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CHAPTER 13

Soteriology: Ways and Goals of Salvation and Liberation

KEY WORDS AND NAMES

faith (as *assensus* and *fiducia*)
Martin Luther
bhakti
Mahayana Buddhism
Theravada Buddhism
Bodhisattva
Amida Buddhism
Shinran
the way of devotion
St. Teresa of Avila
ecstasy
ortho-praxis
Code of Manu
Hindu dharma
the four castes (*varnas*)
the four stages (*ashramas*)
islām
Sharī'a
the Five Pillars of the Faith
halakhah
mitzvah
Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)
Passover
seder
bar mitzvah
kosher
yoga
Samkhya philosophy
Patañjali
samādhi
dukkha
tanha
the Eightfold Path
Nirvana
salvation
Abraham Maslow
"peak experiences"
Zen satori
eschatology (messianic)
the "day of Yahweh"
apocalyptic
Last Judgment
Son of Man
Messianic Age
the "shade"
Hades or Sheol
resurrection of the spiritual body
Heaven and Hell
the Western Paradise of the Buddha Amitabha

Beatific Vision (in Christianity)
Eternal Life
Advaita Vedānta
moksha
samādhi
nirvikalpa samādhi
arhat
Nagārjunā
Śūnyatā

Ways of Salvation and Liberation

Overview

Human life is confronted by a tragic moral and spiritual discontent. At least that is what the great religions teach. Viewed realistically and without illusion, they tell us that life is marked by anxiety, estrangement, and a sense of failure, defilement, moral guilt, shame, pain, and unease. Our empirical self, or ego, compares pitiably with our potentially real or spiritual self. Life, it is felt, is in need of liberation, healing, transformation. The conditions from which we humans need to be delivered range from the most basic physical threats—for example, an absence of food and bodily safety—to the spiritual need to sacrifice our finite, private self to that which is truly supreme and enduring.

The ways or means of achieving liberation or salvation have varied greatly in the history of religion and range from coercive magic, used to foil an enemy or to ensure a harvest; to acts of passionate entreaty and ecstatic devotion; to highly disciplined ethical patterns of behavior; to pure mystical flights of union with the divine. There are, however, three or four discernible "paths" or ways that can be observed in all the historical religions and are recognized as classic types. These are the way of *faith*, the way of *devotion*, the way of *disciplined action*, and the way of *meditation* and *insight*. While these patterns can be distinguished, they obviously are often combined. For example, the devout Muslim may reveal a highly patterned life of ethical and devotional behavior, but the Muslim discipline also reflects a life of radical faith and trust in Allah's providential care and goodness—and, perhaps, may be accompanied by occasional flights of mystical insight. The fact is that many of the world religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam—have at one time or another, in one or another tradition or school, emphasized one of these traditional ways over the others as normative, as *the* way. However, these paths are not mutually exclusive, and in religious traditions such as Hinduism and Roman Catholicism all three or four ways may coincide.

Personal needs and temperaments differ greatly, and it is obvious that different persons are drawn to one or another way as religiously more suitable and effective. Some persons are attracted to highly emotional expressions of religion, as in certain forms of revivalistic Protestantism; other persons require a daily discipline of activities, of prayer and good works, carried out in a ritualistic manner that may appear merely routine to the emotionally charged temperament;

and there are those rarer types who are neither very emotional nor practical but are essentially contemplative and meditative and who seek spiritual wisdom or insight largely in private.

It is true, however, that certain religions do appear to favor or to reflect one way of salvation as more characteristic of its normative life. Protestantism, for example, is characterized by the ways of faith and devotion, is less drawn to disciplined sacramental action, and gives almost no attention to the way of mystical insight. Both orthodox Judaism and Islam reflect a very practical religious life, one that is punctuated by a daily pattern of religious acts. Theravada Buddhism, on the other hand, is normatively meditative and reflects the way of knowledge or insight.

THE WAY OF GRACE THROUGH FAITH

It would appear obvious that any religion holding a belief in a transcendent sacred power, be it personal or impersonal, must assume an act of faith on the part of the believer. It may be that we live, move, and have our true being in and through Sacred Power, but such a reality is not necessarily transparent in the world of sensory experience or demonstrable in the same sense as a physical object. ***Faith,*** therefore, can mean the mental assent to the existence of such an unseen reality. In such a case, faith is synonymous with belief, the intellectual apprehension of a religious truth. However, the faith we are speaking of here is not intellectual assent (***assensus***) alone but, rather, the total response of a person—heart, mind, and will. It is what the theologians call trust (***fiducia***), a total, confident reliance on divine grace, on unmerited love and dependence.

Faith in this second sense implies that the believer feels incapable of taking any action that can lead to liberation from the condition binding him or her to sin, craving, or ignorance. The self has reached a condition of complete helplessness and abasement; the will is in bondage to evil or ignorance and is wholly dependent on the grace and love of the divine for its release. The way of faith is common in all three of the Western monotheistic traditions but is, perhaps, most often associated with Protestantism. Since its beginnings in the Reformation, Protestantism has accentuated the stubborn reality of human sin. It logically follows that the deeper the sense of sin, the greater is the need for help from beyond the self. Because the individual can do nothing to be saved—not the least good work—he or she must eradicate every vestige of self-assertion and humbly cast the self before the mercy-seat of God. The believer is liberated or saved by divine grace through faith alone. However, the way of faith is not exclusive to Western religion. It is present in both popular Hinduism and in some traditions of Mahayana Buddhism in China and Japan.

Martin Luther

The Protestant reformer ***Martin Luther*** (1483–1546) represents the classic expression of the way of faith in the West. Before his break with Rome, Luther was a diligent Augustinian monk. But, despite his devotion, Luther was plagued by

the fact that he felt incapable of attaining the righteousness of God—that is, of standing morally satisfied before a righteous and demanding God. He could not know God as a merciful and forgiving God because of his own unrighteousness. "How," he asked, "can I find a gracious God?" The more this afflicted him, the more he tried to prove his righteousness and merit, by which he would be worthy of eternal life. He tried every possible spiritual and ascetic discipline: fasting, good works, pilgrimage, self-denial, and austerity. Nothing relieved his doubts. He could not acquire the monastic ideal of a proper balance between spiritual "dread" of God's righteous judgment and "security" in God's loving mercy. In desperation, he came to believe that Christianity was a cruel hoax. He felt he was eternally lost and fell into an abyss of despair.

