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## XI. Religious Scripture

### 1. The Origin of Religious Scripture: Transcendental and Revealed *Vedas*

Indian: “The *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, and the rest. They are the breath of the eternal” (Br. Up.\* 2:4.10, p. 144; cf. 4:5.11). “The Lord, the revealer of Self-knowledge, who in the beginning created Brahma and delivered the *Vedas* to Him” (Svet. Up. 6:18).

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) presented a radically new idea that differentiates between the earthly *Vedas* which are Indian scriptures, and the transcendental *Vedas* which are the spiritual laws and truths (Latin Veritas), discovered by the Divine Incarnations, prophets and sages of all the religions of the world in a supersensuous state of consciousness. These laws and principles exist eternally in the transcendental realm (many believe in the mind of Brahman-God). Eternal spiritual Divine laws are complete, permanent, and changeless, unlike their earthly representatives. As Vivekananda brilliantly puts it, “The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the *Vedas*. They hold that the *Vedas* are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the *Vedas* no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.”<sup>1</sup> The *Vedas* as revealed in religious and philosophical scripture are knowledge acquired by the ancient Sages (Rishis), “by the subtle, supersensuous power of yoga.”<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda emphasized, “All these *Vedantists* also believe the *Vedas* to be the revealed word of God, not exactly in the same sense, perhaps, as the Christians or Mohammedans believe, but in a very peculiar sense. Their idea is that the *Vedas* are an expression of the knowledge of God, and as God is eternal, His knowledge is eternally with Him, and so are the *Vedas* eternal.” “Every one of the great religions in the world excepting our own, is built upon such historical characters; but ours rests upon principles. There is no man or woman who can claim to have created the *Vedas*. They are the embodiment of eternal principles; sages discovered them.”<sup>3</sup> “Now as to the *Vedas*, the Hindus believe that they are not mere books composed by men in some remote age. They hold them to be an accumulated mass of endless Divine wisdom, which is sometimes manifested and at other times remains unmanifested.... The Rishis were only the discoverers of the Mantras or Eternal Laws; they merely came face to face with the *Vedas*, the infinite mine of knowledge, which has been there from time without beginning.” “Knowledge exists eternally and is co-existent with God. The man who discovers a spiritual law is inspired, and what he brings is revelation; but revelation too is eternal, not to be crystallised as final and then blindly followed.” “Whether you are a dualist, or a qualified monist, an Advaitist, or a Vishishtadvaitist, a Shuddhadvaitist, or any other Advaitist, or Dvaitist, or whatever you may call yourself, there stand behind you as authority, your Shastras, your scriptures, the *Upanishads*. Whatever system in India does not obey the *Upanishads* cannot be called orthodox.”<sup>4</sup>

The Swami continues, “This mass of writing called the *Vedas* is not the utterance of persons. Its date has never been fixed, can never be fixed, and, according to us, the *Vedas* are eternal. There is one salient point which I want you to remember, that all the other religions of the world claim their authority as being delivered by a Personal God or a number of personal beings, angels, or special messengers of God, unto certain persons; while the claim of the Hindus is that the *Vedas* do not owe their authority to anybody, they are themselves the authority, being eternal—the knowledge of God. They were never written, never created, they have existed throughout time; just as creation is infinite and eternal, without beginning and without end, so is the knowledge of God without beginning and without end. And this knowledge is what is meant by the *Vedas* (*Vid* meaning to know).”<sup>5</sup>

His brother disciple Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) emphasized, “All sectarian religions, you will notice, have their founders, but Sanatana

Dharma [Eternal Religion, Vedanta] has no founder. It is based upon the eternal spiritual laws which govern the souls of all humanity. These spiritual laws are not man made. All other laws that govern our physical conditions might have been made by human beings, but the spiritual laws which govern our soul-life, are eternal. These laws are the fundamental principles of Sanatana Dharma. Therefore we call our religion eternal (Sanatana).”<sup>6</sup>

It was ascertained by Origen of Alexandria, Egypt (c. 185-254) that the scriptures, which exist in heaven are eternal. “Moses handed down through the ‘shadow’ of the law.... that which is a copy and shadow of heavenly things.... In heaven will truly exist what is called the ‘Eternal Gospel’,” which is the Eternal Law (Heb. 8:5, 10:1; Rev. 14:6).<sup>7</sup> “In the kingdom of heaven all the saints shall live by the laws of the ‘Eternal Gospel’.... [Christ the Lord] shall duly transfer all the saints from the temporal [earthly] to the Eternal Gospel.”<sup>8</sup>

The Muslim Asharites Kalamitic theologians of Iraq (beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> century) held that Divine speech, i.e., the *Qur’an* is an eternal attribute of God. “They made a distinction between the outward and concrete expression of the *Qur’an* in language, and the real, self-subsistent meaning of it, and hold that the *Qur’an*, as expressed in words and sounds, is, no doubt, temporal ... that the *Qur’an* in its meanings is uncreated and eternal. The ‘self-subsisting meaning’ eternally inheres in the essence of God. These meanings are expressed; their expression in language is temporal and created.... They further maintained that this meaning is an attribute other than knowledge and will and, as such, inheres eternally in the essence of God and is, therefore, eternal.... The *Qur’an* is ‘knowledge from God’; it is, therefore, inseparable from God's attribute of knowledge which is eternal and uncreated. Hence it is also eternal and uncreated.”<sup>9</sup> The heavenly *Qur’an* is written for all eternity, while the earthly *Qur’an* that is read, written and recited is created and temporal (hadith).

Thomas Aquinas designated, “The Divine Intellect is the measure of things, since each thing has truth in it in so far as it is like the Divine Intellect.... Consequently the Divine Intellect is true in Itself, and Its exemplar is truth Itself.” “No one can know the Eternal Law as it is in Itself, except God and the blessed who see God in His essence. But every rational creature knows It according to some reflection, greater or less. For every knowledge of truth is a kind of reflection and participation of

the Eternal Law, which is the unchangeable truth.” “All laws proceed from the Eternal Law.... All laws, in so far as they partake of right reason, are derived from the Eternal Law.” “All that is in things created by God, whether it be contingent or necessary, is subject to the Eternal Law, while things pertaining to the Divine Nature or Essence are not subject to the Eternal Law, but are the Eternal Law itself.” “All things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the Eternal Law, as was stated above, it is evident that all things partake in some way in the Eternal Law.”<sup>10</sup>

Aquinas adds that Divine Law is derived from Eternal Law as it expresses itself through revelation. It directs people to their supernatural end of eternal happiness. The Law of the *Old Testament*, and the *New Testament* Law of love accompanied by the grace of Christ, constitute the Divine Law.<sup>11</sup> “The end of every law, and above all of Divine Law, is to make men good.... Therefore, the love of the highest good, namely God, above all else makes men good, and is chiefly intended in the Divine Law.”<sup>12</sup> The Divine Law expressed in the scriptures is necessary, “since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness which exceeds man’s natural ability ... it was necessary that, in addition to the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God.... that man may know without any doubt what he ought to do and what he ought to avoid.”<sup>13</sup>

A Presbyterian (in the Calvinist tradition) Principal at Princeton University, Archibald Hodge (1797-1878) made the distinction between revelation and inspiration, both used by the writers of the Holy Scriptures. “God providentially produced the very man for the precise occasion, with the faultless qualities, education, and gracious experience needed for the production of the intended writing.... The writers were the subjects of a plenary Divine influence, called inspiration, which acted upon them and through their natural faculties in all they wrote, directing them in the choice of subject and the whole course of thought and verbal expression, so as while not interfering with the natural exercise of their faculties, they freely and spontaneously produce the very writing which God designed ... This inspiration differs, therefore, from revelation.... in that revelation communicated objectively to the mind of the writer truth otherwise unknown. While inspiration was a Divine influence flowing into the sacred writer subjectively, communicating nothing, but guiding their faculties.”<sup>14</sup> Possibly some people who write religious books and articles are inspired but to a lesser degree.

