

Chapter VI

FROM THE FORM TO THE FORMLESS

When Jesus said no person comes to the Father except through Him, what He meant is not what most Christians understand Him to mean.

Jesus was God incarnate, God made flesh, and as such He is the form, the visible aspect of God. It is difficult for human beings to contemplate the formless God, God absolute. But through the vehicle of a form that we can perceive, we ultimately arrive at some aspect of the formless infinity of being.

Certainly we can understand that Jesus had every right to say that he is the *via, veritas and vita*, the way, the truth and the light. The mistake some Christians and other sects make, a misconception that has continuously been perpetuated for centuries, is when they insist that Jesus, or Shiva, or Kali is the only way to God, the only form we can contemplate.

For example, I may worship *Shiva*, one of the three *Hindu* gods that are said to have created the universe (along with *Brahma* the creator and *Vishnu* the maintainer -- *Shiva* is known as the destroyer) as the form through which, after much contemplation, meditation and scriptural study, I arrive at some understanding, comprehension and union with the divine formless God absolute. This process is clear enough to anyone who has actually practiced this method of worship. And the fact is that most, if not all, religious individuals do engage in this form of worship.

If, however, my practice of worshipping *Shiva* is misconstrued by individuals as idol worship, that judgment is mistaken; it is not, not anymore so than it is idol worship for a Christian to pray in front of a statue of Jesus Christ on the cross. I realize that the image of *Shiva* is not God -- and yet, at the same time *Shiva is God*, in the same way that Jesus is referred to as God the son, yet is not God the Father. The impersonal, absolute God cannot be envisioned by the senses, is beyond all human comprehension and intellectual speculation. The unknown cannot be defined in terms of the known. How can the limitless be limited? How can the infinite be defined in finite terms?

In recognition of this fact, we are well advised to keep our spiritual concerns firmly rooted in what we can know, what we can comprehend and fathom -- our own inner Self. Otherwise, we may delude ourselves, and rather than realize our true divinity within, we can end up pretending that we are a divine being, or that we know some secret about the divine which we actually don't know, because we want to be happy, our ego wants an answer when we don't have that answer yet.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are another holy trinity which grounds for us the conception of God absolute in terms of three conceivable aspects. God is the Father (the creator, in heaven, presumably, depicted anthropomorphically as an old man with a white beard), God is the Son (who could be called the destroyer like *Shiva*, in a biblical sense, as when Jesus says he comes to bring the fire and the sword) and God is the Holy Spirit (which in a sense could be likened to *Vishnu*, the sustainer, since the Holy Spirit is *shakti*, divine energy, upon which all life is dependent.) Here we have God as three, yet also one indivisible incomprehensible whole and thus beyond all human classification, delineation and depiction.

There are many seemingly paradoxical aspects of God when contemplated from a human perspective. For example, while God is within each of us, God is indivisible in each of us, too. It is not just a part of God that's within us, not that God has been broken up into little bits, a piece of God in each of us, but God is there in full in each of us. My *guru's guru* said, *God dwells within you as you*. There is a similar passage in Luke. While it seems that God in this analogy is many, God is, in fact, still one and unaffected by any of creation.

Therefore, it is well and good to envision and relate to God as a personal God with attributes, such as Jesus, Shiva, Buddha or the *guru*, and to pray to and meditate on God in this guise. And ultimately, we may come to the realization that the impersonal aspect of God, God absolute, is beyond all comprehension, beyond that *cloud of unknowing* that we may from time to time press upon in our spiritual quest, and at this point, we will have to discard all images, all intellectual conceptions and come to terms with ourselves in the here and now.

What is the reason we have been born? What is the purpose of life? No matter how confused, how errant we become, sooner or later we find ourselves asking these kinds of questions. The questions themselves, that we end up asking them at all, should be a hint to us that there is a reason, that there is a plan. Often, religions offer us creation myths as a way of answering these types of questions.

Here, in simple terms, is one such myth.

In the beginning, there was only God, only the one. Out of love, a great throbbing, pulsating urge, God desired to behold God. For that, God needed another. So God decided to create a being that could look upon God and see the glory and the majesty, see the beauty and the light. Thus, with a word, a great vibratory sound, the entire universe was set into motion. That being, that ultimate other, with the capacity to know God, to behold God and fulfill this sole purpose of creation, is a human being.

Now, a human birth is an extremely rare occurrence. In order for a human birth to occur, millions of years of evolution had take place, all from that one initial vibration. No matter how poorly some people may value human life, know this to be true.

Above all the creatures of the earth, a human being has been given the intellect, the mind and the body which can know its own Self in its totality. It is for this reason

that we have taken birth, it is to fulfill this destiny that we have been created. It is our duty, it is our goal to know our inner Self, and the sooner we get on with our mission in life, the happier and more peaceful and joyful and free from anxiety we will be.

