

Jesus – the Greatest Spiritual Teacher?

A strange thing happened to me just a few years ago, having spent more than 20 years trying, in my own way, to determine what Truth was/is, and which spiritual teaching was the most appropriate – for me at least.

Throughout that period I was particularly attracted by Sufi and Isma'ili Shia thought, but in 1998 I was on a visit to Malaysia – a Muslim country containing members of all major religions; particularly Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity. I was one night sitting out under the night sky drinking tea with two Hindus and a Christian talking about nothing but everything, when I was suddenly asked the question, “Which do you think is the right religion?”¹. To my own astonishment (I had, if anything, been non-Christian for the previous several decades), I said, “The **Way** of Jesus”. The words seem to form despite myself! At that very moment, and in subsequent reflection, I realised that my own true belief was in the statement that Jesus made; “I am The Way” – that is, to follow the teachings and example of Jesus to become what he became. What was relevant was/is not the Christian Church and what ‘it’ has decreed, but what Jesus himself taught. To focus on Jesus’ *actual* teachings, I would say, is the key to it all, and is essentially no different to the Gnostic teachings that have existed for eons². It then also dawned on me that Jesus’ statement is embodied in the Sufi and Isma'ili thought that I had been for so long interested in, and which, for a while at least, had deflected me from Christian thought because the Bible teachings did not seem complete. They are not, until properly investigated, and that is why I had been looking elsewhere to make sense of it all, by looking outside Christianity. That route had indeed been fruitful.

This realisation that I had come to – so simple but so dramatic! – came on the back of another simple but wonderful moment only some nine months earlier, on a visit to north Italy, and particularly the home of St. Francis of Assisi. That visit to Italy was supposed to have been purely for relaxation, but at the town of St. Marie d’Angeli, situated on the plane below Assisi, is a large basilica that within its own walls contains the very simple prayer-house that St. Francis used some 780 years before. The basilica had literally been built around it. On entering the basilica you are soon confronted with this so-humble little building. I was absolutely amazed to see it, and the impact brought tears to my eyes. Immediately the thought came to me, “This whole scenario is like the relationship between the Macrocosm and the Microcosm”.

It is extraordinary that one of the greatest exemplars of peaceful persuasion in near to modern times – Mahatma Gandhi – recalled his indebtedness to the words of Jesus in persuading him to the path of “turning the other cheek”. Gandhi was always a Hindu and grateful for that, but it was the words of Jesus that had the stirring affect on him to seek further into “the Way”, and also to find out more about his own religion, and of how to apply himself to the task that began to unfold before him.

It is also extraordinary that Jesus is accepted and revered not only in all sects of Christianity, but in several other religions too, even in Judaism (as a rabbi). In this, Jesus is unique. His teaching links Judaism and Islam.

In ‘*Jesus Prophet of Islam*’, Ahmad Thomson states:

Jesus did not disclose the totality of his teaching to most of his followers. The whole truth was known to very few:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, but he shall not

¹ The same questioner, when he later saw me reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, also asked me whether I “believed that stuff”. I said that I did.

² It is claimed that the teachings can be specifically traced back to the Egyptian Mystery School of Pharaoh Tuthmosis III (c.1468-1436 BC), but an older link to the Chaldeans must be assumed. The ancient teachings, documented in the ‘*Wisdom of Lamech*’ and the ‘*Tablet of Hermes*’ were furthered by Pythagoras and Plato. Later they found their way into Judaea through the ascetic Egyptian Therapeutate, which presided at Qumran in the days before Jesus. Allied to the Therapeutate were the Samaritan Magi of West Manasseh, at whose head was the Gnostic leader Simon (Magus) Zelotes, a lifelong confederate of Mary Magdalene, who was his appointed devotional sister. The Samaritan Magi, whose representatives were prominent at the Nativity, were founded in 44 BC by Menahem, a Diaspora Essene and, it is said, the grandfather of Mary Magdalene.

Gnostic thought was universal. Links with the Druids of Western Europe can be evidenced by the mystical yet scientific methods used in the design of such sites as Stonehenge (see Jon Michel and others).

speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak. (*John 16:12-14*).