Luther came to hate the word *righteousness*. He interpreted it as meaning God's demand of justice and his punishment of the sinner for his or her unrighteousness. However, as he studied the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans, he came on this statement: "the righteous shall live from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17). Here, righteousness was disclosed not as demanding justice by God but as a gift from God, as disclosing the mercy of God. Luther later wrote of his new discovery:

> Now I felt exactly as if I had been born again and believed that I had entered Paradise through widely opened doors. As violently as I had formerly hated the expression "righteousness of God" so I was now as violently compelled to embrace the new conception of grace, and thus for me the expression of the Apostle really opened the Gates of Paradise.[1]

About the same time, Luther made a second discovery. The Latin Vulgate (the official Roman) version of the Gospels read, "do penance, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." However, the great scholar Erasmus produced a new Greek text that rendered the passage as "repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." For Luther, the words *penance* and *repent* represented radically different spiritual worlds. His great discovery was that believers are *made righteous by grace through repentance and faith*, not through good works. Luther no longer saw God as a severe, demanding judge but as a loving Father whose will was to forgive the unrighteous. Righteousness is the undeserved gift of divine grace which is to be received by faith alone.

For Luther, any thought of persons meriting righteousness and salvation is utterly out of the question; indeed, it is a blasphemy. The "merit-mongers," he says, "refuse to receive God's grace freely, which is the glory of His divinity, but rather seek to deserve God's grace by their own works."

While the law or good works, such as ensuring public order and justice, has its function in the maintenance of civil society, it has no role whatsoever in personal redemption. In fact, Luther sees works and the law—that is, what is commanded—as the "hammer of God," breaking down human pride and self-reliance, that "rebellious, obstinate, stiff-necked beast." God has need, writes Luther, "of a mighty hammer, that is to say, the law." God uses the law to teach us how miserably we have failed and have "transgressed all the commandments

The reformer Martin Luther's rediscovery that the believer is saved through faith by God's grace alone remains a bulwark of Protestant Christianity today. (*Source:* Lucas Cranach. Courtesy of Giraudon/Art Resource, N.Y.)

of God." The law only strikes "a terror into the conscience so that it feeleth God to be offended and angry indeed, and itself to be guilty of eternal death."[2]

Luther's radical rejection of the way of works as a means of salvation might raise the questions of whether good works have any place in the religious life or what motivation there is in doing good works. According to Luther, these very questions show that one is still mired in an egoistic perspective. The religious life remains motivated by thoughts of heavenly joy and the fear of hell, that is, by our own advantage. For Luther, to be blessed means only "to will the will of God and His glory and to desire nothing of one's own either here or hereafter." The pious do everything that may redound to God's glory alone. The Christian serves God for God's sake, simply because He *is* God. Otherwise, Luther believed, the Christian does not serve God but only himself or herself. In such a God-centered perspective, there is no consideration of meritorious action, for one is set free to pursue good works for their own sake. To ask why the Christian, saved by grace through faith, should do good reveals a total miscomprehension of what it means to have the burden of one's sin removed by God's grace.

> It is as absurd and stupid [Luther declares] to say: the righteous ought to do good works, as to say: God ought to do good, the sun ought to shine, the pear-tree ought to bear pears; . . . it follows without commandment or bidding of any

law, naturally, willingly, uncompelled. . . . Just so, we do not have to tell the righteous that he ought to do good works, for he does so . . . without any commandment or compulsion, because he is a new creature and a good tree.[3]

Luther's joyous experience of being freed from the bondage of sin and condemnation and of being lovingly accepted by a gracious God has been duplicated in the lives of millions. The heart of the way of faith is the profound sense of blessedness, even ecstasy, that comes with the feeling of an awful burden removed, in spite of one's absolute inability to do anything on one's own behalf. It is expressed in the popular Protestant hymn, "Just as I Am":

1. Just as I am, without one plea
But that thy Blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee
O Lamb of God, I come, I come. . . .

3. Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come. . . .

5. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Mahayana Amida Buddhism in Japan

It was mentioned earlier that the way of faith, while typical of Protestant Christianity, is also a popular way of liberation in Hinduism and Buddhism. It is especially typical of the Buddhist Pure Land Mahayana schools in China and Japan. The description of Buddhist doctrine in Chapter 10 focused on the original teachings of Gautama the Buddha as they are found in the earliest Pali texts and interpreted by the elite Theravada monks. *Theravada* means the "Way of the Elders." Like Christianity, Buddhism experienced a celebrated split into three principal schools. Roughly about the beginning of the Christian era, popular devotional Hinduism (known as ***bhakti***) began to influence Indian Buddhism in decisive ways. For example, the Buddha came to be represented as an image and to be worshiped. A revolutionary movement within Buddhism, called the ***Mahayana*** or the Greater Vehicle, was the result, in part, of this penetration of popular *bhakti*. Over the centuries, the Mahayana Buddhism of faith and devotion became the dominant form of Buddhism in China and Japan. Theravada remained the normative expression of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and in Southeast Asia.

Theravada Buddhism centers on the highly disciplined, rather elite life of the monk who renounces life in the world. Conversely, Mahayana is a religion of laypersons that teaches the universality of salvation. While Theravada Buddhism considers each person to be an individual who must work out his or her own salvation, Mahayana sees the fate of each individual as linked with that of

all others. Associated with this belief was the development of *parināmanā*, the transfer of merit, whereby the meritorious action of those enlightened can assist those weaker beings enslaved to passion and attachment in this degenerate age. Note that such a transfer of merit runs counter to the strict Theravada doctrine regarding the pitiless workings of the law of *karma*. While Theravada stresses the original teaching of Buddha and considers him a great sage, a man among men, Mahayana focuses on the life of Buddha, especially on his selfless compassion (*karuna*), and looks to the Buddha as a savior of others. Mahayana removed the distinction between ignorant laypeople and the learned monk, between saint and sinner, and made salvation equally accessible to all. The ideal of Theravada remained the *arhant* (perfect being), the disciplined monk who, through concentrated meditation, seeks only his own enlightenment and Nirvana. As we have seen in Chapter 12, the ideal type in Mahayana is the ***Bodhisattva,*** previous incarnations of the Buddha who, having achieved enlightenment and on the brink of Nirvana, return to the world to make salvation possible for others.