There is a correspondence between the Transcendental *Vedas* and Aquinas' Eternal Law and the Earthly *Vedas* and his Divine Law. He brings out three important ideas. First, the Divine Essence and the Eternal Law (Transcendental *Vedas*) are identical. Second, all human law and morality is a reflection to various degrees of the Eternal Law (Transcendental *Vedas*). Third, all things are subject to being ruled and measured by the Eternal Law (Transcendental *Vedas*). Aquinas wrote, "All that is in things created by God, whether it be contingent or necessary, is subject to the Eternal Law, while things pertaining to the Divine Nature or Essence are not subject to the Eternal Law, but are the Eternal Law itself."<sup>15</sup> "All things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the Eternal Law, as was stated above, it is evident that all things partake in some way in the Eternal Law."

What Vivekananda calls the *Vedas*, the Christians refer to as the *Veritas Aeterna* (English Verities Eternal) as the Eternal Truths (or Principles or Laws). (Notice the similar sound of *Vedas* and *Veritas*). Prophets and rishis were able to make some contact with these Transdenominational heavenly forms or archetypes that are the thoughts of Brahman-God. These exemplary ideas are the source of the eternal spiritual laws that form the bases of the higher aspects of the religious scriptures of the world. The Vedic Rishis (Seers) in a spiritually exalted state made contact with the beginningless and endless transcendental *Vedas* and brought portions of them to Earth becoming the Holy Scriptures. Similar to the universal laws of logic and principles of mathematics they are always valid. Not limited by time, place, personality, or religious denomination through which they are expressed, the eternal spiritual laws are impersonal, immutable, universal principles. Divine Incarnations, prophets, and sages of the various religions discovered the Eternal Laws of religion (through spiritual insight), and Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein discovered some of the laws of physics (through intuitive reason). This knowledge is revealed in the scriptures of other religions and philosophies to varying degrees. Aspects of this knowledge were also revealed to Western philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Origen, Plotinus, Aquinas, Eckhart, and others. Possibly the highest Divinity manifests personally as the living Brahman-God and impersonally in three ways: As the spiritual law which is objectified in the sacred scriptures that direct a person to Brahman-God, the cosmic law that creates and maintains the universe, and the prescriptive and normative moral and social law. Revealed scriptures are sacred because they are partial manifestations of the heavenly

scriptures.

It should never be forgotten that religious scriptures are derived from the spiritual experiences of their transmitters. Religious experiences (contact with Divine Beings or scripture) precede the revealed scriptures as their foundation. The source of revelation is the Father in Heaven for Jesus Christ, an archangel for the Prophet Muhammad, an angel, or a heavenly being. Different Divine sources are apt to disclose to some extent different revelations.

In its transcendental aspect, this eternal knowledge represents the universal religion of which each earthly religion is a partial representation. Higher and more sublime truths found in the various scriptures (*Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Tipitaka, Bible, Quran, etc.*), are imperfect representations images, or reflections of these Eternal Truths.<sup>16</sup>

There are differences between the heavenly and earthly scriptures. For example, the earthly Gospel's speak of the shortcomings of humans and their deficiencies, which would not be necessary in the Heavenly Gospel. Also, at times earthly scriptures contain material that is not of Divine origin (Smriti). Could we say any part of scripture that discusses human weakness is an "Intermediate Scripture" since in the higher world these blemishes do not exist?

Just as revealed scriptures are sacred because they are partial manifestations of the heavenly scriptures, so also Vivekananda mentioned all human sacred languages (e.g., Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, Latin, Pali) are a lesser form of the Divine language (See Chapter VI, Section 2. Creation from Divine Spoken Words).<sup>17</sup> Languages like Sanskrit have the advantage that they do not change over the centuries like other languages do.

Divine disclosures of revelation occur primarily through sacred scriptures and secondarily through the teachings of an inspired religious philosophers, theologians, and commentators; traditions of a particular church, and personal religious experiences.

## 2. Religious Scriptures are Eternal and Infallible Divinely Revealed Truths

Indian: "This eternal yoga I [Lord Krishna] taught to Vivasvat: Vivasvat taught it to Manu ... Thus, handed down from one to another, it became known to the royal sages" (BG 4:1-2).

Old Testament: "The Lord said to Moses ... I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for

their instruction” (Ex. 24:12). “Everything that I command you ... you shall not add to it or take from it” (Dt. 12:32; cf. 4:2; 29:29). “Whatever God does endures forever” (Eccl. 3:14). New Testament: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mk. 13:31; Mt. 24:35; cf. Mt. 5:18; Lk. 16:17; Rev. 22:18-19). “All scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). “No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20).

The Hindu Purva-Mimamsa religious philosophy systematized by Kumarila (620/50-680/700), conceives of the Divine not as a Personal God but as religious scripture, the *Vedas*, a Sanskrit text. Paul J. Griffiths from the University of Illinois, Chicago denotes, “More precisely and fully: some Indian thinkers came to understand a particular set of Sanskrit vocables [words as sound vibrations] as eternal and authorless and as a sustaining feature of the universe, a feature without which an ordered universe could not continue to exist and without which coherent human thought could not occur. These vocables, moreover, contain a set of injunctions to action typically, but not only, to sacrificial action whose proper performance is essential to the maintenance of the order of the universe. Finally, the vocables in question are not written objects, not graphs on paper or palm leaf. They are, rather, vibrations in the air; their written representations are helps to the memory, aids to the possibility of vocalization, but are not themselves the sacred sounds.” These scriptures are uncreated in the transcendental realm from which they originate. They are a collection of chants more than a written text. The interpreter may be in error, but the *Vedas* are impeccable since they have no author. The relation between a word and its meaning is nonconventional, a structural and necessary feature of the universe.<sup>18</sup> In our view the transcendental *Vedas* (of which the earthly *Vedas* are an imperfect copy) are Brahman-God in another form.

Shankara (c. 688/788-720/820) stressed that the Vedic-Upanishadic scriptural testimony is the ultimate authority concerning the supersensible reality, which lies beyond the scope of human sense perception and inference. “Brahman is the yoni (i.e., the material and efficient cause) of great scriptures ... possessed of all good qualities as they are, cannot possibly emerge from any source other than an all-knowing One.... The scriptures, viz. the *Rig Veda* etc., just enumerated, are the valid means of knowing the real nature of Brahman.”<sup>19</sup> The revelation of the Vedic-Upanishadic scriptures (Shastras) is derived from

Saguna Brahman (Personal God). Only an omniscient being could be the source of this great repository of spiritual wisdom, which could never have originated from the human intellect. The eternal spiritual wisdom and religious principles that are called the *Vedas* are infallible ideas in the mind of God. Being of transcendental origin, they are the breath of Brahman (God) that express the thoughts in His consciousness. *Vedas* are the self-luminous wisdom that contain the principles derived from the transcendental existence. They are an unchangeable and eternal source of religious knowledge. *Vedas* are intrinsically self-validating, self-consistent and never contradicted by other forms of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> “It is the eternally composed and already existent *Vedas* that are manifested like a man’s breath—without any thought or effort on His [Brahman’s] part. Hence they are authority in regards to their meaning, independently of any other means of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> “Since the *Vedas* are eternal and a source of knowledge, they can reasonably reveal as their subject-matter something which is (well established and) unchanging; and the knowledge arising from them can be true, so that no logician, past, present, or future can deny it. Hence it is proved that the knowledge arising from the *Upanishads* is alone the true knowledge.”<sup>22</sup>

