

DIVERSITY – UNIQUENESS - UNITY

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“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God (Truth)”, said Jesus. Purity of heart and mind are essential conditions for those who are on the path of Truth. We all believe that there can be only one God or one source. We all come from that one source and we all return to that one source. All the great sages or masters drink from the same source and bring water from the same source. They all speak from that same foundation. All religions come from the same source. Different religions give different names to it and describe it in a unique way. Each great sage has a unique understanding of that source and unique expression of that source. It appears as if they are different from each other and these differences cannot be reconciled. So far religions have lived apart, each one enclosing in its own boundary and often trying to expand into other boundaries and thus becoming the source of conflict and violence. Today, thanks be to God, we are in a world of inter-religious dialogue where serious efforts are being made to reconcile religions. Though these efforts have not yet produced concrete results yet it is an admirable call.

In this article an attempt is made to show the common spiritual journey in three religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. It wants to show that: 1. The starting conditions of each of these spiritual traditions are different. 2. Each of these spiritual traditions had unique experience of that Source 3. At the Source of each of these three spiritual traditions there is an essential unity. It does not try an elaborative scientific explanation but an intuitive synthetic presentation, which calls for an elaborative study. Though these three religions are different from each other yet we can see common elements in them. Today I divide religious traditions into two categories: Wisdom Tradition and Prophetic Tradition. Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism belong to Wisdom tradition and religions like Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam and Bahai belong to Prophetic Tradition. Each tradition has its unique approach to the Truth. This division helps us to understand the uniqueness of each spiritual tradition and also the differences between the spiritual traditions.

THE UPANISHAD SAGES AND HINDUISM

I would like to take the teaching of Mandukya Upanishad and Chandogya Upanishad of Hinduism in order to present the common spiritual growth in the above said three religions. (Each Upanishad has a unique approach to the Truth even though the essential Truth of all Upanishads is the same, the identity of Atman with Brahman). These two Upanishads present the nature of truth or reality in four levels of consciousness. The first level is called waking consciousness, the second level is called dreaming consciousness, the third level is called deep sleep consciousness and the fourth can be described as awakened consciousness. The first three levels have both physical and spiritual aspects.

1. the Waking consciousness, physically, means to be in a state of physical wakefulness. It is the state of consciousness from the time we get up from bed and to the time we go to sleep. Here our senses are awake. As a way of living, waking consciousness means a state of life in which we identify with our physical body and live to satisfy only our physical desires and ambitions. Everything that we do is motivated to

satisfy the needs of our body and the senses. We can say that in waking consciousness our senses are awake and indulge in their satisfaction. Here our identity is with the body: I am my body. We can describe this level as individual mind or consciousness.

2. the Dreaming consciousness, physically, means the time when we go to bed and enter into a state of dreams and to the time when the dreams come to an end. Spiritually it means living our life according to dreams, ideals. In this consciousness we have ideals and ideal persons. In general these ideals and ideal persons are taken from the past. We are inspired by the great personalities and their ideals and wish to imitate them. We place our body and senses under the guidance of these ideals and ideal persons. Here the past enters into the present and goes to the future. The present is just a vehicle for the past to go to the future. The present does not have its own life but allows the past to live in and through it. Here the present is at the service of the past even though some changes can be made now and then as reformation. The present is not free. The present receives its identity from the past. All the religious ideals belong to the dreaming consciousness. Here our identity would be: I am a Hindu, I am a Buddhist, I am a Jew, I am a Christian, I am a Muslim, I am Bahai, etc. We can call this consciousness as collective mind or collective consciousness. This collective consciousness unites us with some and divides us with the others. This consciousness has a boundary to protect and also a possible mission to expand. Here a person's life is guided by the moral code of that particular religion.

3. the deep sleep consciousness, physically, means a dreamless sleep state. It is a state from the time when the dreams stop to the time when the dreams begin. Spiritually it means a state in which the dreams come to an end, dreams in the sense of ideals and ideal persons. It means the past comes to an end. When the past comes to an end the future also comes to an end, as the future is nothing but the continuity of the past. In this freedom from the past and the future, the present becomes original and creative. It connects itself to the eternal present and manifests eternity in the present. Here one's identity is not with the body or with the ideals but with the eternity. A person will say: I am (not divine I AM). We can describe this level as Universal Mind or Consciousness. In this consciousness there are no ideological boundaries. This 'I am' transcends all the boundaries. It has no boundary to protect and so no mission to expand. It invites people to transcend the collective consciousness and enter into universal consciousness. It is all embracing consciousness. In this consciousness a person is not guided by the external moral code but inner realization. Whatever this person does to the others he or she does to himself or herself.