According to Mahayana, Gautama is a Bodhisattva, the last of many compassionate Buddha saviors. In later years, Mahayana came to teach that other Buddha saviors were yet to come, most notably Maitreya. As the tradition developed, the world was seen as full of Bodhisattvas, each one an emanation of the Buddha-essence and each one seeking the liberation of other beings. However, the Pure Land sects of Mahayana taught that, while there were many emanations of the original Buddha-essence, the heavenly Buddha most concerned with earthly beings is Amitabha (Amida), the Buddha of Infinite Light who dwells in the Western Paradise, the Pure Land.

In medieval Japan, Pure Land or ***Amida Buddhism,*** as it is called, became the most popular and influential school. In a time of bewildering change and strife, it offered the weary soul hope for eternal bliss in the Western Paradise. Amida had vowed that all would be saved who simply called on his name, saying *Namu Amida Butsu* with wholehearted trust and devotion. This fervent repetition of Amida's name became known as Nembutsu. It originally signified the work of meditation on the name of Amida but took on the rather different connotation of radical reliance on the saving power of Amida alone.

It was Honen (1133–1212 C.E.) who, more than any other Buddhist sage, called for mutual tolerance in the use of methods of achieving enlightenment and taught that rebirth in heaven is achieved by recitation of the Nembutsu while relying on the grace of Amida. It was Honen's disciple, ***Shinran*** (1173–1262 C.E.), however, who carried the logic of the way of faith to its conclusion. He came to believe that recitation of the Nembutsu was itself an act of merit and therefore self-assertion. He advanced a radical doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Amida. His rejection of merit deepened his own sense of the ineradicable character of human ignorance and lostness to the point that he believed that wicked persons were more acceptable to Amida than righteous men and women, because the wicked were more aware of their need to throw themselves entirely on Amida's mercy.

Shinran concluded that it was impossible for a person to do good works. All acts are tainted with self-centeredness. He saw no bridge between the holy, pure Amida and humankind's petty, egoistic deeds.

> However good a man may be, he is incapable, with all his deeds of goodness, of effecting his rebirth in Amida's Land of Recompense. Much less so with bad men. . . . Good deeds are of no effect and evil deeds of no hindrance as regards rebirth. Even the rebirth of good men is impossible without being helped by Amida's specific Vow issuing from his great love and compassion which are not at all of this world.[4]

Shinran taught that the way of faith, while seemingly easy, is the most difficult of all paths because human pride always tempts individuals to seek their own salvation, rather than to rely on the Buddha. For Shinran, all spiritual merit proceeds *from* the Buddha—including the gift of faith itself.

The experience of "acceptance," despite our being unacceptable, is central to the way of faith and is a pronounced feature of devotional hymns and literature in Protestantism, as well as in the True Pure Land sect. The sentiment is conveyed by the words of the hymn "Just as I Am," cited earlier. Because one is accepted by the mercy of God or by the compassion of Amida, one finds rest and peace, a "nonchalance of faith," the taking of life as we find it, without fear or anxiety. The profound sense of release that accompanies Amida's "acceptance" wells up in expressions of joy and gratitude. For Shinran, as for Luther, all attempts to gain some practical benefit from religion must be rejected. True religion rests, finally, on a recognition of our own moral failure; on our nothingness; and on the infinite, unspeakable mercy of God or Buddha. It is this overflow of thankfulness and love that often is expressed in devotional acts such as bhakti (discussed later), that, while often related, are to be distinguished from action in terms of ethical deeds, as in caste Hinduism or the following of Islamic law (*Sharia*).

THE WAY OF DEVOTION

The joy and feeling of exaltation that accompany the experience of divine grace impel the believer to acts of devotion. These acts are not, however, only grateful responses to divine mercy. They may also be a *means*, a discipline, directed at achieving enlightenment, redemption, or even union with the divine. In this latter sense, devotion has more in common with the way of action or deeds. It is hardly distinguishable from either sympathetic magic or from the way of ritual action discussed in earlier chapters and observed, for example, in certain Hindu or Catholic sacramental practices. Devotion may also be an integral component of mystical insight, as in the case of the Hindu saint Ramakrishna, or the Catholic mystic St. Teresa of Avila. As such, it often is considered a distinct path and has been called *devotional mysticism*.[5]

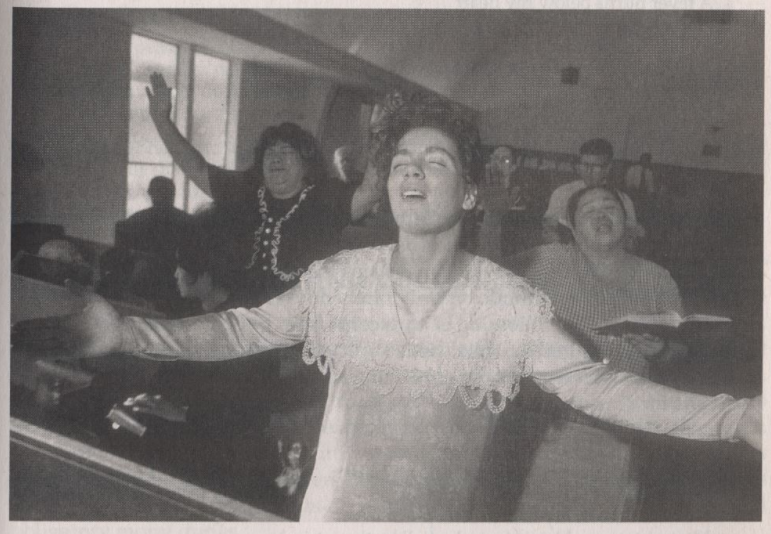
The point that needs to be underlined here is that ***the way of devotion*** is found, more often than not, in company with the ways of faith, action, and insight

and is either an integral means or a natural outcome of those classic paths. The way of devotion is, then, an inclusive way of salvation. Nevertheless, it does have distinctive features that deserve brief analysis.

The intensity of devotional religion is often regarded with disfavor by those who follow the more prosaic way of obligation and duty, and by those who take the arduous path of wisdom and insight. An example is the horror expressed by the Hindu temple priests on encountering Ramakrishna's childish devotional excesses before the image of the Divine Mother, the goddess Kali, or the revulsion of the sober and inexcitable Protestant when confronted with the ecstatic shouting and dancing of a Pentecostal revival. The first mark of devotionalism is its deep feeling and emotion. It often reflects a dissatisfaction with the formal, unfeeling character of traditional religion. Devotionalism involves an effervescence of emotion that is often absent in older, established churches.

Closely related to its emotional character is the deeply personal quality of devotion. Here, again, it reflects a reaction against the dispassion, even detachment, of much traditional religious practice. Devotionalism expresses a deeply felt personal encounter with the divine or ultimate, felt as a profound presence, vividly experienced in a revelatory encounter that leaves the devotee radically changed.