It has been said that our lives are a great forgetting. We have forgotten our true Self, which is God, and instead identify with our limited self, our body and our mind and our ego, the *I* and *mine*, all of which are transient, all of which will pass away. In an attempt to deny this, we try to set our limited self up as a god.

Speaking of creation myths, in Genesis, in the Holy Bible, this is exactly what got Adam and Eve in trouble. The serpent promised them that if they ate of the Tree of Knowledge, they would become gods. What they got instead was the knowledge of diversity, a forgetting of the unity they formerly enjoyed. Then they were aware of their separateness, their nakedness, they forgot their true nature, their true Self (which was none other than God), and they were shrouded in darkness, in the great cloud of unknowing, and they lost Eden. This was the beginning of our collective acknowledgment of the *I* and *mine* in contrast to everything else, all of which is God, none of which is in reality different from us. This was the beginning of *Samsara* and therefore the beginning of *Nirvana*, too, since you can't have one polar opposite without the other.

So, now we must work to regain our birthright, to regain the garden of delight in union with our creator. Let us begin immediately, in the present, to realize our inner Self, and in doing so, recognizing the Self in all.

Unfortunately, most of us don't live in the present, in the now, but in the past or in the future. We either cling to memories of people, places, things or moments in the past, or in anxiety about the future, which is hope, dreams or fear. Yet neither is real; neither exists, except in our minds. The future is not yet here, the past is gone forever.

The vital moment, ripe with possibilities, is this very moment. To be alive to this very moment, moment by moment, without thoughts, without dreams, hopes or fears, neither rejecting or becoming attached to things as they arise, is to be truly alive, is life itself; it is the grand opportunity we have been given to embrace our divinity, our immortality. It is infinity of time and space, this moment and place when we become one with our inner Self -- when we realize that we are the creator in our own life, and the creator is our true Self, and that our true Self is God.

For in the silence and peace of deep meditation, in the ecstatic chanting of God's name, in the abandonment of dancing to God's glory, in a mountain vista and a raging river, in the serene contemplation of inner solitude, our inner Self is there, God is there.

Chapter VII

AVATARS, SAINTS AND DIVINE ENERGY

IT is said that those who do not learn the life lessons of experience are destined to repeat these same experiences again and again until they do learn the lessons. So listen to yourself -- if you find that you are saying things like -- "This always happens to me." "I always fall for the same type of guy." "That's just my luck." -- it probably means that you are stuck in this kind of cyclical pattern, and that it's time to start learning -- and changing.

It also seems that even after an individual, through hard experience, pain and suffering, learns a lesson, that particular bit of learning, knowledge or wisdom stops with that individual, and others who come after must enter into the same process and undergo the same trial and error in order to come to the same knowledge. This despite attempts to transmit wisdom and knowledge on the part of those who have gained it. In this regard, we hear all too often, "You can't tell him anything -- he's going to have to find it out for himself."

Admittedly, there is some transmittal of knowledge and wisdom, some advice which is heeded; some fortunate ones find a teacher, a leader, a master or a *guru* who is perfect, and they follow their instructions explicitly. However, as a rule, human kind seem to progress at an excruciatingly slow pace, if as a whole, we progress at all.

One would like to embrace a Utopian attitude and believe that we, as a species, can rise to a greater good, a more sublime and peaceful, loving and happy whole, yet the lessons of history seem to contradict this. How shall we then achieve the advancement of our species on the spiritual front? Through individual self effort, guided by true spiritual masters -- *gurus*, saints and *avatars*.

It is said that in every age, when the human condition becomes overwhelmingly debased and immoral, God sends an *avatar*, an incarnation of God on earth, to set things right again.

Of course, Jesus was such an incarnation, as was *Krishna*, and in more recent times, *Ramakrishna*. They and others, such as *Buddha* and *Mohammed*, all brought revolutionary teachings into their respective periods, transforming the moral and spiritual

landscapes, enabling countless numbers of individuals to obtain real love, peace and happiness in their lives. Followers of these saints and *avatars* benefited from their devotion in numerous ways: their faults were removed, their errors ceased, darkness and evil was obliterated in the lives, goodness and light prevailed, truth was revealed -- all this culminating in the grounding of the disciples in the here and now, their spiritual enlightenment and union with God.

Of course, *avatars* are very few and far between, and, as witnessed in the case of Jesus Christ, they are often not recognized and valued as such by the majority of people during their stay on earth. Sometimes they are abused and even killed. An Indian saint, *Mastur Mantana*, was executed for saying *I am God*, after he saw the immaculate vision of the *Blue Bindu*. In their absence, there are supreme teachers, *gurus*, *bodhisattvas*, perfected masters, self realized beings who can also effect a transformation in individuals far out of proportion to the effect a mere philosophy or a set of moral principals could generate. These individuals, similar to saints, are also rare beings.

