant whereas Prakriti or Nature is dynamic and changing.

The Divine or God in most major traditions is characterized by Light. The Brahmasutras and Upanishads define Brahman as self-effulgent, the Light from which all other lights are borrowed. One of the prayers in the Upanishads specifically speaks about taking one from falsehood to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality equating the characteristic of the Divine with truth and light. Diwali, the festival of light, in most Indian traditions represents the triumph of good over evil or an attainment of nirvana in Buddhist and Jain traditions. Genesis explains that at the time of creation God said, “Let there be

light” and from light all the possibilities of the universe appeared. People who have had near-death experiences recount them as a godly tête-à-tête with light. The Tibetan Book of the Dead contends that as soon as an individual dies, it has an encounter with “Clear Light of Reality.” It is not able to hold that state because its karmic propensities bring it to lesser and lesser states until it is reborn.

Ramakrishna, describing his experiences in featureless or nirvikalpa samadhi, stated that he saw an ocean of light having no beginning or end. Many mystics from different traditions have also experienced and recorded spiritual encounters as light. It is the life giving light of solar deity that we find in ancient Egypt, Chinese, Aztec, and Inca mythology. Even in movies like *The Abyss* and *The Ghost*, higher beings are projected as self-effulgent.

It is not surprising that three centuries after Descartes conceptually separated mind and matter Albert Einstein (1879-1955), who had an exposure to Indian spiritual traditions (Einstein-Tagore conversations), came out with his Theory of Relativity and the $E=MC^2$ equation, where the speed of light is the unchanging constant. However, mass and energy—and if we take his entire Theory of Relativity into account, space and time also—being attributes of Nature, are changing. Everything in Nature is changing and relative (though never absolute) except Light. It is true that the velocity of light changes when it is approaching a black hole, but not the speed. Light, constituted of photons, has zero mass. The speed of light is not affected by the gravitational force exerted by a black hole—only the direction is affected. From this we may say that the unchanging nature of the speed of light is associated with Purusha, and the changing nature of light direction is associated with Prakriti. Philosophically speaking this intuition of Einstein may be thought of a next great step in civilizational thought, perhaps heralding a new age leading from the modern preoccupation with the Science and Technology of changeful Nature to a search for the unchanging Source of consciousness and Being.

What about other physical constants like the Alpha? Nobel laureate physicist *extraordinaire* Richard Feynman called Alpha a “magic number” and its value “one of the greatest mysteries of physics”. A dimensionless number which goes by the symbol alpha must remain constant for our existence. If not, then stars, including sun, would not be able to sustain nuclear reactions that synthesize carbon and oxygen atoms and therefore the carbon-based life would not exist. New research in astrophysics, reviewed in *Economist* magazine dated September 4, 2010, discovered that the Alpha may not be constant after all, but changing from place to place within the universe. If these results hold up to scrutiny, they will have profound implications, for they suggest that the universe stretches far beyond what human telescopes can observe, and that the laws of physics, discovered by human beings, vary within it. Our material existence, if true in matters of the size

of the universe, has become even more insignificant. The new research, however, does not change our connectedness with light. The speed of light remains unchanging at least in our part of the universe, and probably elsewhere.

Light therefore remains the conduit to the Divine and connects it with Nature. All living souls in Nature, bounded within the space-time continuum, are also connected with the gale of the sun, as described by Ananda Coomaraswami. The significance here is that we need to learn to live “Now”, not in the past and not in the future. That would help us to transcend to higher states of mind. Recall “Now” is the common apex of both, past and future cones, in space-time continuum bounded within the confines of the speed of light. “Now” literally is at the threshold to escape the domain of Nature. Apparently our existence at the apex “Now” may be a step away from the ultimate state of Sat-chit-Ananda.

The goal of a transcending philosopher is to acquire the highest mental state of being, the spiritual self. The insight here is to becoming selfless, egoless. This condition is quintessentially light-like in quality, mass-less and approaching the attribute of changelessness. Here we need to focus on only the mind disassociating from the somatic self. Thoughts are similar to sub-atomic particles; thoughts jump discretely from one to the next or from lower to higher energy states similar to quantum jumps of sub-atomic particles. By identification with thoughts, our mental being also knows no rest and cannot know itself as an unchanging reality. Intuitively therefore, only a thoughtless mind could be egoless, and selfless. It is amazing and significant that Einstein was able to uncover the relative nature of Nature by associating light with the realm of the Divine, which happens also to be the view of the world's great religious traditions.

Before Einstein had made such a discovery, Descartes made a *second* error. He believed that the non-material world, though separate from, interacted with the localized material world within the realm of Nature. It reminds me of the story from *Reader's Digest* recited by my teacher some time in 1940s in India, about scientists in the US trying to see if the escaping soul can be detected employing very sophisticated instruments of the time. Obviously they could not detect an escaping soul from the dying body. Brahman-Atman (soul), as stated in Upanishads, is not in the realm of Nature.