On occasion, this direct, intense personal encounter with the divine issues in a rapture in which the devotee actually feels transported out of the body or to another spiritual plane. This is often the case with the great mystics, such as the Spanish nun ***St. Teresa of Avila*** (1515–1582). ***Ecstasy*** (from the



Three women standing with outstretched arms in ecstatic devotion at a Pentacostal meeting in Los Angeles. (*Source:* Courtesy of A. Ramsey/PhotoEdit, Inc.)

Greek *ekstasis*) literally means being outside oneself. St. Teresa describes such a transport:

> In these raptures the soul seems no longer to animate the body, and thus the natural heat of the body is felt to be very sensibly diminished; it gradually becomes colder, though conscious of the greatest sweetness and delight. No means of resistance is possible. . . . Often it comes like a strong, swift impulse, before your thought can forewarn you of it or you can do anything to help yourself; you see and feel this cloud, or this powerful eagle, rising and bearing you up with it on its wings. . . .
>
> The majesty of Him who can do this is manifested in such a way that the hair stands on end, and there is produced a great fear of offending so great a God, but a fear overpowered by the deepest love, newly enkindled, for One Who, as we see, has so deep a love for so loathsome a worm that He seems not satisfied by literally drawing the soul to Himself, but will also have the body, mortal though it is.[6]

St. Teresa's frequent reference to the divine love is also characteristic of devotionalism. In fact, the divine–human encounter is often described in terms reserved for a lover's desire—words such as *rapture*, *ecstasy*, and *thirst for union*. Ramakrishna insisted that "extreme longing is the surest way to God-vision," and he often used the explicit language of passionate desire in expressing his encounters with the divine. This personal intimacy of devotionalism is pronounced in the ardent words of a Muslim Sufi poet:

> A fever burns below my heart
> And ravages my every part;
> It hath destroyed my strength and stay,
> And smouldered all my soul away. . . .
>
> So passionate my love is, I do yearn
> To keep His memory constantly in mind;
> But O, the ecstasy with which I burn
> Sears out my thoughts, and strikes my memory blind.[7]

In the West—for example, in Catholicism or Islam—devotional mysticism will occasionally blur the distinction between the human devotee and God. Normally, however, Western devotion maintains the distinction and remains within the bounds of theistic orthodoxy. Only rarely does it reach the explicit eroticism of Hindu **bhakti**. The following is an excerpt from popular Bengali devotional lyrics offered to the god Krishna. He is depicted as a noble warrior and a divine lover, and the lyrics express the erotic longing of the beautiful young Radha as she waits for Krishna's return:

> When my beloved returns to my house
> I shall make my body a temple of gladness,
> I shall make my body the altar of joy
> and let down my hair to sweep it.
> My twisting necklace of pearls shall be the intricate
> sprinkled design on the altar
> my full breasts the water jars,

> my curved hips the plantain trees
> the twinkling bells at my waist the young
> shoots of the mango.
> I shall use the arcane arts of fair women in all lands
> to make my beauty outshine a thousand moons. . . .
> The moon has shown upon me,
> the face of my beloved.
> O night of joy![8]

The rapturous and erotic devotionalism of Hindu *bhakti* and some Sufi mysticism does appear occasionally, though more covertly, in Christian devotion. It is evident, for example, in some of the language used by devotees of the Roman Catholic cult of the Sacred Heart. One of the leaders of the cult, Mother Louise Margaret de la Touche (1868–1915), in her *Book of Infinite Love*, exhorts Catholics to adore the eucharistic Host, the wafer or bread, and to lovingly kiss the consecrated paten, or plate holding the wafer. Students of Protestant **revivalism** have also pointed to the veiled erotic imagery in some Pentecostal sermons and hymns. However, Protestant devotionalism does not express so much erotic union as it does the warm personalism of friendship. God is spoken of in the intimacy of a real human friend. The dominant feeling of Protestant devotionalism is expressed in the popular hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus":

> What a Friend we have in Jesus
> All our sins and griefs to bear!
> What a privilege to carry
> Everything to God in prayer.
>
> O what peace we often forfeit,
> O what needless pain we bear
> All because we do not carry
> Everything to God in prayer!
>
> Can we find a friend so faithful
> Who will all our sorrows share?
> Jesus knows our every weakness
> Take it to the Lord in prayer.

THE WAY OF ACTION AND OBLIGATION

The human body and mind need to be active. This is a deep human compulsion. We are anxious and discontent when, involuntarily, we are inert and passive. It is no wonder, then, that activity is also central to the religious life of humankind. In fact, the way of action is the most universal and popular of the paths to salvation. Dramatic conversion experiences, mystical flights to the One, even devotional ecstasy are relatively infrequent events, the experiences of a religious elite. The vast majority of believers express their religious convictions and hopes through rather prosaic patterns of religious activities—rites, sacraments, and obligatory moral duties.

There are certain characteristic features of the way of action. First, it reflects a very *practical*, everyday, nondramatic approach to religion. It is the secular as

sacred or, more accurately, the secular round of life punctuated by habitual religious duties. It is a deep, if unconscious, conviction of the way of action that the cosmos or reality is sustained by a rehearsal of the "way of the fathers," the Grand Harmony. Without these actions, it is felt that the world will degenerate further and may even return to chaos.

A second feature of the way of action is its *patterned character*. What is striking about religious rite and duty—pointed out in Chapter 5—is the regular nature of this form of religious life—down-to-earth, ordered, and disciplined, usually lacking the ecstasy and effervescence of the devotional mystic. The way of action is typically conservative and institutional. This relates to a third feature, namely, the *traditional* character of religious action. It is the way not only of orthodoxy (correct opinion) but also of ***ortho-praxis*** (correct practice). Right duty or action means following the path established by the gods or the fathers "in the beginning." The way of action is suspicious of innovation; it demands a conformity of behavior as essential to community survival. The way of action is basically the only way found in primal and archaic religion because the function of religious rite is to sustain social, even cosmic, order. It is natural that this way is also characteristic of the orthodox traditions in the historic religions: Orthodox Judaism and Islam, traditional Roman Catholicism, and caste Hinduism. Chapter 5 introduced the main features of the way of action as observed in the practice of religious ritual and sacrament. Here, we will concentrate on those aspects of religious action exhibited in the full range of obligatory duties expected of the faithful in Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