Along these lines, Nyaya theologians, particularly Udayana (950/1050-1060/1100) designated that the *Vedas* are universal, inclusive, all encompassing, and without a temporal beginning or a historical founder. The *Vedas* are the Word of God, a revelation of the Divine Intelligence, the transcendental knowledge that is not known by inference or empirical perception. Mrs. Aruna Goel in her clarification of Nyaya theology adds, “The individual self cannot be the author of the *Vedas*, since the supramundane realities and the transcendent principles related in the *Vedas* cannot be objects of knowledge of any ordinary individual. Hence the author of the *Vedas* must be the supreme person who has a direct knowledge of all objects, past, futures and present, finite and infinitesimal, sensible and supersensible. That is the *Vedas*, like other scriptures, are revealed by God.”<sup>23</sup>

As Ramanuja (1017-1137) stated it, “Scripture which rests on endless unbroken tradition, cannot therefore be suspected of any, even the least imperfection, and hence cannot be non-authoritative.” “A theory which rests exclusively on arguments derived from human reason may, at some other time or place, be disestablished by arguments devised by people more skillful than you in reasoning; and thus there is no getting over the objection founded on the invalidity of all mere argumentation.



The conclusion from all of this is that with regards to supersensuous matters, Scripture alone is authoritative, and reasoning is to be applied only to the support of Scripture.”<sup>24</sup> “Brahman being raised above all contact with the senses is not an object of perception and the other means of proof, but is to be known through Scripture only.” On the other hand, “Scripture, although not dependent on anything else and concerned with supersensuous objects, must come to terms with reasoning (tarka); for all the different means of knowledge can in many cases help us to arrive at a decisive conclusion, only if they are supported by reason.”<sup>25</sup>

It was written by Madhva (1190/1238-1276/1317), “A person who has not studied the *Vedas* or who has no clear understanding of the *Vedas*, cannot know the Perfect Being, who is all knowing and also the creator of all. This creator of the world is knowable only by the *Upanishads*.”<sup>26</sup> “It is impossible to imagine any inadequacy (or defects) in the *Vedas* which are eternal and impersonal (apauruseya) being that the *Vedas* are intrinsically valid. Their validity does not depend on ascertainment or agreement with some other knowledge or upon the realization of the fruits of results mentioned therein.”<sup>27</sup> Madhva’s views on this subject as explained by Surendranath Dasgupta are, “It is only by the *Vedas* that one can know the nature of God. The *Vedas* are not produced by any human being; unless the transcendental origin of the *Vedas* is admitted, there can be no absolute validity of religious duties; all ethical and religious duties will be relative.... The *Vedas* exist in their own nature and have been revealed only to the sages, and their validity does not depend on anything else; for, unless this is admitted, we can have no absolute criterion of validity and there will be an infinite regress. Their validity does not depend on any reasoning; for good reasoning can only show that the process of thought is devoid of logical defects, and cannot itself establish validity for anything.”<sup>28</sup>

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) emphasized, “The correct meaning of the statement ‘The *Vedas* are beginningless and eternal,’ is that the law or truth revealed by them to man is permanent and changeless.”<sup>29</sup> “The mass of knowledge called the *Vedanta* was discovered by personages called Rishis, and the Rishi is defined as a Mantra-drashta, a seer of thought; not that the thought was his own. Whenever you hear that a certain passage of the *Vedas* came from a certain Rishi, never think that he wrote it or created it out of his mind; he was the seer of the thought which already existed; it existed in the universe eternally. This sage was the discoverer; the Rishis were spiritual discoverers.” “All these questions,

whether there is an immortal soul, whether there is a God, whether there is any supreme intelligence guiding this universe or not, are beyond the field of reason.... All our ethical theories, all our moral attitudes, all that is good and great in human nature, have been molded upon answers that have come from beyond the circle.”<sup>30</sup> Brahman’s (God’s) infinite knowledge cannot be confined to a single religious book.

Vivekananda’s brother disciple Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) explained, “The *Upanishads* are the most wonderful books. One should learn Sanskrit in order to be able to grasp their true meaning. They are a concise statement of all the great truths of the universe. Every line is the expression of a mind that has realized. Those who gave them out had realized God, and he who has realized God is the same as God Himself. Those great seers were the embodiment of purity, so they were able to perceive all Truth.”<sup>31</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) remarked, “Man is directed to God as, to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason.... Hence, it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by Divine revelation.... For the truth about God, such as reason can know it, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors; whereas man’s whole salvation which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they be taught Divine truths by Divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that, besides the philosophical science investigated by reason, there should be a sacred science by way of revelation.”<sup>32</sup> Theology differs from philosophy primarily in its acceptance of Divinely revealed truths, as the starting point of metaphysical knowledge. It begins with God as He revealed Himself to creatures, while philosophy attempts to rationally ascend in the reverse direction from creatures back to God. Theology surpasses all other sciences in its degree of “certitude, because other sciences derive their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which can err, whereas this derives its certitude from the light of the Divine knowledge, which cannot not err.”<sup>33</sup> If the conclusions of philosophy contradict the Christian revelation then their premises are incorrect and/or their arguments are fallacious. Revealed theology is the most practical of all sciences since it concerns an individual’s final and ultimate

end, which is to attain perfect happiness in the next life through the supernatural end of the vision of God.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) taught that a “Theology of the Cross” strives to know the true nature of God and His relationship to humans. “Reason knows that there is a God. However, it knows neither who the true God is nor what He is like.... So there is a great difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who He is and what He is like.” “Philosophers and Aristotle are not able to understand or to define what the theological man is, but by the grace of God we are able to do it, because we have the *Bible*.” “What God thinks of us, what He wants to give and to do to deliver us from sin and death and to save us-which is the particular and the true knowledge of God-this men do not know.”<sup>34</sup>

The French-Swiss leader of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin (1509-64) stressed that the *Bible* is the Word of God confirmed by its: Divine authority, dignified subject-matter, “majesty of its style, antiquity of its teaching, sincerity of its narrative, miraculous accompaniment, predictive contents authenticated by fulfillment, continuous use through so many ages, and its sealing by martyr’s blood.” “The heavenly nature of its doctrine, which never savors of any thing terrestrial, the beautiful agreement of all the parts with each other ... the peculiar property of the scripture, appears from the insufficiency of any human compositions, however artificially polished, to make an equal impression on our minds.... you turn your perusal of the sacred volume, whether you are willing or unwilling, it will affect you so powerfully, it will so penetrate your heart, and impress itself so strongly on your mind, that compared with its energetic influence, the beauties of rhetoricians and philosophers will almost entirely disappear, so that it is easy to perceive something Divine in the sacred scriptures, which far surpasses the highest attainments and ornaments of human industry.”<sup>35</sup>

It was articulated by Lutheran Scholastics that internal intrinsic proofs for the validity of scripture include, “material simplicity, dignity, and gravity of the text, together with formal attributes of perfect holiness, truth of a statement without admixture of error, and the sufficiency of the scriptural revelation for salvation.” “Extrinsic authenticity points to the antiquity of the scriptures and their doctrines, the obvious gift of profound knowledge to the human writers of scripture to which they themselves would have had no natural access, the many miracles attending the production and preservation of the text, and the Divine purpose or mission to which the Scriptures testify and to the

furtherance of which they contribute.” After the texts were written we have the external proofs of “the holiness and constancy of the martyrs and the conservation and [successful] propagation of the Word in history.”<sup>36</sup>