4. the Awakened Consciousness is a consciousness where a person realizes being one with the Brahman or Atman or God. A person declares: I am Brahman (aham brahma asmi). We can call this level as the unitary consciousness or Non-dual consciousness (advaita). Here one's identity is: I AM (I AM WHO I AM of the Bible). This I AM is Real and eternal and the other three are described as UNREAL or non -eternal. Our call is to go from the UNREAL to the REAL. We have the famous prayer in the Upanishads, which says: Lead me from the unreal to the Real,

from darkness to Light
from death to Eternal Life.

According to these two Upanishads a person begins with the first level of consciousness and then slowly has to move into the fourth level of consciousness. It is a

long journey. In Chandogya Upanishad, Prajapathi, the spiritual teacher or guru, guides his disciple Indra to realize this truth. For Indra it takes total years of 101. The first stage 32 years, the second stage 32 years, the third stage 32 years and the fourth 5 years. It is a symbolic number to show that the journey is hard and long. One needs to have strong determination, dedication, self-enquiry and devotion to the master and to the truth. One should not settle down on the way like Virochana, who was satisfied with the first stage. Hence everyone has four bodies: the physical, the ideological, the universal and the unitary. Sacred scriptures belong to the second level. A person who moves into the universal consciousness is greater than the scriptures. Mundaka Upanishad speaks of two types of wisdom; Paravidhya (higher wisdom) and Aparavidhya (lower wisdom). *Paravidhya* is the direct experience of Truth and *Aparavidhya* is indirect understanding of the Truth. Even the four Vedas (the revealed truth) belongs to the lower wisdom. Paravidhya is non-dualistic experience (*advaita*) and aparavidhya is dualistic experience. We begin with aparavidhya and move into paravidhya. The Upanishad sages were universal spirit. They cannot be put into any label like Hinduism. Hinduism is a system of beliefs. But the sages were beyond beliefs.

BUDDHA AND BUDDHISM: I take the analogy of the four levels of consciousness of the Upanishads and interpret the spiritual journey of Buddha and different bodies of Buddha in Buddhism. Hinduism and Buddhism are like sister religions. There are some concepts like *Karma*, *Reincarnation*, *Dharma*, *Sannyasa*, which are common to both Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddha rejected the over intellectualism of the Upanishads, the violent animal sacrifices of Vedic rituals, the social caste system which gave dominant place to the Brahmin caste. He opened the possibility of spiritual life to every one including women. He rejected the authority of the Vedas and rejected the division of life into four stages like *brahmacharya* (spiritual student) *grhastha*(family life), *vanaprasta*(hermetical life) and *sannyasa*(wandering life). He advocated immediate renunciation to everyone who is ready to renounce the world at any time. But there are also many similarities between them. We can see four important stages in the life of Buddha.

1. Siddhartha, the man: Buddha began his life as Siddhartha. Siddhartha was the son of a local king. Siddhartha was the individual consciousness of Buddha. It was his waking consciousness. He tried to find fulfillment in his physical desires and ambitions. But he was not satisfied. He felt something was missing. He left his wife, his son, his parents and his kingdom and went on in search of freedom.

2. Siddhartha, the seeker: After leaving his wife, child and home Siddhartha became a seeker. He tried to follow different types of spiritual path, which existed at that time to find what he was looking for: inner freedom and peace. We can say that he was living in the dreaming consciousness, perusing ideals and ideal persons. He was not yet original as he was imitating others. But he was disillusioned by these practices, which brought him even to the point of physical death. We can call this as the dreaming consciousness of Buddha.