Hinduism

Orthodox Hinduism places great emphasis on the performance of duties associated with the four stages and goals of life. These include worldly well-being and pleasure, but also one's duties and, finally, *moksa*, liberation from the cycle of birth and death. These are formulated in ancient sacred codes of behavior, especially in a series of law books called the *Dharma Shastras*. The most ancient and authoritative of these texts is the *Manu Smriti*, or ***Code of Manu.*** The practice of duty—or ***dharma,*** as it is called—is the heart of orthodox Hinduism and, it is believed, will lead to a happy and moral life. Some see the fulfilling of *dharma* as leading to **moksha,** or liberation. In the Vedas, the word *dharma* stood for an eternally fixed moral law that underlies the universe. In the later law books, *dharma* came to refer specifically to the duties and obligations of social life. In the ***Code of Manu,*** for example, these duties are elaborately formulated in terms of two social patterns: the duties of the ***four classes***, or ***castes*** (***varnas***), and the duties of the ***four stages*** (***ashramas***) of life.

Hinduism looks on social life as a complex and fragile organism. Complexity can involve danger. It is possible that if there is a breakdown in one part of the organism, the whole social body will be endangered. Unless each strand of the social fabric is maintained and makes its proper contribution, the whole will unravel. And so Hinduism teaches that the functioning of the four classes—the

Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (farmers and producers), and Shudras (laborers)—is essential to the perfect ordering of society. So also is the right functioning of thousands of other groupings that are distinguished by occupation, family, geography, cult practices, and so on. Hinduism considers it entirely natural and realistic to recognize differences in sex, age, type, and status—and that to confuse the station and duties of various classes and stages of life is to invite chaos. The *Bhagavad Gita* describes the consequence of such social confusion:

> When the religious laws of the family are destroyed, then lawlessness destroys the whole family. Because lawlessness prevails, the women of the family become corrupted, and when women are corrupt, intermingling of caste follows. Intermingling of caste leads to hell, both those who destroy the family as well as the family itself. The ancestors also fall into hell for they are deprived of the offerings of food made to them.[9]

The *Code of Manu* describes in detail the duties of the four classes, including the sacraments appropriate for each stage (*ashrama*) of life. It points out that "it is better to discharge one's own appointed duty incompletely than to perform completely that of another,"[10] because to do otherwise is to introduce the confusion that results in social chaos. Therefore, in the beginning the Lord

> for the sake of the prosperity of worlds, created the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Shudra. . . .
>
> To Brahmans he assigned teaching and studying (the Veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms).
>
> The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures;
>
> The Vaishya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Veda), to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land.
>
> One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudra, to serve meekly even these (other) three castes.[11]

The *Dharma Shastras*, or law books, describe the sacramental as well as the social obligations that accompany each of the first three stages of life for the males of the three "twice-born" classes. The *Gautama Dharma* alone lists 40 sacraments, although there are 16 principal ones. The numerous obligations and rites of the male of the "twice-born" classes differ from stage to stage and therefore depend on the stage in life he has reached.

The first stage—after a young man undergoes initiation, including the investiture of the sacred cord—is that of a celibate student living with his master, or guru. This *ashrama* begins between the ages of 8 and 12 and lasts for 12 years, although today this first stage is not as exacting as the one described here in part:

> Now follow the rules for the studentship.
>
> He shall obey his teacher, except when ordered to commit crimes which cause loss of caste.
>
> He shall do what is serviceable to his teacher, he shall not contradict him. . . .

> He shall not eat food offered at a sacrifice to the gods or the Manes,
> Nor pungent condiments, salt, honey, or meat. . . .
> He shall preserve his chastity. . . .
> Bringing all he obtains to his teacher, he shall go begging with a vessel in the morning and in the evening, and he may beg from everybody except low-caste people unfit for association with Aryas [Aryans].[12]

The second *ashrama* begins with marriage, when interests are turned to family, occupation, and the wider community. Begetting children, studying the Vedas, and performing the traditional rites, prayers, and sacrifices associated with the householder are especially important.

The third stage is that of retirement and retreat when the householder, "seeing his skin wrinkled and his hair white," takes to the forest as a **sadhu**, or ascetic, in search of self-control and spiritual insight. The *sadhu* spends his days fulfilling his new *dharma* through the study of sacred scripture and the performance of prescribed rituals.

The final stage of life is that of the homeless wanderer, the **sannyasin**, or recluse, who has no fixed abode, no possessions, and no obligations. He no longer performs sacrifices and other rites, and he has abandoned all attachments to this world. He shaves his head and beard and puts on the redbrown robe of the **mendicant**, or beggar. The *Code of Manu* describes the renunciant:

> Delighting in what refers to the Soul, sitting in the postures prescribed by the Yoga, independent of external help, entirely abstaining from sensual enjoyments, with himself for his only companion, he shall live in this world, desiring the bliss of final liberation.[13]

The *Bhagavad Gita* and other texts make it clear, however, that a person who acts without attachment may strive for liberation through the performance of daily work.

Islam

We have remarked that the soul of Islam is to be found in its law rather than in its theology. The Muslim tradition is called ***islām***, meaning "to commit" or "surrender" to Allah, who guides the faithful "in the straight path" (*Qur'an* I, 6). Islam, like all the historical religions, can point to Muslim saints and sages who epitomize the way of radical faith, the way of devotion, or the mystical path. However, the heart of normative Islamic religion is located in the daily obedience of the faithful to the commands of God.

The term used by Islam is ***Sharī'a***, which is law, morality, and religion, for in Islam the three are not distinguished. The *Sharī'a* is—like the Torah for Judaism—a complex of obligations governing personal, civil, political, and ritual activity. Islam speaks both of things to be believed (*imān*, or faith) and things to be done or works (*islām*). It is clear, however, that for the faithful Muslim, things to be done take precedence over theology. A Muslim's obligations are principally expressed in five explicit duties or ***Five Pillars of the Faith.*** The five "pillars" reflect the importance of the way of duty and action in Islam.

Shahādah—Confession The first "pillar" of *islām* is bearing witness to the faith by saying the Confession: "there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger (or Apostle) of God." The Confession must be said intentionally, thoughtfully, and with full understanding of its truth. The pious Muslim will recite the *Shahādah* several times a day in prayer.