The dialectical theology of Karl Barth (1886-1968) the Swiss Protestant theologian, denotes that God is the revealer, the revelation and the act of revealing. “For the Christian the revelation is itself the proof, the proof furnished by God himself.... This act of revelation is a token of his Being and the expression of his nature.”<sup>37</sup> A religion should be centered around what God tells us about Himself in the Holy Scriptures, and not what humans say about Him. God speaks to us through revelation; His Word is the founder, preserver and ruler of the church. “As the self-offering and self-manifestation of God, as the work of peace which God himself has concluded between himself and man, revelation is the truth beside which there is no other truth.”<sup>38</sup> There is a subordination of “all human concepts, ideas and convictions to the witness of revelation supplied to us in scripture.”<sup>39</sup> Speculative human reason cannot grasp the essence of God or the supersensible realm. Even the most debatable parts of the *Bible* surpass what human judgment could ever articulate about theological issues.<sup>40</sup>

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) emphasized that religious “experience is not the source from which the contents of systematic theology are taken but the medium through which they are existentially received.” “Saints are persons who are transparent for the ground of being which is revealed through them and who are able to enter a revelatory constellation as mediums.”<sup>41</sup> “The Prophet always speaks from the vertical dimension and does not care about what happens on the horizontal dimension.... out of the vertical there comes a new horizontal line, that is, a new cultural actualization of the Prophetic word.”<sup>42</sup> Revelation is a manifestation of divinity that has been previously hidden, which imparts new meaning to human existence. It is the extraordinary disclosure of hidden truths, which cannot be acquired by means of the ordinary ways of gaining knowledge. Jesus as the Christ was the “bearer of the final revelation” because he was able to “surrender his finitude—not only his life but also his finite power and knowledge and perfection.” He became “completely transparent to the mystery he reveals” being “united with the ground of his being and meaning without separation and disruption.”<sup>43</sup>

Swami Vivekananda makes the following statement, “Krishna is not

the authority of the *Vedas*, but the *Vedas* are the authority of Krishna himself. His glory is that he is the greatest preacher of the *Vedas* that ever existed. So with the other Incarnations; so with all our sages.”<sup>44</sup> Do the transcendental heavenly scriptures surpass the Divine Incarnation, prophets, sages, etc? Many devotees consider an Incarnation of Brahman-God such as Krishna or Jesus Christ to be greater than their teachings. One might consider the Divine Incarnation as a personal manifestation and the *Vedas* as an impersonal manifestation of Brahman-God of equal importance.

It is generally held that the scriptures are a product of Brahman-God. From another perspective Brahman-God and the scriptures (including the eternal truths) are the same entity. If the transcendental *Vedas* are eternal (nitya), without beginning (anadi) and not a product of human authorship (apaurasheya), then are they not Brahman (God) in an impersonal form? But this does not apply to the earthly *Vedas* that are only an approximation (or images, reflections) of the transcendental *Vedas*. Similarly all of the religious scriptures of the world only approximate the Eternal Truths (Latin Veritas). Sri Ramakrishna said Brahman is beyond the scriptures.<sup>45</sup>

Why does the revelation of one religion differ from that of another? Religious scriptures are a mixture of an eternal gospel derived from the transcendental religion, and a limited revelation made at a particular time and place in the historical process. All religions are an imperfect image or reflection of the transcendental religion. One religion disagrees with another, due to the fact that their revelations are limited, partial, and incomplete expressions of these eternal truths.

According to the Indian “Loka Concept,” Divine Incarnations, prophets, and Buddha’s descended from different realms (lokas) of the Divine world and hence teach a message that differs to some extent. For example, the Christian Loka is different from the Muslim Loka. Consequently, it is possible that a Divine Incarnation or prophet who is born on earth descending from one loka, might teach religious doctrines that vary to some extent from Incarnations-prophets descending from other lokas. Though there is much more agreement between religions than most people realize, they obviously differ on some ideas. Nevertheless, it is possible that one revelation originates from a more sublime plane of Divine existence than another.

When a Divine Being incarnates He not only becomes a human being (“the Word became flesh,” John I:14), but by free choice, He becomes a

person born into a specific religious cultural milieu at a particular time in history. This is necessary so that the Incarnation-prophet can convey his message in a way that will be properly understood by the people. Every Divine Incarnation, prophet, and sage we have a record of was to a large extent, a product and reflection of their own religious environment and historical contexts. Religious scriptures that are based on the interpretation of the spiritual experiences of great souls are somewhat culturally conditioned by the pre-existing ideology, historical events, and linguistic background of the recipient. Their message embodies the eternal spiritual truths, which are adapted to the prevailing ideology of their society and to the needs of the time. They create a new spiritual path to Brahman-God, but that path begins within the beliefs, concepts, logical categories, language, moral system, rituals, and practices of the society in which they are born into, and ends in the heavenly realm. Christ's path ends in the Christ world and the Krishna path in the Krishna world (loka).

The leading traditional Indian, Jewish, and Christian thinkers are in basic agreement on the Divine origin and infallibility of revealed aspects of religious scriptures. Spiritual truths are pre-eternal existing in a transcendental realm before a Divine Incarnation, prophet or sage makes them known to humanity.

### 3. Interpreting the Scriptures

Shankara considered the limits of human reason acting independent of scripture, in interpreting religious matters. "For reasoning that has no Vedic foundation and springs from the mere imagination of persons, lacks conclusiveness. For man's conjecture has no limit." Nevertheless, reason when used as an auxiliary to and based on revelation, is a tool for understanding and defending the meaning of the scriptures and for explaining what they are communicating. "Logic conforming to the *Upanishads* is alone resorted to here as a subsidiary means helping realization."<sup>46</sup> Over the centuries sages in an exalted supersensuous state of direct mystical experience (anubhava), have validated the teachings of the Vedic *Upanishadic* revelation. Lower level scriptures (Smritis) are to be accepted if they agree with the *Upanishads* and rejected if they contradict a Vedic text.<sup>47</sup>

Swami Vivekananda pointed out that some scripture carry more authoritative weight than others. "We know that in our books a clear distinction is made between two sets of truths. The one set is that which

abides for ever, being built upon the nature of man, the nature of the soul, the soul's relation to God, the nature of God, perfection, and so on; there are also the principles of cosmology, of the infinitude of creation, or more correctly speaking--projection, the wonderful law of cyclical procession, and so on--these are the eternal principles founded upon the universal laws in nature. The other set comprises the minor laws which guided the working of our everyday life. They belong more properly to the Purânas, to the Smritis, and not to the Shrutis. These have nothing to do with the other principles. Even in our own nation these minor laws have been changing all the time. Customs of one age, of one Yuga, have not been the customs of another, and as Yuga comes after Yuga, they will still have to change.”<sup>148</sup> “Next to the Vedanta [*Upanishads*] come the Smritis. These also are books written by sages, but the authority of the Smritis is subordinate to that of the Vedanta, because they stand in the same relation with us as the scriptures of the other religions stand with regard to them. We admit that the Smritis have been written by particular sages; in that sense they are the same as the scriptures of other religions, but these Smritis are not final authority. If there is anything in a Smriti which contradicts the Vedanta, the Smriti is to be rejected—its authority is gone.... These Smritis, as mainly regulating the manners and customs of the nation, had also to be changed from time to time. This is a point I specially ask you to remember. The principles of religion that are in the Vedanta are unchangeable. Why? Because they are all built upon the eternal principles that are in man and nature; they can never change. Ideas about the soul, going to heaven, and so on can never change; they were the same thousands of years ago, they are the same today, they will be the same millions of years hence. But those religious practices which are based entirely upon our social position and correlation must change with the changes in society. Such an order, therefore, would be good and true at a certain period and not at another.” “The Smritis, *Puranas*, *Tantras*--all these are acceptable only so far as they agree with the *Vedas*; and wherever they are contradictory, they are to be rejected as unreliable.”<sup>49</sup> “Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvelous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The *Bible*, the *Vedas*, the *Koran*, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded.”<sup>50</sup>