3. Siddhartha becomes Buddha, the awakened: Disappointed with his practices he sat under the Bodhi tree in deep meditation, which opened him to the universal mind or consciousness. He moved beyond the past and the future. He moved into eternity and tasted the timeless reality. From that eternity he saw the passing moment of time, which

is the product of desire. He achieved freedom, *nirvana*. He became awakened, the Buddha. This universal consciousness was before Siddhartha. Buddhism says that Siddhartha was not the first one to realize this truth. Before him there were many others who realized it. Siddhartha was not the only Buddha he is one of the Buddhas. In this level Siddhartha entered into the Deep Sleep Consciousness and became an original person who proposed his own original way to the Truth. He did not repeat some one's discovery or truth. He became an original teacher and spoke from his own inner authority.

4. Siddhartha established in Wisdom, Buddhi: Siddhartha was not only awakened (Buddha) but he was also established permanently in that awakened consciousness. He was ever wakeful. He was in the permanent state of unity. This experience of Buddha we can call as unitary consciousness or non-dual consciousness or advaita.

So we have Siddhartha the man, individual consciousness, Siddhartha the ideal pursuer, the collective consciousness and Siddhartha, the Buddha, the awakened, deep sleep consciousness and Siddhartha, the Buddha, established in wisdom, unitary consciousness.

Buddhism speaks of three bodies (Kayas) of Buddha: the *Nirmana Kaya* (physical), the *Sambogya Kaya* (universal) and *Dhamma Kaya* or *Dharma Kaya* (the Ground). We can also add one more body, which is the body of his teachings. We can call it *dhmma kaya*, with small 'd'. Hence Buddha has four bodies or four levels of consciousness.

1. *Nirmana Kaya*, which is the physical body of Buddha, Siddhartha. But Buddha's body also extends to the whole physical universe. The whole universe is the physical body of Buddha.

2. *dhmma kaya*: *dhmma kaya* is the teachings of Buddha. It is the spoken words of Buddha and recorded in the history. It becomes the source and authority to Buddhism.

3. *Sambogya Kaya* is the universal body of Buddha. It is beyond time and space. It is the universal consciousness of Buddha. Universal consciousness is the bridge between *Dhamma Kaya* and the *dhmma Kaya* and *Nirmana Kaya*. *Samboghya Kaya* is not limited by the teachings. It is the Word from which all the words or teachings come. This Word cannot be put into words. The Word is like the infinite space and the words (teachings) are the space with the four walls.

4. *Dhamma Kaya* is the eternal aspect of Buddha. It is greater than *Samboghya Kaya*. *Dhamma Kaya* is like the hub of a wheel. It is the foundation of all the bodies. It holds all the other bodies and transcends them. We can call this as unitary consciousness or the non-dualistic consciousness.

If we take the symbol of a tree, the leaves represent *Nirmana Kaya*, the branches represent *dhmma Kaya*, the trunk represents *Sambogya Kaya* and the roots represent *Dhamma Kaya*. There is only one tree but manifesting in four levels.

Dhamma kaya (the branch) is greater than *Nirmana Kaya* (Siddhartha, the leaf) as it lives longer than physical Siddhartha. *Samboghya Kaya* (the trunk) is greater than *dhmma kaya* as it supports the teachings (branches) but is not conditioned by it. *Samboghya Kaya* can modify the expressions of *dhmma kaya*. *Dhamma Kaya* (the roots) is greater than *Samboghya Kaya* as *Samboghya Kaya* is manifested body and *Dhamma Kaya* is unmanifested body. Hence Buddha cannot be limited to his physical body and to his teachings. He is not confined to his teachings. He is greater than his

teachings and he has power even to change it. The primary role of Buddha is to invite people to grow into *Dhamma Kaya* not just to establish *dhamma kaya* (a body of teachings). The body of teachings is like a boat that one uses to go beyond river of *samsara* into *nirvana*.

CHRIST AND CHRISTIANITY:

We can also see four important stages in the spiritual journey of Jesus.

1. Jesus, the Man. The first stage of Jesus was his physical birth and physical identity. He was a man. As a physical body he had an individual consciousness of his own. This was his waking consciousness.