Often a saint's ways seem strange to normal, average beings. They may appear mad, insane by society's standards. They may sleep on garbage heaps or wear fancy clothes. They may throw money away when it is given to them, yet beg for it when it is not offered. No matter how unusual these persons may appear to the casual observer, they may, in truth, be spiritually realized beings, with the power to ignite in others the amazing process of self realization through *Shaktipat diksha*, or initiation.

Therefore, we should keep our eyes open as we go through life, watching very carefully everything that is happening, without judgment, without either hope or fear, so that we will be ready and recognize people for who they really are. Jesus told us as much: Stay awake! Be thirsty!

These individuals we have been discussing, these avatars, saints and perfected *gurus*, have the power of *Shaktipat*, the ability to transmit divine energy to a disciple; through the process of self realization, they have consolidated and amplified their divine energy, God's grace, which is the active force of all creation. This energy is palpable -- real in every sense of the word. Christians call it the *Holy Spirit*; Chinese Buddhists call it *Chi*; Hindus call it *Shakti*, *Kundalini* and *Chiti*.

A readily available report of such a consolidation of energy, as well as supreme knowledge of its quality and quantity, can be found in The Gospels of the Holy Bible. There are many examples of Jesus' command of God's grace. Here is one of them.

Jesus was walking through a town. By this time, even though He always told the people that He had healed not to reveal how they had been made whole again, His fame had spread through Judea. So as He walked, His disciples surrounded him and walked down the street together, to protect Him from being mobbed by crowds of people seeking healing, grace and absolution.

A woman desperate for forgiveness of her sins crawled on her hands and knees underneath the disciples and touched the hem of Christ's garment from behind.

Immediately upon her touching his clothing, He exclaimed, "Who touched me?"

His disciples replied somewhat incredulously, "It must have been one of us, our being so close to you as we move along."

"No," Jesus said to them, and then again, "Who touched me?"

The woman arose and stood before Jesus, admitting that it had been she. Because of her honesty, sincerity and faith, Christ did not take back the grace she had received by touching him, but admonished her, exhorting her to "Sin no more."

From this story, we get a glimpse of the power and divine energy He possessed and how well He was aware of its quality and *quantity* within himself.

Once this energy is transmitted to us by such a being directly, through another means such as the sacrament of The Holy Eucharist, for example, or if it is bestowed by the *guru*, it works a miracle of transformation within us, and under these circumstances, if we are pure at heart and the ground of our desire for spiritual union is fertile, if we practice our religious disciplines and adhere to the *guru's* commands which purifies us and prepares the soil, it continues to grow and burn within us, until our *samskaras* and *karma* is obliterated, and we glow in the light of the truth. In this regard, no effort, no grace is ever wasted. If we do not realize the inner Self in this life, but do put forth earnest effort towards that goal, it is said that we will reincarnate in a better circumstance in the next life, we will take a more propitious birth, so we can continue with increased speed on the path that leads to union with God, the fulfillment of our lives, the realization of the all pervasiveness of the true inner Self.

Chapter VIII

NOTHING TO ACCEPT OR REJECT

In order to find God, in order to become aware of our inner divinity, there is no necessity to make long pilgrimages, to visit holy places, to travel to high mountains or hidden valleys, because God exists within each of us. It is more than enough that we visit the holy shrine in our hearts and the thousand petaled lotus in the crown of the head, the *sahasrara*, in meditation.

Once we envision God within ourselves, our own inner Self, we realize that God is outside as well; God permeates every animate and inanimate object in the universe. In this sense, it is perfectly all right to visit holy places, too. The cumulative effect of the religious practices and acquired grace in such places cannot help but enhance the experiences of a receptive seeker.

From this world view which sees all as God, a greater, deeper and more sincere compassion and charity ensues in us, and real love is possible. With this understanding, this knowledge borne of actual experience and the attendant wisdom, the sanctity of every sentient being becomes obvious, so one can no longer abuse and kill any living thing. It becomes obvious that to harm or abuse another is to harm or abuse one's Self, to abuse God.

This is the beginning of seeing unity where diversity was previously perceived. The snake we saw and feared is discovered to be nothing but a rope. We realize that there is nothing in others that should excessively attract us or repel us -- when all is God, what is there to accept and what is there to reject?

Since we are now not rejecting or accepting anything, not judging anything or trying to get to any particular place that we think is *good* or *right*, since we are now taking things as they come and dealing with everything, we naturally become more interested in everything, too, and use everything that comes up as stepping stones to even deeper experience, greater understanding of the world. Because there is nothing faked any longer, no pretense attempted.