Concerning multivalency (many interpretations), there is a hierarchy of interpretations of the religious scriptures that could be described as sattvic, rajasic, and tamasic. For example consider Jesus' statement, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33). Swami Prabhavananda relates, "This passage has been interpreted to mean that love for God will bring material benefits. It is perfectly true that the Lord watches over his devotee and provides his necessities of life. But to worship God in order to obtain fulfillment of material desires is to use him as the means for worldly ends. It is a degeneration of religion. What is added unto the man who depends entirely on God? Spiritual benefits: purity, divine love, and eternal joy."<sup>51</sup> What is added is what the Apostle Paul referred to as "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

Indian texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita* cover many themes and cannot be reduced to a single subject. D. Jeste and I. Vahia found that applying computer software to the *Bhagavad Gita* translation by the Indian scholar Swami Nirmalananda Giri (2007) yielded ten domains as follows: Knowledge of Life (28 verses), e.g., differentiate the perishable (material) from the imperishable (spiritual) things; Emotional Regulation (20 verses), e.g., equanimity, joy, and sadness are treated similarly; Control over Desires (20 verses), e.g., self-restraint, moderation, detachment from desire, and renunciation; Decisiveness (20 verses) and lack of doubt; Love of God (19 verses) and faith in God; Duty and Work (14 verses) in society; Self-Contentedness (13 verses) from detachment; Yoga or Integration of Personality (12 verses); Compassion and Sacrifice (8 verses); and Insight and Humility (7 verses). Of course, other translations would give us a list that differs somewhat from this one. This list totals only 161 of the *Gita's* 700 verses (23%), so additional themes are possible.<sup>52</sup>

There is the Indian idea of Yuga Dharma that some dharmas have limited scope and authority and are valid for one historical period (yuga) and not another. This particularly applies to those aspects of religion dealing with social interactions, law, ethics, custom, and so on.<sup>53</sup> Vivekananda states, "Even in our own nation these minor laws have been changing all the time. Customs of one age, of one Yuga, have not been the customs of another, and as Yuga comes after Yuga, they will still have to change. Great Rishis will appear and lead us to customs and manners that are suited to new environments."<sup>54</sup> The ancients thought of Yuga



Dharma lasting for hundreds of thousands of years, but Vivekananda realized that Yuga Dharma (or sub-Yuga Dharma) changes over far shorter periods of time.

Vivekananda made the point that, “You may pray for the salvation of the modern skeptics, but they do not yield, they want reason. The salvation of Europe depends on a rationalistic religion.”<sup>55</sup> In the Euro-Asian Middle Ages scriptural revelation predominated in the Abrahamic religions and Hinduism. But in modern times Vivekananda had to emphasize reason, since that is what the atheist and agnostic will accept. Vivekananda’s message to the West differed to some extent from what he taught the people in India. In the Middle Ages, the religious audience for the intellectuals consisted primarily of well-educated priests and monastics. It is different today, and so the way the message is presented must change somewhat.

For Origen of Alexandria, “There are three ways in which the meaning of the Holy Scriptures should be inscribed on the soul of every Christian. First, the simpler sort are edified by what may be called the ‘body’ of scripture. This is the name I give to the immediate acceptance [the literal interpretation]. Secondly, those who have made some progress are edified by, as it were, by the ‘soul.’ Thirdly, the perfect ... are edified by the ‘spiritual’ Law, which contains the shadow of the good things to come. Thus just as a human being consists of body, soul, and spirit, so also does the Scripture which is the gift of God designed for human salvation.”<sup>56</sup> “There is the doctrine that the scriptures were composed through the Spirit of God and that they have not only the meaning which is obvious, but also another which is hidden from the majority of readers.... while the whole law is spiritual, the inspired meaning is not recognized by all, but only by those who are gifted with the grace of the Holy Spirit in the word of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) (as interpreted by Joseph Blau), “The *Bible* was written in this fashion in order to convey some impression of the reality or God to the common people. God had to be described in a way that would show even the most unlearned that He exists.... To assert that God has physical attributes like those of man is equivalent to saying that God has needs and lacks, and is therefore imperfect, which is obviously incorrect.... A naive and literal reading of the Bible leads to a false notion of God.”<sup>58</sup> Moses Maimonides point is well taken. In all religions of the world, a great deal of scripture had to be

written to be understandable by the great mass of common people who were not well educated. This presents a problem in correctly conveying the higher abstract philosophical and theological truths of religion. All Divine Incarnations, Buddha, prophets expressed their ideas through the vocabulary and concepts of the society in which they lived. This was necessary to make their teachings understandable to these people.

John Calvin's "Doctrine of Accommodation" indicates that God adjusts His revelations "according to our capacity for understanding them, not according to what they are."<sup>59</sup> He "assumes a form we are able to bear." Though God teachings are accommodated to different ages, the doctrines and requirement of worship remain the same over the centuries. Christ makes his teachings understandable to both, the most intelligent and to ordinary people. If God "wished to speak in his own language ... would mortal creatures have been able to bear it?" "If we heard God speaking to us in His majesty, it would be useless to us, for we would understand nothing. Therefore, since we are carnal, He has to stutter or otherwise, He would not be understood by us." He veils Himself in earthly symbols that our limited mental capacities can bear. *Old Testament* prophets saw God "not in all His reality and greatness, but in accordance with ... which He accommodated to the capacity of man." Moses "did not so perfectly see God such as He is in Himself, but so far as the human mind is capable of bearing."<sup>60</sup> Vivekananda concurred stating, "Even if a book were given by God which contained all the truth about religion, it would not serve the purpose because nobody could understand the book."<sup>61</sup> The Apostle Paul wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Paul Tillich made it clear that, "The biblical message cannot be understood and could not have been received had there been no preparation for it in human religion and culture." The preceding revelation through the prophets of Israel was a concrete preparation for the final revelation in Jesus as the Christ. "God in his self-manifestation to man is dependent on the way man receives his manifestation." He "acts through men according to their nature and receptiveness." The writings of all prophets and mystics are expressed in the language of the intellectual tradition from which they came. "The biblical theologian, to the degree to which he is a theologian (which includes a systematic point of view), does not present pure facts to us; he gives as theologically interpreted facts."<sup>62</sup> If the original revelation loses the potency to create new associations with the prevailing culture, it may be terminated and superseded. There is an

inseparable relationship between revealed knowledge and the historical situation. Traditional religious symbols and the language and categories of the *Bible* and the Church Fathers, often do not speak to modern people nor do they motivate them. These ideas and symbols must be revived by modern interpretations.<sup>63</sup>

We learn from the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, that certain truths were hidden until they were Divinely revealed by Jesus and the prophets. Though we lack absolute comprehensiveness of this knowledge, though the gift of God some people attain some understanding of the mysteries. Yet, the hidden meanings of the scriptures cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind. “We are exiled from the Lord for we walk by faith and not by sight.... no created intellect can be elevated to the point where it will have absolutely comprehensive knowledge of God.... by the gift of God, attains some understanding of mysteries.... Although the concepts by which one knows mysteries are only remotely similar to the realities for which they stand, they afford a knowledge that is fully valid so far as it goes. Indeed, the contemplation of mysteries in this life can provide a kind of faint anticipation of the eternal vision enjoyed by the blessed.... [There are] truths concerning the created order that are not knowable without revelation but that, once revealed, are free from any special obscurity... [and those that] remain obscure to us by reason of the sublimity of their object (which includes understanding of the Incarnation).... Supernatural mysteries in the strict sense, since they concern realities of the Divine order, are beyond the comprehension of any created intellect.... we can definitely establish that there must be in God perfections that lack any counterpart in the created order, so that we could not learn them without revelation or, even after revelation, understand their internal possibility.... If Christianity were devoid of mystery, he added, it could not stir and hold men as it does.”<sup>64</sup>

Scriptures are read because they cover things that are not discoverable by the human intellect or sensory perception. The problem is that revelation is based on interpretation (Hermeneutics) that varies from person to person and religion to religion. For example, the various Protestant denominations interpret parts of the *Bible* differently. There are differences between a theological, philosophical, mystical, or moral comprehension of the scriptures. The best interpretation is the way omniscient Brahman-God understands it. The advantage of this is that religions are not stagnant, since there is room for growth and

development, each generation adding new elements. In the political realm Americans have the same Constitution, but the way it is interpreted today is not the same as in the 18th century. Political conservatives and liberals interpret the Constitution differently.