It is interesting to note in passing that this passage is said to be one of the few passages referring to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad ... which has not been removed from the four official Gospels. The 'Spirit of truth' to which the above verses refer is identified by John with 'the Paraclete'. The Greek word for Paraclete is '*Parakletos*' or '*Parakleitos*', meaning 'the Comforter' or 'the Praised One'. Its equivalent in Arabic is '*Ahmad*', meaning 'the Most Praiseworthy', 'the One who Distinguishes between Truth and Falsehood', and 'the Comforter' - and Ahmad is one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad. Dr Bucaille (*The Bible, Qur'an and Science*), after considering the four references to the Paraclete in the New Testament (who is only mentioned by John, but not by anyone else), and after considering the textual variations in the various versions, as well as the natural meaning of the vocabulary used, concludes:

According to the rules of logic therefore, one is brought to see in John's Paraclete a human being like Jesus, possessing the faculties of hearing and speech formally implied in John's Greek text. Jesus therefore predicts that God will later send a human being to Earth to take up the role defined by John, i.e. to be a Prophet who hears God's word and repeats his message to man. This is the logical interpretation of John's texts arrived at if one attributes to the words their proper meaning.

Each of the other main religions have in most cases their own specific founder that is held in esteem by that religion, but rarely does one great teacher cross over into the lore of other religions. Buddha is highly esteemed in the Hindu faith, and by his own followers of course, but then Buddha is regarded as one of the Hindu faith's own children, having in their view emphasised specific aspects of ancient Hindu teaching. To Hindus, Buddha did not so much create a new religion but revealed the old one through his trials and tribulations on "The Way". The Hindu faith (properly known as *Sanathana Dharma* – 'the Eternal Way') is the oldest known religion on Earth, and appears to contain answers to virtually every spiritual conundrum and question of knowledge. Their doctrine, the Vedas, was finally written down quite a long time before the birth of Buddha, together with the Upanishads and the Sustras.

Jesus' teaching is also accepted in the Hindu and Buddhist faiths, with whom there is also an apparent historical link. We now move on to one of the greatest mysteries, and one that has not been answered satisfactorily by the established church, concerning what happened to Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30.

An indication of what happened to Jesus in his years of youth and early manhood was brought to light by the discovery of an ancient document in a Tibetan monastery, in the 19th century. The finder, Nicholas Notovitch, was able to translate the ancient *Pali* language to discover the secrets. The document referred to a young man called *Issa* (note that The Qur'an refers to Jesus as *Isa*), who travelled much of India and who seems to have had the characteristics of what might be expected from the young Jesus. This Issa clearly learnt much from the prevailing religions and wise people of India, and, later, Persia. From that lengthy period of learning (and no little conflict with conservative thinkers), it is recorded that Issa returned to Israel at the age of 29. The document goes on to relate how Issa was crucified, but survived – not resurrected in the way the Bible and the Church claim.³

There are allegations that the text found by Notovitch was written a considerable number of years after the supposed time of Jesus. Nevertheless, the text should be taken seriously in my opinion, as in those days people relied much more on memory and verbal transmission – and successfully so. To those that query whether Jesus ever lived, because there is a paucity of actual historical evidence written during the time of Jesus, then I would say to the doubter, "If you are able to believe in the revealed word of God, then why not read the Qur'an and read the numerous accounts of Jesus in it, together with references to other Judaic prophets such as Abraham and Moses?"

³ The story of Jesus' travels and mission in the east is stated also in '*The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*' by Levi Dowling (1844-1911) – as apparently given to him by revelation.

The fact that the Biblical story of Jesus equates so closely, it is said, to that of Krishna and Horus (and others) is to me neither here nor there. To me, the notion expressed by some that all these personages did not live and that they are simply representative of a perpetuating myth (though a myth with a good and fine purpose), is not reality. Tradition, the works of Jesus' disciples, and books such as the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita (referring to Krishna), the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Collection, and the Qur'an (references to Jesus), seem to confirm without reasonable doubt that these persons did live. Whatever the similarity of the Bible stories to those of ancient texts (which may indicate that the Bible has a mythical - allegorical? - content to confirm the teachings of Jesus as consistent to his predecessors), the actual life of Jesus seems not to be in real doubt.

There are other writings that claim that Jesus (Issa) eventually lived a full life and died in Srinigar, Khashmir, where it is claimed his tomb exists to this day.⁴ Barbara Thiering in '*Jesus The Man*' postulates supporting events and happenings concerning Jesus, including his marriage to Mary Magdelene, and the issue of his children. As noted earlier in this book, it is also known that the apostle Thomas Didamus ('Doubting Thomas') travelled to India and was eventually martyred at Madras. To add to the mysteries concerning Jesus is the story of the visit to Britain of Joseph of Arimathea, but that is another story for another time!

