

The Question of Time

Modern civilization seems to be pushed by an incessant impulse forward, trying at each step to overcome former achievements and using it as a trigger towards the next discovery or creation. The main thing being this movement, production, that which is ahead. Even when only recycling the past, everything seems to take airs of newness. Forgetfulness is a characteristic of human beings. The disappearance of the past contributes to emphasize the present and to make us move without questioning.

This worldview has been amplified through science, where a fixed idea of linear and evolutionary time has definitely contributed towards burying our origins. The greatness of history has thus been lost.

Besides the action of time, our past has also been fragmented by ingenious minds which, at all times, and under different circumstances, have been working for the maintenance of the *status quo*. In this way, our historical perspective has been manipulated throughout the centuries. It has been left to the historians to put the pieces together and to attempt to assemble the real picture. But even they are not free from the burden of their time and therefore from the influence of an established ideology, whatever it may be.



As we look back to a not so very remote past we find a completely different perspective of history. *Ham so, so ham* - that which I was, I shall be again - goes an Indian saying. The civilizations of the East, of Egypt and Greece, as well as Pre-Colombian Americans have commonly possessed a cyclic approach of history. Plato believed that *'the same views have arisen among men in cycles, not only once, nor twice, not even a couple of times, but endless times...'*; and Aristotle thought all arts and sciences reached perfection many times in history and were almost forgotten afterwards, being ultimately completely lost as a result of huge catastrophes.

As everything in nature gets consumed and renovated in definite cycles, time itself - in all its vastness and complexity - would follow this infinite rhythm as an endless cosmic clock in a movement of eternal recurrence.

This view of history is in reality still unknown. It throws us back into a glorious past, quite in opposition to a journey from a stone age. It places us as descendants of dignified and elevated ancestors, true gods and goddesses who once lived on this very earth. It shows us that within a continuum pattern of events, we find civilizations successively ascending and descending and thus making way for new civilizations, which will, ultimately, cause the events that will once again take us to the point where everything had 'started'.

Cyclic time is inserted within a wider context of life for it is based on the inner journey of the spirit throughout history. It is a metaphysical approach, presenting a perspective where the new meets the old, taking subjective aspects into account.

As we deepen the understanding of it, we may come to look through the eyes of the ancients and rediscover the wisdom and values which considered man in his totality, in interaction with the material universe as well as a superior force.

In no other place as in India, has the issue of existence occupied so many hearts and minds for so long. This was the cradle of metaphysics and one can still witness passionate discussions over the complex and controversial matters presented in her scriptures. India was also the place where an ongoing force of devotion shaped the way of being and living. Indeed, many aspects of Indian culture have developed from metaphysical or spiritual foundations.

The huge variety of methods which have sprung from Indian soil have given scope to the birth and development of a number of schools of thought. Of these many schools, one in particular was chosen – the Raja Yoga of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.

This perspective may be useful not only in understanding a little of what so many people, through the ages, tried to say, but also to comprehend the cosmogony of an old culture, once rich and sophisticated.

The Question of Being

The psyche is the axis of this story, the thread that leads the plot. It is the human soul who 'turns the wheel of time' as it passes through a cycle of births and rebirths.

To realize the self as a spiritual being, one needs deep, inner experiences. In a meditative state one can begin to access one's innermost nature and gradually become aware of the difference between the physical and the subtle or metaphysical.

With gentle introspection and subtlety of mind one can go deep within the self. As we know, there is no known dimension or mathematical formulae that could possibly be used to physically measure our spirit. To realize the self, one needs depth and a quiet mind.

Only then can our thoughts – the energy flow that carry messages – become more focused. We start to experiment with a number of things, including how we may consciously choose the feelings we want to express. Experimenting with the source of thoughts will result in clear awareness of who we are and how we function. *It is the soul who gives life to the body; it is the soul who is actually the self.*

The soul is internally perceived as a luminous point of energy, located inside the brain. The Sanskrit word *Atma* conveys the meaning of an infinitesimally small being; one who generates ideas, emotions and reasoning, who commands its existence through the mechanism of thinking. It is the life force that survives the bodies it takes during its journey through history.



*As a man puts off his worn clothes
and puts on other new ones,
so the embodied soul puts off worn-out bodies
and goes to others that are new*

*Weapons do not cleave it,
fire does not burn it,
waters do not wet it,
wind does not dry it.*

*For the soul there is never birth nor death
Nor, having once been,
does it ever cease to be.
It is unborn, eternal and primeval
and it is not slain when the body is slain.
Bhagavad Gita II - 20,22,23*

Every single soul carries its own individual traits and tendencies, expressed in the course of its many lives. We are similar in our functioning, but we do possess a set of traits that makes us unique as individuals. The faculties of the mind, intellect and the subconscious are in the soul and we use them to play our part with the external world.

The human spirit exists eternally, subjected to natural laws, playing the game of life in this ever changing field of action.