Having found everything within ourselves, we are now not running away or running towards anything in particular, and of course, we have found the truth because

we are practicing the *yoga* of meditation, or the *yoga* of *bhakti*, of devotion, which is naturally purifying our bodies and fulfilling our goal of self realization. Due to our practices and the grace we have received from the *guru*, things that tend to cloud our vision (our petty affections, addictions and obsessions) fall away. Temptations hold less sway over us. We become established in the *witness consciousness*, which is our inner Self, even when not practicing *yoga*. We realize the natural benefits of virtue without having to feign spirituality, without having *to try* to be good. We see the necessity for truth, honesty and integrity from within. We understand the necessity of telling no lies, stealing not even the most insignificant thing; refraining from sexual misconduct, not poisoning our bodies.

We conduct ourselves within the guidelines of judicious moral precepts, yet it is a natural, moderate path, without severe austerities. We practice right conduct in order to perceive the light of God within us in full splendor, and in order to accomplish this, we must surrender ourselves to God, we must die to our limited sense of self, our ego consciousness, so that God will be revealed to us, just as a clean window lets all the rays of the sun through and it itself become transparent, it actually disappears, while a dirty window diffuses the light, lessening its intensity and drawing attention to its dirtiness.

Certainly, in the course of our daily affairs, it is necessary to work, to provide for our material needs -- food, clothing, shelter; we must earn our daily bread, in order to fulfill our destinies and not incur debt. And this world is a competitive arena, to be sure. Still, it is not right conduct to gain unfair advantage over another, to desire power or control over another, to strive for position or praise or wealth. And it is a travesty to work for money, power, position or fame, neglecting spirituality in the process.

Just as we must control our bodies and our minds, we must not desire more than we must have to survive, we must not desire to possess an ever increasing abundance of things -- we will prosper, if it is God's plan, but certainly not at the expense of others, not by exploitation or greed. And of course, if we prosper, we must give part of our fortune to those less prosperous than ourselves.

The reason Christ states that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven is not because wealth, abundance or riches in themselves taint a person, but that most rich people have gotten affluent by desiring riches, and those desires corrupt a person and usually result in their spiritual downfall. In fact, this well known saying of Jesus' is often misinterpreted in light of the following information.

It seems that in ancient Jerusalem, there were seven gates by which one could gain access to the city, and each one had its own name. One of the gates was called *The Eye of the Needle*, because it was a very low gate, just high enough for a man, and if you wanted to bring a camel into the city means of this gate, the camel, with great difficulty, had to kneel down on all four legs and crouch quite low, barely able to pass in this fashion. But it could be accomplished with great effort.

Just as a lack of possessions does not necessarily imply a lack of desire for them in an individual, the possession of wealth does not necessarily presuppose a desire for it either. It is relatively easy to understand how a celibate person may harbor the most lustful desires in their heart, and no one would claim, knowing this person's secret thoughts and longings, that this individual was enlightened and free from lust.

More difficult to understand is how a person can be surrounded by riches and yet not be desirous for them, not be greedy or proud. There is an interesting story to illustrate this point.

Once there was a disciple who traveled to a distance principality to take instruction from a renowned perfected master at the request of his father. When the disciple arrived at the sage's domicile, he was shocked to find the great *guru* sitting on velvet cushions, surrounded by golden chalices and plates, being waited on by a number of servants and enjoying a sumptuous, lavish meal.

After years of practicing renunciation and severe austerities, the disciple could not fathom the state the *guru* was in and began to deride him.

"How can I learn anything from you, one who lives in such luxury?" The *sannyasin* exclaimed.

The sage replied, "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the state you find me in is a result of my *karma*, and in truth, I remain unaffected by it.

To this the skeptical *sannyasin* said, "If this is the case, accompany me to the jungle, without any possessions, and there you can teach me your knowledge, if you can endure it, of course."

Thus, they went out together into the dense jungle without any provisions or possessions. After traveling for a good part of the day, the *sannyasin* told the *guru*, "OK, we'll stop here and rest. You sit here and wait for me, and don't do anything, and I'll go into the jungle and find us some food."

The sage agreed.

Soon after the disciple had departed into the deep forest, a large caravan happened to come out of the jungle and pass near the clearing where the master was sitting in meditation. It was the king's caravan on a hunting expedition. The king, astride his elephant, recognized the *sadguru* instantly, as the *guru* was known throughout the land as *The Guru of the Kings*, and he ordered his entourage to halt.

An hour later the disciple returned to the spot where he had left the *guru*, carrying a few nuts and some roots. He was amazed when he found the sage, once again, reclining on velvet cushions, drinking from golden goblets, and dining on a resplendent meal, being attended to by all the king's servants.

As the disciple approached the *guru* in disbelief, the sage reminded him of his previous statement. "You see, it is as I told you before. This is my *karma*, the result of past actions, my destiny, and nothing I will for myself in the present. And I truly do remain unaffected by it."

Upon hearing this again, the disciple now understood the greatness of the *guru* and the mysterious workings of *karma*, and humbly agreed to take lessons from him.