To the question, "*what were the teachings of Jesus?*" I would refer to works such as those of Peter Phipps and Ahmad Thomson for a lucid explanation on why the New Testament should not be assumed to be a total report and explanation of what Jesus said. Better, perhaps, to consider the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a living teacher of the unity of all religions and the essential Truth. However, the following expands on Jesus' declaration that "*I am the Way*":

When Jesus tried to tell the password he said, "There is only one way you can enter the kingdom." He said, "I AM the way," but mankind didn't hear. They thought he was saying that Jesus, the man, was the way, but he was saying the password, "I."

That's it. That's all. Just "I." So simple, but so very, very complicated. For "I" cannot be spoken; it can be felt and experienced, but not thought. Any thought about "I" carries with it the seeds of ego, separation and defeat. "I" is the most sacred of all words because it can be comprehended only in silence, in an inner silence.

We have missed the secret of life because we have spoken it. In fact, we have spoken it more than any other word, and every time we have said "I" in a finite way we have desecrated the word. Whenever we have said, "I feel depressed" or "I feel sick," "I need this" or "I need that," we have closed the door on ourselves. We have misused the password.

Whenever we have called any man on Earth our father, any guru, any mate, any effect, we have shut the door on "I." Those who know I AM will never have to look to man whose breath is in his nostrils for anything. They can travel anywhere in the world without money or protection. Everything will be provided from the "I" within.

But we must not speak "I." We must hear it. "I" must enter the heart, it must be in the soul, it must be felt rather than reasoned or thought; only then do we dwell in the secret place of the most high. And it says to us, "Know ye not that I am God? 'Be still and know that I am God.' I in the midst of you is mighty, and I will never leave you, nor forsake you." [...]

I is the invisible presence within you. I is the invisible presence that goes before you to make the way clear, is always with you as your protection if you call upon it and hear its voice. "Listen to ME, I, look unto ME, the I of your own being. Don't look to effects. Your body is only the temple of 'I'; I made it in my image and likeness, of my substance. I knew you before you were conceived in the womb. I formed your body.

⁴ Nur Richard Gale, who lived and worked in India for about three years and belonged to a small Sufi order in Kashmir, has said in 2001, "...for me, the most interesting Isa reference is found in the Kashmiri Hindu text '*Bhavishya Maha Purana*' (circ. 2nd c., the name of a specific Sanskrit text of the 'purana' category) about King Shalivahana (last mentioned circ. AD 80) meeting a foreigner calling himself Ishvara Putaram (Son of God), Isha Masih (Isha = Isa in Arabic = Jesus; Masih = Messiah), and Kanya Garbam (Born of a Virgin)". About the alleged tomb of Jesus in Srinigar, Nur Richard Gale says, "Fida Hassnain conducted the archeological research on the tomb (as much as the guardian family and Islamic law would permit). What he did discover was that the underlying older crypt above the newer north-south Muslim structure was similar to early Hebrew burial crypts, being east-west direction....".

"I am the way, live by Me. Do not live by the way of the world, do not live by form. I am your high tower. Put up your sword; don't live by the physical or the mental. Live by the recognition of I always with and as you. I in the midst of you is ordained. . . ."

I, LOVE, and YOU are all the same word. Your capacity to love is your capacity to experience the I of another. Supreme love is when you see another as your own I, when you see yourself in another because you have gone beyond form and know I. When you love another and see your I as his I, you have become *total*: all is one.

Walter Starcke, 'The Gospel of Relativity'

Also:

"I am" is one of the Hebrew names of God, Yahweh. Derived from the Hebrew YHWH, the unspeakable name of God, it is often translated as "I AM THAT I AM."

Similar claims appear in Eastern traditions. The great Indian sage Sri Ramana Maharshi said:

"I am" is the name of God... God is none other than the Self.

In the twelfth century, Ibn-Al-Arabi, one of the most revered Sufi mystics, wrote:

If thou knowest thine own self, thou knowest God.

Shankara, the eight-century Indian saint, whose insights revitalized Hindu teachings, said of his own enlightenment:

I am Brahman... I dwell within all beings as the soul, the pure consciousness, the ground of all phenomena... In the days of my ignorance, I used to think of these as being separate from myself. Now I know that I am All.

This sheds new light on the Biblical injunction "Be still, and know that I am God." I do not believe it means: "Stop fidgeting around and recognize that the person who is speaking to you is the almighty God of all creation." It makes much more sense as an encouragement to still the mind, and know, not as an intellectual understanding but as a direct realization, that the "I am" that is your essential self, the pure consciousness that lies behind all experience, is God.

This concept of God is not of a separate superior being, existing in some other realm, overlooking human affairs and loving or judging us according to our deeds. God is in each and every one of us, the most intimate and undeniable aspect of ourselves. God is the light of consciousness that shines in every mind.

Peter Russell, "From Science to God"