



Danjel Turina

# The jewel in the lotus

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# Introduction

In most of my writing I only barely touch the “insider” concepts, but the time has come to change that. This, therefore, is a book written for the advanced yogis, but enough of it is accessible to a wide enough audience that if you get it, it's obviously meant for you.

The concept of “karma”, or spiritual energetic structures, is somewhat difficult to understand without direct experience, especially if you aren't familiar with the traditional texts of Yoga and Buddhism. Knowledge of the literature can create familiarity with the terminology, but no amount of literature can be a substitute for direct experience – you just lack a frame of reference in which you could place what you've read about, you can't ground it into your reality. This is the reason why further reading becomes pointless unless it's accompanied by yogic practice, because the intellectual concepts will remain suspended in such an abstract way, that it will not be possible to recognize them as a reflection of anything known or real. Still, the literature is useful and necessary, because it forms an intellectual frame of reference into which experience will be able to “land”.

On that thought, I will now try to clarify the origins and evolution of the various Eastern concepts. This will include a form of analysis that is different from my usual way of writing; for instance, my commentary of the Bhagavad-gita was written from the position from which its author wanted it to be understood, the position of its literal and absolute accuracy. Still, in order to achieve complete understanding one needs to approach things from many perspectives, including the one of a neutral scientist observing the origin, context and evolution of the terms through several philosophical systems. Also, in my former writing I neglected Buddhism and relied mostly on the Hindu sources and terminology, but those who are familiar with Buddhism will recognize the similarity between my ideas and the Buddhist concepts, although I developed them all independently. In any case, it is time for me to correct this omission.

# **The hermetical and the dissociative spirituality**

One of the most important corollaries of science is that human intuition is notoriously unreliable in establishing how the material world actually works. Despite the profound impact of the scientific understanding of the world, probably the most important discovery predated science by several millennia, when Buddha understood that physical matter is no reflection of the Divine, and that no “divine realities” are to be sought here. He understood that all phenomena are synthetic, consisting of the subjective experience and the underlying objective reality. This means that the attachments and the projections are superimposed on the material phenomena and perceived by the consciousness as a singular experience. Attachment to the material phenomena is the result of “desire”, of investment of one's own spiritual momenta into the material, which leads to the entanglement of the two, at the expense of the ability to understand the difference between the material and the spiritual elements. The prime examples of the philosophies that advocate such integral, holistic understanding of the reality are the alchemy and the astrology.

To be clear, the magical understanding of the Universe always permeated that which is usually called “spirituality”. The Vedas (*karma kanda*) are this way from start to end, understanding the Universe as the body of God, interpreting all the events as the gameplay of the gods, seeing the gods and the sages in the sky, seeing fire as a portal into the world of the gods. Basically, this lack of distinction between the elements of one's own psyche and the elements of the material world is merely an early stage of human psychological development. Only by 700-500 BC, in the time of the Upanishads, did the humans start the transition into the higher level of abstraction, and in this atmosphere appeared the Buddha. So the foundations were already there, the philosophy of his time was on the right track, and it seems that the Buddha developed his ideas in the context of the early Upanishads, and that the later Upanishads developed in the context of the early Buddhism. Those philosophies stimulated each other and helped each other crystallize into final form; they did not arise independently. Buddha's concept of the synthetic nature of the

phenomena originates from the early Vedanta, which stimulates the growth of the early Buddhism, while the mature Vedanta takes many things from the Buddhist theory of karma, reincarnation etc.

Those are very smart, complex philosophies, and the period between Buddha and Shankaracharya produced the mature theory that exists today, in several branches that do not differ significantly. Their common elements are these:

**1. Synthetic nature of human experience.** This means projection of the spiritual elements into the material phenomena, and the standard example which is used in the texts in order to illustrate it is psychological coloration of the experience depending on the expectations. A piece of rope that appears to be a snake when it is seen in the dark, causing fear, is one of those standard examples. The things that are neutral in themselves but depending on expectations cause either happiness or suffering are another example, for instance an officer knocking on the wife's door while her husband is on the front line, causes her mortal fear, because she expects news of her husband's death, but the officer in fact tells her that her husband is alive and decorated for bravery, and that he came to invite her for the special ceremony with the President. A golden-hued metal causes happiness because it is mistaken for gold, but this is illusory since the metal is in fact pyrite. In this way all phenomena are analyzed and we come to the conclusion that infusion of one's spirit into the world causes one to have expectation of the world, which are called desires. In interaction between the world which is indifferent to man, and human psyche which is prone to delusions, attachments are formed, causing suffering. This is the teaching of both Buddhism (expressed in the four noble truths) and more-less all schools of Vedanta.

**2. Vectorial nature of action and its inherent reactivity.** This means that action is interpreted as a vector of a force that necessarily includes the doer, the direction and the amount, and that every action is immediately followed by an equal and opposite



reaction, it's just that in the relative world of space and time those reactionary forces are not always immediately visible, but mostly encapsulated in form of the reservoirs for the potential energy, like coiled springs, called “karmic seeds” (*karmashaya*). The corollary of karma defined in vectorized form are the atomized actions and reactions, where good and evil do not negate each other, but good brings good results and evil brings evil results, and no amount of good deeds can wash away the evil consequences, but instead they need to be suffered separately.

**3. Layered nature of the spiritual world, spiritual bodies, experiences and consciousness.** The theory of stratification of the spiritual worlds according to their subtlety, or “density” of the spiritual substance, is a reasonably new invention and can be dated to the middle ages. The example of a text that embraces such a concept is *Bardo Thodol*, the so called “Tibetan book of the dead”, which explains this concept as a “top-down sieve”, where a soul is exposed to the decreasingly subtle layers of reality, from pure buddhahood to hell, until it finds its point of resonance, and there creates its next incarnation. The Tibetan tradition dates the text between 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

**4. Salvation through dissociation.** As much as the various philosophical systems disagree about the definition of liberation, they all agree about the need for separating the elements of one's own psyche from the aspects of the material world, leading to liberation. This approach is directly opposite to the one of alchemy/astrology/magic/animism, which does not differentiate between the psyche and the matter, treating them instead as one entity. The latter philosophies abandon this concept as inherently illusory, and ceremonies and sacrifices based on this principle are seen as futile and useless, while knowledge is seen as the way to salvation. This form of knowledge manifests itself in dissociation (as opposed to association) and analysis (as opposed to synthesis). Buddhism calls it “the proper seeing” and Vedanta calls it *viveka*. *Viveka* is therefore not “discernment between good and evil”, as it

is often misunderstood, but discernment between the elements of the psyche and the matter, as well as the analytical, dissociative approach to all phenomena.

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# **The nature of the world**

The hermetic philosophy (in the narrow sense) is based on the following principles<sup>1</sup>:

- 1. The principle of mentalism** (the Universe is essentially mental and is located within the mind)
- 2. The principle of correspondence** (as above, so below)
- 3. The principle of vibration** (everything vibrates, everything flows)
- 4. The principle of polarity** (everything is dual)
- 5. The principle of rhythm** (cyclical and rhythmical nature of events)
- 6. The principle of cause and effect** (the laws of the Universe are inherently causal)
- 7. The principle of gender** (male and female gender are the universal cosmic realities)

The hermetic philosophies in the wider sense are those that accept the majority of those premises, and have a magical, anthropomorphic understanding of the Universe.

To be clear, the hermetic understanding is intuitive and natural to man. Hermetism is a verbalization of the first idea about the Universe that the first ape-like hominid had before he descended from the trees. Hermetism is the way small children perceive the Universe. Hermetism paints cars, trains, ships and planes with smiling faces. Hermetism doesn't distinguish between one's own spiritual experiences and the physical objects associated with those experiences; in all external things, hermetism sees the symbols and agents of the spiritual world. Hermetism perceives the material world as an extension of one's spirituality, and the whole world as a playground of gods and spirits, who reveal things and whose will needs to be understood, as one is guided throughout life by the spiritual forces and their signs.

Hermetism has been so widely accepted as the unquestionable

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1 <http://www.hermeticsource.info/the-seven-hermetic-principles.html>

truth by the New Age philosophies, that it is simply axiomatically assumed in all further explanations, often with absurd results, as in the attempts of uniting the hermetical principles with Buddhism, which naturally follows from the New Age belief that all philosophies and religions are but fragments of the One Truth. This belief is mistaken. There are indeed philosophies and religions that have enough similarities that they can be considered variations of the same general idea, but it is also true that there are different groups of philosophies, which are mutually exclusive, because they have diametrically opposite opinions on the fundamental issues. Such is the case with Hermetism and Buddhism.

Hermetism was not alien to the civilization that gave birth to Buddhism. In fact, the Vedic culture is one of the prime examples of the hermetic worldview. Still, the conclusions of the Buddha are fundamentally opposite to the hermetic principles.

This fundamental conflict can be missed if one doesn't consider the corollaries of the four noble truths:

- 1. suffering is inherent to human experience** (*sarvam dukkham*, or “all is suffering” or “suffering is all-pervasive”);
- 2. suffering is caused by desire** (or investment of one's spirituality into the world, which causes attraction or repulsion to the worldly objects and their states);
- 3. cessation of suffering is possible**, and is attained by separation of one's spirituality from the world, by cessation of projections of one's own spiritual states into the worldly objects;
- 4. the way toward the cessation of suffering** is the practice of the “noble eightfold path”, which essentially means correct perception of the phenomena, non-creation of attachments, non-creation of projections, and ethical principles based on truth and goodness, which means that the fundamental ethics are based on the principle

that the sensitive beings suffer in the world and that actions need to be such that they do not increase this suffering, but to reduce it if possible.

From the Buddhist perspective, the hermetic principles are *de facto* an ideology of attachment and suffering, an ideology invented from a deluded perspective of inability to distinguish between one's own spirituality and the worldly phenomena, and from spiritual reactions that are guided by subjective interpretation of the worldly states.

For instance, a Buddhist analysis of a pretty sight in nature says that a certain favorable condition of the worldly elements and forces interacts with the sensory inputs of a being, which interprets those inputs according to its physical nature (genetics) and the current state of the energies that form the mind and the emotions. A phenomenon that would be interpreted in one way by an insect, is interpreted in the exact opposite way by a man. This means that no physical phenomenon is “favorable” as such, but only in the mind of the observer; emotional characterization of entities is not inherent to the entities. “Tasty” is not inherent to an apple. “Tasty” is the result of a specific interaction between you and an apple. Also, a photograph taken by me in nature is not a photograph of nature. It is the photograph of my emotional and mental choices when presented with nature as a stimulus; nature is quite secondary here. A photograph is in fact a frozen aspect of a photographer's consciousness. It is the photographer who chooses what to see, how he will perceive, what spiritual states will he attempt to “capture” with the photograph. He could see those states in either a landscape or in dust on the floor. The content of a photograph doesn't have anything to do with the world; it's a window into the mind of the photographer.

A beautiful sunset after a boring day evokes dramatic spiritual responses. The same beautiful sunset on Antarctica, lasting for months, at first becomes common, then boring, then tiresome, and

finally painful. The beauty is therefore not in the sunset, not even in the “eye of the beholder”. It is a complex artifact of consciousness, and that's one of the cornerstones of the Buddhist teaching: all experiences are synthetic. This means that experience is a resultant of multiple vectors, which is quite on the line of the scientific understanding of perception. The earth you walk on doesn't really exist as “earth”; it's a resultant of a vast number of forces. Earth is what you get by interaction of an enormous number of atoms of different substances, none of which is “earth”; they all need to be in a certain narrow range of temperatures, at certain gravity, atmospheric pressure etc., and it is all relative to the set of senses and forces at the disposal of a certain animal species by the name of “Homo Sapiens”, which you perceive as yourself.

I don't think that people, except maybe a few scientists, really understand how much of their perception of the world is determined by their nature. Somehow they all assume objectivity of their perception of the world, which brings us just a few steps away from a hermetic worldview in which even gender is a cosmic category, where gods have the same emotional patterns as humans, according to the “as above, so below” principle – surely, because the gods made men at their image, not the other way around.

I'm not sure how to illustrate this point further, because if I stop here, I'm not sure that the majority of the audience will understand the “gravitas” of the matter. Let me take something from the popular literature, for instance the “Twilight” series by Stephanie Meyer. If you didn't read the Buddhist theory, you probably read this, so it will be easier for you to follow the imagery.

So, if you enter the “world” of her novels, when you're human you must pay attention to how you're dressed in order not to freeze when it's cold. You must pay attention to what shoes you wear in order not to hurt your feet. You must pay attention not to go to the dangerous parts of the town or you might get mugged or killed. At night you must pay attention not to go to the very dark places or

you'll be unable to orient yourself, and you might even encounter some danger. You prefer to go somewhere in daylight, and you sleep during the night. Your daily cycle is governed by your need to sleep and rest. Some things are your preferable food and drink, and some are repulsive. Human blood makes you feel disgust, fear and nausea.

If someone turns you into a vampire, your perception of the world radically changes. Your behavior is dominated by thirst for human blood; spilt blood is your sweetest object of desire, and the greatest pleasure you know is to drink it. You lack any need for sleep or rest. Your physical strength and resistance to physical attack are such that you need fear only fire, other vampires and werewolves: nothing else could harm you.

What people consider to be food is as unappealing to you as the plate on which it's served. On the other hand, the people serving the food are incredibly appealing to you as sustenance, and you must exercise a great deal of self-control in order not to kill them and drink their blood to the last drop. Being close to invulnerable, you don't have to worry about protecting your body from the elements; clothes and shoes serve a purely decorative purpose and are useful only for playing a human role. You can hit a mountain at full speed, and only the mountain and your clothes will get damaged. You can fearlessly walk through the most dangerous parts of the town, but you need to avoid sunlight because its reflection off your skin will reveal you for what you are. Your senses are so sharp, you can hear a whisper kilometers away; you can sense scents too faint for a tracking dog to pick up, and you can see better than any bird of prey. Your perceptions of "hard", "cold", "hot", "dangerous", "desirable" and "unpleasant" is completely different from the human ones. You perceive the same material Universe the humans do, but you perceive it with an inhuman body, inhuman intellect and inhuman senses, which makes your experience of the world's realities completely other. Time, too, is something completely different for you and for the



humans, because unlike them, you don't age. A forest full of predatory beasts is a place of mortal danger and fear to the humans, but to you, it's a peaceful, pleasant place where you go to have lunch: bears and mountain lions, preferably. When a human faces a pride of lions, he thinks about his death. You think how much of the lions you can eat without interfering with the ecology of the place, and which one would taste better.

To leave this example and move onto a less fictional one, let's say you have a gun in your hand and you're surrounded by a pack of wild dogs. You have a very healthy sense of control of the situation, you aim for the closest dog, pull the trigger and hear "click" - the gun had jammed. This sense of change in the perception of a situation, that's the cornerstone of Buddhist teaching. It's also a perfect demonstration of the synthetic nature of the experience and its inherent subjectivity. This is the point Buddha understood, this is the point where the hermetic worldview was written off as a narcissist illusion similar to the geocentric system, alchemy and astrology, all of which approach the Universe from an implicit premise of the seamless transition between the inner and the outer world, failing to differentiate between the material things as such, and their role in our personal world, seeing the thing and experience as one - that the Sun loves us and is happy because we feel good when it shines upon us, and that the forest is terrible because we fear it in the night.

The hermetic worldview is incredibly intuitive, in the same way in which the geocentric worldview is incredibly intuitive. All our experience tells us that the earth stands still and the celestial bodies move. Every child understands that the Sun moves across the sky. But in reality it is the Earth that moves, revolving around its axis and around the Sun. A geocentric worldview is an illusion. A hermetic worldview is an illusion. It is an illusion that is born out of immersion of subjectivity into the perception of the material world; it lacks the ability to objectively analyze, and it is first and foremost a philosophy of a subjective feeling. What makes

Buddhism so radical is its statement that the entire experience of the world is synthetic. A synthetic nature of the experience means that our experience of the world doesn't necessarily have much connection with the world as it is. Our experience is defined by the genetic makeup of our biological species, by our senses, and by interaction of those senses with the substance of the world. You cannot really tell whether the world is the body of God, God's dream or some astral being's video game.

Unlike Hermetism, the basic truths of Buddhism are not intuitive at all; moreover, the majority of people will find them pessimistic or even depressing. The basic truth of Buddhism, that all is suffering, sounds crazy, since we all perceive the mixture of pleasant and unpleasant experiences and apparently the pleasant ones are sufficiently widespread to form a good balance to the unpleasant ones. An instinctive reaction to "*sarvam dukkham*" is directly opposite to the instinctive heart-centered reaction to the hermetic principles. Nevertheless, Buddhism is on a far better trail; it is much closer to the truth.

"*Sarvam dukkham*" follows very closely on the trail of the fundamental statement of Yoga, "*yogas citta vrtti nirodhah*" - yoga is cessation of the fluctuations in the mind-stuff (*citta*). This statement implies that absolutely all fluctuations of the mind-stuff project suffering upon *atman/brahman*. Once the mind-stuff becomes calm, we feel the bliss of *brahman* shining through from beyond. Due to illusion, you think that bliss is caused by interaction of the senses with the favorable objects, but it is not really the case. Bliss is caused when the spirit dives away from the senses and toward itself, and some states of the senses and of the mind promote this inward movement. In sex, pleasure is not caused by the stimulation of the genitals. Pleasure is what takes place when, during genital stimulation, you turn your consciousness in on itself, when your *Kundalini* rises upwards through *sushumna nadi*. Then you have an orgasm, when your energetic system is rearranged in a way that it can perceive something of the inner

nature of consciousness, instead of the senses, and it is accompanied by a form of brain-reset. This experience is still filtered through a thick layer of bodily limitations, but essentially, an orgasm is closest to the yogi experience of all common worldly states – the part of it when you “pop”, when you are no longer able to maintain the continuity of your thoughts and sensory perception, and this surge of pleasure overwhelms your existence. As dramatic as it can feel, it is essentially a form of interruption of normal brain activity, a reset-pulse. It disturbs the “normal” connection between the world, the senses and the consciousness, and that's exactly why an orgasm is a blissful experience. If you attempt to remain conscious and aware during orgasm, you either won't have one or it will be subdued into insignificance, or even transformed into pain.

This essentially means that the entire bodily experience of the world is in fact suffering that covers the inner bliss of *atman*, and when this suffering interrupts for even a moment, we get to feel some of the underlying bliss, and being the fools that we are, we cling to the world even harder, looking for more, with the inevitable result of disappointment and pain. This is what Buddha understood: that the world is total, absolute crap without a single redeeming quality that would make it worth the effort. The only proper way to truly understand the world is to leave it behind. Its nature is absolutely, unconditionally negative. By extinction of all attachments, and with divestment of psyche from the world, arises freedom, which is the absolute and utmost bliss.

Knowledge of the nature of the world leads to the realization that the soul is a foreigner in this world; a superfluous and alien element. We do not belong here. The world has its own laws and abides by them regardless of us, and we play the role of mere witnesses deluded into thinking that we are the important players in the cosmic drama, while in reality we are attached to a self-propagating illusion that feeds on the energy of our consciousness.

This is the cornerstone of the teaching of the Gita: that he is

deluded, who thinks “it is I who act”. In reality, it is “the *gunas*”, the qualities of the world itself, who perform all action. *Atman* is merely the witness, upon whom the experience of the world is projected, like movie upon a screen. He who knows this truth, is not identified with this circus, and binds himself with neither sin nor merit:

*"The Lord does not create  
neither the activities nor their fruits,  
nor does He incite the beings to action,  
nor is He responsible for the connection  
between he who acts and the fruits of his activities.  
It is the doing of Nature.  
The Almighty does not accept anyone's sin, nor merit.  
The wisdom is covered by a cloak of ignorance.  
Because of that, beings are in illusion.  
But in them, who have destroyed ignorance with knowledge,  
the knowledge reveals the Almighty, like a rising Sun.  
With their minds founded in That,  
with their souls founded in Him,  
focused at Him, utterly devoted to Him,  
utterly cleansed by wisdom  
they achieve the final perfection."*

*(Bhagavad-gita 5, 14-17)*

The message of Gita is essentially identical to the message of Buddhism: if you happened to get stuck here, you should practice proper action, that which is done with detachment, and which dispels the illusion. But do work on not returning here, because this is not a good place. This Universe is very far from being “the body of God”. In fact, it is closer to being God's nightmare, filled with all kinds of evil. All our longings should be directed toward transcendence of the world, not toward wallowing in the mud of its qualities.