The words “*Bhagavad Gita*” literally mean the “Song of God,” which compares with the idea of the *Bible* being the “Word of God.” “Song of God” and “Word of God” are two different phrases with similar meaning, which were first spoken orally and later written down. The word Gita is probably a cognate of the Old Iranian word Gathas that also translates as “songs” and in addition is the oldest part of Zarathustra’s *Avesta*.

The Indian division of religious scripture into Shruti (“what is heard” by the seers in the process of revelation, e.g., *Upanishads*) and Smriti (“what is remembered” “tradition” not revelation, e.g., *Puranas* and *Laws of Manu*) is an important distinction. It should be mentioned that religious scriptures may be heard as in the case of Vedic chants or seen by the rishis (Seers; from dris, to see; Mantra-Drashta). Shruti is of Divine origin and Smriti of mixed Divine and human origin. Expressible revelation can come through Divine hearing, or is seen by the Seers, or it can come in the form of unheard and unseen ideas through the intellect. Jesus speaking to the Father in Heaven or Sri Ramakrishna to Mother Kali are examples of revelation that is heard. When Ramakrishna entered into Nirvikalpa Samadhi he received inexpressible revelation that transcends all thought and even Divine sense experience.

Some orthodox Indian thinkers believe that only the *Upanishads* are Shruti and all other scriptures are Smriti. Another view is that the teachings of a Divine Incarnation such as Krishna, Jesus Christ, or Ramakrishna are Shruti. Their teachings are ultimately derived from the Transcendental *Vedas* (which are spiritual principles, not a book, and certainly not denominational), and thus can be conceived as part of the earthly *Vedas*. Many would not consider scriptures like the *Puranas* to be on the same level of authority or infallibility as the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Shruti is considered to be infallible by many, but Smriti certainly is not. Thus, if parts of the *Puranas* (Smriti) are found to be mythological this is acceptable and the Indian religion remains intact. We find Shruti (revelation) and Smriti (tradition) combined in religious scripture such as the Biblical *Old Testament*. If a member of the Judeo-Christian religion accepts this distinction, then there is no problem if a statement in the *Old Testament* is found to be incorrect or mythological. Fundamentalists’ in the past did not recognize the Shruti-Smriti distinction, and consequently

have been criticized by their contemporaries for endorsing nonscientific ideas. The *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* represent true revelation and therefore have universal validity.

In addition to scriptural revelation there are the inspiring lives of Incarnations, prophets, and sages (biography); natural theology based on the light of reason; and private spiritual experiences. Concerning the latter in addition to public revelation (scriptures) that is for the benefit of a large number of people, there are the private revelations of the believers that are acquired from their own personal mystical experiences. Brahman-God in His Self-disclosure communicates Himself/Herself to many people who experience private revelations. These experiences have far less power and authority than the public revelations that originally became the religious scriptures. Private revelations are limited to the effects they have on the recipient and may extend to a small number of associates. If they are authentic, they will bring about a permanent spiritual transformation in the character of the individual. Sri Ramakrishna stated that a person can slay themselves with a pin, but to kill others it takes a sword. Similarly, we can teach the truth to ourselves with the “pin of knowledge” (private revelation), but to teach others requires the “sword of knowledge” (public revelation). Some renowned mystics and saints experienced revelations that fell short of scriptural revelation, but nevertheless exerted a positive influence on a large number of people over the centuries. Generally revelation is of a spiritual nature, but possibly the intellectual insight of an academic is a form of revelation.

Concerning the idea of a “continuous revelation,” the original revelation has been followed throughout history by an inspired continuous interpretation and commentary on that revelation, which can be creative, progressive, and enlightening. After the scriptures have been established by the primary revelation, there is an ongoing secondary historical revelation of commentary and interpretation of the scriptures that has continued up to this day. Secondary revelation may be inspired by the light of reason as employed by distinguished theologians and religious philosophers, or by the spiritual experience of the mystics. It is hopefully progressive, because it is based in part on the cumulative knowledge gained in other fields of study. Interpretation is affected by the configuration of ideas held in all areas of thought at that particular time in history. For instance, ideas discovered in modern physics and biology are pertinent to contemporary scriptural interpretations in all religions. Vivekananda combined the ancient Indian teachings with modern ideas of

physics, biology, and psychology, etc., to enhance our understanding of these subjects. Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there has been an increase in Mother worship in Catholicism and in India is another example of modifications in revelation. There is also the modern idea that scriptural interpretation and the religious message are determined in part by the social conditions and events of the time (Sociology of Knowledge). For example, modern communication and transportation have brought the people of the world together stimulating the need for ideas concerning religious pluralism.

Another distinction is between scriptures that are theoretical describing the highest reality and those that are practical explaining spiritual practices needed to reach these higher states. Applying reason to the scriptures involves fact-finding, classification of ideas, causation and relations, differentiation and making distinctions, synthesis and generalization, naming the concepts, and a combination of these. When an authentic translation is made, it is considered to be as good as the original in terms of ideas and meaning. But the sound vibrations have changed in the new language and verbally it loses some of its original charm. Practical teachings are presented in the form of moral injunctions and in the concrete life events of holy personages who serve as role models.

One problem with scriptural interpretation is a “selection bias” (or a “hermeneutic bias”), within a given text certain teachings are overemphasized and others are ignored. This creates a one-sided interpretation of what the scriptures or great religious teacher have to say. Another problem is that of equivocation, since many religious terms with the same spelling have more than one meaning (homonyms) and thus when they are used ambiguity can arise.

Following Origen analysis, scripture may be interpreted literally (body), intellectually (soul), or spiritually (spirit). The intellectual interpretation of the scriptures is preferred by theologians, philosophers, and scholars. Higher is the spiritual interpretation of the scriptures, which is found in the teachings of the great souls.

For more on this subject see: SRWT, Ch. X. Religious Practices, Section 6. Read the Scriptures.

#### 4. Prophets and Revelation

Indian: “This eternal yoga I taught to Vivasvat ... Thus handed down from one to another” (BG 4:1-2; cf. Svet. Up. 6:18).

Old Testament: “I will raise up for them a prophet ... I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him” (Dt. 18:18; cf. Jer. 1:9).