2. Jesus, the Jew: After his circumcision Jesus became part of Jewish collective consciousness. He was not only a man physically but also a Jew. As a Jew he was united with all the Jews but separated from the non-Jews, the so-called Gentiles. As a Jew he had the Law, the Torah as his ideal and great personalities of his tradition like, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses as his ideals and he might have tried to imitate them. Jewish belief structure was his dreaming consciousness. In this stage Jesus was not original as he was still belonged to his spiritual tradition and gave continuity to it. Here he was guided by the moral code of his religion. But he began to realize the limitations of his religion. He was not satisfied. That brought him to the third important moment of his life: his baptism.

3. Jesus the Christ, the Son of God: At the moment of his baptism Jesus moved away from the collective consciousness of Judaism and entered into the Universal mind or consciousness. He realized himself as the Son of God, which can be understood as the universal consciousness and experienced the New Covenant, the Law within or Truth within. Here his identity was just "I am", which was freedom from the past and the future. He went beyond the Torah and said: It is written in you Law but I say unto you. He became free and original. He proposed his own way and the Truth. He became an authority based on his experience. We can say that at the moment of his baptism Jesus came out of his dreaming consciousness (Judaism) and entered into the Deep Sleep Consciousness. Here he could say: I am the way, the truth and the life. The Son of God is the bridge between God and the people.

4. Jesus Christ identical with God: Jesus moved one step higher and realized himself as being identical with God: I and the Father are one, he declared. He established himself in that eternal identity with God. This was his fourth level of consciousness.

We can also say that Jesus has four bodies. The first one is Jesus of Nazareth, the physical body (Nirmana Kaya or waking consciousness). It appeared two thousand years ago and ended after thirty-three years of his earthly life. The second one is his teachings (dhamma kaya or dreaming consciousness), which are two thousand years old and continue to guide a large section of humanity today and the third is his universal body (samboghya kaya, the risen Christ), which is not confined to time and space but present everywhere. This universal body was before his physical body and teachings. The final, the fourth one, is his unity with the Father, God, (Dhamma Kaya). St. John says: "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word

became flesh and dwelt among the people.” God manifested everything in and through that Word. Jesus’ teachings are higher than his physical body as they last longer than his physical body. His universal body (Word) is higher than his teachings as we cannot reduce the Word into words, to his teachings.

The Son of God is not identical with his teachings. He can even change his teachings according to the situation in which he gives his teachings. His divine identity is higher than his universal body because the universal body still belongs to the level of manifestation. The Word was God. His divine identity is foundation of all the other three levels like the hub of spokes. Jesus came from God and returned to God. In Christianity we say that Jesus is hundred percent divine and hundred percent human. He is hundred percent human in the lower three levels and he is hundred percent divine in the fourth level. This applies to the Upanishad sages and Buddha. The Upanishad sages were hundred percent divine in the fourth level of consciousness so that they were able to say: aham brahma asmi- I am Brahman. But they were also hundred percent human in the lower three levels so that they would pray to lead them from the unreal to the real. The same applies to Buddha. He was hundred percent divine in his Dhamma Kaya and he was hundred percent human in the lower three bodies.

Individual Sages and Universal Mind: We need to distinguish between the individual sages of the Upanishads and the Universal mind. The individual sages, as physical bodies, are not identical with the universal consciousness. The universal consciousness was there before the individual sages. It manifests through them but it does not exhaust in them. It is for this reason that the same truth is communicated through each sage in a unique way. Each Upanishad explains the same truth in its unique way. No sage has the lost word on it. Interestingly the Hindu Tradition does not give much importance to the physical bodies of these sages. There is not much worship and veneration of the Upanishad Sages. The emphasis is on their teachings and on the eternal-Brahman and Atman.

Siddhartha and Buddha: we also need to make a distinction between Siddhartha and Buddha. They are not identical. Buddha consciousness is before Siddhartha. Buddha manifested in Siddhartha but does not exhaust in Siddhartha. Siddhartha has entered into the consciousness of Buddha but Buddha is greater than Siddhartha. There were many persons who were awakened to Buddha consciousness before Siddhartha. Siddhartha was not the only Buddha but one of the Buddhas. Even though in Buddhism the emphasis on finding Nirvana, there is also much veneration and worship to physical form of Buddha.