*Karma, dharma* and  
reincarnation

There is a trend in neo-Hinduism, Theosophy, New Age philosophies and their various offshoots – one of mystifying the oriental terminology and invoking the ancient origin of the presented philosophies. The reality is quite different, and I find it necessary to describe the historic context behind certain terms in order to remove the confusing layer of mystification and emotionality.

The concept of karma (sanskrit. *karman*; action) as it is known since 6<sup>th</sup> century BC is not found in the older texts. There was a concept according to which action produces effect, and according to which every evil action eventually finds a way to backfire at the doer, and the afterlife of an individual is determined by his actions in life. This, however, does not go beyond the usual moralizations present in all cultures. If reincarnation is mentioned in the Vedic theory at all, it is in the context of occasional material embodiments of the beings from the spiritual world with intent of achieving some particular purpose, or birth in a lower form as a consequence of a curse suffered over some insult or another evil deed. Reincarnation as a central mechanism of spiritual development is unknown to the Vedic theory, which operates primarily with the concept of heaven (*svarga*) and hell (*naraka*). This has been developed further into a greater number of unearthly realms, each having a ruler and specific qualities that reflect the ruler's nature; for instance, the world ruled by Brahma is significantly different than the world ruled by Indra, but those worlds are not stratified, but parallel. There is no theory of the spiritual strata of increasing subtlety, energetic quality or “vibratory frequency”, as it would be called in the New Age circles. The Vedic religion is in this respect quite similar to the religions of other hunter-warrior nations, where the brave and honorable warriors, after their death, go to Sto-Vo-Kor with Kahless, where they spend their days hunting a boar, and the evenings singing about heroic deeds by the fire.<sup>1</sup>

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1 If you don't understand the reference, the Geek is not strong with you.

Within this religion, the concept according to which the deeds determine a man's destiny is prevalent, and there is also the concept of reincarnation, according to which some of the gods and sages, if they became too proud and were cursed, can be born among the mortals, as either man or beast, but there is no clear theory behind it. It's all based on emotion and observation of the unconnected phenomena.

The second important concept is *dharma* (sanskrt. *dharma*; duty, order, law). In an older version, the term means order infused into the Universe by the Creator in the very act of creation, according to which all things within the Universe have their place and their personal *dharma*, determined by the part of the “cosmic man”, *Purusha*, they originate from. Some texts identify Brahma himself as the “cosmic man”, and the differences between the four castes are explained by divine origin: the *brahmanas* are made from his head, *ksatriyas* from his arms, *vaisyas* from his thighs, and *sudras* from his feet. The “value” of the body part one originates from therefore determines one's role in society. This concept was therefore used primarily to rationalize the social order, as a “divine sanction” to the social establishment.

The third concept is that of *atman*. The word originally means “breath” and denotes the breath of life, that by which a being is alive while it breathes, and when it gives its last breath it is thought that its soul had departed with it.

The fourth important concept is that of *brahman*. It was originally developed in order to denote “that something” that gives holiness and significance to the Vedic hymns and ceremonies. *Brahman* is “that something” which is touched by the ceremony and makes it transcendental.

The above makes it apparent that all the mentioned terms had primitive origins, and that the philosophical subtlety that is usually attached to them was developed through time, and wasn't there

from the beginning. The concept of the Ancient Vedic Religion that contains All Wisdom is a mere fairy tale, something that was made up in order to satisfy an emotional need for safety by providing divine guidance that is both ancient and certain. Like all things, the Hindu philosophy too had evolved from primitive origins to its high summits. There is no significant difference between the “Ancient Vedic Wisdom” and the Nordic mythology; only the names of gods and places are different.

Of course, as soon as a term is introduced, the arguments begin regarding its meaning and significance. Such polemics were the cornerstone of the culture of the wandering sages, the *sramanas*.<sup>1</sup>

To understand who the *sramanas* were, one needs to look into the historical context. The “holy men” of that time were divided into the *brahmana* caste which performed the Vedic rituals for money, essentially the priests for hire who lived off the wealthy Vedic civilization like fat cows in a barn full of hay, and those who considered this kind of lifestyle incompatible with their perception of spiritual upliftment, however it may be defined, and left for the wilderness (*aranya*) to practice austerities (*tapasya*), choosing a life of a wandering ascetic (*sramana*) on the very margins of civilization.

Such a way of life was possible mainly because the *sramanas* of the Vedic civilization were admired as the wise and saintly people, and there was an established practice of begging for alms, where the wandering sages went through villages and towns asking for food, and the householders would ritually give it, considering it their duty. The *sramanas* would then repay them by providing spiritual advice and instruction.

The caste of spiritual people was thus split into two main branches: the well-fed performers of the Vedic hymns and rites, who lived in the towns and villages, and not-so-well-fed beggar-monks who

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1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sramana>



lived on the margins of civilization or even in total wilderness, dwelling mostly on philosophy and personal spiritual practice. This produced the separation of Vedic theology, into parts recited by the town-priests, known as “*karma kanda*”, and the parts produced and studied mostly in silence by the wandering beggar-monks, known as “*jñana kanda*”. *Karma kanda* consists of the Vedic hymns and rites, and *jñana kanda* of the Upanishads, Aranyakas and sutras. Somewhere in between those two are the Puranas and the epics (Mahabharata and Ramayana), containing elements of both traditions. For instance, the Mahabharata is essentially a collection of stories that were told during the informal stage of the Vedic ceremonies, after their completion, so it exists within the context of *karma kanda*, but its parts were often told by the wandering monks, the *sramanas*, who occasionally interpolated the instructional parts of the Upanishadic genre, such as for instance the Bhagavad-gita. The parallel existence of both the ceremonial and shramanic spirituality is, therefore, something we need to understand in order to get a good grasp of the historical context of the evolution of Hindu philosophy.

The greatest difference between the “urban” and the “outdoor” spiritual people is asceticism, also called austerity, or *tapasya* in sanskrit. Asceticism is a part of all primitive religions, and can be reduced to a concept in which a man will perform some severe act of renunciation or deprivation, thus putting the gods in his debt, with a purpose of forcing them to fulfill his wish.

Probably the oldest written testimony of asceticism is found in the Epic of Gilgamesh, where Gilgamesh is challenged by the gods to perform acts of superhuman endurance in order to deserve immortality, at which he fails. The quests for immortality, special powers and renown among other ascetics and gods are woven deeply into the old tales about the *sramanas*; apparently, their motives were initially neither very noble, sophisticated, nor transcendental.

There are two old terms that denote asceticism: *tapasya* and *yoga*. *Tapasya* originally means “heat”, while *yoga* originally means “yoke”, and it is very likely that they described the forms of self-torture practiced by the ascetics in order to pressure gods into giving them immortality and powers. There are several mentions of exposure to fire during the times of great heat, like *pancaagni upasana*, which was later interpreted metaphorically, but in the original meaning the ascetic would have lit four fires around himself, on the four sides of the world, with the midday sun as the fifth, and would slowly cook himself in the scorching heat. To this day we can find the ascetics doing similar things: standing on one leg for days, cutting themselves with knives etc., with an occasional self-immolation, so I don't want to hear anything about this being a metaphor for some spiritual phenomenon, understandable only to the select initiates. There is extensive scriptural evidence for the concept of self-torture in the ascetic context, in the oldest texts, and there is also a living practice that survives to this day. *Tapas* therefore originally meant self-torture by heat, *yoga* meant putting your body in a yoke of torturous and painful postures during prolonged periods of time, and all of it was spiced up with torturous fasts, which meant starvation almost to the point of death. That's what Vedic asceticism must have looked like. Only later did the different directions of thought arise, attempting to interpret the entire thing metaphorically, but judging on the available evidence, that's not realistic. Originally people practiced the coarsest forms of self-torture, and it was only later that some good came out of it. The true, useful techniques of yoga therefore came into existence in a context where the ascetics had no problem experimenting on themselves with various methods of torture, and in this experimental surroundings with a tendency to go overboard, some correlations were noticed between certain practices and certain positive spiritual phenomena. Considering how extreme the practices were, the experiences of near death, separation of soul from the body, extreme movements of *Kundalini* and authentic spiritual visions are not at all surprising, especially having in mind the constant chanting of the mantras, which were the concentrated prayers accompanied by visualizations. Of course,

the brain damage, disability and death were not surprising either, and they probably took place much more often than spiritual experience.

The ancient Indian asceticism is therefore a very dangerous extreme sport, in which torturous death was seen as a successful outcome of the practice, and giving up was seen as spiritual downfall.

This is the context Buddha stumbled upon when he figured out that the comfortable worldly life is an illusion, and that the realities of the world are suffering, disease, old age and death. He snuck out of the house in the middle of the night and joined a group of wandering ascetics who indulged in extreme practices. Whether the members of the group were Jains, as Čedomil Veljačić thought, or simply the generic *sramanas*, is quite irrelevant for all practical purposes.

In order for us to understand the functioning of such groups of wandering ascetics, we must first understand that their way of thinking didn't have much in common with the way we think today, which is greatly influenced by science and the scientific way of thinking, according to which you first need to form a hypothesis based on experience, then test it experimentally, and then form a theory, or an intellectual framework of data and hypotheses that serves to interpret the observation.

Their way of thinking had nothing to do with that; it was magical, hermetical. They first started with the ascetic practices and only along the way did they think of coming up with a theory that explained why that would work. The theory behind asceticism is a hermetic one, of cosmic unity, teaching that lack in one place must produce excess in other, that undeserved suffering of an ascetic must be compensated by the Universe by fulfilling his desires. They never actually bothered to formulate a theory on how or why that would work. They all considered it intuitively correct, and it

seemed to suffice on the emotional level, and besides, they could always invoke venerable traditions dating all the way back to the times of Gilgamesh; if everybody kept doing it, then it must be good. So there was no coherent intellectual theory behind the ascetic practice, and that was quite common for most things that people did in the ancient times. For instance, astrology didn't have a coherent theory behind it, explaining why stars influence people. There was just a feeling that there must be some connection between the inner and the outer Universe and therefore everything must be connected. The difference between one's emotions and the outer world was not perceived. On the contrary, the hermetic statement "as above, so below" indicates that the opposite was assumed – that what's in the sky must reflect on the events on Earth, and what happens on Earth must have an analogue in the sky, its cosmic template.

When an ascetic cooks himself on a fire, he feels as if the worlds of the gods burn along with him, that the heavens and the earth are on fire, and the gods will surely have to do something in order for it to stop. They will fulfill his wish, if only he would put out the fire that burns all three worlds. That's how the ancient Indians saw things. Still, it appears that such extreme practices had an unintended side effect on the psyche, that goes far beyond what is usually thought of as normal, and this resulted in creation of the philosophy of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-gita, which was produced at the very times when asceticism was at the heights of its popularity and was obviously written by the tradition of *jñana kanda* as a perfected, more refined version of the teaching and poetic style that also produced the *Katha-upanishad*. The connection between asceticism and such sublime philosophy is most likely similar to one between astrology and astronomy, or alchemy and chemistry. What was originally a magical and emotional practice of attempting to influence things by means of the illusory hermetic principles, had an unintended side effect of unexpected discoveries and results, which then continued their life on a tangent of the original practice. The traditions of Yoga (as it was known at later times) and Vedanta were therefore formed in

the context of Vedic asceticism and renunciation of the world, as a tangent of an even more marginal discipline of the brutal asceticism. Still, there was an agreement on one thing, between the ascetics and the philosophers of the early Vedanta: that salvation cannot be attained by the Vedic rituals. The Vedic rituals were considered useful for attaining the worldly goals, such as rain, good harvest, happiness in life, healthy offspring and the like, but are quite useless for attaining transcendence.

The attitude of the contemporary ascetics on Vedas and rituals was not really that much different from that of the early Protestant Reformationists on the Catholic Church. They all agreed that the Church was no good, but whatever else you asked them, they started arguing. Similarly, some of the wandering ascetics thought that asceticism alone is the virtue. The others thought that truth is the ultimate virtue, that speaking the truth and leading a righteous life will result in magical harmonization of the practitioner and Truth as the fundamental cosmic principle, thus giving him powers and immortality. This is the origin of the Vedic belief that he who always speaks the truth possesses a magical power that makes his words come true, because when he, the truthspeaker, says something, the Universe is magically coerced into making it true. The third group of ascetics thought that knowledge is the ultimate virtue, that only knowledge leads to enlightenment – not just any knowledge, but knowledge of *brahman*, of that which is the essence of righteousness, virtue and holiness in all the sacrificial ceremonies and good deeds. This group produced the Upanishads, the group which dwelt on the attempts to produce the Cosmic consciousness, the realization of the one all-pervading, universal principle. Within this group there were various fractions with different ideas on how the knowledge of *brahman* is best achieved, and most likely it was achieved by accident, at least in the beginning; whether harmonious life, deep thought, or extreme asceticism contributed to the likelihood of the experience, it cannot be said with certainty. This uncertainty made the opinions divided – some thought that it was the alignment with the cosmic principles of truth and virtue that produced the realization of

*brahman*, which is the ultimate truth and virtue. Some thought it was the result of purification of body and mind in the practice of yoga (which at this point ceased to be merely a form of brutal and random asceticism, becoming a semi-science which established what worked and what did not, with the result of a more focused practice). The others thought that only discerning between the real and the unreal can produce enlightenment. Judging by human nature, it is likely that they each ascribed the result to their own practice prior to spiritual experience, and God only knows what was the true cause. Most likely, it was the longing for perfection combined with focus of consciousness.

So, when the young and hopeful Shddharta Gauthama ran away from home and decided to do something to save himself from suffering, sickness, death and the similar wonderful aspects of the worldly existence, it was logical for him to join the wandering monks, where he got his ascetic name Shakyamuni. There he learned the practices of the ascetics, and through many years of self-torture and starvation brought himself almost to the point of death. This was the point where he must have thought something along the lines of this: "I ran away from the world in which there are suffering, disease, old age and death, and went to practice asceticism through which I exposed myself to suffering and disease almost to the point of death. This looks like yet another form of the same problem, not a solution". Then he abandoned the ascetics, who concluded that he had spiritually fallen and returned to the worldly life. He, however, remembered the state of peace into which he entered in childhood under an apple tree, and concluded that this had more to do with true spirituality than all the asceticism he endured. He sat under a tree, reproduced the state of consciousness from his childhood, and swore he would not move from that spot until he attained enlightenment. Of course, most of it is a Buddhist legend but there is probably a kernel of truth in it: Shakyamuni gave up on the magical, hermetic methods of attaining goals, and discovered the path of dissociation, of separation of consciousness from the world. He discovered the state of *dhyana*, meditation. How deep was the enlightenment he attained, it's hard

to tell, but his discoveries are so radically new, that I failed to find a precedent in the history of mankind that would show that anyone before him accomplished such a thing. Buddha departed from the magical, hermetic worldview, and replaced it with one that is analytical and dissociative. The extent of the revolutionary impact of such a move is comparable to that of the Newtonian gravity and Einsteinian general relativity. Buddha came to a radical conclusion: that the Universe cares for no one, that the inner and the outer are not connected, that asceticism as a method of coercing the Universe has no value, that prayers to the gods are useless, and that the most important thing of all is to divest one's spirituality from the world, that it is essential to withdraw one's spiritual force from the world, to stop investing oneself into the world and its activities and to allow the consciousness to dwell within its own nature, completely transcendental to the world and untouched by the world, like a lotus flower above the swamp.

Buddha didn't invent all the aspects of the teaching he exposed. In his time, a great deal of it was already known, and he merely connected it all into a meaningful whole. The theory of karma and reincarnation in his time was much more advanced compared to the Vedic times – it was thought that sin produces attachment to the bad karmic fruits and virtue produces attachment to the good fruits. It was thought that each action was instantly joined with a reaction. It was thought that the unsprouted seeds of past deeds attract the soul into the next birth, which resulted in formulation of the first coherent theory of reincarnation. There were different theories that argued about which forms of action are nonbinding and will not cause rebirth. There was some rudimentary knowledge about the stratification of the spiritual world.

But Buddha was the one who brought sense into it all, much like Isaac Newton who brought sense into the incomplete and incorrect models of the solar system and mechanics in general. Buddha removed magic from the equation, and introduced exactness, to the point of spiritual mechanicism. The phenomena that used to be

perceived as a whole are now analyzed down to their constituent elements – a tomato is analyzed into components, none of which is Pomidorium. Beauty is analyzed into components, none of which is beautiful (or Beautium). Things that used to be considered a reflection of the cosmic hermetic principles are now perceived as an illusion, the synthetic phenomena that take place due to infusion of the spiritual elements into a material object or a state, which is either illusory or transient, leading to suffering.

Maybe the greatest contribution of the Buddhist theory is the theory of spiritual compounds (or karmic aggregation), which produces the important corollary of *anatman*, nonexistence of the eternal individual soul. This is probably the most questionable aspect of Buddhism. The theory of karmic aggregation states that the entity which humans perceive as “self” is a compound of particles of spiritual substance, an aggregation of karmic matter formed as a result of spiritual choices and actions. Essentially, unlike the classic Yoga which perceives the karmic seeds (*karmashayas*) as additions to *atman* which need to be removed, Buddhism perceives *atman* as an illusory entity created by the aggregation of karmic matter (a concept somewhat evolved from the concept of the *karmashayas*), stating that there is no “soul” different from “karma”.

This is actually the point where the word “karma” starts to be used in the meaning close to what we have today. Karma, in this sense, means an aggregated structure made of spiritual matter, and for the first time the idea of “cleansing” the karma starts being used.

In order to illustrate the concept, it might be better if we use the analogy with colors as the equivalents for emotions that stand behind actions as their motivators and are invested into action, creating the “definitions” of personality on the level of action. So let's say that selfishness as an emotion exists as astral substance of brown color. A selfish action means that we have created selfishness as a state of consciousness, existing in form of a selfish



brown stain on our astral body, and “sealed” it into existence with action, because action confirms choice. Our “soul” now contains a brown stain, consisting of low-energy astral particles. If we feel greed and confirm it by an action of theft, we likewise “enrich” our soul with another stain, let's say of dirty red color. This way we collect “bad karma”, in a sense that our soul consists of increasing quantities of filthy and lowly things. If we happen to die while we are defined by various kinds of sin, something interesting happens, that Buddhism for the first time defines as a possibility. In the Buddhist theory of karma, integrity of the karmic body, which in our case includes stains of colored astral matter of various energy states, exists only as an artifact of perception, maintained by the continuity of bodily existence, and the cohesive forces between the karmic particles are variable. Once you remove the body which creates continuity of personal existence with its continuity of memory and the sensory inputs, depending on the level of cohesion between the karmic elements there is a possibility of dissociation or fragmentation, where each element would re-incarnate separately, being attracted to a different physical structure depending on its specific energetic level, if the tension on the internal bonds due to attraction to the different outside forces exceeds the strength of the inner cohesive bonds. This process is very similar to the behavior of materials in physics and chemistry, for instance when we mix oil and water mechanically without addition of an emulsifier and they gradually separate, but if we mix reactive elements they will form strong bonds that can be broken only with great investment of energy. A common physical body creates an impression of a virtual whole and functions as an emulsifier (or a process of freezing a liquid which traps the bubbles of gas in a resulting solid), but when the body goes away, dissociation of the karmic elements becomes possible, like bubbles of gas escaping when a solid thaws into a liquid. This is why the concepts of karma and reincarnation in Buddhist theory differ greatly from the Hindu concepts of reincarnation of *atman*, the individual soul, which can be stained or purified but cannot be divided or joined with other souls into greater units, and is perceived as some sort of an atomic soul-particle which resides in

the core of a being as its kernel. Still, Vedanta doesn't differ greatly from Buddhism in this respect, because in a sense, Vedanta also abandons the concept of *atman* as an individual, atomic soul, and adopts most of the Buddhist concepts, but offers an alternative and, quite possibly, superior interpretation of *nirvana* – as the state of *sat-cit-ananda* which is the intrinsic nature of *brahman*, devoid of karma. So in both mature Vedanta and Buddhism, that which is usually considered to be soul is in fact karma, an aggregation of karmic substance. An individual soul in Vedanta is an appearance which takes place when an aspect of *brahman* called *asmita*, “selfness”, is perceived through the lens of karma. Binding *asmita* and karma creates attachment to the world and propagates the concept of *samsara*, the continuity of rebirth in the world. Perception of *asmita* as one's true nature, unrelated to karma, enables withdrawal of *asmita* from karma and the dissolution of karma into the elements of the material world, while *asmita* in the self-realization of *brahman* attains deliverance from all worldly things and dwells in its true nature.