Salāt—*Prayer* In Islam, prayer is primarily something that must be *done*, must be ritually performed, although Muslims also engage in private devotional prayer. There are five obligatory times of ritual prayer each day, each prayer having as its theme adoration and submission to God. The Muslim prays on arising, at midday, in the afternoon, immediately after sunset, and before retiring. The prayers vary in the number of ritual movements (*Rak'ah*) and appropriate recitations, but each begins and ends in an erect posture, with intervening bowings, prostrations, and recitations. The following is a description of some of the actions involved in the completion of one *Rak'ah*, so distinctive of *Salāt* in the Sunni tradition of Islam:

> Both hands are raised up to the ears in a standing position, with the face towards the *Qiblah* in Mecca, while the words *Allahu Akbar* [God is the greatest of all] are uttered. This is called the Takbir and is followed by a standing prayer and the recitation of the opening *surah* of the *Qur'an*. . . .
>
> Then, saying *Allahu Akbar* the worshipper lowers his head down, so that the palms of the hands reach the knees. In this position, which is called *Rukū*, phrases expressive of the divine glory and majesty are repeated at least three times: "Glory to my Lord the great."
>
> After this, the standing position is resumed, with the words: "God accepts him who gives praise to Him, O our Lord, thine is the praise."
>
> Then the worshipper prostrates [the first *Sijdah* prostration] himself, the toes of both feet, both knees, both hands, and the forehead touching the ground, and the following words expressing the divine greatness are uttered at least three times: "Glory to my Lord the most High."[14]

The worshipper then sits in a reverential position, which is followed by a second prostration (as described previously). This finishes one *Rak'ah*.

Noon prayer in the mosque—the place of prostration—on Friday is the time of congregational *Salāt*. The worshippers are called to prayer by a **muezzin**, usually from a tower or minaret. A sermon, often, but not necessarily, by an *Imām*, or spiritual leader, usually in the form of an exhortation, precedes the *Salāt*. The *Imām* also leads in the timing of the congregational prayers.

There is something majestic and powerful in the corporate action of the faithful joining in their largely mental or subvocal recitations and ritual prostrations toward Mecca. The essence of *Salāt* is this personal sense of awareness and intention on the part of the faithful as they "remember" God in humility and reverent awe. *Salāt* involves this heightened response to God's mercy and "refuge" that discourages mere perfunctory, heedless gestures.

Zakāt—*Almsgiving* The third "pillar," *Zakāt* (or almsgiving), is derived from a root meaning "to purify." The *Qur'an* is full of appeals for charity to the poor and oppressed, and the practice of *Zakāt* has become the foundation of Islam's tradition of social responsibility.

The *Zakāt* is obligatory and—while technically not a civil function but a "pillar" of *islām*—in modern, complex society often is implemented by civil authority. Over the centuries, interpretations regarding the obligatory rate of alms tax on crops, cattle, camels, other possessions, and income have varied. As complex and legalistic as the administration of the *Zakāt* has become, its religious significance has remained foremost:

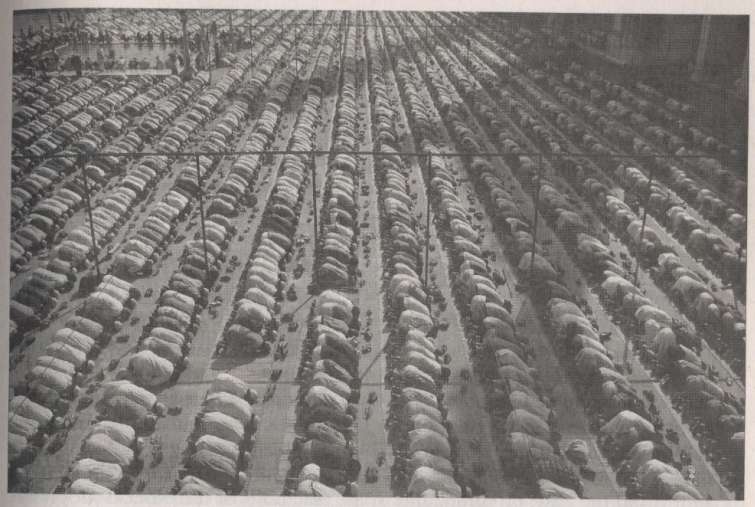
> The doctrine is that property is validated as a private right and enjoyment, provided a portion of it is devoted to the common need, in token of the corporate awareness that should characterize all personal possession. This paid portion "purifies," that is, legitimatizes, what is retained. Without this active conscience, retention and ownership would be impure and disqualified. The community has not only a stake in, but also a claim on, the individual's *amwal* or substance.[15]

Sawm—*Fasting during Ramadan* The duty of fasting during the month of Ramadan (the ninth lunar month of the Islamic calendar) is the fourth and most rigorous obligation of the Muslim's religious life as set forth in the *Shari'a*. Like the other "pillars," the fast is a physical as well as a spiritual action, or deed—a sacramental ritual. The fast involves total abstinence from food and drink during the daylight hours for the 28 days of Ramadan. When the fast falls during the heat of summer, the hardship of this obligation is intense.

Islam teaches that fasting nurtures self-discipline and compassion as well as a sense of our own frailty and dependence on God:

> The benefit of fasting is primarily in terms of character. The abstention from food and drink and the other material pleasures for the long hours between dawn and dusk during the month of Ramadan is an act of self-discipline by which an individual asserts his or her ability to gain control over material pleasures and habits. This is a triumph of mind over matter. The desire to quench thirst, to soften the pangs of hunger, or to light a cigarette, are placed in their proper perspective of things which can be postponed, and in some cases given up entirely. . . . There is a social dimension of equal importance. The community sense of those who fast and break their fast together is greatly heightened and a necessary element for concerted social action is added. . . . One who can afford food and yet abstains from it, is better able to understand the person who does not have the food because he or she cannot afford it. . . .[16]

Hajj—*Pilgrimage to Mecca* The fifth religious obligation is pilgrimage to Mecca, the holiest shrine of Islam's faith. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able is obliged to make this pilgrimage at least once during his or her lifetime. The rites connected with the pilgrimage bind the Muslim with his or her brothers and sisters from all classes, nations, and races in a powerful sacrament of spiritual unity.



Long rows of Muslims prostrating themselves on their prayer rugs at the great Jami Masjid Mosque in Delhi, India. (*Source*: Courtesy of Hartmut Schwarzbach, Argus/Peter Arnold, Inc.)