According to the cyclic approach, there is a connection between one's inherent qualities and the moment the soul first descends into this world. The cycle of life of every soul is related to its latent attributes and qualities - its 'celestial degrees'. It is this inner potential that determines one's first birth at a certain moment in history. From then on, the soul remains taking rebirth in the cycle of *samsara*.

Every soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life. Its place in this world as a vessel appointed to honor or dishonor is determined by its previous merits or demerits. Its work in this world determines its place in the world which is to follow this.

The First Principles - Origenes

In this way it is understood how our intrinsic ethics and values determine the quality of our actions. They, in turn, pre-determine many aspects of our life's journey. On a spiritual level we are never immune to the result of our actions.

The soul has an extremely sophisticated mechanism of recording. The Sanskrit word *sanskaras* can be translated as the record of memories, habits and tendencies - the roots of our personality.

The observation and mastery of our inner world is a process that can come to clarify how each external circumstance relates to aspects of an individual's inner experience. One also becomes aware that we are only fit to play human roles and that transmigration or rebirth into animals or to any element is made impossible by nature. Our inner tendencies or *sanskaras* are responsible for defining the body, the place and the circumstances of every birth of the soul.

The Mechanism of Consciousness

A thought emerges from a self-generated movement that causes a deliberation. Before any word is uttered or any action performed, there is a thought or intention in the mind, though we are not always conscious of this process. Every action is automatically recorded in the subconscious mind, creating impressions - *sanskaras* - the vast record of our personal history.

These impressions will again lead to impulses of realization emerging in the surface of the mind. The intellect is able to analyse them, deciding either to initiate or stop an action and this, again, according to the tendencies already existent. If a thought is put into action, a new *sanskara* is recorded or an old

one is reinforced (habit). These tendencies manifest themselves constantly as desires to be fulfilled.

In this way, our mind, in the form of ideas, desires or thoughts, allows whatever it had recorded in the past to re-emerge, and is able to acknowledge things. Recognition generally occurs through external stimuli like words, colors, sounds, people, etc. The intellect can understand the visualizations and experience them.

Karma

*"No man can attain freedom from activity by refraining from action; nor can he reach perfection by merely refusing to act. He cannot even for a moment remain really inactive, for the qualities of nature will compel him to act whether he wants it or not... Therefore do your duty perfectly, without care for the results; for he who does his duty disinterestedly attains the Supreme."
Bhagavad Gita III/4,5,20*

Karma - from the Sanskrit *karam* - means simply action. It does however indicate that a reaction is implicit within each and every action we perform. Our deeds build up into a chain of causes and effects, which in their totality form a cyclic continuum.

Karma is an energy flow released by the soul - a thought, a word or a deed. In analogy to one of the laws of physics postulated by Newton, action is an applied force that generates a reaction of equal intensity. It has, however, the addition of a value. This value is what gives a spiritual dimension to *karma* and is that which determines the now blurred limits between 'good' and 'evil'. Ethical or moral value is therefore inherent to the law of *karma*.

The *karmic* residues in our subconscious - the *sanskaras* - build up our tendencies, habits and character traits. These are personality determinants and directly influence our way of thinking and doing things.

The cycle may be seen as a game, the play where all of us - real life actors - determine our destiny through the quality of our *karma*. We may then come to understand how free will and predetermination keep on moving the wheel of time.

Symbols

The ancient *rishis* of India devoted a great deal of time in researching matters related to the invisible. The rich symbolism they left tried to illustrate every spiritual realization, attempting to bring things of the subtle into the physical. The symbol was the means of holding a mental image or a feeling; it was believed to be of help in stimulating the mind to re-emerge a given experience. Today, the multiple visual references found in Hinduism can be confusing, for sacred images and signs have passed through successive interpretations and have often lost their original meaning.

One of the most portrayed symbols is that of the soul. In most places of worship we still find oval form images. The *lingam* originally came up as an attempt to reproduce a form as invisible as the atom. The soul as perceived in meditative insights: a self-luminous point, frequently remembered as the 'third eye'. The mark on the forehead, as well as the dot - *bindi* - many people still wear, is there to remind us of the existence of our imperishable self.

Shivalingam



The One revered as the Supreme has been often remembered in its eternal, incorporeal state. *Shiva*, meaning 'the Point' as well as 'the Benefactor', is a name that beautifully describes the form and the main attribute of a universal God. *Shiva* has later been echoed as the *Jeovah* of Abraham.

The oval-shaped *Shivalingam* is an image found in almost all temples of India. It is frequently surrounded by thousands of smaller *saligrams*, expressing a parental relationship. The Supreme was also remembered in the Sanskrit word *Deus Peter*, which was taken to Greece as *Zeus Pater*, being then translated by the Romans as *Jupiter*.



Swastika

The *swastika* was used as a sacred sign by many cultures. The oldest symbols have been found in ancient sites like Mohenjodaro, Harappa and the Sarasvati Valley, as well as in Persia and Mesopotamia. In Turkey, it was a custom to place it inside the grave. In ancient Italy and Greece, it was used to ensure the welfare of the dead. In India as well as in Greece, there were *swastika* coins, and among the Celts and Egyptians it was used as a religious sign from the first dynasties. The symbol was also found in the Roman Empire, including England and Ireland as well as in China. It was widely spread in the Far East through Buddhism, and was also a common sign to the native inhabitants of

the Americas. The Christians also used the *swastika* on their graves, a custom that was later replaced by the symbol of the cross.