The main difference between Buddhism and the mature Vedanta is therefore not in that Buddhism would negate the existence of soul and its eternity, because there must have been a good and positive element in Buddha's enlightenment; there must be an universal positive principle. The thing is, Buddhism makes a very radical claim that eternity does not belong to man. The eternity doesn't belong to any archetypally human spiritual entity, because humanity in all its aspects is temporary, and the only eternity is that of the perfect spiritual peace and bliss of *nirvana*, which is no anthropomorphic paradise, but negation of all that is human.

Since the great Buddhist teachers such as Milarepa spoke of enlightenment as a state of self-realization, it isn't all that difficult to figure out that the difference between Buddhism and the mature Vedanta is in fact semantical, and was in all likelihood introduced because Buddha had his fill of anthropomorphisms and hermetism, as well as the magical perception of the Universe, gods who fulfill

desires of humans who made the proper rituals, and heaven that looks exactly like the human world, only with its drawbacks removed. He simply took a large broom and swept all that refuse away. Shankaracharya adopted more-less all the philosophical and theological concepts from Buddhism, from the compound nature of the phenomena, through stratification of the spiritual states, futility of rituals and asceticism for the purpose of enlightenment, knowledge as the cornerstone element of the practice, all the way to the absolutely transcendental nature of the goal. His only true contribution was the concept of the transcendental Self which is reflected in the beings as *atman*, and is in fact *brahman*. The methods and goals of Vedanta and Buddhism are not really all that different at their core, and the only difference is in the formulation of the desired state, where in both cases the same quality is attributed to it: a blissful state of perfect peace and realization.

So, where the New Age philosophies define “karma” basically as “a soul’s filth”, Buddhism defines the soul itself as karma. The word *karma* in Buddhism describes that, which is usually considered to be soul. *Dharma*, which is colloquially defined as “the spiritual path” or “the spiritual law”, means literally “Buddhism” in the context of Buddhist teaching. Where New Age defines reincarnation as rebirth of a soul with the purpose of learning and acquiring new experiences, Buddhism perceives reincarnation as a release of the potential energy from the karmic aggregate which is colloquially called “soul”, where the aggregated parts can in theory fly away each in their own direction, like parts of a car that collided with a concrete wall at high speed. Each individual part has its own energetic properties; the bonds between them are variably strong, and the continuation of the existence of the compound as a whole is more a matter of the specific circumstances than a general rule. As a Buddhist nun explained it to me once, when a pot is broken into shards, Buddhism would say that the pot reincarnated in form of shards. This is the official Buddhist understanding of the reincarnation of karma: continued existence is a property of the consequences of actions, or energetic structures, the whirlpools of momentum

created by attachment and investment of spiritual energy, not to the soul. A soul is an apparition, a virtual entity in Buddhism, the same way an apple is a virtual entity formed by temporary arrangement of the atoms and molecules of matter into a certain state.

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**The historical context of the  
appearance of monotheism  
in Indian philosophy**

The poor understanding of Indian philosophy that is prevalent in the West has led to several distortions and misperceptions that are especially common in the New Age circles. The terms that relate to the concepts of soul and reincarnation are especially easy to misinterpret, primarily because that, which can be called the New Age philosophy, came into existence when people, who were brought up in a Judeo-Christian context, selectively embraced the Eastern concepts which they found similar to what was known to them from their native philosophy, or at least this is what they thought.

An additional problem is contamination of the authentic Eastern philosophic concepts by an invasion of the foreign, abrahamic philosophies into the Indian subcontinent. Here I mean primarily the Islamic scourge which crushed everything in its path with sword and fire, from the destruction of the Buddhist university in Nalanda onwards, but I also mean the British, whose Christian concepts also influenced the indigenous philosophies. In short, I mean the flood of the monotheistic branches within Hinduism, whose appearance interestingly coincides with the Muslim invasion of India. An example of this is the Vaishnava dualism of Madhva, Caitanya and others. If you doubt the existence of such influence, let's put down the timeline:

1193. - the Muslim fanatic Bakhtiyar Khilji destroys the Buddhist university in Nalanda; this can be taken as the official beginning of the destruction of the indigenous Indian civilization.

1238.-1317. - Madhvacharya, the first monotheistic philosopher of India, the proponent of the extreme dualism which is not significantly different from the abrahamic concepts of soul and God. Madhva calls his monotheistic deity Vishnu, but according to his description, he might as well call it Jehovah or Allah for all the difference there is between them.

1498. - the beginning of regular European commerce with India.

1486.-1534. - Caitanya, the philosopher of Vaisnava (Vishnuite) monotheism, proponent of the Vaishnava dualism, founder of what

would later be known as the Hare Krishna philosophy. His concepts of soul and God are for all intents and purposes identical to the Abrahamic ones; only the wrapping is Hindu.

1500+ - Sikhism was founded, a religion that attempts to unite Hinduism and Islam, what with its monotheistic theology and the practice of chanting God's name, attempting to unite Islamic *zikr* and Hindu *japa*.

1757. - the beginning of the British occupation of India.

1830. - Hindu reformation movement Brahma Samaj is founded, and includes all abrahamic theological concepts.

1850. - the British control more-less the entire Indian subcontinent.

I don't know about you, but this makes me come to the following conclusions:

- The conquerors of India brought with them their own religion and philosophy;
- The Muslims of the time were not all that different from those of the present day;
- According to the main stream interpretation of Islam of the time, the non-islamic religions were evaluated according to the degree of their compatibility with, or, more precisely, reducibility to the fundamentals of Islam. The religions that were deemed more compatible were tolerated to a greater degree than the ones that were incompatible with Islam or even negated its fundamental teachings;
- Buddhism was perceived to be a direct negation of Islam. Advaita Vedanta was perceived to be a direct negation of Islam. Hindu polytheism was perceived as "idolatry", a sinful religion, but an essentially tolerable one, because of its perceived inferiority to monotheism. Everything that was perceived to be an offense to Islam was destroyed;
- If someone in India, occupied by Islam, dared to teach something that was perceived by the Muslims as offensive

to Islam, he was separated from his head;

- If he happened to teach something that was perceived as consistent with Islamic teaching, presumably monotheism, he was left alone;
- It all significantly contributed to the coalescence of the philosophies and theologies into the abrahamic concepts.

Essentially, this means that the medieval monotheistic offshoots of Hinduism are indigenous to India about as much as the medieval Mosques are indigenous to Spain and Bosnia. The abrahamic concepts still had a great influence on Indian perception of both morality and philosophy; it suffices to see the difference between the perception of sexuality in Kama Sutra, created somewhere between 100 and 400 AD, and today's sexually frustrated and restrictive, moralizing India, to understand that this sexual frustration was in fact imported, that it is a result of violent grafting of the abrahamic sexual morality onto the Indian subcontinent.

Basically, wherever you can find Islam specifically or the abrahamic religions in general, you can see a similar situation. Whatever remained of the indigenous Indian culture after the assault of the Muslims, the Victorian English proceeded to run into the ground. I can't honestly tell which were the worse. It's generally easy to notice the imported sexual morality, but the imported concepts of soul and God can hide under the radar, especially since the Europeans, as well as all other humans, perceive the theological similarities as "proof" that they were right all along and that all religions "come from the same God", not as proof of foreign interference.

Why does it matter? Because it explains the abrupt interruption of the evolutionary processes that lead from the shramanic tradition and Jainism to Buddhism, forming the context that produced the late Upanishads, Yoga sutra, as well as the works of



Shankaracharya and Padmasambhava. It explains why there is an abrupt cut on the territory of India, which extinguishes Buddhism, but gives birth to multiple theologies that worship the personal, anthropomorphic deities, whose spiritual theories are the grotesque distortions of the older systems, whose elements were adopted out of context and without understanding.

Maharishi Yogi explained this process of degradation by invoking the natural mechanisms of information loss during the long periods of time, but in my opinion, there is a better explanation, the one that recognizes the violent and destructive influence of Islam and other abrahamic religions. It's interesting to notice how the “long periods of time” produced no degradation of information in Tibet, where the Muslims and the British were absent. It is therefore essential to understand that the changes on the religious map of the territory had causes that had nothing to do with “victory” of the “personalist” philosophies over Buddhism and Advaita, but were caused by the persecutions, arson and murders committed by the monotheistic fanatics of Islam.

## *Atman and karman*

The Buddhist theory of karmic aggregation, or, in other words, of the compound structures made of the particles of spiritual energy, that form a virtual entity called “soul”, is such a radical innovation in spiritual philosophy that I absolutely must elaborate on that.

The old Vedic theory of soul (*atman*) is basically what people find intuitive, and is quite similar to Christian and Muslim concepts. There are heaven (*svarga*) and hell (*naraka*); the heaven is occupied by the ancestors (*pitri*), maintained in their exalted position by the offerings of their descendants in the world of men. When the offerings stop, for instance when a family line is extinguished, the ancestors fall from their position, presumably to hell.<sup>1</sup> The concept of reincarnation, in today's sense, is not known; what *is* known is the concept of descent of souls into the world with some particular mission (as in Mahabharata); what is known is a fall into the world due to a curse (tale of Indra as a pig, Nahusha as a snake etc.); a concept of *avatara* is known as an appearance of a God in bodily form, usually temporary and with a limited purpose, for instance Shiva in Mahabharata takes form of a hunter in order to test whether Arjuna is worthy of the heavenly weapons. Krishna takes form of a hunter from a lower caste in order to test whether Uttanka is worthy of the nectar of immortality. Nara and Narayana are incarnated as Arjuna and Krishna. So the concept of incarnation is not used in today's form, but more in a meaning we would recognize as Divine intervention into the worldly affairs. This older Vedic theory of soul is therefore not very elaborate and solves the issue of sin and virtue with residence in hell or heaven, with duration proportional to merit or demerit. Furthermore, the scholars of old used to argue whether the *shudras* have *atman*, or is it the case only with the three higher castes. After long discussion it was concluded that they probably have *atman*.

In the later times, 900-600 BC, a concept develops according to which not only all humans have *atman*, but all beings in general.

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1 Bhagavad-gita 1,42-44

Likewise, a concept of violence as the primary form of sin arises, stating that *dharma*, the cosmic law, determines that any sin committed against other beings must be repaid, and that all beings are equal. Those ideas were either developed within Jainism, or were adopted and further developed into the motto of “*ahimsa paramo dharmah*”, “nonviolence is the fundamental law”.

This was a positive step in the evolution of the theory of soul and karma, but due to its extreme nature it was never widely adopted. Unlike the Vedic systems of thought, which differentiate between actions according to circumstances, subject and object, with further elaboration according to caste and similar divisions, Jainism completely removes the concept of quantity from consideration, by declaring that *atman* is a point-like entity that is the same in all beings, and the actions are considered only in terms of a direct qualitative equivalence of action and reaction, without any other considerations. This makes a life of a mosquito equally valuable as a life of a man, and *dharma* punishes killing of a mosquito with the same punishment as it does killing of a man.

Of course, the reasonable people immediately recognized this position as extreme and most likely wrong, and this kind of absolutistic egalitarianism was useful only for feeding the unnecessary guilt.

Still, the concept of universality of *atman* and the great problem of violence and suffering were strongly present in the philosophic circles of the time. The position where only some people have *atman* was not philosophically supportable. The position where only humans have *atman* and animals and other beings do not was very soon recognized as the same kind of argument, also unsupportable. This line of thought crystallized into a conclusion that all living beings must have *atman*, which brought about the radical consequences which were intuitively recognized as dubious. The answer of the Upanishads was that *atman* is in fact identical to *brahman*, that it is the omnipresent reality of the

Absolute, and that the living beings, the *jivas*, are merely a fragmented view into the reality of *brahman*, like the Moon is reflected on many surfaces of water without losing its singular nature.

This perspective keeps the Vedic concepts as valid for the relative sphere of action, while introducing the new philosophic concepts on the higher level of abstraction. Jainism at this point introduces the concept of karma as a form of subtle matter, something similar to momentum of force, which is exchanged by action. According to this concept, the souls are seen as point-like atomic entities that accumulate the “karmic substance” that binds them to the world and which has a tendency to “sprout” from its latent form into the retributive consequences and thus be “expended”; this expenditure releases the karmic momentum into the soul, which reacts by committing further binding action. For instance, if a being insults another being, it accumulates karma; when this karma is manifested as a consequence, the soul suffers a reactive impact, for instance is slapped as a reaction to the insult. If the soul suffers the slap and accepts it as a deserved consequence of the insult, no further karma is created. However, if the soul reacts by feeling anger and retaliates with a blow, additional karma is created and the cycle is thus perpetuated. Jainism also introduces the concept of an ocean of birth and death, from which one can save himself only by cleansing the old karma and not creating the new. Cleansing karma has the result of liberation from the cycle of birth and death, and is followed by the natural state of great spiritual peace.

A great deal of those concepts was obviously adopted into Vedanta, Buddhism and the schools of the post-Vedic Hinduism, and we must notice the eclectic nature of the philosophies of the Indian subcontinent, which cannot be stated enough. Whenever someone came up with an idea that was recognized as valid, the others adopted and extended. After a while, there would be a great number of branches and hybrids of different philosophies, and it

often happened that someone took a concept and drew completely different conclusions than originally intended, embedding it into a completely different context.

The Jainist concept of karma contains a certain dose of intrinsic problems that make it impractical. Despite the elegant mechanism of the Jainist definition of karma, there remains the problem of the definition of nonviolence. A being can interpret something as violence, while it is in fact not. Is karma created by perceived violence? In an encounter of a sadist and a masochist, a sadist can inflict pain upon the masochist, who enjoys it. Does violence in this context create karma?

The Jainist model is too simplistic and materialistic and thus unable to resolve paradoxical situations of this kind. To Jainism, violence is violence, and there are no gradations, no exceptions, no allowing for circumstances, no finesse. St Augustine could teach Jainism a thing or two about violence; how sometimes violence can be an instrument of avoiding greater evils, and how not all kinds of violences are the same, for instance. Limited violence committed in defense from an aggressor is not only a “lesser evil”, it is actually an unqualified good thing. Likewise, vaccination can be interpreted as violence, since we are using a sharp needle to pierce a living being's skin and inject harmful substances, producing pain and discomfort in the process. But we do it in order to expose the body to the harmful microbes in controlled conditions, in order to form immunity and avoid contracting a potentially fatal illness. Is this form of violence evil? Would it be better if we didn't vaccinate someone who was bitten by a rabid animal, with a rationale that violence is violence and it can never be condoned; since a fox already bit him and gave him rabies, do we have to commit another evil by poking him with a needle? “Violence doesn't solve anything”, “there is no problem that violence couldn't make worse”, that's the thinking. The consequence, of course, is that a person dies from rabies. Of course, the hypocrites in questions will have a clear conscience,

because they opted for the path of nonviolence. They are the saints here.

So Jainism introduced some very good and innovative concepts, but their rawness and lack of refinement makes them very dangerous in practice, and quite unfit for application in normal life. Despite all its moralizing about nonviolence, Jainism is not a useful philosophy.

Buddhism obviously built on those foundations, because aspects of the Jain philosophy are clearly visible in its teaching, but to Buddhism, the main problem is not violence. The beings suffer in this world even without violence. Old age, for instance, is not the result of violence, and still it causes suffering. Buddha did not know about the microbes as causes of disease, and even if he did, he could have cited the diseases caused by deficiencies, which can be horrible, for instance scurvy, beriberi, rickets, pellagra, spina bifida etc., and have no other cause but poor nutrition. Violence can cause suffering, and indeed it often does, but it is not the sole cause of suffering. If we could completely remove violence from the world, the fact remains that the very nature of the world and of human existence produce suffering. Violence is therefore a peripheral problem, which Buddhism acknowledges and accounts for, but in a wider context.

The point where Buddhism becomes radical is when it observes that the main cause of the problem are the hermetic expectations. People intuitively expect the material object to be a reflection of some perfect, spiritual object, which eludes them due to the qualities of the material world, but they still find it worth the effort because the quest for those material reflections of the spiritual archetypes is in fact manifestation of the desire for the spiritual, and will eventually produce the desired result of attaining this spiritual goal.

Buddha states that this approach is completely wrong. The thing is,

everybody understands that an apple, in its ripe, clean and healthy state, is appealing food for humans, and this perception is projected into the spiritual realm where the perfect apples are envisioned, always perfect, appealing and never decaying. Plato would say that there is an archetypal ideal apple in the ideal world, and that the material apple is but an imperfect manifestation.

Buddha says that such thinking is the cause of suffering and that it needs to be permanently abandoned. Not only is there no perfect apple, but there also is no “apple”. What actually exists is an interaction of forces and particles, none of which is “apple” or “Applium”. An apple can be divided into a multitude of different parts, none of which is apple. There is no archetypal idea or an elementary particle of apple; an apple is an illusion, an ephemeral phenomenon. None of the building blocks of apple are “apply” in any way – they are the atoms of oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, hydrogen etc.

An example of this core teaching of Buddhism is the tale of a beautiful buddhist girl who was annoyed by the sexual advances of a man who kept praising her beauty. After having stoically endured it for a while, she decided to teach him a lesson. She told him to come in two weeks, which is how long it will take for her to produce an extract of her beauty, which they can then consume together and have the best sex ever. The fool was thrilled with the offer and promised to come. The girl then took some substance for inducing vomiting and diarrhea, and stored feces in one vessel and vomit in another. The substance made her very ill, and she turned all green and looked more like a wraith than a person, with sunken eyes and skeletal face, but she did collect an impressive amount of shit and vomit. After two weeks, the idiot in question appeared and at first he failed to recognize her because of her altered appearance. She then assured him it was indeed her, and told him: “here in this shed is the extract of my beauty – here, in this first vessel is the first component, in the second vessel is another, and if you want we can drink them now and then we can have sex”. The guy of



course ran away filled with utmost horror.

This is the fundamental difference between the hermetic idealism and Buddhism. Before the European science, Buddhism was the first philosophy that treated the phenomena and entities analytically, instead of magically, and it is probably the greatest spark of genius in all of antiquity. Buddhism recognizes the virtual, ephemeral nature of phenomena, which were perceived as reflections of the Divine, eternal principles, since the very dawn of human thought. Buddhism produced a needle to pierce this bubble.

Buddhism also turns the things upside-down in regard to Jainism. Where Jainism states that violence, which causes karma, is the main problem, Buddhism states that suffering is the main problem. Suffering can have its cause in violence, but mostly it doesn't. The main cause of suffering is desire. Most violent acts have its cause in some form of desire, and so Buddha reduced violence, which Jainism sees as the central problem, to a mere manifestation of a deeper problem. But what's the problem with desire? The problem is that desire is an investment of spiritual force into the world, whose nature makes suffering inevitable. This investment is what binds one, not actions and their consequences. The binding quality of action is an illusion, because the binding action is always accompanied by desire, and desire is the act of a binding investment of self into action. This is how it was also described in the Bhagavad-gita, and I would guess that the author "borrowed" the concept from Buddhism, since it appears in Hinduism in its final, evolved form, and only in the line from Jainism to Buddhism can we see evolution of the concepts.

The Gita therefore reflects the reformation of the basic Hindu concepts in light of the Buddhist theory of compounds, which is such a radically innovative idea that it opened the entire new directions of accelerated philosophical development. In practice this means that Buddhism completely abandons the Jainist concept of *atman* as a kernel-entity of soul, the "atomic soul" which, as

Hare Krishnas put it, “resides in the hearts of all beings”, including, presumably, the beings without hearts. Where Jainism perceived a living being as *atman* surrounded by karmic substance, Buddhism radically states that there is nothing in the core, no *atman*, no archetypal indestructible core of being, and that a being's personality together with all its qualities is just an aggregation of karmic substance. This is why I call it the theory of aggregation, in order to accentuate the fundamental aspect that makes it a revolutionary and unique step forward, never before seen.

Defining a being as a karmic aggregation is a fundamental negation of the idealist philosophy, which states that all material objects are created by descent of the perfect archetypes from the ideal world into the imperfect physical matter, which fails to reflect or maintain this perfection properly, but in the spiritual world, there are the perfect archetypal ideas, all perfection and beauty the beings strive for on the material plane, but devoid of decay and limitation. What is a cow in the material world, is a *kamadhenu*<sup>1</sup> in the spiritual world. What is a fruit-bearing tree in the material world, is a *kalpataru*<sup>2</sup> in the spiritual world. In the material world there are a man and a woman, and in the spiritual world there are the perfect Divine pairs of Shiva and Shakti, or Krishna and Radha.