The pilgrimage involves a series of rituals. First, the pilgrim must undertake certain restraints, such as sexual abstinence. On approaching the city, the pilgrim greets Mecca with the cry, "Labbaika: 'Here am I, Lord, here am I.'" There follows the sevenfold circuit of the cube-shaped *Ka'bah* in the center of the mosque court. The pilgrim must try to kiss, or at least to touch, the sacred stone that is mounted on a corner of the *Ka'bah* and is the object of solemn reverence. The climax of the pilgrimage comes between the eighth and tenth day with a journey from Mecca through Mina to Arafat 12 miles away. There, the pilgrim assembles with the others from noon to near sundown, a "standing in the presence of God." At sunset, the pilgrims move on to Muzdalīfah for the night. The next day, a symbolic "stoning" of Satan takes place at Mina. The 12-day pilgrimage ends with a ritual sacrifice of animals at Mina and the return to Mecca for a last circuit of the *Ka'bah*. The sense of excitement, of spiritual unity and camaraderie is recalled by a convert to Islam, Malcolm X, on returning from *Hajj:*

> We parked near the Great Mosque. We performed our ablution and entered. Pilgrims seemed to be on top of each other, there were so many, lying, sitting, sleeping, praying, walking. . . . Then I saw the *Ka'bah*, a huge block stone house in the middle of the Great Mosque. It was being circumambulated by thousands upon thousands of praying pilgrims, both sexes, every size, shape, color, and race in the world. I knew the prayer to be uttered when the pilgrim's eyes first perceive the *Ka'bah*. . . . My feeling there in the House of God was a numbness. My *mutawwif* led me in the crowd of praying, chanting pilgrims moving

> seven times round the *Ka'bah*. Some were bent and wizened with age. It was a sight that stamped itself on the brain. I saw incapacitated pilgrims being carried by others. Faces were enraptured in their faith.[17]

The religious obligations of a pious Muslim do not end with the "Five Pillars." The faithful are expected to conform their daily lives to the entire Islamic *Sharī'a*, which would include such things as prohibitions on drinking wine and eating pork; requirements of just actions in all commercial transactions; and in some extreme cases, participation in a holy war (*jihād*).

Like the "twice-born" classes of orthodox Hinduism, the Muslim's life is encompassed by daily religious obligations that, far from being a burden, give life its dignity, its sense of purpose and communal unity, and its feeling of joy in conforming to a divine and sacred law.

Judaism

Christianity, at least until very recently, has placed great importance on belief and doctrine, on orthodoxy. Judaism, on the other hand, has given greater attention to correct practice (*ortho-praxis*). Judaism never established an official creed. Pious Jews differ widely on theological questions; what is central is a holy living as set forth in the Law, or Torah, and in the teachings of the biblical prophets.* Judaism holds that an observant religious life prepares the way for the coming of the messianic age, God's kingdom on earth, when everything will be sanctified. It could be said that Judaism believes morality can be legislated, in the sense that habitual observance creates a complex of values and beliefs that, in turn, reinforces behavior.

The traditional path of life, or "way," prescribed for the religious Jew is, as we have seen, set forth in what is called the ***halakhah***—the tradition of legal decisions and prescriptive rules of the rabbis concerning every aspect of Jewish observance. *Halakhah* is the way the Jew shapes his or her daily routine into a pattern of sanctity. It is the way to redemption. The hallowing of everyday activities—including eating, work, and sexual relations—means that for the Jew there can be no sharp separation of the sacred and the secular; the sacred impinges on every situation of life and under all circumstances. Since most activities are fenced by certain religious rules of observance, only a few examples can be mentioned here. Jews call their observance ***mitzvah,*** the pious response to God's command. Therefore, every act should, ideally, be preceded by the spoken intention that it be done "for the sake of Heaven."

The heart and soul of Jewish observance is the keeping of the Sabbath (*Shabbat*). On the Sabbath, a person must not work or engage in the usual mundane activities. It is a time of worship, rejoicing, and rest—a "taste of the world to come." The ritual of the *Shabbat* observance is here well described:

> How does the pious Jew keep the Sabbath? All week long, he looks forward to it, and the anticipation enhances the ordinary days. By Friday afternoon, he has bathed, put on his Sabbath garments, and set aside the affairs of the week. At home, his wife will have cleaned, cooked, arranged her finest table. The Sabbath comes at sunset, and leaves when three stars appear Saturday night. After a brief service, the family comes together to enjoy its best meal of the week, a meal at which particular Sabbath foods are served. In the morning comes the Sabbath service, including a public reading from the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, and prophetic writings, and an additional service in memory of the Temple sacrifices on Sabbaths of old. Then home for lunch, and very commonly, a Sabbath nap, the sweetest part of the day. As the day wanes, the synagogue calls for a late afternoon service, and then comes a ceremony, *havdalah*, "separation," effected with spices, wine, and candlelight, between the holy time of the Sabbath and the ordinary time of the weekday.[18]

*As we saw in Chapter 12, even in observance of the Law, the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform movements of modern Judaism allow differing interpretation of the Law or Torah.

In addition to Sabbath observance, the traditional Jew also observes the several festivals that mark the seasons of the Jewish calendar year and commemorate significant events in Jewish history. The festivals mentioned here are the major holidays observed by Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism, the three principal movements.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the year, New Year's Day, a fall festival originally associated with the harvest but now initiating a time of the Days of Awe, a week of remembrance, judgment, and penitence. This period culminates in ***Yom Kippur,*** the ***Day of Atonement,*** the holiest day of the year, in which Jews confess their faults and ask for the forgiveness of God and their fellows (see Chapter 5). It is a 24-hour period of fasting and prayer, punctuated by confession. *Yom Kippur* is followed by *Sukkot*, a time of joy and thanksgiving, originally an autumn agricultural feast called the "festival of ingathering." God's preservation and shelter are symbolized by the construction of a booth or hut, covered with branches, fruits, and flowers, in which the family eats its meals. The hut now reminds the Jew that God made his people dwell in booths when he rescued them from Egypt and preserved them in their wanderings in the wilderness.

Two other principal festivals are *Pessah* (Passover) and *Shabuot*. ***Passover*** is not only a traditional spring festival celebrating the new life but also a festival of freedom commemorating the Exodus of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The central ritual is the Passover ***seder,*** or family service, at table on the eve of the holiday. The father presides and, as he relates the story of deliverance, several symbols are present at the table as graphic reminders of both the renewal of life given by God (an egg and vegetable greens) and the suffering and cost of the Exodus. The latter is represented by a dish of salt, symbolizing both the tears of slavery and the saltiness of the Red Sea; bitter herbs again remind those present of their earlier slavery; and *matzah*—or unleavened bread, baked like a cracker from flour and water—symbolizes the fact that the Israelites had to leave Egypt without preparation and had to take with them only unleavened bread.