At the beginning of each cosmic cycle, Shankara emphasized that the authoritative scriptures (*Vedas*) are revealed to the illumined sages (rishis) who see them in an exalted spiritual vision. “Saunaka and others mention that the rishis were the seers of the mantras of the *Rig Veda*. And in the same way it was mentioned by Bodhayana and others, with the regard to the Kandas part of the other *Vedas*, that they were seen by the rishis.”<sup>65</sup> This superconscious wisdom is derived from direct immediate perception of a far greater intensity than sense perception. In the revelation process the Vedic rishis in a superconscious state, see and hear with their eyes and ears the eternal sound-forms that constitute and embody the *Vedas*. Making contact with the heavenly realm, they perceived the transcendental knowledge which is the fundamental rhythm of creation. These subtle cosmic sounds, which are the speech of Brahman (God), are preserved in their exact form on the gross plane of existence, as the words and phrases of the *Vedas*. Over the centuries, the great mystics have validated the truth of the Vedic scriptural statements, in their own spiritual intuitions (anubhava).<sup>66</sup>

Swami Vivekananda mentioned, “Outside India, we find the great-souled Zoroaster bringing down the light of knowledge from above to the mortal world. So also did Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, who, possessed of heavenly authority, proclaim to fallen humanity the tidings of Divine wisdom in their own unique ways.... Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed are great personalities who incarnated themselves for the fulfillment of some special mission; so also did the Incarnations of God mentioned by the Pauranika sages. For others to look up to that seat of these Divine personages with a longing eye is madness.”<sup>67</sup> “But if you go to the fountainhead of Christianity, you will find that it is based upon experience. Christ said he saw God; the disciples said they felt God; and so forth. Similarly, in Buddhism, it is Buddha's experience. He experienced certain truths, saw them, came in contact with them, and preached them to the world. So with the Hindus. In their books the writers, who are called

Rishis, or sages, declare they experienced certain truths, and these they preach. Thus it is clear that all the religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamant foundation of all our knowledge—direct experience. The teachers all saw God; they all saw their own souls, they saw their future, they saw their eternity, and what they saw they preached."<sup>68</sup>

He continues, "The *Vedas* are said to be written by Rishis. These Rishis were sages who realized certain facts. The exact definition of the Sanskrit word Rishi is a Seer of Mantras--of the thoughts conveyed in the Vedic hymns. These men declared that they had realized--sensed, if that word can be used with regard to the supersensuous--certain facts, and these facts they proceeded to put on record. We find the same truth declared amongst both the Jews and the Christians.... even the Buddhists find an eternal moral law, and that moral law was not reasoned out in our sense of the word. But Buddha found it, discovered it, in a supersensuous state. Those of you who have studied the life of Buddha, even as briefly given in that beautiful poem, *The Light of Asia*, may remember that Buddha is represented as sitting under the Bo-tree until he reached that supersensuous state of mind. All his teachings came through this, and not through intellectual cogitations. Thus, a tremendous statement is made by all religions; that the human mind, at certain moments, transcends not only the limitations of the senses, but also the power of reasoning. It then comes face to face with facts which it could never have sensed, could never have reasoned out. These facts are the basis of all the religions of the world. Of course, we have the right to challenge these facts, to put them to the test of reason. Nevertheless, all the existing religions of the world claim for the human mind this peculiar power of transcending the limits of the senses and the limits of reason; and this power they put forward as a statement of fact."<sup>69</sup>

On this subject Swami Prabhavananda (1893-1976) wrote, "For the term *Vedas*, as used by the orthodox, not only names a large body of texts composed in times indefinitely remote, and handed down by generation after generation to our own day, but in another sense stands for nothing less than Divine Truth itself, the inexpressible truth of which the Vedic texts are of necessity but a pale reflection. Regarded in this second aspect, the *Vedas* are infinite and eternal. They are that perfect knowledge which is God.... The *Vedas* are said to be *apauruseya*, which means Divine in origin.... The authority of the *Vedas* does not depend upon anything external. They themselves are authority, being the



knowledge of God. And, as we shall see later, their truth is verifiable by any spiritual aspirant in transcendental consciousness.”<sup>70</sup> All Hindu “schools of thought regard the *Vedas* as recording the transcendental experience of the first mighty seers of ancient India. These experiences, because they have become standard for all Hindus, cannot and should not contradict those in any other age. Furthermore they are the truths experienced and experienceable in every age and every country by all who are pure in heart. For this reason, all Hindus believe that the *Vedas* are eternal, beginningless and without end. Transcendental experience therefore has received its standard expression in these Indo-Aryan scriptures. It is true that, though all orthodox Indian philosophers regard the *Vedas* as eternal—without beginning or end—some limit these eternal laws to the records in the *Vedas*, the Indo-Aryan scriptures.

Transcendental experiences of other ages and other countries, though not denied their due authority, are regarded by them not as *Vedas* or Shruti, but as Agamas.... This distinction is arbitrary and seems opposed to the very definition and spirit of the *Vedas*. Whatever a particular community may or may not sanction, a revealed truth is a direct experience, and as such it must be in the same category of revealed truth as the *Vedas*.”<sup>71</sup>

In his writings Saadia Gaon (882-942) a Jewish thinker from Muslim Egypt concluded, “Mankind is fundamentally in need of the prophets, not solely on account of the revelational laws, which had to be announced, but also on account of the rational laws, because their practice cannot be complete unless the prophets show us how to perform them. Thus, for instance, Reason commands gratitude towards God for the blessings received from Him, but does not specify the form, time and posture appropriate to the expression of such gratitude. So we are in need of prophets. They gave it a form which is called 'Prayer'; they fixed its times, its special formulae, its special modes and the special direction which one is to face when praying.”<sup>72</sup> Philosophy functions to provide rational proof by explanation and interpretation, for the higher truths already known through the process of revelation. Revelation seeks to protect the philosopher from incorrect beliefs and to give them absolute truths, by which as a consequence of the reasoning process they would arrive at, only after a sustained effort over a long period of time.<sup>73</sup>

Julius Guttmann described Judah Haveli’s (1075/85-1141) from Muslim Spain conception that, “The highest form of communion with God is granted to the prophets. They comprehend God through immediate

experience, which is as distinct from the conceptual philosophic knowledge of God as the immediate certainty of intuition is distinct from the lifelessness of discursive thought. The God of the prophets is not the supreme abstract cause of the world, but a living presence permeating everything above and beyond the limitations of nature. He is not simply 'God' but 'their God.' Even prophets, however, cannot comprehend the presence of God without any mediation whatsoever. God reveals himself to them in sensual manifestations which serve as signs of His presence. This certitude of God based on immediate perception is the foundation for the love of God which distinguishes religion from philosophy."<sup>74</sup>

The nature of a prophet was described by Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) a Jewish thinker from Muslim Spain and Egypt. Concerning a prophet, in addition to receiving the grace of God, "His intellect must be as developed and as perfect as a human intellect can be; his passions pure and equally balanced; all his desires must aim at obtaining a knowledge of the hidden laws and the causes that are in force in the Universe; his thoughts must be engaged in lofty matters; his attention directed to the knowledge of God, the consideration of His works, and such other things our belief ascribes to Him. There must be an absence of the lower desires and appetites, of the seeking after pleasure in eating, drinking, and cohabitation; and, in short, every pleasure connected with the sense of touch."<sup>75</sup> A prophet who is illuminated by a celestial light greatly exceeds the rational philosopher in their eminence, attaining an intuitive height far beyond the scope of discursive reasoning. "There is a limit to human reason and as long as the soul resides in the body, it cannot grasp what is above nature ... Know that there is a level of knowledge which is higher than all philosophy, namely prophecy ... Reason and proof cannot aspire to the level of insight at which prophecy exists—how can they ever prove or disprove it?"<sup>76</sup>