Buddha radically states that this concept is illusory, from start to finish; and not only that, but also that believing in this kind of perfection perpetuates the projections that produce desire, which produces attachment, and the result of all that is suffering, again and again, in attempts to follow a mirage in the desert of the world.

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1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamadhenu>

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalpataru>

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**The accretional theory of  
evolution and Buddha in  
the flesh**

How does reactivity of karma function in the context of a soul as a karmic aggregation?

In this respect, Buddha didn't diverge greatly from the Jainist teaching: karma is a specific form of subtle matter which is accumulated by binding action, and spent by reaction released by the karmic matter within the doer, manifesting itself as either a harmful event or an unpleasant spiritual condition. Buddha simply stated that the karmic reaction is produced not only by the violent deeds, but by all deeds committed out of desire, because desire is that which binds. The rest of the teaching is similar to that of Jainism: when karma is spent, there arises the state of enlightenment, the exception being that the personality is defined as a negative thing in Buddhism, as a collection of delusions and attachments which cause suffering, so that enlightenment is not defined as *atman* in its isolated and pure state, but as extinction of the personality which is made of, well, the various causes of suffering.

If a great deal of the above paragraph reminds you of Gita, there's a good reason: Gita is a scripture of late Vedanta, which adopted a great deal of the original Buddhist teaching of karma, and incorporated it into the Upanishadic teaching of *brahman*.

Buddha introduced further innovations, which are quite interesting. For instance, his concept of reincarnation is very sophisticated, far more so than anything seen before. The thing is, in the theory of soul as a karmic aggregate, reincarnation doesn't work the same as in the kernel-soul theory. The aggregation theory states that the "soul", which is made of karmic substance, does indeed survive the death of the physical body, but not necessarily as a singular entity. If the cohesive forces, between the karmic segments that make the aggregate, weaken, the aggregate will break into separate fragments after death, and each of the resulting karmic blocks will reincarnate independently, binding itself to the kind of physical destiny that promises the fulfillment of the desires and attachments

that formed it.

So karma definitely survives the physical death of the being that created it, but the continued existence of that being as a singular entity is not a necessity. In order to explain the circumstances that determine possible outcomes, I need to explain an aspect of the theory that is perhaps even more radical than the theory of aggregation itself: the accretional theory of evolution.

Jainism and the older philosophies know karma only as a negative thing, as a sum of the results of the evil deeds that cling to the doer, binding him to the fruits of his actions. To be cleansed of karma is, in this context, the goal of spiritual development. However, Buddhism introduces and gradually develops something far more significant: the all-encompassing theory of spiritual evolution.

There is a significant problem with the Jainist soul-kernel theory: it fails to provide an adequate explanation for the existence of souls of obviously different size. If we consider the enormous diversity of life, ranging from bacteria to humans (or worms to humans, to contain our reasoning within the range known in antiquity), and there is an *atman*-kernel of the same size in all beings, this means that karma represents the difference between the reincarnational destinies, determining that he who was once a man can be reborn as a worm. So basically a being that consists of the *atman*-kernel and nothing else is reborn as either a perfect saint or a god, while a being who has lots of karma superimposed on the *atman*-kernel is reborn as a lowly form of life. That is actually a very frequent understanding of karma, and not just among the westerners. The concept of karma as spiritual impurity is quite common in the spiritual circles, but that is so because of lack of knowledge about the more advanced aspects of Buddha's teaching on karma and the later developments of the theory. You see, Buddha postulated the concept of polyvalence of karma.

Polyvalence of karma means that karma is not merely a form of

spiritual impurity. Karma is not only a result of evil deeds, but also a result of desire, love, passionate mercy and desire to do good. Karma can be a result of a longing for wisdom. All those things bind and determine a being's destiny, but Buddha's great contribution to the theory is to acknowledge their polyvalence, according to which the karmic substance consists of several aspects. One aspect is the attachment which causes suffering, but the other aspect is the size of the soul, in a sense of maturity and number of experiences. Buddha states, in a moment of staggering innovation, that all beings have been reborn a huge number of times, maybe millions of times in short-lived forms of life, gradually maturing due to accretion of karma, the way a snowball in cartoons grows into a huge avalanche by accretion of snow. Where karma had a low degree of inner cohesion, resembling wet toilet paper, accretion functioned less well and the aggregate didn't hold together because the "adhesive" was weak, and it fell apart into several lower beings. But certain forms of karma were more cohesive than others, thus accelerating the process, which made it possible for souls to grow to sizes sufficient for inhabiting the higher lifeforms. The term "mahatma", or "great soul", for the first time in the theory of karma makes sense and emerges as a positive concept, because in the kernel-soul theory all souls would be equally big, except for the size of the spiritually degrading karma. In the Buddhist theory of accretional evolution of the karmic aggregates, the size of the soul means it consists of more "positive" elements, that have significant cohesive quality. The karmic elements that have the qualities of nobility and virtue create the stable compounds, while the karmic elements with qualities of chaos and evil create the unstable, weakly bound and discordant aggregates, that dissociate after a being's death. It's a brilliant theory, quite similar in some respects to the theory of the neural networks, where the complexity of the structure grows with the number of attached neurons; by analogy, the complexity and size of the soul grows by accretion of karmic particles.

The Buddhist theory of karma therefore states that a karmic aggregate goes through a long lasting period of maturation until it

grows to a size sufficient to warrant human incarnation, and that one's choice of incarnating lifeform is by no means accidental, but depends on the size of the karmic aggregate, and that it is not possible for something as huge as a karmic aggregate suitable for human incarnation to incarnate in a body of a, let's say, worm. That is so because the complexity of a karmic aggregate is a result of increasing sophistication and complexity of the spiritual activity, namely the desires. Certain desires project their realization through forms of life and circumstances of certain complexity, and a complex karmic aggregate will, by the very nature of things, not project the kind of desires that can be fulfilled in a lowly life form. A desire to study sophisticated philosophy cannot be fulfilled in a body of a worm. A desire to experience beauty of nightfall through human senses and mind cannot be fulfilled in a body of a fish. Of course, if a being adopts, by accretion, a bad karmic component (in simple terms: if he does something bad), several things can happen:

A being can be destabilized if bad karmic substance is generalized (its influence spreading across the main spiritual mass), which means that a sinful act catalyzes a process in which the entire personality is dedicated to rationalization and justification of that sin, which renders the entire karmic aggregate unstable and, on termination of the present incarnation whose inertia keeps the karmic elements together, fragmentation and dissociation of the aggregate can take place, with the components parting ways and incarnating as various lower life forms. The next possibility is that the soul “spits out” the sin, isolating it from its main spiritual mass as a foreign body, and it forms a splinter fragment that separates from the main mass and incarnates independently after death. Also, the soul might accept the sin as its own and experience sincere remorse, and in this act it “grows” by including the size of the sinful karmic substance, and as a whole suffers the consequence of the sinful act, temporarily changing its energetic pattern, but when the effect wears off, the soul ends up magnified and enhanced by the experience.

How much of this theory was formed by Buddha himself, and how much by the later thinkers, I do not know. Some aspects of the doctrine were developed in the span of more than a thousand years, but from many aspects of Buddha's teaching it is clear that he had to know those things; if not in an intellectually clear and straightforward way, then at least in the sense of a general understanding of the principles involved. His instructions about practicing detachment, extinguishing the spiritual investments into the world, as well as the development of virtues, have the result of stabilization of the karmic body, in the sense of calmly suffering the consequences of past deeds and not creating the new sinful karma which manifests as incoherence and fragmentation of the karmic body, as inner spiritual tensions that produce the emotions such as remorse, hatred, anger, greed and similar sinful passions. Buddha recommends acquiring and nurturing the ten perfections (*parami*), namely (in *pali* and *sanskrit*):

- *dana (dana)*; generosity, giving self
- *sila (śīla)*; virtue, good conduct, morality and discipline
- *nekkhamma (naiṣkāmya)*; lack of desire
- *panna (prajñā)*; insight of wisdom, discernment and cognitive clarity
- *viriya (virya)*; manliness, decisiveness, forcefulness
- *khanti (kṣānti)*; patience, tolerance and forgiveness
- *sacca (satya)*; truth
- *adhitthana (adhiṣṭhāna)*; determination, fortitude
- *metta (maitri)*; loving kindness, benevolence
- *upekkha (upēkṣa)*; emotional stability and focus, detachment

Nurturing the *parami* produces the state of *paramita*, possession of the fullness of those perfections. From the position of the tantric energetics developed in the northern India and in Tibet, in the context of the Buddhist teaching about the karmic aggregates or “energetic bodies”, the perfection in the aforementioned virtues



manifests as complete homogenization of the energetic components within the karmic body. This means that all the lines of force within the karmic mass are oriented in the same direction, and that all the whirlpools, the conflicting currents causing disturbance, are eliminated, which transforms an incoherent spiritual state into something analogous to laser light, directed and collimated, and of a very narrow frequency band. From the position of Patañjali's classical yoga, this is interpreted as the cessation of the whirlpools in mind-stuff (*citta*). From the position of the tantric yoga of the Upanishads and its anatomy of the *chakras* and *nadis*, it is interpreted as withdrawal of the energy currents from *ida* and *pingala nadis*, its focus within *sushumna nadi*, and a stable, coherent energetic vibration of all the *chakras* in their pure, perfect state. Essentially, this is a practice whose goal is to purify and harmonize the energy system on the “note” of the peak of the spectrum of the *anahata chakra*. From the position of the advanced yogic practice, as it was known to the *tantrikas* of India and Tibet, it is apparent that the goal of Buddha's teaching is the attainment of initiation into *vajra*, or a harmonization of the lower elements to the point of their spontaneous sublimation into higher spiritual substance. This concept of *vajra* was developed in the tantric schools of the Himalayas, especially in the Tibetan school of *vajrayana* Buddhism. The concept of *vajra* is so alien to the common human experience, that it represents a public secret of the tantric practice, where the otherwise obscure concepts become immediately clear to a yogi who is an initiate of *vajra*, while the uninitiated have no hope of understanding what it's all about, because this special, new quality of consciousness is absent from their experience.

For instance, an enlightened tantric guru is labeled “*vajracharya*”, which is intuitively clear to the initiates, since it denotes a person whose soul is made of *vajra* and whose teaching manifests this state, but to the uninitiated, the term is vague and arbitrary.

The same goes for the terms such as *vajrasattva*, *vajrapani* and *padmasambhava*. *Vajra* is symbolically represented as the void (*sunyata*) from which emanate the two lotus flowers with eight

petals each. One symbolizes *nirvana*, the other *samsara*. *Vajra* is, therefore, the state of the relative Absolute, of *nirvana* within the *samsara*. *Vajra* (literally: “lightning” and “diamond”) is the jewel in the lotus (the symbol of the Buddha): “*mani padme*”.

*Om, Mani Padme, Hum.* Of Absolute, the *vajra* in the relative, Buddha in the body.

The goal of the tantric Buddhism is, therefore, initiation into *vajra*.

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# **Buddhism about the gods, the world and the Creator**

Buddha's position on gods is as radical as his position on the nature of the soul. It's not that Buddha denies the existence of the gods, the demons and the spiritual worlds. He thinks they are as real as this world. However, unlike the Vedic religion, which considered gods to be the higher beings worthy of worship, Buddha sees them as the poor misguided souls who are unaware of their true position, which is in most respects very similar to our own. Buddha states that the gods are as mortal as men, but because of their long lifespan they are unaware of that fact, because suffering and death aren't slapping their faces on a daily basis like they are ours. Likewise, their spiritual fluctuations cause them the same kind of suffering that we humans also endure; true, they are free of the material disease and hardships, but spiritual afflictions and maladies such as anger, hatred, fear and the like trouble them the same way as they trouble us. Because of this, both gods and men have essentially the same problem, with human position being actually better because our problem is more noticeable and concentrated within a shorter lifespan, so we are more likely to do something about it and attain buddhahood.<sup>1</sup>

As for the origin of the Universe, the Buddha responds: “who cares?”. The Universe exists in its present form, we are in the position we are in, and now we need to get out. The analogy is a situation where you fall into a pit and break a leg. Who gives a damn about who dug the pit and what kind of shovel he used? What is important is to get out of the pit and treat our injury, and to avoid falling into pits in future.

As far as the prayers and offerings to gods are concerned, the position of Buddhism is also radical, and turns the “conventional wisdom” on its head. The conventional wisdom of the Vedic religion states that men keep the gods in their exalted position by their offerings and prayers, and in turn the gods assist men in their activities.

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1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhahood>

Buddhism makes an interesting remark: if you do indeed keep the gods in their exalted position with your offerings, do you really think they will allow you to abandon your position of attachment in which you make your offerings, and attain buddhahood? At the very moment you desire to attain liberation, those very gods you nurtured with your prayers and offerings will become your enemies, and will do whatever is in their power to discourage you from the path of *dharma* and return you to the position of being the source of their nourishment. According to this, all prayers and offerings are in fact opposed to your best interest, at least in the long run, because you strengthen your own jailers. In order to free yourself from bondage, you will eventually, after having dealt with all other issues, also have to overpower those very gods who grew strong and fat from your offerings. Buddha was familiar with this from his own experience with Mara the ensnarer, the demon who has this world in his power. After summoning everything in his power to prevent Shakyamuni from attaining buddhahood, and failing, that one said “ok, great, you became a Buddha, now get out of here and don't bother me”, in a sense, “I lost one, but I still have the entire remaining herd peacefully grazing in a dream of ignorance, and it would be very inconvenient to have this one preach some ideology of awakening”.

So the gods are essentially an obstacle, and it is harmful to dwell on them. All the spiritual energy that we invest into them strengthens the chains that bind us to this world, and the concept of “devotion to God” is, essentially, from a Buddhist point of view, as useful for deliverance as devotion to the jailers would be useful for obtaining release from a prison. Devotion to gods is useful for having a comfortable life in this world, but it is absolutely counterproductive for attaining liberation from it. The only useful attitude one can have towards the gods is indifference. They are not useful for attaining enlightenment; the truth about the nature of the world is known through the four noble truths; *dharma*, or a noble eightfold path, is known and it is to be upheld, and liberation will be attained. As far as God the Creator is concerned, Buddha is quite indifferent toward such a being; for the world is not a good

place. Its qualities are such that one is to desire deliverance from it, and why would a creator of such a world merit worship? Whether the Universe has a Creator or not, from human perspective is as irrelevant as the question whether a hole in the road was dug by men or a flood. If you fell into it, you need to get out, and invoking the assistance of the one who presumably dug the hole is not particularly wise.

What is Buddha's opinion on this world? Buddha considers it ideal for attaining buddhahood. It is so unconditionally unpleasant, and suffering is so pervasive here, that Buddha considered it impossible for one to escape into the kind of self-deception that is common in the worlds of the gods. Likewise, he considered the human existence ideal because a man possesses the intelligence required for recognizing both his unenviable position and the need for liberation. The presence of acute and pervasive suffering in this world is therefore seen by Buddha as an advantage, because this world reveals the principles that could elsewhere remain obscure, and is still not as bad as hell, where any kind of emancipation is impossible, and the only possible form of existence is helpless suffering for the duration of karma that binds us to that place. Buddha therefore considers this world to be a very nasty place which is to be abandoned as quickly as possible, but before that we should utilize its unpleasant nature to help us identify the problem and the solutions, and to attain buddhahood, which will take us not only beyond this world, but also beyond the more subtle ones, with more subtle snares.

As an illustration of the attitude of Buddhism towards gods, I quote a joke from the *pali* canon (*Kevaddha Sutta*) which illustrates the matter most succinctly.

A monk used to consider a metaphysical problem he was unable to solve, and invoked gods one by one in order to ask their assistance, which they were unable to provide. Eventually he reached Brahma the Creator himself, greeted him and asked: “Where are the four

elements extinguished and cease without remainder?”

“I, monk, am the Great Brahma, the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Sovereign Lord, the Maker, Creator, Chief, Appointer and Ruler, Father of All That Have Been and Shall Be.”, answered the Brahma.

“Be it as you say, friend, I did not ask you that. I asked where the four elements are extinguished and cease without remainder?”, replied the monk.

Then the Great Brahma, taking the monk by the arm and leading him off to one side, said to him, “These gods here believe that I know everything, and that's why I, in order not to cause their confusion, evaded your question in their presence, for I do not know the answer. But let us go and seek out the Buddha, because he knows.”

The answer to the question, of course, is the *vajra*.

# *Mahayana*



The last words of the Buddha for his disciples before he died were: “Remember: all compounds are impermanent. Strive for your own liberation with diligence and perseverance.”

What does it mean, really? What are the consequences of Buddha's teaching and worldview?

There are several important lessons in the teaching of Buddha. The first lesson is about nonexistence of a magic wand in form of a god, magical rite or an external force, that will provide a solution to all our problems. Our “soul” is a karmic aggregate, a compound of all our decisions, bound together by the cohesive forces between the particles. If this aggregate dissociates, the illusion of continuity of the soul's existence will suddenly cease.

By development of the positive emotions and mental coherence one is therefore in a position to stabilize his soul, so that its segments start working harmoniously with each other. With sustained and focused effort, the spiritual substance of the soul is transformed, and the amorphous substance of the aggregate, initially resembling weakly bound concrete, transforms into a homogenous, cohesive and monolithic structure.

When purification of the soul is complete (meaning the state of homogenous structure and uniformly high energy of the constituent particles), there occurs the phenomenon of cessation of the four elements into *vajra*, which is the key point of the process of transformation of karma, in a way similar to that which happens when graphite, under high pressure, transforms into diamond, or when the process of nuclear fusion takes place in a stellar core. Enlightenment, according to Buddha, is a culmination of a long lasting process of transformation of karma, of a karmic aggregate that makes a “soul”. It is absolutely not something that is the potential of all beings, and especially it is not a certain event whose occurrence is but a matter of time. Enlightenment is an improbable event, highly unlikely, practically impossible to

achieve accidentally, and one can assume the position of Indra or Brahma and still not be enlightened. The state of *vajra*, the relative Absolute, the state which binds *nirvana* and *samsara*, transformation of the four elements and their cessation without remainder that could be reborn, is a radical breakthrough. It is not an experience. It is not something that could accidentally happen to you when you stumble and break a jar. A diamond is not something that will happen to you accidentally, that will happen if you leave bread in the oven for too long, or wake up oxygen from its dream of carbon or whatever zen bullshit you can think of. In order to create a diamond, you need to expose pure amorphous carbon to immense physical forces that will rearrange the carbon atoms into tetrahedral crystalline structure. So in order to create a diamond, it's not enough that you start with just any form of matter; you need exactly the right kind, the pure carbon, and then you need to apply sufficient force in exactly the right way, for exactly the right time.

So, in Buddha's teaching the enlightenment is not switching your consciousness into some state, for instance into a perspective of *brahman*, as in the teaching of Vedanta. The enlightenment is not the state of "One" which is "the same in a *brahmana* of high learning and humility, in a cow, elephant, dog, and even in the lowest of the outcasts", as Gita professes. That doesn't concern Buddha in the slightest. If asked, this would have been his response:

"Dear Krishna, even if it all were as you say, what is truly reborn – the karma that makes the difference between the *brahmana*, cow, elephant, dog and an outcast, or the *brahman*, to which you sing such high and eloquent praise?" Krishna would respond: "Surely, it is *karman* that is reborn. *Brahman* is neither born, nor does it ever die." Buddha would then answer: "If *karman* is that which is reborn, then transformation is necessary in the sphere of *karman*, in order to prevent rebirth. The aggregation of karma is susceptible to suffering, disease, old age, death and rebirth, quite independently of its relation to *brahman*, which is, under the

influence of the apparent continuity of existence known as *jivan*, known also as the illusory entity of *atman*. Only in the extinction of karma does the possibility of rebirth cease. Therefore all efforts should be directed into the sphere of transformation of karma, and all activities directed towards switching perspective from the position of *jivan* to the position of *brahman* are to be considered useless for the purpose of liberation, because the attachments that define the karma, untouched by the change of perspective, prevail.” With this, Krishna would have to agree, and would stay with Buddha as his disciple in order to learn more.