People who are agnostic or atheist should consider the following a few signs of the Divine. As explained in my book, *Transcendence: Saving Us from Ourselves*, the earliest sacred text of the world, the Veda teaches us that Ritam is the first evolute, the first cause, the first sign of the Absolute, and samskara acquired through hard training becomes the first link, the first several steps to transcend to the ultimate state of Godhood. If we believe in downward causation, meaning the primacy of

the life force over the non-living matter as stated in Upanishads, we have to believe in God. Downward causation occurs in a non-ordinary, non-local state of consciousness that we call "God-consciousness." If we believe that we have a soul (Atman), then we have to believe in God (Brahman). If we accept that we have the power of creativity, then we must accept the existence of God. Creativity often is instantaneous and spontaneous because we are connected with consciousness. Samskaras linked with Ritam (Ruta or Rutta), are very much instrumental to experience creativity. If we accept the non-local non-ordinary working of quantum physics, we are indeed a lover of God. Only downward causation can help us resolve the mystery of fossil gaps in the theory of evolution.

The fact that we perceive, communicate, and understand each other is due to our connection to consciousness. If we believe that mind could help heal the body, then consciousness is the cause. If the reader is interested in discovering more in detail, the reader should consider reading the book, *The Signatures of the Divine*, written by Professor Amit Goswami. As explained earlier, Einstein's insight of connecting unchanging nature of light with the traditional view of the first glimpse of the Absolute is, I believe, one of the strongest proofs of the existence of the Absolute.

If we believe in love for all living beings, then certainly God loves us all. Following is a very appropriate poem written by James Henry Leigh Hunt:

ABU BEN ADHEM

*Abu Ben Adhem awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room, making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold: Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said, "What writest thou?"
The vision raised its head, and with a look made of all sweet accord,
answered, 'The names of those who love the Lord.'
'And is mine one?' said Abu. 'Nay, not so,' replied the angel.
Abu spoke more low, but cheerily still; and said,
'I pray thee then, write me as one that loves his fellow men.'
The angel wrote, and vanished.
The next night it came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest."*

APPENDIX:

Sun worship in Hinduism (From Wikipedia)

The Ādityas are one of the principal deities of the Vedic classical Hinduism belonging to Solar class. In the Vedas, numerous hymns are dedicated to Mitra, Varuna, Savitr etc.

Even the Gayatri mantra, which is regarded as one of the most sacred of the Vedic hymns is dedicated to Savitr, one of the principal Ādityas. The Adityas are a group of solar deities, from the Brahmana period numbering twelve. The ritual of sandhyavandanam, performed by Hindus, is an elaborate set of hand gestures and body movements, designed to greet and revere the Sun.

The sun in Upanishads is described as Sutratma that like a needle pierces all the Jivatmas or the individual life souls, on this earth. Each of us, the life soul, has to realize the oneness with the cosmic wind and the sun; if not, the life soul cannot cross the frontiers of death and will not experience the immortality.

The Sun God in Hinduism is an ancient and revered deity. In later Hindu usage, all the Vedic Ādityas lost identity and metamorphosed into one composite deity, Surya, the Sun. The attributes of all other Ādityas merged into that of Surya and the names of all other Ādityas became synonymous with or epithets of Surya.

The Ramayana has Lord Rama as a descendant of the Surya, thus belonging to the Surya Vansh or the clan of the Sun. The Mahabharata describes one of its warrior heroes Karna as being the son of the Pandava mother Kunti and Surya. The Sun God is said to be married to the goddess Ranaadeh, also known as Sanjnya. She is depicted in dual form, being both sunlight and shadow, personified. The goddess is revered in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The charioteer of Surya is Aruna, who is also personified as the redness that accompanies the sunlight in dawn and dusk. The Sun God is driven by a seven-horsed Chariot depicting the seven days of the week.

In India, at Konark, in the state of Orissa, a temple is dedicated to Surya. The Konark temple has also been declared a UNESCO world heritage site. Surya is the most prominent of the navagrahas or nine celestial objects of the Hindus. Navagrahas can be found in almost all Hindu temples. There are further temples dedicated to Surya, one in Arasavilli, Srikakulam District in AndhraPradesh, one in Gujarat and another in Rajasthan. The temple at Arasavilli was constructed in such a way that on the day of Radhasaptami, the sun's rays directly fall on the feet of the Sri Suryanarayana Swami, the deity at the temple.

Chhath (Hindi: छठ, also called Dala Chhath) is an ancient Hindu festival dedicated to Surya, the chief solar deity, unique to Bihar, Jharkhand and the Terai. This major festival is also celebrated in the northeast region of India, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Chhattisgarh. Hymns praying to the sun can be found in the Vedas, the oldest sacred texts of Hinduism. Practiced in different parts of India, the worship of the sun has been described in the Rigveda.

[1\[1\]](#) na tatra suryo bhati na candra-tarakam / nema vidyuto bhanti kuto'yam agnih / tam eva bhantam anubhati sarvam /tasya bhasa sarvam idam vibhati.

There the sun shines not and the moon has no splendour and the stars are blind; there these lightnings flash not, how then shall burn this earthly fire? All that shines is but the shadow of His shining; all this universe is effulgent with His light. Katha Upanisad 2.2.15; [Mundakopanisad II - ii – 11](#); [Svetasvatara Upanisad VI - 14](#)

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