The *swastika* is still used to convey many meanings such as good fortune and auspicious omens, and is believed to be related to God or the Creator. In India's traditional literature, the *swastika* represents four directions or paths - *chatushpatha*. Its four arms, pointing clock-wise, indicate a pattern of circular motion. Its division into four ages or *yugas*, refers to actual periods of history, which have deep connection with different stages of consciousness.

Many of the signs that India has once created and sustained are now scattered or distanced from their original meaning. They can however still be acknowledged when inserted within the cyclic perspective, for this is a view that brings the contents of many primordial symbols and images to light.

The Origin

It was a dimension of light. We used to rest in this space of light, as if floating in a state of inner fulfillment. Without a body, the soul experienced deep inner silence. There was no impulse of action, no necessity for thoughts. There was peace.

Many others were there. Millions, billions of them. Points of energy, subtle stars in absolute silence. Consciousness, pure, waiting for its moment of expression.

Just as the physical world exists in an element called *Akash*, or ether, similarly, the incorporeal region is in a principle called *Akand Jyoti Maha Tattwa* – divine infinite light. This is our true, original home. It has also been called *Nirvana* – the realm beyond sound, and as *Brahmand* – the land of subtle light.

The incorporeal dimension exists far beyond the limits of outer space. The soul has no mental or sensorial experiences while resting there, nor is it lost or dissolved in what seems like an ocean of diffuse light. It is a moment of stillness. The being is unmanifest though its qualities are latent – as if awaiting a clue – or the right moment to begin playing its role on the world stage.

"...Suddenly, quite unnoticed, I stood on this other earth in bright sunlight of a day as beautiful as paradise...Oh, everything was exactly as on our earth, but it seemed that everything around radiated with some holiday, and with great, holy and finally achieved triumph. The calm emerald sea gently splashed against the shore embracing it with manifest, apparent, almost conscious love. Tall beautiful trees stood there in full luxury of their bloom, and their countless leaflets - I am sure of it - welcomed me with great, gentle, kind murmur, uttering, as it were, words of love. The grass sparkled with bright fragrant flowers. Little birds, in flocks, flew through the air, and, unafraid of me, alighted on my shoulders and hands, joyfully beating at me with dear little trepidating wings.

And, finally, I saw and got to know the people of that happy land. They came to me themselves, they surrounded and embraced me. Children of the sun, of their sun. Oh, how beautiful they were! Never did I see on our earth such beauty in man. Perhaps only in our children of tenderest age is it possible to find a remote reflection of that beauty. The eyes of those happy people were full of bright glitter. Their faces radiated with intelligence and some kind of consciousness which had reached the level of tranquility; yet those faces were cheerful. Innocent gladness sounded in the words and voices of those men.

Oh, at once, at the first glance of those faces, I grasped everything, everything! This was an earth not defiled by sin; upon it lived men who had not sinned; they lived in a paradise similar to that in which, according to the tradition of all mankind, lived our fallen forefathers...

...Oh, I understood at once, that in many respects I should not comprehend them at all...It seemed incredible, for instance, that they, who knew so much, did not possess our science. But soon I came to understand that their knowledge was amplified by and derived from revelations which differed from those on our earth, and that their aspirations were altogether different. They had no desires and they were placid; they did not aspire to the knowledge of life, as we seek to explain what life is; science itself endeavors to conceive it in order to teach others how to live; they, however, knew how to live, and this I understood...

...They were vivacious and joyous like children. They roamed through their beautiful groves and forests; they sang lovely songs; they subsisted on light food, on fruits from their trees, on honey from the woods, on the milk of animals which loved them. They labored but little and slighted for their food and clothing. They were endowed with love, and children were born to them, but never did I observe in them those impulses of cruel voluptuousness which affect virtually everybody on our earth - everybody, and which are the sole source of almost all sin in our human race. They rejoiced over their newborn as new participants in their felicity. They never quarreled and there was no jealousy amongst them; they did not even understand what these things meant.

There were virtually no diseases among them, although there was death. However, their old men passed away gently, as though falling asleep, surrounded by men bidding them farewell, blessing them, smiling to them; and they departed accompanied by serene smiles. On these occasions I perceived no sorrow, no tears; there was merely love grown to the level of ecstasy...

..They were so unaccountably convinced of an eternal life that it did not constitute a question to them. They had no temples, but in them there was some kind of a daily, live, unceasing communion with the whole of the universe. They glorified nature, the earth and seas and forests. They were fond of composing songs about one another; they praised each other like children. Those were the simplest songs, but they evoked them from the heart and penetrated it. And not only in songs, but it seemed they were spending all their lives in admiring each other. It was a sort of mutual, complete and universal captivation.

"The Dream of a Strange Man" - Feodor Dostoevsky