Buddha introduces the concept of the essential prerequisites for enlightenment. First, one needs to inhabit a body that is at least human. He needs to have an adequate level of intellectual prowess in order to understand his teaching. The intellectual aspect of the teaching is very important, and Buddha therefore constantly appeals to reason. This is so because purity and composure of intellect represent a strong indication of the other prerequisites for enlightenment. A strong and composed mind is a sign of a high degree of cohesion within the karmic aggregate; in other words, it's a sign of maturity of the soul. It means that the soul does not consist of a multitude of weakly bound fragments, whose interconnections are stressed by discordant forces, but a monolithic unit of karmic substance. Defragmentation and homogenization of the karmic aggregate is a process that requires a long time spent in developing and nurturing virtues, often throughout several incarnations. A pure, composed and strong mind is therefore an indicator of this condition.

The second important factor is the ability to recognize the truthfulness of Buddha's teaching. Immature persons will simply not have the problems to which Buddha's teaching is the solution. It's like explaining the virtues of the best pen to an illiterate person. It's a solution to the problem he doesn't have; he could use the pen to poke his nose, but hardly anything more. A soul of insufficient quality (defined as a combination of size, homogeneousness and

refinement of the four elements) will therefore lack the subtle interests, and instead will preoccupy itself with things such as social position, possession, reproduction and pleasure. There is therefore a concept of a critical mass and of a degree of organization, like in neurology, where you get increasingly sophisticated emergent phenomena as you add neurons. A brain with an insufficient number of building blocks is simply unable to form structures of sufficient complexity. To say that self-awareness is the destiny of all beings is simply wrong – a being can keep incarnating in a body of a single-cell algae, and fail to make any kind of progress, just as a hydrogen atom can reside in a cloud of interstellar gas from Big Bang to Big Crunch, while another atom can evolve through increasingly complex forms, binding with other hydrogen atoms in the process of fusion, being blown out into the interstellar gas in a stellar explosion, mixing with other atoms in a cloud of gas, and eventually participating in the evolution of life within increasingly complex molecules. Of two identical protons, one can remain in the same form throughout the lifetime of the universe, while another can be placed within your DNA as one of the carbon or nitrogen atoms, or in a gold filling of your tooth. Similarly, a fundamental particle of karmic substance can remain in its primordial state for a billion years, while another, its sibling, can join with other similar particles into compounds and form complex structures. The first fundament can reincarnate as protozoa for a billion years, while the other not only changes bodies from simple to increasingly complex, but probably also creates evolutionary pressure towards forming increasingly complex physical beings in order to create adequate conditions for manifestation of his desires and potentials. As this second chunk of karmic stuff evolves, it builds increasingly complex spiritual structures, until it reaches a certain critical mass of maturity where it possesses a combination of size, homogeneousness and subtlety sufficient for a spiritual breakthrough into *vajra*, a qualitative transformation of spiritual substance, analogous to transformation of graphite into diamond or of hydrogen into helium.

The evolution of karma is therefore not a necessity. Reincarnation

of karma is a necessity, but not its evolution. Evolution is a matter of choice, and is a rare privilege. For this reason, Buddhism considers the four noble truths to be an advanced teaching of the highest order, which intellectually reveals the nature of the entire mechanism of spiritual existence, and provides a way from blind and ignorant suffering to deliverance for the rare souls who are evolved enough to understand and apply them.

The third necessary prerequisite for understanding the teaching of Buddha is the emotional purity. It is difficult to describe, considering how rare a thing it is in this world, but essentially, emotional purity is the ability to experience emotions that are clear, pertinent to the object of contemplation, do not form attachments, are not governed by personal interest or benefit, and have their root in the general, universal concept of goodness and virtue. This means that a person of pure emotions will do good because it's the right thing to do – not because of its perceived usefulness. Such a person will feel love for the good and the beautiful, but this love does not turn into a need for control and possession. Basically, this means that such a person will feel an aesthetic pleasure from seeing a beautiful house, a beautiful car or a beautiful woman, regardless of the fact that he does not have any personal claim on them, and will feel no envy towards those who do.

The aesthetic sense of a pure person will therefore be independent of ownership or possession – to such a person, a beautiful car is a beautiful car, regardless of the owner. A man of impure emotions will perceive a beautiful car as ugly if it is owned by his enemy, or call a beautiful woman ugly if she is not his. He will call truth a lie if he is envious to the one who states it. The pure emotions are free from such egotistical colorations. When a person of pure emotions wishes to say that he dislikes someone, he will not criticize his car, house, wife, children and pets by association, but will instead recognize the exact thing he dislikes and state it in clear terms. Such an attitude, among other things, results from a Buddhist analysis, which separates emotions from their objects, and attempts

to clarify the thought-space.

Buddhism is therefore the way of gradual increase of purity, clarity, detachment and spiritual accuracy. Buddhism is not a magic wand: there is no baptism, or a savior to redeem your sins. Your personal purity is your job; none can redeem you from it, nor would you want him to. Buddha can show you the *dharma*, but the entire job of developing virtues and removing flaws is up to you.

One could say it's an elitist teaching. Of course it is. There is an equality of beings in suffering, but not all are capable of ending the suffering. According to the Buddhist teaching, suffering is simply inevitable for the beings until they develop sufficient sense to perceive the problem and apply the solution. Before one manages to establish the nature of his attachments, he will consider them his assets, and if one were to attempt taking them away from him, he would react with fear, repulsion and aggression. An immature soul sees no problem in the binding things that cause suffering, and sees suffering merely as an undesirable peripheral thing that accompanies the process of fulfillment of desires, a thing that can surely be avoided if he does better the next time. The immature beings, therefore, see suffering as something that happens to the "losers", the ones who are not skilled enough to avoid it, and after each failed life in the quicksand of the world they rush back into this very quicksand, thinking they will now do better, that they will avoid making the same mistakes, avoid suffering and attain pleasure. This, of course, never happens, because suffering is inherent to the very nature of the world and to the functioning of karma, but the immature beings fail to understand that. They think that suffering is a result of failure, either their own or someone else's.

Of course, as it usually happens when an elitist teaching is transformed into a religion of the masses, the original Buddhist concepts were too sophisticated for the main body of its followers, who didn't know what to begin with this theory. In formulation of

his teaching, Buddha targeted the small number of the sufficiently advanced disciples who will be able to understand the teaching of *nirvana*, and started a monastic order. I sincerely doubt he ever had the intention of creating a massive religion in which the majority of the followers will practice a few rituals and call themselves Buddhists. I likewise doubt that Jesus intended to create a religion whose first association at the mention of his resurrection is the Easter bunny. Still, the logic of things happened to produce those end results.

Transformation of the four elements and their cessation in *vajra* is an extremely intangible and esoteric concept which only a few enlightened ones experienced. Those who have gone through the process cannot explain it to those who have not, because it is a qualitative transformation of consciousness, not a spiritual experience. A spiritual experience is, for instance, when you go through a tunnel towards the light and then you see a spiritual being. This experience can have a transformational quality, but it is essentially just an experience, which means you are the same person before and after. But *vajra* is something entirely other. In the context of spirituality, *vajra* is like expecting a Santa Claus bearing gifts, who will communicate with you on some common emotional grounds, in a “good-bad” context, and instead you are turned into an alien with a completely different hardware for producing emotions, with no glands producing hormones that cause the feelings you are used to, and everything is completely different from anything you have ever read about or heard of, and no “spiritual teacher” you know had ever mentioned it; there is no love, no religious concepts, but there are things you see for the first time, for which you don't have names, compared to which the human emotions and thoughts are but fog compared to a mountain made of bright hard diamond illuminated by inner lightning which *is* the diamond, the diamond and the lightning are the same substance, described in different analogies. Instead of thought and emotion, you experience hard clear light of consciousness without thought or emotion, with hardness, width and clarity of awareness impossible to human experience, and if you could think, it would

be along the lines of “Dorothy, this ain't Kansas anymore, but it's not the Oz you expected, either”.

But you can't make a human religion out of that. Buddha was smart and didn't even try. He provided instructions to attain it, and that was essentially the best thing he could have done. But after a few centuries, where he wisely stopped, the others filled the vacuum by creating a religion around human emotionality, explaining the “true meaning” of Buddha's teaching, in reality rescinding and supplanting it with a derivative of late Vedanta. This is how Mahayana came into existence.

Mahayana is, basically, “Buddhism for the masses”, which, despite being a product for mass consumption, tickles the ego of the followers by presenting itself as the true, deepest teaching of Buddha, hidden from the sight of all but the rare most profoundly initiated individuals.

The following characteristics are usually attributed to the teaching of *mahayana*:

- universalism; the concept according to which all beings will attain *nirvana*, because *nirvana* is thought to be inherent to all beings;
- *bodhisattva*; the concept according to which the *arhat* (an enlightened Buddha) is not the final goal of the spiritual evolution but only a transitional step toward the state of *bodhisattva*, who because of his compassion for all beings chooses to be reborn within *samsara* until all beings attain *nirvana*;
- *upaya* (opportunistic approach); attitude according to which all means and opportunities can be used for attaining the enlightenment;
- introduction of a complex hierarchy of the heavenly worlds and forms of prayer, intercession and blessing; the



concept of liberation by one's own effort is considered unattainable and is discarded, and in its place a more pleasant and widely acceptable concept of salvation and saviors is introduced;

- introduction of the indestructible *atman*, under a different name - "Buddha nature", which is inherent to all beings. Buddhahood is therefore completely redefined, from a qualitatively new state which only the rare few can develop, to an universally present state which is latent in all, and merely needs to be revealed;
- enlightenment is defined as *prajña paramita*, a state of enlightened insight where one's own nature is recognized as "Buddha nature", which is essentially identical to the concept of recognizing *atman* as *brahman* in the state of *samadhi*.

So basically, *mahayana* is something that only looks like Buddhism, and is in fact a combination of Vedanta and all the rationalizations on the theme of "why it's not good or possible to attain enlightenment" and "how to make attachment look like a more virtuous choice than liberation". So let us answer the teaching of *mahayana* with orderly arguments.

First, the concept of the universal potential for attaining *nirvana* is completely non-Buddhist. If *nirvana* were an inherent reality of beings, then we could discuss it, but in Buddhism it is utterly out of the question. Buddhism clearly states that *suffering* is the inherent reality of the beings, and the true nature of their existence. *Nirvana* is the product of the highest level of maturity, not a discovery of something that was always there, but unknown. As an analogy, it can be said that *nirvana* is the state where a ripe peach falls from the tree; to talk about a ripe peach as something that is somehow present in the hidden form in a flower of peach is an error. The inherent reality of all beings is *samsara*, the eternal wheel of birth and death driven by attachments and projections, made of the substance of suffering.

Second, the teaching of Buddha does not recognize the concept of *bodhisattva* and is actually quite opposite. Any kind of rationalization that postpones entering *nirvana* is to be rejected. *Nirvana* is the uncertain goal of infinite value, which is easily missed and it is quite unlikely that another opportunity will present itself in a next life. The opportunity for attaining enlightenment rarely presents itself, and is to be taken immediately. The concept of renouncing *nirvana* in order to guide other beings within *samsara* is utter folly. This is so because a being which didn't go through the process of transformation into *vajra*, which had not been formed by the process of cessation of the four elements into *vajra*, a being which is not *nirvana* within the *samsara*, has no ability whatsoever to lead the others to *nirvana*. His quality of consciousness is essentially the same as the other beings in *samsara*, and attempt to guide them would be like blind leading the blind. Besides, any such attempt can be colored by egotism, which the desire for leading others usually is, as much as this egotism can be masked and presented as generosity, humility and compassion. This is either a result or a cause of impurity of the four elements of the spiritual substance, which negates the possibility of enlightenment. Likewise, unless one entered *nirvana*, by going through the process of transformation of one's own spiritual substance, he cannot state without a doubt that his level of attainment is truly the very edge of *nirvana* and not just some illusion on the very beginning of the path. Furthermore, since all of *dharma* is made of the tangential escape from the *samsara*, it is not possible to teach *dharma* unless you happen to embody it, by being on a tangent away from the *samsara*. The conclusion is that the entire concept of *bodhisattva* is completely wrong, and that any kind of diversion from *nirvana*, no matter how well rationalized into a form of compassion, is spiritual decline and fall, and is an aspect of *samsaric* behavior. *Bodhisattva*, a concept of a teacher of the world which teaches *dharma* without entering *nirvana*, is a complete error in understanding. Only the fullness of *nirvana* which is present within *samsara* can function as a magnet which attracts other beings into *nirvana*. Only the perfect Buddha, the *arhat* who is pure *vajra*, can in some form of connection between

*samsara* and *nirvana* (*vajrasattva*, *vajrapani* and *padmasambhava*) manifest the perfect nature of *dharma*. Before one is initiated into *vajra*, teaching means losing coherence of one's own karmic substance, and, likely, spiritual dissociation. So not only that the “path of *bodhisattva*” doesn't accelerate one on the path towards enlightenment, it actually produces the spiritual death of the practitioner, whose soul will lose integrity if it forms strong connections with others before initiation into *vajra*. Only by initiation into *vajra* does one attain the higher order of spiritual substance, defining one's existence in a medium that is an order of magnitude above the basic four elements, and attaining independence of the states of the four elements, which remain to be used only as a means of continued physical existence in order to instruct others. Only a guru made of *vajra*, *vajracarya*, possesses distance from the momenta of energy introduced by the students, distance that in fact saves him from being compromised and having his spiritual core broken. The unenlightened ones should therefore never engage in guru-student relationships, because it is absolutely fatal.

Third, the concept of spiritual opportunism, in a sense of using all the means at your disposal, is essentially correct, but it also leaves an abundance of room for calling all sorts of binding things and disciplines the instruments of salvation, so it needs to be taken with a grain of salt.

Fourth, if Buddha really thought that prayer, intercessions of the saints, blessing of the *bodhisattvas* and similar methods could produce *nirvana*, he would surely have mentioned it somewhere. Instead, he stated that enlightenment is attained solely and exclusively by one's own efforts, and by no external influence. Enlightenment is the result of inner spiritual transformation and has nothing to do with the external influences. Rebirth in this or some other world is equally irrelevant, like prayers, intercession or curses. Buddha attained enlightenment despite being cursed, attacked and showered by illusions of Mara and all his demons.

Therefore, the external forces are irrelevant for enlightenment and reliance on them is a delusion and an aberration.

Fifth, if Buddha nature were indeed latently present as the nature of all beings, then Buddha would have said so, instead of stating the exact opposite: that there is nothing eternal in the beings, that they are the karmic aggregations and that enlightenment is a completely new element, accessible only to the rare mature persons. The concept of the pervasive Buddha nature that resides in all beings is a result of introduction of the elements of the mature Vedanta into Buddhism, which closes a circle of a sort, where the early Vedanta “borrowed” the concept of karma from the early Buddhism and developed its own theory around it, and the late Buddhism adopts the elements of this theory which it recognizes as an improvement, but not understanding their essential difference from the original teaching of Buddha. Vedanta and Buddhism thus coalesce, forming hybrid branches and offshoots, most significant of which are *vajrayana*, the school of tantric Buddhism which was originally brought to Tibet, Bhutan and the surrounding areas by the monk Padmasambhava, and the Advaita Vedanta simultaneously preached by Shankaracharya across India. This period on the one hand represents the very crown of human thought, and on the other hand it is a period of mixing of the original philosophies beyond recognition of each, where every hybrid considers itself the “true, authentic, eternal and original knowledge”, as it usually happens with those things. So the concept of *atman* was introduced into Buddhism, but under a different name, because Buddha happened to teach against the concept of *atman*, so taking it under its Vedantic name was out of the question, and so the “Buddha nature” was born.

Sixth, redefining the enlightenment into attaining insight instead of a transformation of the karmic mass is a serious problem, and unlike the previous point, where a hybridization of Vedanta and Buddhism produced some interesting and good consequences, here the consequences were mostly bad. Instead of a systematic

investment of effort towards transformation, a haphazard concept of zen-enlightenment is introduced for the first time in history, in a meaning of sudden realization, like a lightning that breaks across the night sky. Of course, it is a result of introduction of the concept of *atman/brahman* into Buddhism, under a different guise, because only in this context does this concept of piercing the superficial consciousness in order to reveal the underlying depths make any sense. In Vedanta and Yoga it is called *samadhi*, the realization of *atman* as *brahman*, but Buddha, even if he knows about *brahman*, and by all indications he does, intentionally refuses to talk about the experience of *brahman* as important, because it is merely a distraction. An experience of *brahman* has no influence on *karman*, since it transcends it completely. *Karman* remains uninfluenced by the experience, all the karmic energy is still here, it's neither consumed nor gone, and returning from the experience one finds that *karman* is not “gone, all gone”, in the words of *prajñaparamita hrdayasutra*, but consciousness was merely temporarily displaced from *karman* into a “place” where *karman* never was, into the transcendental *brahman* which “neither acts, nor causes action”, in the words of Krishna. But this *brahman* exists simultaneously with *karman*, and one does not negate the other. *Karman* cannot be switched off into nonexistence by some trick of consciousness, but needs to be transformed into *vajra*, which is the only thing that matters and the only guarantee of liberation. Entering the state of *brahman* provides a unique perspective, but it does not produce transformation of consciousness, nor does it provide a qualitative leap of evolution that would take one out of the worldly circle. *Karman* is that which is reborn, not *atman/brahman*, and that which is reborn needs to be transformed, and one should not rely on tricks and experiences.

In any attempt to form a hybrid between Vedanta and Buddhism one should therefore have in mind that they are *not* the same teaching and that they *do not* say the same things “in different words”. Vedanta speaks of the transcendental *brahman* and Buddhism speaks of karma and the conditions that make it possible to attain liberation from the circle of birth and death. Those two

truths are not incompatible, but their improper mixture can result in the loss of truth and clarity in either.

*Mahayana* considers itself a generous, broad teaching, a “big wagon” into which all beings can fit, unlike the “small wagon” of Buddhism into which only the select few fit. In reality, the classical Buddhism has a realistic idea on how to attain the only goal worth attaining. *Mahayana* doesn't even understand this goal to begin with (with the exception of the *vajrayana* schools which have a very good understanding); failing to understand it, it supplants it with another goal (zen-enlightenment), which is also beyond reach for the majority of its adherents, and instead of all that it introduces the temples, priests and ceremonies in hope that someone's intercession or blessing will save you, because they clearly don't know how to help you in any way other than by instructing you how to turn the pray-o-mats<sup>1</sup> and put their hopes in the compassion of the saints. In the meantime, their saints think something along the lines of “Ah, after a million lives I reached the brink of *nirvana*. I attained liberation from all attachments and the transformation of the karmic aggregate that makes my personality has begun. I realize that my entire personality used to consist of the karmic substance, of four elements bound into compounds, which are now dissolved into *vajra* without remainder. But alas, the horror! An euglena<sup>2</sup> in the puddle of water beside me suffers due to its hopeless love for some paramecium<sup>3</sup> or another. Seeing its suffering, I understand that I need to return into the world and remain there until all the euglenae attain buddhahood. I will intentionally stupefy myself in order not to understand that new euglenae keep forming due to the source of karmic substance being inexhaustible, making the ocean of *samsara* interminable. I will intentionally stupefy myself in order not to understand that rejecting *nirvana* means to spit into the face of Buddha and his teaching, which stated that it is the only thing worth attaining. In the point where the four elements coalesce into *vajra*, I will listen

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1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan\\_prayer\\_wheel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibetan_prayer_wheel)

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euglena>

3 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramecium>

to my *heart*, the fourth of the four elements, thus establishing an attachment/desire on this element, and reject *nirvana*, thus forming a karmically binding decision which will bind my karmic body with unforeseeable consequences. But when I see the euglena suffering for the paramecium of his desire and lusting after its pulsating vacuoles, desiring to join her and exchange cytoplasm, I understand that my decision to reject *nirvana* in order to feed my attachment to the beings is of the exactly the same silly quality as its fixation on the paramecium, and I decide I should enter *nirvana* instead, but since I already made a karmically binding decision on my peak energy level, now I can proceed to fuck myself because I no longer have this order of magnitude of energy at my disposal, and it is no longer possible for me to rescind this magnitude of choice.”

In short, there is a name which Buddha used for the “great wagon”. He used to call it “*samsara*”.