Continuing with this line of reasoning, Maimonides specified that Moses ascended to the heavenly realm to receive the message of the *Torah* from God. "The words of Moses are prophecy and therefore are beyond the domain of speculation, validation, argument or proof."<sup>77</sup> As an ascetic, he abstained from food and water for forty days and nights, for the purpose of preparing himself for this experience. The *Torah* was directly dictated to Moses the lawgiver, who acted as a scribe and recorded the words of God verbatim. He received a full revelation of the detailed teachings of the *Torah*, which were never subsequently altered. After this event, he never fell from his exalted spiritual state. Without any

intermediary, the Lord directly addressed Moses while he was fully awake. God spoke to him, “mouth to mouth” (Num. 12:8) and “face to face” as a man speaks to a friend (Ex. 33:11). Other prophets received their message in a vision or dream often from angels (Num. 12:6). Due to his spiritual perfection, Moses could enter into prophetic communication with God at will. He felt no fear when he confronted God. Moses communicated everlasting statutes of the Law for all generations, while the other prophets spoke primarily to their own generation.<sup>78</sup>

Thomas Aquinas specified the degrees of prophecy, “The prophecy wherein supernatural truth is manifested through imaginary vision is differentiated first according to the difference between dreams which occur during sleep, and vision which occurs while one is awake. The latter belongs to a higher degree of prophecy, since the prophetic light that draws a man away to supernatural things while he is awake and occupied with sensible things would seem to be stronger than that which finds a man asleep and withdrawn from objects of sense. Secondly, the degrees of this prophecy are differentiated according to the expressiveness of the imaginary signs whereby the intelligible truth is conveyed. And since words are the most expressive signs of intelligible truth, it would seem to be a higher degree of prophecy when the prophet, whether awake or asleep, hears words expressive of an intelligible truth, than when he sees things significative of truth, for instance the seven full ears of corn signified seven years of plenty (Gen. 41:22, 26).... Thirdly, it is evidently a still higher degree of prophecy when a prophet not only sees signs of words or deeds but also, either awake or asleep, sees someone speaking or showing something to him, since this proves the prophet's mind to have approached nearer to the cause of the revelation. Fourthly, the height of a degree of prophecy may be measured according to the appearance of the person seen: for it is a higher degree of prophecy, if he who speaks or shows something to the waking or sleeping prophet be seen by him under the form of an angel, than if he be seen by him under the form of a man: and higher still is it, if he be seen by the prophet whether asleep or awake, under the appearance of God.... But above all these degrees there is a third kind of prophecy, wherein an intelligible and supernatural truth is shown without any imaginary vision.”<sup>79</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> CW, I:6-7.

<sup>2</sup> CW, VI:181.

<sup>3</sup> CW, II:239; III:183.

<sup>4</sup> CW, III:456, 323; VII:30.

<sup>5</sup> CW, III:118-19.

<sup>6</sup> Swami Abhedananda, *Universal Religion and Vedanta* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1968, 1989), pp. 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> FP, III, 6:8.

<sup>8</sup> FP, IV, 3:13; G. Stavig, "Origen and Indian Thought," BRMIC (March 2003), pp.133-40.

<sup>9</sup> M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (2 vols.; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1966), I, pp. 232-34.

<sup>10</sup> ST, I-II, 93.2-4; 91.2

<sup>11</sup> ST, I-II, 91.2, 5.

<sup>12</sup> CG III, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> ST, I-II, 91.4.

<sup>14</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1879, 1948), pp. 66-69; CTR, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> ST, I-II, 93.2-4.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace (1982), p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> CW, I:447-48.

<sup>18</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, "Nontheistic Conceptions Of The Divine," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> BSB, I.1:3.

<sup>20</sup> BSB, I.1:3; 3:29-30; Satindra Mukherjee, "Sankara on the Relation Between the Vedas and Reason," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 6 (1930), pp. 108-13; Radhakrishnan, II, pp. 494-96. It is not altogether clear if Shankara regarded the Vedas as an attribute of God or as something separate from Him.

<sup>21</sup> BRU, II.4:10.

<sup>22</sup> BSB, II.1:11-12.

<sup>23</sup> Aruna Goel, *Indian Philosophy Nyaya-Vaisesika and Modern Science* (Bangalore: Sterling Publishers, 1984), pp. 155-56, 60-61; Satischandra Chatterjee, and D. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1984), pp. 214-15.

<sup>24</sup> VS, I, 1:1, p. 25; II, 1:12.

<sup>25</sup> VS, I, 1:3; II, 1:4; Radhakrishnan, II, p. 674.

<sup>26</sup> BSM, I.1.3, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> BSM, II.1.4, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (5 vols.; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1922, 1988), IV, pp. 75-77.

<sup>29</sup> CW, V:205-06.

<sup>30</sup> CW, III:119; I:181.

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<sup>31</sup> Tipple, p. 494.

<sup>32</sup> ST, I, 1.1.

<sup>33</sup> ST, I, 1.5.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), XXXIV, p. 142; XXVI, p. 399.

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. John Allen (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1928), pp. 87-88.

<sup>36</sup> Muller, p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> John Bowden and James Richmond, ed., *A Reader in Contemporary Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> CTR, p. 323.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Bromiley, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 419.

<sup>40</sup> James Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 333, 332; Bromiley (1978), pp. 408-11, 414, 416-17, 419.

<sup>41</sup> Tillich, I, pp. 42, 121.

<sup>42</sup> HCT, p. 474.

<sup>43</sup> Tillich, I, p. 133.

<sup>44</sup> CW, III:249.

<sup>45</sup> GSR, p. 882h.

<sup>46</sup> BSB, II.1:11, 6.

<sup>47</sup> BRU, I.1:1.

<sup>48</sup> CW, III:111.

<sup>49</sup> CW, III:120-21, 457.

<sup>50</sup> CW, II:374.

<sup>51</sup> Prabhavananda (1992), p. 110.

<sup>52</sup> D. Jeste and I. Vahia, "Comparison of the Conceptualization of Wisdom in Ancient Indian Literature with Modern Views: Focus on the Bhagavad Gita," *Psychiatry* (Fall 2008), pp. 197-209.

<sup>53</sup> [En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuga\\_dharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuga_dharma)

<sup>54</sup> CW, III:111-12.

<sup>55</sup> CW, II:139.

<sup>56</sup> CTR, pp. 46-47; FP, IV, 2:4.

<sup>57</sup> FP, I, Pref:8.

<sup>58</sup> Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism*, tr. Franz Rosenzweig (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 204; Joseph Blau, *The Story of Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 219.

<sup>59</sup> William Bouwsma, *John Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 124.

<sup>60</sup> Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), pp. 3-4, 7; Bouwsma (1988), pp. 124-25.

<sup>61</sup> CW, II:363.

<sup>62</sup> Tillich, I, pp. 34-35, 61, 139.

<sup>63</sup> Tillich, I, pp. 126-29.

<sup>64</sup> NCE, X, pp. 82-85

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<sup>65</sup> BSB, I.3:30.

<sup>66</sup> BSB, I.1:3; Radhakrishnan, II, pp. 495-96, 514-18.

<sup>67</sup> CW, IV:430-31.

<sup>68</sup> CW, I:12..

<sup>69</sup> CW, II:60-61.

<sup>70</sup> Prabhavananda<sup>1</sup>, pp. 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> Swami Prabhavananda, *Vedic Religion and Philosophy* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1957), pp. 6-8.

<sup>72</sup> JPR, p. 176.

<sup>73</sup> Abraham Heschel, "Reason and Revelation in Saadia's Philosophy," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 34 (1944), pp. 391-408; Guttman (1973), pp. 71-72.

<sup>74</sup> Guttman (1973), p. 143.

<sup>75</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1963), II, sections 36.

<sup>76</sup> Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 160.

<sup>77</sup> Leaman (1985), p. 160.

<sup>78</sup> Moses Maimonides, *Commentary on the Mishnah*, tr. Fred Rosner (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), pp. 153-55; (1963), II, section 45; Isaac Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916, 1946), pp. 280-81.

<sup>79</sup> ST, II-II, 174.3.