Jesus and Christ: The same principle applies to Jesus also. We need to make a subtle distinction between Jesus and Christ. Jesus, as a physical body, is not identical with Christ, the universal consciousness. Christ Consciousness was there before Jesus. Christ Consciousness manifested in Jesus but it does not exhaust in Jesus. Jesus, as a physical body, has the beginning and the end but Christ as the universal consciousness has no beginning and end. Jesus, as a body, is one leaf on the tree. Christ is the trunk. The leaf has entered into the consciousness of the trunk but it is not identical with it. There are also so many other leaves the trunk has. But it seems that in Judaism this experience has no precedence. No one had this experience before Jesus. He was the first one to claim this

experience and for that reason he was in difficulty with the spiritual authorities of his tradition. He was crucified for blasphemy.

Diversity, Uniqueness and Unity

In the first level of consciousness, which is the physical level, the Upanishad Sages, Buddha and Christ are different. It seems that the search of the Upanishad sages began during the period where belief in the efficacy of Vedic rituals was declining and there was economic prosperity in which people had time and leisure to ask fundamental questions of life. We know that Siddhartha was born in the royal family. He was born 500 years before Christ. He renounced everything and went in search of freedom. After his enlightenment he became an itinerant missionary who dedicated his life to help sentient beings to find freedom from samsara. He died in a good old age. Jesus was born in Palestine, which was under Roman occupation. He was born to a carpenter family. His people were looking for a Messiah who would liberate them from Roman oppression. After his enlightenment he began to preach his message of the kingdom of God. His teaching became controversial. He was accused of blasphemy and met a violent death in the prime of his life. The starting conditions of Siddhartha and Jesus were different but the essence of their discovery seems to be identical though the manifestation and emphasis are different. In the third level of consciousness, which is universal consciousness, the Upanishad Sages, Buddha and Christ are essentially one. The universal consciousness is like the Trunk. There is only one Trunk. In the second level of consciousness, which is dreaming consciousness, they are all unique. Their backgrounds are unique and their manifestations are unique. The Upanishad Sages manifested their discovery in a unique way, Buddha manifested his discovery in a unique way and Jesus manifested his discovery in a unique way. Though they discovered the same source their emphasis and manifestations are different. The way we encounter the Universal consciousness depends on the questions with which we make our journey.

The Upanishad Sages were preoccupied with the Eternal: “What is that by finding which we find everything and what is that by knowing which we know everything” was their question. The answer they found was Brahman and Atman. “What is the source of suffering and how to be free from suffering” was the question of Buddha. The answer he found was freedom from Desire. “How to establish a just society where there will be love, freedom and equality” might have been the question of Jesus. The answer he found was the kingdom of God, the radical love of God and the radical love of neighbour. In the fourth level of consciousness, which is the unitary consciousness, the Upanishad Sages, Buddha and Christ are all essentially one. There is no essential difference. This unity is not based on concepts, which is artificial which will be gone once a person changes his ideas, but it is essential unity.

Inter-religious Dialogue: In the inter-religious Dialogue our focus is on the teaching body of the Upanishad Sages, Buddha and Christ. This belongs to the second level of consciousness. It is not possible to arrive at a consensus at that level. We tend to imprison the Sages, Buddha and Christ in their teachings. We are looking at the trunk and the roots with the eyes of a leaf and a branch. We need to have a radical change in our perspective. We need to move away from their teaching body into their universal body and the unitary body. We need to look at the leaf, at the branch and at the trunk from the roots, only then we see the uniqueness of each branch and leaf and also their limitations.

It helps us to find creative answers to the questions that we are asking today. It means we need to liberate the Upanishad Sages from their teachings, we need to liberate Buddha from his teachings and we need to liberate Christ from his teachings. The Upanishad Sages are not identical with Hinduism. Buddha is not identical with Buddhism and Christ is not identical with Christianity. The Universal Mind is one. It has manifested in a unique way in the Upanishad Sages, it has manifested in a unique way in Siddhartha and it has manifested in a unique way in Jesus. It is the same Universal Mind that has been enlightening them and manifesting in them. But its manifestation has not exhausted. It will manifest itself in a unique way for our times. For this we need to make our journey with our own specific questions. We need to have a pure mind and pure heart; a mind and heart that are willing to free themselves from the conditionings and become a virgin so that they can give birth to the original and creative truth. "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God (Truth)".