## **The spiritual cosmology**



The Buddhist cosmology is often confusing and consists of guesswork based on unreliable interpretations of some words of the Buddha, synthesized by taking things out of different contexts, perhaps taking analogy and metaphor as literal truth. The later elaborations attempt to unite this patchwork into a sensible cosmological system, but with limited success, in my opinion.

The most important aspect of the Buddhist cosmological theory is vertical stratification, or classification of the worlds by the level of spiritual subtlety of their inhabitants.

Vertical distance between the worlds (or spiritual strata, if you want) is not measurable as actual physical distance, but as a difference between the spiritual states. Surely, this concept was too abstract for some people, so they added a distance in *yojanas* from the Earth in the descriptions of such “worlds”. This is particularly ludicrous considering those worlds are not physical. Stratification of the worlds is therefore of the kind similar to the stratification of the wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum: if Buddha knew about the concept of light as a wave, he would probably have used a parable with white light and its separation into rainbow by using a prism. Still, we should have in mind that the Buddhist cosmology is, for the most part, superstition, nonsense and guesswork, and that the truth must be sought in the general concepts and not in the details.

Before I attempt to introduce some semblance of order into this chaos, I will make a short synthesis of the Buddhist vertical cosmology. It is important to know that all those worlds are in the realm of the four elements, below *vajra*, or liberation. Hinduism would call them the layers of Prakṛti:

**The sphere of the formless** (*arupyadhatu*) lacks any spatial location but it is the domain of the greatest subtlety of experiences of the gods who attained the state of absorption into the formless by means of *arupajhana* meditation (which basically means

“meditation on the formless” so this doesn't give us much information about the actual contents of the practice). This sphere is further divided into four basic areas or aspects:

- area of neither perception nor lack of perception
- area of nonexistence
- area of limitless awareness
- area of endless space

**The sphere of form** (*rupadhatu*) is substantial, which means that it has spatial location and some kind of substantiality. Between 17 and 22 areas are mentioned within the sphere of form. The beings in those areas are not subject to the extremes of pleasure and pain like the beings of the lower sphere of *kamadhatu*, nor are they separated into genders. When a being from the *rupadhatu* sphere, such as Brahma, wishes to visit a being in the *kamadhatu* sphere, he needs to take a more coarse form, in order to manifest his presence within this sphere and become visible to its residents. Like the sphere of the formless, it is further divided into aspects or areas, according to the defining types of meditation. Those meditations are, of course, coarser and more common. Within this sphere and unrelated to the other divisions there is a segment called *suddhavasa*, “the pure abode”, which is not the residence of ordinary beings which happened to find themselves there because of their merits or meditative achievements, but exclusively the followers of *dharma* on the path toward arhant hood, who attained a state which renders them free from the requirement of reincarnation on the lower planes of existence. They proceed with their spiritual development from here.

**The sphere of desires** (*kamadhatu*) is inhabited by the beings which differ by the degree of happiness, but they are all under the authority of Mara and are bound by the sensual desires, which causes their suffering. The sphere of *kamadhatu* has its peak in form of the pleasurable worlds which are the abode of the *devas*,

the lower “gods”, which could actually be better described as the benevolent demons. This is the equivalent of *svarga* from the Vedas, the heavenly abode of Indra. It is divided into the following layers:

- *Parinirmita-vaśavartin* is the abode of the *devas* who have the power over the creations of others
- *Nirmanarati* is the abode of the *devas* who enjoy their own creations
- *Tusita* is the abode of the “joyous *devas*”, where *bodddhisattvas* supposedly reside before their physical incarnation
- *Yama* is the “heaven with no conflict”, where *devas* live free in the air, and which is closest to the Earth

Below that, but still within the sphere of *kamadhatu*, there is the area of the mountain *Sumeru*, which is the abode of all kinds of mythological beings that nobody ever sees but it was probably considered blasphemous to say that they don't exist at all. This is therefore the imaginary zoo inhabited by faeries, dwarves, nymphs, dragons, goblins and similar beings.

Below the mountain of *Sumeru* there is Earth, the world of men, and if someone has a problem accepting the literal veracity of the above descriptions, it would suffice for him to take a look at the silly and mythological descriptions of the parts of this world, which at least should fall in the domain of verifiable fact, in order to see without a doubt how much of fiction and pure mythology must surely be present in the descriptions of the higher worlds. Basically, the Earth is described as a mountain ring that circles around the mount *Sumeru* in the center of the world, around which the Sun and the Moon revolve. This mountain ring is limited by the vast ocean, which fills most of the world. Around this ocean there is a wall of mountain called *Cakravada*, which defines the horizontal limit of the world. Within this ocean, there are four

continents like small islands.

Below the Earth there is hell, *naraka*, where the evil beings suffer for their sins. With this ends the sphere of *kamadhatu*.

So basically Buddhism knows three main spheres of the world:

- formless sphere
- sphere of form
- sphere of desire

The lesson we must draw from reading those descriptions is that they are more metaphor than geography. The experiences of the higher worlds are so rare, fragmented and sensitive to distortion by the physical body which interprets the experience in order for it to be verbalized, that the descriptions are more of a figment of imagination and guesswork than some objective presentation of reality.

There are similar, parallel “spiritual cosmologies”, like those of the Theosophy and the Rosicrucianism, but they share the same problems; what is common to all of them is the concept of spiritual stratification according to subtlety and refinement, and an attempt to arrange the system according to some rational pattern, but anything more precise than that is usually interpolated.

Vedanta is different from those system in that its cosmology is intentionally rudimentary. Shankaracharya divides the objects of experience and the levels of subtlety into *sthula* (coarse), *sukshma* (subtle) and *karana* (causal). The coarse world is this material one, with the material senses and their objects. The subtle world is divided into two basic segments: *manasic*, which is lower, and *buddhic*, which is higher. The *manasic* layer is what the rosicrucians and theosophists would call “astral world”, and buddhists the sphere of desire. The *buddhic* layer is what the

theosophists would call the “mental level”, and buddhists the sphere of form. In some interpretations of Vedanta, the causal layer is partially equivalent to the formless sphere of Buddhism, but there is no direct equivalence; it is, basically, what Vedanta considers to be the karmic body, which contains the causally reactive karma which causes rebirth. The schools of Yoga and Vedanta believe that those karmic seeds (*karmashayas*) can be “roasted” by knowledge and thus rendered inactive.

In short, if anyone thought that there is a “traditional division” of the levels of reality, he probably knows better now. There is not one, but many, and the chaos and silliness of it all shows that nobody really knows anything with any degree of certainty; it's all mostly guesswork based on a few basic principles everybody mostly agrees on. What they agree on is the concept of vertical stratification depending on spiritual subtlety, and that's more or less it. My approach to all that was “be informed about everything, but accept only what you can confirm in practice, and even that only as a framework of terminology and a working model”, which is on the line of Buddha's recommendation not to accept things based on authority, but only after you confirmed it by thought and experience as true, good and useful.

Besides, Buddha had a very good antidote for the excessive intellectualizations about origin and nature of the world and the desire to number all kinds of levels and sublevels. He said something along these lines: “If you are struck by an arrow, will you immediately go to a doctor to take it out, or will you first try to establish the archer's city of origin, his caste, number of his children, name of the maker of his bow, name of the maker of his shoes, how many cows does he have, how much milk do they yield, does he make cheese or butter from the milk, and similar nonsense? While you waste time trying to find out all those unimportant things, you will die from your wound. So the facts are that you are who you are, you have a problem, I'm telling you the solution, and you can either practice the solution until your

enlightenment, or you can waste your time asking me about nonsense such as how many angels can fit on the head of a pin. If you have time to ask about trivia you are obviously not taking this shit seriously.”

He used to deal with the questions such as “what happens to Buddha after he dies”, “is there a Creator”, “is soul different or identical to the body” in a similar manner. He would simply remain silent. There is a good reason for that: whatever he answered, people would misunderstand and form dangerous, binding ideas. If there is a Creator, he is certainly not what people can imagine, so a Boolean yes/no answer is in fact wrong. You can imagine Buddha facepalming when people asked him things along the lines of “are there birds in heaven”. Any answer would actually confirm some idiotic preconception, and would therefore be false. He therefore remained silent, and his silence is correctly interpreted as “you are asking the wrong questions”. The correct question would be “what am I misunderstanding about God, soul, myself and the world”. This is the true problem: the anthropomorphic concepts people can't seem to get rid of, which create an obstacle in any attempt to understand the spiritual realities.

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***Vipassana, the kalapas and  
the four elements***

Buddha's thinking reveals his lack of interest for the hypothetical things and vague philosophy. He dealt with concrete and exact things. He set a diagnosis for the human condition, prescribed therapy, provided intellectually clear answers and dispelled the nonsense that was abundant in the thoughtspace of the time. A logical question arises: did Buddha think that enlightenment is attainable by purely intellectual means, or did he integrate some of the practical aspects of yoga and meditation into his teaching, because his years as an ascetic must have given him some degree of expertise?

The answer is, as usual, twofold. On the one hand, Shakyamuni found the limits of the ascetic practices and managed to attain real results only after making a radical leap away from this concept. On the other hand, when he parted ways with the ascetic practice, he didn't really renounce the ascetic principles altogether, and he continued to live as a beggar-monk. Likewise, if you were to ask him whether asceticism and yoga can lead to enlightenment, he would have said no, thus disowning the practices that were usually thought of as the instruments of spiritual progress in his time. That said, at the same time he founded a new spiritual practice of awake and distanced observation of the mechanisms of creating, discreating and reforming of the mental structures, known by the name of *vipassana*.

*Vipassana* is different from the Patañjali's theory of yoga in about the same way as the Einstein's theory of corpuscularity of the photons and the photoelectric effect differs from the Newton's theory of light as a wave phenomenon. Patañjali defines consciousness as a sum of the wave functions, the oscillations (*vrtti*) that disturb the mindstuff (*citta*), and all phenomena within consciousness are defined in a way in which the modern acoustic theory defines sound – both speech, noise and music are defined as waveforms made by summation of the vibrations of various frequencies, an example of which you can see if you open a .wav file in a sound editor and look at the visual representation of the



waveform that defines the sound, and produces the sound once it has been converted into an electric signal which drives a magnet which produces the mechanical vibrations of the speaker, which in turn produce the vibrations of the surrounding medium. The sound is therefore a synthetic phenomenon, consisting of the various frequencies, volume and duration. Patañjali sees the phenomena within consciousness in a similar way, as a synthetic waveform, which defines transparency, or opacity, of the mindstuff to *atman/brahman*.

Buddha's *vipassana*, however, has a completely corpuscular view of the phenomena, seeing them as reducible to fundamental particles. Where Patañjali sees waveforms, Buddha sees the fundamental particles of extremely short lifespan, but whose entire energy, upon decay, is spent in formation of the new particles. Such a particle, named *kalapa*, dies to give birth to new particles, according to the laws of conservation of energy and momentum. Such a mechanism perpetuates the momenta both within consciousness and within the material world, creating the complex compounds and phenomena. The model formulated by Buddha is not to be understood as pertaining to the superficial level of atoms and molecules, but rather on the more profound level of a mathematical formulation of the quantum vacuum.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the modern physics, which strictly separates the quantum phenomena of matter and the phenomenon of human consciousness, which is seen as an emergent phenomenon several degrees of separation away, on an electrochemical level, Buddha postulates something that I recognize as a quantum theory of consciousness. According to this theory, the functioning of both matter and consciousness is explained with the common model of the *kalapas*, or the fundamental particles which you can call bosons if you prefer, which create the appearance of the totality of

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1 <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn16095-its-confirmed-matter-is-merely-vacuum-fluctuations.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vacuum\\_state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vacuum_state)

the material and spiritual reality with their continuity of appearance, disappearance and expenditure of energy into creation of other phenomena, going in and out of existence in infinitesimally small units of time.

*Kalapas* are incredibly small particles, of quantum dimensions, and despite occasionally being called “atoms” I think that they are more compatible with the definition of the photons and perhaps, more generally, the bosons. Buddha thinks that *kalapas* exist in several basic types, divided according to the elements and their tendencies. The *kalapas* form compounds, but in a way that is more consistent with the way in which the quantum fluctuations of the vacuum, according to some theories, form the more permanent particles such as protons, than in a way that most people might find easier to understand, by gluing particles together into larger structures. Let's put it this way: Buddha had a good idea about how those things work, but an exact mathematical formulation of these phenomena was beyond him, and I personally don't fare much better, so I will follow his example and keep using the simplified imagery. Essentially, if you disturb the quantum field, particles containing the energy of the disturbance pop in and out of existence along the waveform path of the disturbance.

The theory of the *kalapas* is closely connected with the theory of the four elements, which, according to Buddha, are the fundamental constituents of matter. Of course, those four elements aren't even close to being as silly a concept as most scientifically educated people might think at first glance. The four elements are earth, water, fire and air.

Let me stop your expected reaction there: those names are a visual metaphor, not literal truth. A man who was smart enough to formulate a theory, 2500 years ago, that is not significantly different than the modern physical theory of the quantum fluctuations of the vacuum, was not so silly as to think that fire is an element. He knew that fire was a complex interaction of

different kinds of matter, not an element. When he talks about fire as an element, he has something completely different in mind, something that unites the phenomena on the quantum level of the material universe, with the spiritual phenomena and states.

The element of earth is, rather, a state of “materiality”, inertia of existence, continuity and tangibility. “Earth” as an element is closest to the definition of the Higgs boson; it is the difference between the sum of short-lived particles and a single long-lived particle such as a proton or a neutron, which can continue existing for the order of magnitude of  $10^{35}$  years. Having in mind that the current age of the Universe is in the order of magnitude of  $10^{10}$  years, you can get the picture. So “earth” is this factor of stability and permanence of particles and phenomena.

The element of water can be described as “interactivity” or “cohesion”. Water would be the interactions – strong and weak nuclear, electromagnetism and, perhaps, gravity.

The element of fire is energy, radiance, radiation. All form of radiation and propagation of energy are fire, so one could say that the stars function by producing the element of “fire”, the radiation, from the element of “water”, the interactivity that initiates the nuclear fusion.

The element of air is probably the most difficult one to describe, since I manage to observe it foremost as a spiritual phenomenon of the expanse of space, and if I had to map it onto some fundamental physical phenomenon, it would be the cosmological constant<sup>1</sup>, or the inherent spatiotemporal expansiveness of Space.

Those four elements can be observed in both microscopic and macroscopic scale, for instance the “fire” can be observed in both nuclear reactions and the processes of oxidation, wherever energy is released and radiated, and “earth” can be observed in both

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1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological\\_constant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological_constant)

permanence of the protons and firmness of a rock. They can likewise be observed in spiritual processes, which are essentially made on the same fundamental elements as the physical Universe, and reflect the same principles. Buddha observes that within the fluctuations of our own spirit we can observe the same fluctuation of the *kalapas* that continuously creates, dissolves and recreates the material Universe, because the fundamental building blocks of the world and of the mind are the same.<sup>1</sup>

Some interpretations of Buddhism state that this means reducibility of spirit to matter, while the other interpretations state that it means reducibility of matter to spirit. Buddha himself chose to answer such questions with silence.<sup>2</sup> This is so because both statements contain faulty assumptions. If someone asks you if an airplane is kind of an automobile or a kind of submarine, what will you answer? Buddha formulated the new teaching about the *kalapas* and the impermanence of the compounds, and this teaching needs to be understood. This understanding will have a result of seeing our original position about matter and spirit as wrong. Buddha's teaching about the *kalapas* is no mere theory, however. It is accompanied by the practical discipline of *vipassana*, which I am about to explain.

The basic technique of *vipassana* can be nothing more than sitting peacefully, feeling one's body deeply on a level similar to that of the autogenous training, and observing the mental processes in their impermanence and conditioning. This means that you observe the emotions and thoughts coming and going, and in the process giving birth to new emotions and thoughts. This is recognized as a manifestation of the same basic principle that creates and dissolves all other compounds. In all that, one observes that none of the thoughts and emotions that come and go is "self", that selfness is not defined in those phenomena. Observing them from a witness viewpoint, one attains progress in spiritual qualities (*parami*), for

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1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchestrated\\_objective\\_reduction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orchestrated_objective_reduction)

2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14\\_unanswerable\\_questions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14_unanswerable_questions)

instance by distancing oneself from the passions and desires, and, most important of all, one spends the karmically reactive substance which is inherent to the observed compounds. The position of a detached observer, who feels but doesn't react, creates both progress in the quality of *ksanti* and, through the experience of suffering which is a consequence of observing the traumatic and stressful experiences from his unconscious self unraveling in his consciousness, he spends the traumatic cohesive material of such karmic compounds, thus allowing them to be dissolved into individual *kalapas* and transformed. This gradually processes and transforms his spiritual body, from a state of dramatic whirlpool-like passions and traumas, into a calm, coherent ocean of spirit, as the momentum of the whirlpools is spent by suffering, without forming a reaction that would release the momentum into creating a new whirlpool, according to the basic principle of *samsara*.

When the concept of self is separated from the *kalapas*, one discovers the possibility to influence the substance of what he previously thought of as “self” as he would any other external thing. When you attain the position of a distanced observer, your thoughts and feelings are seen as no more “you” than your clothes or other possession. When you think of something as “you”, you hold on to it with fear for the continuity of your personal existence. The Buddhist practice of detachment and distance allows you to abstract the self from the transient phenomena, and eventually, the attainment of the final goal of liberation.

Such a Buddhist version of yoga produces essentially the same results as the one of Patañjali – energy of the whirlpools within consciousness, produced by the self-propagating tensions, is absorbed and spent, thus calming and homogenizing the spiritual substance. On the levels of both theory and practice, it is apparent that the difference between the yogas of Patañjali and Buddha is more a matter of explanatory imagery and viewpoint, than actual practice, where the differences are insignificant. The most useful thing that can be learned from the difference between the two

approaches is that they help form a very good stereo image of the anatomy and behavior of the spiritual substance. A yogi who understands the behavior of his consciousness from both perspectives has a greater chance of forming a correct understanding of the issues and attaining the results, compared to someone who looks from only one viewpoint and has a greater chance of missing the point, thinking that something is a metaphor or a thought experiment. Exactly the opposite: it's a technique of transformation, a method that can be visualized as taking entangled and dirty wool freshly shorn off a sheep and transforming it into a clean, orderly yarn.

A particularly important thing about the *vipassana* meditation is observing the inherent painfulness of the experience. Practically everything that crosses your mind during the practice contains suffering, trauma and spiritual discomfort, all of which need to be calmly spent and suffered through. This meekness and patience in suffering is the mechanism we use for accelerating the process of “spending karma”, because simultaneously with the endurance of suffering arise the new insights that become possible only after the entangled fleece of karma has been disentangled and purified. “Spending karma” with a method of *vipassana* is therefore not just garbage disposal, as Jainism and New Age would let you believe, but also a process of opening up towards the experience and the knowledge that is bound together with pain, and if we calmly suffer and endure the pain, not retaliating, the other side of the pain of the karmic disentanglement is revealed, and it is wisdom and knowledge.

I knew a man who said of himself that he walks the path of *bodhisattva*, by taking painful karma from other people, the things they themselves were disinclined to work through, considering it a grave ordeal. He would take such karmic blocks onto himself, and his technique of yoga consisted of simply suffering through it, to experience the spiritual trauma that is bound into the structure and is released during its dissociation, and the result would be the

integration of the sum of the *kalapas* from the karmic blocks into his own spiritual body, making his “ego” grow and attain increasing complexity and ability to comprehend the spiritual realities and truths. Practice of such a discipline enables a yogi to develop many abilities that would have eluded him, had he opted for an easier path. For instance, one develops great endurance for unpleasant and traumatic experiences, as well as the ability to endure grave spiritual blows, which are inevitable to an advanced practitioner in any case. Furthermore, one develops the ability to directly perceive the spiritual energetics, which is a rare skill, since most people understand such things only symbolically and from a greater distance, and perception of the spiritual structures directly on the level of *kalapas*, or *vrtti*, belongs to the level of skill that only a few expert yogis possess, mostly because the experience is painful, chaotic and destructive for the ways in which people perceive both reality and their own personality.

I talked to this Buddhist yogi some sixteen years ago (around 1998) in order to compare our respective techniques, and having learned about my technique of the inner space and up-stream *kriya* he concluded that they operate on the same principles he uses in transformation of karma, with a slight difference in technical realization, since I use the *Kundalini*-whirlpools to accelerate the dissociation of the compound structures into their basic constituents, while he uses compassion through which he identifies with the karma in question and opens him up towards the suffering it contains. Since similar opening and integration is one of the main elements of my technique, which does the same thing until the point where *kriya* is activated in surrender to the higher consciousness, I conclude that *vipassana*, if practiced by an expert and skilled practitioner such as my colleague at the time, is principally equivalent to the technique I developed through experience and effort. My technique contains all the aspects of *vipassana*, but joined together with the *Kundalini*-energetics which reduces the directness of contact between the traumatic content and the consciousness, and accelerates the dissociation of the harmful contents with a focused contact with the energies of the higher

order. Nevertheless, my colleague was familiar with the concepts of the higher and lower orders of energy, so I have to conclude that there are no significant differences between the techniques that really work, because the skilled practitioners improvise the tools necessary in order to overcome the difficulties. In any case, an effective technique of yoga appears to be something that is eventually developed by any true seeker of enlightenment, since the means seem to be spontaneously crystallized from sufficient spiritual focus, like the diamonds are crystallized when graphite is exposed to sufficient pressure. A technique of yoga is therefore a fruit of spiritual labor, and not its prerequisite.



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## **Death and rebirth**

One of the most common objections faced by Buddhism is the perception of its goal, *nirvana*, as a negative state, an extinction of consciousness and all positive aspects of experience, which indeed does solve the problem of suffering, but in such a way that it throws out the baby with the bath water, so to say. Buddhism is therefore perceived as a system that strives for the state of no suffering, but also no soul, eternity, happiness or goodness, either.

People who think like that usually reject Buddhism as a philosophy and a worldview and instead opt for some system like Yoga or Vedanta, which contains more-less all Buddhist concepts related to karma, but also recognizes the *atman/brahman* as a positive principle of human experience, understanding the goal as ultimate recognition of *brahman* as one's true identity.

This objection to Buddhism is actually valid in part. A solid number of practitioners perceives Buddhism exactly in the negative way that is pointed out and criticized by Shankaracharya, and from this point of view, Shankaracharya's insistence on *brahman* is highly justified. Vedanta and Buddhism are philosophically so similar, that the teaching about *brahman* makes the only true difference between them. Even the teaching about reincarnation is more-less identical, because Vedanta, too, states that *karman* is that which is reincarnated, and not *atman*; *atman* is eternal and unborn, it is merely a different name for *brahman*, which is neither born nor does it die, so it is not reborn in any way, but its light shines through the entirety of the relative experience, it saturates the human existence like oxygen saturates the air, or the way butter saturates the milk, and through a process of discrimination, or analytical filtration of experiences, a man can understand that his self is in fact *brahman*, and identification with *karman*, the sum of relative experiences, creates the phenomenon known as *jivan*, a relative living being, which is ignorantly thought to be the self, that it is the one who experiences and is reborn. What people usually know as *jivan* is in fact the same as the karmic aggregate from Buddhism – a transient, ephemeral

phenomenon, which today is, and tomorrow is something else. *Jivan* is the one who is born and the one who dies; it is a structure that is different in childhood, adulthood and old age. Vedanta states that *atman/brahman* is the silent witness<sup>1</sup> (*sākṣī brāhman*), the calm uninvolved screen upon which life is projected, the golden bird which dwells atop the tree of life, eating neither sweet nor bitter fruits, but instead dwelling in the golden light of its own true nature.<sup>2</sup>

More than a decade ago I would have been inclined to agree with Shankaracharya in his assessment of Buddhism, especially having in mind that I had the state of *brahman* (*nirvikalpa samadhi*) in personal experience, which appeared to confirm the position of Vedanta, and falsify what I perceived as a negatively defined goal of Buddhism. Still, based on further experience and analysis I became inclined to revise my original assessment of Buddhism and see its discord with Vedanta as a strategic, and not a philosophic issue.

It appears that Buddha knew simply too much to make such a glaring omission due to ignorance. It must have been intentional, and it appears that his teaching of *anatman*, and apparently negatively defined *nirvana*, are in fact a deliberate placement of accent on the karmic aspect of the problem, and that Buddha was much more wise and farsighted than I gave him credit. The thing is, Buddha advocated his teaching from the position of practical usefulness, and we shall now analyze both perspectives and see what follows.

From the perspective of Shankaracharya's Vedanta, the only thing that matters is the realization of *brahman*. *Brahman* is transcendental to karma, and knowledge of That as one's own true

1 "The same Deity remains hidden in all beings, and is all-pervasive and the indwelling Self of all beings. He is the supervisor of actions, lives in all beings, (He is) the Witness, the bestower of intelligence, the Absolute and devoid of the (three) gunas." (Shvetashvatara Upanishad Sl. VI.11)

2 Mundaka Upanishad III, 1:1-3

identity breaks the bonds that form the illusion of *jivan*. Without the association between *brahman* and karma, which forms the ephemeral *jivan*, there remains nothing to hold the karma together and the reincarnating entity that is misidentified as the soul disperses like a cloud in the midday sun. The realization of *brahman* thus results in liberation. It's all nice and well in theory, but Shankaracharya is in error – a fundamental and fatal error at that. You see, *brahman* is always transcendental to *karman*, and eternally free. In the state of *brahman*, *brahman* is recognized as the reality, and *jivan* is perceived as an illusion. But the state of *brahman* is parallel and simultaneous to the state of *karman*. Recognition of self as *brahman* has no influence on the *karman*, and this is where Shankaracharya is wrong. Far from it that the knowledge of *brahman* will have the effect of dispelling karma; it will have no effect on karma whatsoever, because *brahman* is transcendental to *karman*. Like a sword, which can cut a man's body and cause death, but has no effect on *atman/brahman*, the realization of *brahman* has no effect on *karman*, because it is transcendental to it. The realization of *brahman* is therefore a karmically irrelevant event – it neither creates nor dissolves karma. After entering the state of *brahman*, a yogi must always return to the state of *jivan*, where the totality of his karma awaits him, to proceed where he left off. In exact opposition to the teaching of Shanaracarya, Vedanta in fact lacks any instruments for attaining liberation from the circle of birth and death, since all its efforts strive toward the goal which is transcendental to the sphere of karma and therefore holds no sway over it.

Having recognized this truth in practice quite a few years ago, in 1997, I concluded that there are two essential teachings, about the relative and about the Absolute. The teaching about the Absolute is useful for entering the state of *samadhi*, and the teaching about the relative is useful for refinement of the energetic bodies in the relative, and for attaining liberation. Still, for reasons of my own, I simply formulated my own teaching about the Relative, and did not dwell on Buddhism at all, up until recently, when I happened to give it a second look for a different set of reasons, and understood

quite dramatic similarities between the actual teaching of Buddhism and my concepts of refinement of the relative existence. Based on that, it clicked to me that Buddha must have known what I realized years ago, before writing my first book: that the teaching about *brahman* is true, but can eventually be a mere distraction and of little practical use. In the attempt to realize *brahman*, which is always here anyway, one wastes the time that would be better spent on efforts of transforming karma, because that is the factor that determines our future the most. It is not *brahman* that is reborn, but *karman*; and it is reborn quite independently on realization of *brahman*, it being a step into transcendence and not an act of transformation. Karma, untouched by the experience of *brahman*, binds and conditions. Without transformation of karma there can be no liberation, and an experience of *brahman* is, in that sense, but a pleasant and comforting distraction.

Is it possible that Buddha knew a great deal about the eternal and transcendental *brahman*, but that he also knew more than Shankaracharya did, and so he formulated his teaching in a way that focuses attention toward the true problem, that which conditions one towards rebirth? When this problem is solved, one attains liberation, and in liberation, a yogi will most certainly realize *brahman*, its nature, eternity and transcendence. Still, having already disentangled all karmic knots, and having transformed the compounds of the *kalapas* into a coherent form that is no longer karmically reactive, and no longer requires rebirth of the “self” that created it, the liberation of Buddhism is the true one, in a sense that there remains no karma that would require a return from the state of perfection, while the liberation of Vedanta is a mere excursion, a visit to the goal that comes and goes, and then one is to return into the world of suffering, because the practice of Vedanta didn't do anything that would produce a permanent liberation.

Even if we consider entering *samadhi* a karmically relevant act from the position of *jivan*, this new karma is merely added to the

existing, and neither transforms nor dissolves it. This is why Buddha chooses to mention the aspects of *brahman* only in the context of *nirvana*, while on the other hand he diligently avoids mention of the concepts of the Hinduism and Jainism of the day, according to which all beings possess *atman*, as their eternal and indestructible kernel. This is so because it is certain that everybody will say “*atman*” and think “*jivan*”. Considering any aspect of a human person an eternal cornerstone of one's reality and personality is to deny oneself the possibility to transform the karma that defines *jivan*, which becomes abundantly clear in the practice of *vipassana* or inner space, where one can dissolve and purify only the energetic structures one removes his personal consciousness and identity from, and stops perceiving them as “self”. Aspects of karma that are perceived as “self” are untouchable by the techniques. By stating that *none* of those things are eternal and constant, Buddha creates the philosophical framework that enables one to detach himself from his karma. By stating that none of it is *atman*, one frees the *atman* from the need to be any of those things, and one is free to dissolve any energetic structure without fearing for his own continuity of existence. Where Shankaracharya gives lip service to *atman*, Buddha actually frees it from the reactive bonds of karma.

Where Patañjali sees coherence, and ultimately the complete cessation of the waveforms that disturb the mindstuff, as the state where *brahman* dwells in its own true nature and is observed as such, Buddha speaks of coherence and dissolution of the karmic compounds, leading to the state of *nirvana*.

A state of positive existence is impossible after the dissolution of the building blocks of soul, if there is no all-pervading positive principle that is revealed after the illusion is dispelled. From the very definition of *nirvana* as a good thing and a desirable goal it is clear that there is something that is revealed after the illusory personality has been dissolved, something which is the fullness of the real, free and unconditioned existence. Since Buddha took a

great deal of care not to connect eternity and human nature in any way, it all remains a matter of guesswork, but if we take a closer look at the Tibetan descriptions of the process of dying and rebirth, it becomes apparent that this guesswork has very good foundations in reality. Likewise, the way in which Milarepa describes his spiritual achievement is quite compatible with the teachings of Vedanta. The Buddhist concept of *nirvana* can, therefore, be understood as a state of *brahman* without any remainder of karma.

Let's just take a look at this quotation from the *Bardo Thödol* by Padmasambhava, also known as "the Tibetan book of the dead". It consists of the instructions to a dying person, with the intent of helping him attain liberation or at least the best possible rebirth:

*"O nobly-born (so-and-so), listen. Now thou art experiencing the Radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality. Recognize it. O nobly-born, thy present intellect, in real nature void, not formed into anything as regards characteristics or color, naturally void, is the very Reality, the All-Good.*

*Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as of the voidness of nothingness, but as being the intellect itself, unobstructed, shining, thrilling, and blissful, is the very consciousness, the All-good Buddha.*

*Thine own consciousness, not formed into anything, in reality void, and the intellect, shining and blissful, -- these two, -- are inseparable. The union of them is the Dharma-Kāya state of Perfect Enlightenment.*

*Thine own consciousness, shining, void, and inseparable from the Great Body of Radiance, hath no birth, nor death, and is the Immutable Light -- Buddha Amitābha.*

*Knowing this is sufficient. Recognizing the voidness of thine own intellect to be Buddhahood, and looking upon it as being thine own*

*consciousness, is to keep thyself in the [state of the] divine mind of the Buddha.*"<sup>1</sup>

I don't know about you, but to me that doesn't look like *nirvana* as it is usually perceived: as a negative state of cessation of being and nothingness, a form of real and true death, such as the one imagined by the materialists. You can now say that it's some Tibetan offshoot of Buddhism that has more in common with Shankaracharya's Vedanta (to which it is contemporary) than the true original teaching of Buddha, but what would you then answer to the words of Buddha in the work of Dhammapada, a part of the oldest Theravada canon, that Nibbana is the greatest bliss, and that the enlightened one "drinks deeply the taste of the bliss of the Truth?"<sup>2</sup> The classical interpretation<sup>3</sup> states that this happiness is the lasting, transcendental joy that is the quality of the attained peace which is the result of the enlightenment (*bodhi*). So, far from being an apocryphal heresy, the Tibetan view of *nirvana* as the ultimate, essential, absolute reality which is the fullness of truth, light and bliss, is in fact the most orthodox teaching of the original Buddhism<sup>4</sup>.

After all, only from the westerners who are conditioned by materialism did I have the opportunity to hear the interpretation of *nirvana* as death of the soul or a negatively defined void; from all eastern Buddhist practitioners I only heard the interpretations of the kind that is professed by Padmasambhava. The concept of Buddhism as a "spiritualized version of atheism" is exclusively a western heresy, created by a superficial understanding of the concepts of Buddhism. The difference between Vedanta and Buddhism is therefore foremost in the Buddhist insistence that *nirvana* is a state that has nothing to do with a human understanding of self, but that *nirvana* is a new state that is

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1 Translated by Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup and W.Y. Evans-Wentz

2 Dhammapada 203-205.

3 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana#Nirvana\\_in\\_Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana#Nirvana_in_Buddhism)

4 "'The liberated mind (citta) that no longer clings' means Nibbāna" (Majjhima Nikaya 2- 4.68)



attained, not revealed, when everything human is dissolved and dispelled.

The question that arises is what is it exactly that dies and is reborn? During human life, we see how “I” identifies with various states and modes of existence. There is a continuity of personality and memory, but the state of “I” is subject to constant change. What happens to the “I” when the human body dies?

It is probably best for me to describe the contents of the Tibetan book of the dead, which describes this very process.

After the physical death, a man at first finds himself within the subtle (“astral”) body, but within the physical world, and can see and hear people and see his dead body. After this phase, occurs that which I usually call the “top-down sieve”, the process of sieving the pearls through a series of sieves of increasing density. The biggest pearls remain at the top, while the smaller ones travel towards the bottom, until they meet the sieve through which they can no longer fall. The worthless sand, however, travels all the way through, and is discarded. *Bardo Thödol* describes the process in the following way:

A being initially faces the state of *nirvana*. It is enough for him to decide: “this is my true nature”, and it will be so: he will forever dwell in the all-blissful state of pure consciousness, absolute bliss and perfection of the supreme reality. However, most beings find themselves unable to make such a choice. Exposed to the pure light of *nirvana*, they feel fear, pain, suffering and horror.

Why is that so?

Everyone who is adept at *vipassana* will immediately understand the cause. The karmic aggregates that are exposed to such a high order of magnitude of reality start to strain and dissociate, releasing a terrible amount of concentrated suffering in the process.

This is the kind of suffering that is felt by a sinner when he is forced to face the ultimate truth and consequence of his sinful actions, because the perfect truth of *nirvana* makes it impossible for one to hide in lies, ignorance and darkness, which are forever the refuge of sinners, who attempt to hide or misinterpret their actions, inventing false explanations that portray them as good persons. In the state of *nirvana*, anyone who deceived, betrayed, stole, lied or murdered is forced to immediately face the ultimate truth of those deeds, and this makes it impossible for him to keep perceiving himself as a good person. He would have to admit that what he sees in the light of *nirvana* is the truth, that he is an evil person, and suffer the immense pain that follows such a realization. Had he opted to calmly and stoically suffer the pain, he would have attained purification and the light of *nirvana* would then reflect his inner purity, finding no evil or flaw, revealing nothing but harmony and spiritual peace. *Nirvana* would then be seen as the same within and without, and the being would recognize it as his true nature and fulfillment of his longings.

A sinner, however, sees no light in *nirvana*, just his inner darkness reflected and amplified. He sees the horrors of his inner world assaulting him, he experiences the trauma of his sinfulness, he faces the virtue of his victims, the consequences of his evil deeds, the suffering he caused and the evil nature that is his own. Being unable to acknowledge his evil deeds and his evil nature, he cannot free himself of those qualities and thus recognizes *nirvana* as a great dark evil that looms over him intent on destroying everything he is. He sees *nirvana* as a hell full of worst atrocities, vice and evil. This causes the villains and sinners to run away in the opposite direction. Even the sort that we might call ordinary people have the spiritual bodies that “vibrate” far below this level, their spiritual qualities being of a far inferior order, and due to an enormous number of attachments and desires that they possess and nurture, that bind them to the physical and astral plane, they are unable to recognize *nirvana* as fulfillment of their longings – in fact, it's the exact opposite. In *nirvana* there is no ownership, no sex, no control or anything similar, and they are conditioned to

perceive it as a bad thing and a negation of their own nature and their desires, as well as a negation of their concepts of goodness and fulfillment.

After having ran away from the sight of *nirvana* in utmost horror, the soul is exposed to the pale-white light of the world of the *Devas*. If it feels attraction towards the form of existence that resonates with this plane, the longing for the attainment of this form of existence will result in birth at this plane. But most human souls are unable to feel attraction towards this form of existence, either. This is so because life in the world of the gods is a life of truth and virtue, where all sins are immediately visible and cannot be hidden, where it impossible to lie because one communicates by direct insight into the other person's spirit, and most things that humans perceive as the causes of happiness do not exist there. A sinful soul would therefore feel naked and violated in the world of the gods: all its sins and bad intentions would be revealed and obvious to everybody, and all would despise and avoid it; it feels as if the powerful spotlights of truth reveal all its flaws in searing pain and shame. The obviousness of all its lowly and sinful thoughts also makes it impossible to lie to others, to delude them and to exploit them, as it used to in the physical world, and since the beings here are naturally protected from abuse by the very nature of the world, this makes heaven look like hell to the sinful soul, and it would run away from it as soon as possible. Explanation for this is the same as in the case of *nirvana* – the soul doesn't want to release the identifications with the lowly and sinful structures, and the natural process of their dissolution in the benevolent energy of the heavenly world is perceived as a threat to its spiritual integrity and existence. For this reason, it perceives everything good as evil, as a dark threat to its way of life, and fights it in any possible way, and if it can't fight, it escapes.

Having escaped the sight of the heavenly worlds, the soul perceives the pale-blue light of the Earth. Most souls, due to the qualities of their spirit, feel attraction for this place, because the

karmic patterns that condition them find their natural place of fulfillment there. For instance, it is possible to lie, to steal, to have secret dark thoughts, there are sex, ownership, pleasure of having what the others have not, as well as the coarse sensual experiences the primitive and unevolved souls strongly identify with and perceive them as the only valuable and full form of existence. Experiencing the visions of strongly attractive intercourse of man and woman, the soul is attracted and bound into conception and birth.

There are, of course, the beings to whom even this dark world is unpleasant because its spiritual vibration is too high for them, and they perceive it as something that threatens their spiritual structures. Those are the beings of pure sin, to whom every kind of light of truth in any form and shape is painful, and who desire to escape into complete darkness, and they are attracted to the dull gray light of hell, which they perceive as the place where no truth and virtue will never catch up with them and hurt them. But there in hell are others like them, the beings of pure sin, whose only pleasure is to humiliate and abuse others, ridicule truth and virtue, deny any holiness, and inflict pain to others with the goal of destroying any form of spiritual existence and increasing the amount of suffering. If you find it difficult to believe that such beings can exist, you obviously haven't been watching the news. They exist here, too, but not for long, because hell is their final destination, and there they will torture each other and make each other's existence immensely painful, but compared to the pain they would feel in the presence of the higher reality and consciousness, as well as in the presence of the genuinely good and holy beings, they actually find hell preferable.

It is obvious that Buddhism doesn't think that bodily death marks the end of a conscious personal existence. On the contrary, the qualities a being acquired in its previous lives determine the form of its future existence. A very superficial mind could come to the conclusion that Buddhism teaches that the extremely sinful beings,

whose karmic bodies dissolve into individual *kalapas* due to the incredible amount of accumulated inner tensions, attain the same kind of destiny that a saint attains in *nirvana*, but this is a misunderstanding of the fundamental concepts, and comes from the lack of experience with *vipassana*. Fragmentation of karma does not preclude the personal experience of suffering – it merely precludes the complexity of soul that is a necessary prerequisite of salvation. This means that the consequence of a soul's dissolution due to extreme sinfulness is a fall into many simultaneous lifeforms, each of which is the same “I”, only experiencing a more limited existence filled with greater suffering, and without cohesion and strength of consciousness that is necessary in order to understand one's position and attempt salvation. This is so because “I” is not the result of aggregation of karma into greater structures. Buddhism teaches that “I” has nothing to do with karma. Karma is reborn, and “I” is merely the subjective experience of suffering, that is not seated in a single locus, so that it could vanish or change when karma is fragmented. In enlightenment, one recognizes that “I” is *nirvana*, but prior to that, “I” is suffering.

# Mara

*"You are emaciated and ill-looking, you are near to death! A thousand parts of you belong to death and only a fraction of you is alive. Live, good Sir! It is better to live. Living you may perform meritorious deeds. From practicing celibacy and tending the sacrificial fire much merit is made, but what is obtained from striving? It is difficult to enter the path of exertion, it is difficult to do, difficult to maintain."*

*To Mara speaking thus, the Lord replied:*

*"You who are the friend of the negligent, O Evil One, for what reason have you come here?" (Mara to Buddha; Padhana Sutta, Khuddaka Nikaya)<sup>1</sup>*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Satan to Jesus, Matthew 4,8-10)*

The problem with the Devil is that the westerners can't really take his existence and activities seriously, because the entire thing sounds absurd, like a childish form of a theological *deus ex machina* which can only be discarded as superfluous by the serious thinkers. After all, what is evil but the lack of good? And if that is so, then what point is there in visualizing some personification of evil, or cold, or vacuum, or stupidity? Well, that's not really how things work, and it's not the first time that the "common sense" actually creates more problems than it solves, because in reality, the complex energetic relationships between the beings, the energetic stratification of reality, as well as the concept of authority over the energies of their respective levels of reality, in a certain scope, acquired by the investment of one's personal spiritual energy into the substance of that level, create complexity that

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1 <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.3.02.irel.html>

believes “common sense”, but actually provides a very good model for explaining the things that can be experienced, but otherwise fail to make sense. Those explanations belong to the canonical Buddhist teaching, and everyone who is familiar with *vipassana* and energetic yoga, will understand the basic underlying theory. So yes, my friends, there is a Devil, and Buddhism, one of the most abstract and scientific of all spiritual teachings in circulation, actually has a very good understanding of this fact.

In fact, the Buddhist teaching goes so far as to clearly define which levels of reality belong to the realm of a demonic spiritual being by the name of Mara: everything below the level of the Brahmas, which includes the entire realm of desire, encompassing both the lower and the higher astral plane, as well as *prana* and the matter, according to my system of naming those levels. None of it is arbitrary or imaginary, but most of it is profoundly esoteric in nature and requires a significant degree of technical prowess to verify.

There was an incredible multitude of yogis in India throughout history, with a high degree of spiritual insight. A significant number among them had a great degree of physical authority of the world, meaning the material *siddhis*<sup>1</sup>. Why is it that so few of them actually recognized the Devil or his intent and purpose, as well as the true nature of this world? I would expect this to be a widespread achievement throughout history, but on a closer look that doesn't appear to be the case. In fact, only two appear to have independently understood the Devil and opposed him in a sensible and planned way. Those two are Shakyamuni and Jesus.

Buddha's entire philosophy can be reduced to the principle of “disentangle and/or spend all the spiritual momenta that you had invested in the world, and get out of here”. His approach is therefore to stop us from providing the power supply to the system, which would leave the Devil and his toys without energy, and in

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1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siddhi>



any case, powerless. Buddha calls the Devil Mara – he is a being who attempts to portray the negative and binding things as positive and thus cause attachment to the world and investment of our personal energy into the “matrix” of the world, either by attraction, or by intimidation. Mara's goal is therefore the status quo, where the beings would remain deluded and with their energy invested into the world. Whether he will attempt to achieve his purpose by bribery, by intimidation, by trying to convince you that he is God and Lord of the world and that you have no rights save what he grants you, or by saying that you are sinful and unworthy of enlightenment, is beside the point. Whether he will attempt to bind you by convincing you that this world is the ideal place for realizing your dreams and desires, a place where you will conquer your enemies, a place where you will achieve spiritual growth or a place to which you must return, either to repay some debt or out of compassion for those who failed to attain liberation, it is all the same to him. What matters to the Devil is that you stay. Whether you stay believing you're a slave and fearing your own shadow, or thinking that you're an enlightened *bodhisattva* on a noble mission of redemption of all beings, is quite irrelevant as long as your energy remains invested into this world.

What I wrote here is pure orthodox teaching of Buddhism, without much of my interpolation or interpretations. This is what the Buddhists believe about the demonic being by the name of Mara, and is almost a quotation from the Theravada canon. So why do I insist on talking about Satan? Because it is of paramount importance, and holds the key to the final liberation from the world. Without knowledge about Satan, it is possible to attain great spiritual heights, but if you don't know the truth about him, sooner or later he will trick you, he will deceive you with some spiritual concept or another, which will bind you to the world and turn the whole of your spiritual progress into fuel for great attachment and evil. The majority of the traditional spiritual teachings are the result of some trickery or another, which the Devil used to deceive this or that saint, who was spiritually more advanced than you are, with knowledge greater than yours, and who also, like yourself,

thought that devotion to God, truth and virtue will protect him. Do not delude yourself by groundless optimism. If Buddha and Jesus had serious problems with the Devil, enough so that they had to endure real temptation, he will not only have you for lunch, but he in fact already did, and when you think that you emotionally or intellectually oppose these ideas, it's in fact him having gas from digesting you.

The problem which arises when we analyze Jesus' attitude regarding the Devil is that Christianity is intellectually less explicit than Buddhism, and so one often needs to work his way through the imagery, vagueness and contradiction, but essentially, Jesus calls the Devil “the Prince of this world”<sup>1</sup>; he is aware that the Devil opposes him and interferes with him; he knows that the Devil seduces his disciples and tries to delude them into sin; he is aware that the world is under the authority of the Devil; that the majority of humans walk the path that leads them to ruin; and that only the few walk the path of salvation. He consciously and deliberately does probably the only thing that can redeem the world from the Devil's rule, if it is done right. The Devil obtained his rule over the world by some kind of an investment of his spiritual energy, in form of a personal sacrifice for the world: he sacrificed himself in the process of manifesting his ideas here, he entangled his spiritual essence into the foundations of this world and his energy is seamlessly intermixed with the energy of the world. One can redeem the world from the Devil only in the most indirect and least straightforward of ways: on one hand, his sacrifice for the world must be at least as great as the Devil's – his spiritual investment and expenditure must be as large – and furthermore, the sacrifice must be performed in such a way that the Devil sins against that person in a way that would outweigh the positive investment with which he “bought” the world. So essentially, the Devil must neutralize all the positive things he himself had done by doing the things that are at least equally evil, which is possible only if he acts against his equal or superior spirit,

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1 John 12:31, John 14:30

a spirit high, pure and blameless, and thus negate his original intent and vector. So it's essentially a dangerous gamble, and one who ventures into that must know absolutely everything about the esoteric "contracts" and the way spiritual forces interact as vectors. Those things are highly complex and it is easy to miss something important and fail. Apparently, that's what happened to Jesus because he failed and the Devil is still in the position of power. If Jesus dedicated his entire life to something, with his excellent understanding of the issues involved, used his own torturous death as a weapon, and still failed to achieve his goal, then we can clearly see the extent of the problem.

Satan, also known as Mara. The prince of this world. Sanat Kumara.

The Theosophy, which is, in my personal opinion, a vehicle created by the Devil in order to express his own philosophy, diligently works on the apotheosis of the Lucifer (with the personal name Sanat Kumara) and his promethean gift of spiritual energy to the beings of this world, and in essence creates a school of thought that is directly opposite to the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity, with the incredibly audacity to proclaim none other than Jesus and Buddha to be Lucifer's henchmen, the main spiritual branches and conduits through which his energy flows into the world. Apparently, if something is the greatest threat to the Devil, he modifies it and integrates it into the system, turning it to serve his purpose in a form of spiritual Aikido.

The name Sanat Kumara doesn't appear to be arbitrary. I wouldn't dismiss the possibility of it being some form or modification of the actual spiritual name of this being, which found its way into the different theologies and philosophies in various distorted forms. Of course, I'm not talking about the stories about the Kumaras written by Vyasa, which seem to be quite unrelated, but something significantly older, which he picked up and modified into serving his own philosophy and teaching, as seems to be the case with the

entire Bhagavata-purana, which recycles the older myths. What does “Sanat Kumara” mean? The usual translation is “eternal boy” or “eternal youth”, but in a very literal etymology it can be translated as “eternal, barely mortal”, or, in a more extreme rendition, “the eternal immortal one”. “Sanat” means “without origin”, “eternal”. “Kumara” means “boy”, but we can also split it into the prefix “ku”, which translates as “with difficulty”, or “barely, hardly”, and the root “mara” which is translated as “mortal”. I could play with naive etymology here but I don't think it would be productive. What I do find interesting is that the two names for the Devil, from the two completely unrelated and different religions, together form the name that the Theosophy uses to name the King of the world, whom they also call Lucifer, to remove any doubt as to whom they mean. It might be a coincidence, and it might also be an obscure wordplay by the Theosophists. What matters is that the being called Sanat Kumara by the Theosophy has the same qualities as the one Jesus calls the Prince of this world, whom the Bible also calls Satan, and whom Buddha calls Mara. Looking at the spiritual qualities of the being that is described in all cases, Buddha and Jesus are talking about the exactly the same person as I do when I talk about Sanat Kumara. There is a complete match. My assumption is that there might be something authentic about the name because it actually came into my mind in this exact form, “Sanat Kumara”, when I spiritually explored the boundaries of this world in 1998, and I asked around to ascertain its meaning, and only then did I come up with Theosophy and its interpretations. I actually got it independently, but didn't figure out the whole story until almost a decade later; initially, I saw nothing that contradicted the Theosophical narrative – this being was completely immersed in the world and was for all intents and purposes incarnated through it. I saw it as the Earth being his physical body; the Theosophists talked about Sanat Kumar<sup>1</sup> having Earth in his aura. None of my personal visions seemed to contradict what Theosophy was saying, so I accepted their narrative for the time being.

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1 Sanat Kumar is the Hindi form I prefer in common speech.

But to go back to the beginning of the story: why is such understanding so rare among the yogis? Seeing the manifestation of Sanat Kumara, even without any understanding of his true nature, seems to be incredibly rare. But understanding him as the Devil, understanding his true nature, that seems to be more rare than the snake's feathers. Why is nobody, save for the Buddha, providing a good description of the primary problem encountered by the seekers of liberation?

Let us understand one thing here: one huge and powerful spiritual entity coordinates all the binding forces with the goal of nobody getting out of here, and he has the almost-total authority on this world. This is a serious problem. Why is it not the cornerstone of Vedanta and Yoga?

I think the answer is rather unpleasant: none of those yogis truly attained liberation. The Devil found something he could present them with as a substitute, and they accepted, thus never really coming to the point of conflict with him, where they would be forced to recognize him as the problem. It is certainly possible that a significant number of the yogis had their battle with the Devil in silence and left the world without much drama, but I can only really comment on those who left the trail of writing behind them, and this written trail has very peculiar omissions.

## *Trikaya*

The Buddhist theory of reincarnation, reducible to the principle of birds of a feather that flock together, meaning that the beings reincarnate according to the resonant point of the qualities accumulated during their previous development and experiences, provides a very good explanation for practically all phenomena, except one, which remains unclear. It is the presence of the highly evolved, advanced souls on the physical plane.

If you read the Tibetan book of the dead carefully, you must have noticed how this world is the Mos Eisley<sup>1</sup> of all Creation – “the most wretched hive of scum and villainy”, as Obi Wan succinctly puts it. Anyone with any semblance of goodness and virtue would have stayed in *nirvana* or at least in heaven, and only the worst scum happens to be attracted to the Earth; in fact, it seems that the inhabitants of hell got most of their “training” here before finding an even worse hole to crawl into. So how do we end up with the fact of incarnation of Vyasa, Shuka, Buddha, Shankaracharya, Krishna or Babaji in this world of depravity, evil and sin? How does it happen that a being gets born here, who is since the earliest youth attracted to the spiritual matters, and considers the material goals irrelevant and uninteresting?

The answer to this question is of considerable complexity. As an explanation to this kind of phenomena Buddhism offers the concept of *trikaya*, the simultaneous existence of Buddha in the states of *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*.

*Kaya* means “body” in sanskrit, and so *dharmakaya* means “the body of *dharma*”, *sambhogakaya* means “the body of pleasure”, and *nirmanakaya* means “created body”.

*Dharmakaya* is the state of pure, transcendental buddhahood: a Buddha in the state of pure *nirvana*, untouched by attachments and transient phenomena such as life and death. *Sambhogakaya* is a form of a Buddha's astral existence, his existence on the astral

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1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mos\\_Eisley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mos_Eisley)

plane. This body contains joy, thoughts, ideas and teachings of the Buddha, therefore manifesting buddhahood as eternal joy and wisdom emanating from the state of *nirvana*. *Nirmanakaya* is the Buddhist name for an avatar: a physical body of a Buddha, a human incarnation which exists in physical space and time, to which buddhahood is not an eternal reality but something that needs to be attained via a process, through effort and labor.

The ocean of Dharma is thus manifested as the bliss of enlightenment and spiritual truth, and as a physical being which embodies the process of enlightenment within the physical matter; it is therefore born in an unenlightened state, strives toward enlightenment, attains it and then manifests it in the physical matter as the living Buddha, who thus binds all three states – *dharmakaya*, *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya* – into a singular entity which lives *nirvana* in a physical body, and represent a point of convergence toward which the other beings can focus their efforts. This singular, simultaneous existence in all three states is called *trikaya* (literally “three bodies”).

Buddhism is not the only one familiar with this concept – the Christian concept of Trinity, or simultaneous existence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is closely on trail of the concept according to which one God, manifested through different vehicles of the relative world, can appear as many. In His transcendental state He is the Father; manifested as the energy of blessing and inspiration He is the Holy Spirit, and manifested in physical form, as a man who goes through birth, spiritual path, enlightenment, manifestation of the enlightened state, and death, He is the Son.

The Buddhist concepts are extremely similar, since some of the paradoxes of incarnation of a transcendental spiritual entity, which remains transcendental despite incarnation, can for all intents and purposes be solved in no other way.

According to Buddhist theory, *nirmanakaya* is manifested because



of Buddha's compassion for the suffering beings. In order to properly explain what Buddhism means by compassion, it would be best if I quoted a tale from the life of Buddha.

One day a crying woman whose son died approached him, and tearfully begged him to use his supernatural powers to revive him. Buddha then, as the original text states, “felt great compassion” and told the woman to bring him some mustard from a house in which nobody ever died, and that he will use it to revive her son. The woman rushed to do as he said and started going from house to house, but of course it happened that every family lost someone at one time or another and she could not complete her task. After a while she understood how selfish her desire was, because death is a part of life and all beings eventually die. Then she returned to join Buddha as a disciple.

If that woman managed to understand the silliness of her selfish attachment, imagine what it must have looked like from the position of Buddha. When we look at it this way, Buddha's “compassion” is obviously closer to the famous Internet meme of Picard's facepalm, than what people usually imagine. Buddha's compassion is understanding that the beings, due to their attachments and stupidity, experience great suffering, while at the same time there is an ocean of bliss which is *nirvana*, and it is within their reach. The compassion of Buddha is therefore an aspect of *nirvana*, an intrusion of *nirvana* into *samsara*, or an attracting force with which *nirvana* guides the sufficiently mature beings toward itself, if they are ready to discard their petty attachments which they call by the noble names of love, compassion and the like, which obscure their true lowly and pathetic nature. The compassion of Buddha is not a samsaric force, unlike human love and human compassion, which out of ignorance create attachments to the passing things, and mourn their inevitable change. The compassion of Buddha is the song of the eternal, which echoes through time, symbolically portrayed in Hinduism as the flute of Krishna which calls the souls, deluded and tormented

by the ephemeral things of the world, and awakens them to the eternal realities of the spiritual world.

Of course, the higher motives for choosing a physical incarnation exist, in a less extreme form, also in the beings that are not yet Buddhas, but have outgrown the lowly attachments of the physical plane, and the motive for their incarnation in this world can be manifestation of some sophisticated aspect of virtue and goodness from the higher worlds. Such beings are also much more numerous than the living Buddhas. Still, without the understanding of the concept of *trikaya*, as an extreme manifestation of the principle, it is also impossible to understand the process of incarnation of the beings that are less than the Buddhas and more than the ordinary human souls, which are born in this world due to attachment, depravity and sin.

*Trikaya* is therefore the mechanism which explains the incarnation of the Enlightened one as simultaneous existence on several planes of being. This concept is further expanded on in Tibetan Buddhism, and so the process of incarnation of a *bodhisattva* is explained in a way that is not only completely foreign to the western thought, but to Hinduism as well – because in *vajrayana* Buddhism, a *bodhisattva* is never incarnated at all. A *bodhisattva* exists eternally in his transcendental state, and his compassion, which arises when he looks at the material world and the suffering of its inhabitants, creates a phenomenon known as “*tulku*”. A *tulku* is an artificial spiritual being, created by application of the spiritual force of a powerful yogi. Such a being is not a mere astral illusion – those are called “*tulpa*” – but a being which possesses a karmic body, desires and consciousness, and is incarnated as a man in the world of men, passing through birth, childhood, adulthood, old age and death, but which was created as a crystallization of will and intent of a *bodhisattva*, and in self-realization it knows itself as the *bodhisattva* who is never born and remains transcendental.

Depending on the needs of the physical beings, a *bodhisattva*

creates a *tulku* (in fact, often many of them at the same time) which is most useful to the beings in their present situation, possessing the qualities that are adjusted to the circumstances of the time. Sometimes a *tulku* will be a warrior-savior and the lawmaker, sometimes a holy guru, sometimes a cave yogi. The Dalai-lama is thus perceived to be a *tulku* of the Chenrezig, the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. This *tulku* is not an incarnation of the Bodhisattva, the way westerners understand the concept, but a reflection of his will and intent for the world, which takes body and throughout his life crystallizes “the tears of compassion” which Chenrezig cries looking at human suffering in *samsara*. Those tears are the holy teaching, holy example in action or a holy practice of yoga that leads toward liberation – sometimes, they are the holy beings such as Tara. This is the way the Tibetans perceive those things, and this is why they, for instance, happened to ask Milarepa whose incarnation is he, thinking that he came to be because some *bodhisattva* chose to bestow upon the humans a gift of the path of perfect yoga. Milarepa responded that he appreciates the intent behind the question, but that he considers the assumption harmful, because it implies preexistence of perfection – in fact, he responded, he is an example that even a sinful, lowly wretch, such as he was in the beginning, can with diligent practice of yoga come very close to enlightenment.

I don't see those two positions as mutually exclusive. From my own experience I know that for the largest part of my life I indeed perceived my own position as that of a lowly and wretched person who gradually, through the process of yoga, strives and touches the progressively more sophisticated states and attains enlightenment. However, in the attainment of the enlightenment it became apparent that my physical incarnation is in fact a *tulku*, or an *avatar*, which manifests the path from ignorance toward enlightenment in time, space and through a process, thus providing an example for the humans, manifesting the gifts of the Supreme through life and deeds of a limited, relative human being which strives toward the transcendental perfection. The *nirmanakaya*, therefore, does not necessarily have to know his true nature in any

part of his temporal existence; what matters is the vector, the direction, force of his desire for the Divine, the force with which he desires to touch the transcendental, because this force truly is God within the world, *nirvana* within *samsara*. In time, there are the beginning, the process and the end, and so *nirmanakaya* consists of ignorance, desire for knowledge and the attainment of knowledge. This temporal process is the gift of the Supreme to the humans, it is the path that is cut into the relative, material world by the force of Buddhahood, making it possible for the conditioned beings to gain insight into the nature of the goal itself.

Surely, only the rare beings will respond to the song of *nirvana* within *samsara* with burning desire, elation and acceptance of the challenge, and the majority will respond the same way in which the souls in the *bardo* react to the pure light of *nirvana*: with fear, terror and hatred. The only difference is in the fact that *nirmanakaya* has blood they can spill, and flesh they can cut and crucify, and so he gives them the opportunity to show their opinion of the Supreme Light in the physical matter. The karmic effect of such a choice is, of course, ultimately fatal.

*Nirmanakaya*, however, accepts neither merit for the enlightenment of those who choose to follow him, nor demerit for the destruction of those who choose to hate him. *Nirmanakaya* is but a shadow of the transcendental, its reflection in space and time, a trace it left in the flesh of the world, a passing shadow of the intangible eternity – *vajra* in the world, jewel in the lotus.

*Om, mani padme, hum.*