The festival of *Shabuot*, or the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), comes seven weeks after Passover and marks the end of the grain harvest and the sacrifice of first fruits. The rabbis later connected *Shabuot* with the giving of the commandments, or Torah, to Moses on Mount Sinai. Today, it is the day in which children are confirmed in a synagogue service to a life dedicated to the Torah.

The ritual Jewish seder meal, focal point of the festival of Passover. (*Source:* Courtesy of Lawrence Migdale.)

Jewish life is also punctuated by a series of religious rites of passage—including the circumcision (*brit milah*) of the male child on the eighth day after birth, and the advent of puberty, at which time the young boy undergoes the rite of ***bar mitzvah*** (*bar* means "son," or "subject to," and *mitzvah* means God's commandment), a sign of allegiance to the Torah. Many congregations today have instituted a similar rite (*bat mitzvah*) for girls. In addition, there are, of course, rites prescribed for a traditional wedding as well as for sickness, funerals, and mourning. However, the observance that is perhaps most distinctive of Judaism, what can be called its "condensed symbol," is that associated with the *dietary laws*.

We know that most of the dietary observances followed today by traditional Jews have their origin in ancient taboos associated with hygiene. Yet they are also perceived by the devout as laws given by God to sanctify life. Furthermore, they are an outward sign of a community of faith, an observance that helps bind the community around ancient practices. Observance of the dietary rules varies among modern practicing Jews. The Orthodox make every effort to observe these laws strictly, often at great personal inconvenience, indeed sacrifice. However, many Jews observe a ***kosher*** (fit and proper) table in their home but not when eating away from home. Others observe only some laws, such as the prohibition against eating pork, as a symbol of their participation in the community.

To the outsider, the meticulous following of the dietary laws, whose original meaning often is obscure, may well appear to be an obsolete irrelevance. However, to the observant Jew, these requirements are meant to make God's presence known in one of life's fundamental activities. In carrying out this *mitzvah*, the Jew is made joyful in the knowledge that he or she is hallowing the day in following God's command. To be real, of course, commandment must be accompanied by faith and devotion. Commandment without devotion is dead.

THE WAY OF MEDITATION AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHT

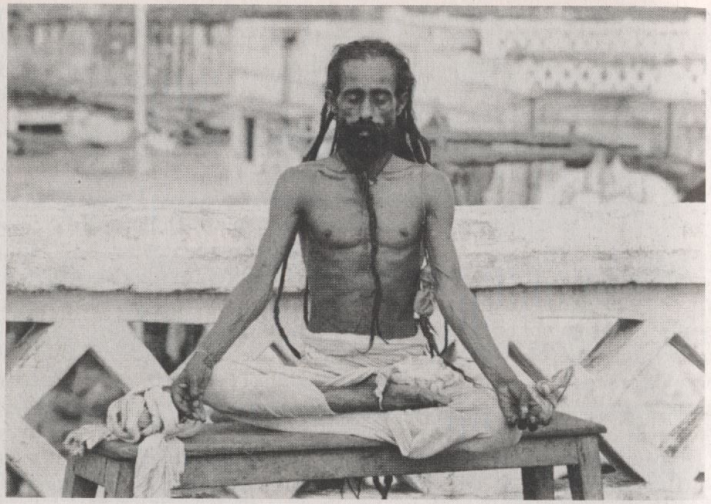
The three paths to salvation previously discussed are ways followed by millions of devout believers in all the major faiths. They are the *exoteric*, or common, means to salvation. The way of meditation and insight is an ancient path that also is open to all who are willing to follow its demanding discipline. However, just because of its rigorous conditions, it remains the *esoteric* way, that is, one pursued by a spiritual elite. Our Western word *meditation* does not adequately convey the meaning of the word in Hindu Sanskrit or Buddhist Pali. Meditation in these religions means a regimen of mental cultivation and development that proceeds, as we will see, through a series of moral and physical disciplines to the higher levels of mindfulness, or true consciousness, wisdom, or insight-enlightenment.

Those who follow this way believe that true insight is absolutely crucial for the achievement of genuine spiritual freedom and release. But it is insight of a particular kind: enlightenment regarding the illusory division between subject and object, and between the self and the Ultimate. We select as examples two notable paths of meditation: (1) classical Yoga, expounded by the Indian sage Patañjali (second century B.C.E.) in his *Yoga Sutras* and, building on the techniques of Yoga, (2) the final goal of the Eightfold Path of Theravada Buddhism.

The Yoga Techniques of Patañjali

Yoga (meaning "to yoke or join") is the physical and mental discipline, conjoined with certain philosophical principles, that constitutes one of the six orthodox philosophies of India. The yoga system was refined and combined with the ***Samkhya philosophy*** by ***Patañjali.*** Briefly, according to Samkhya (the oldest philosophy of India), the world is constituted by two uncreated, eternal substances: *prakrti*, or indestructible matter, and *purusha*, or the infinite number of individual souls. The soul's entanglement in matter is the cause of its fall into misery and suffering, due to its immersion in what is mutable or changing. Suffering, then, is due to a "want of discrimination," a failure to recognize the essential difference between soul and matter. Deliverance is the "discriminating knowledge" of the absolute difference between these eternal realities. Samkhya describes the human situation and its "fall"; Yoga elaborates the techniques for the soul's release.

According to Patañjali, the soul's emancipation from illusion is achieved only through struggle, more particularly through **ascetic** techniques and meditation that alone can abolish our normal, illusory consciousness. Yoga begins then in action, or ascetic practices, that lead on to concentration, meditation and, ultimately, wisdom. The point of departure is concentration on a single object, which can block or break the circuit or stream of the normal conscious and



An Indian seated in motionless concentration in the lotus position. The senses are withdrawn from external distractions preparatory to *samadhi*, union or superconsciousness. (*Source:* Courtesy of Stock Boston, Inc.)

subconscious mind. However, concentration can be achieved only if the body is suitably prepared. Therefore, physiology plays a critical role in yoga. The body must be pure and without strain; the breathing must be rhythmical. The first four steps in the yogic technique prepare the body and mind for concentration. The first preliminary step involves the *yamas* ("restraints"), the five desire-killing vows: to abstain from killing living things (*ahimsa*), from lying, from stealing, from sensuality (unchastity), and from acquisitiveness. Along with these restraints, the yogi must practice a series of disciplines including physical cleanliness, ascetic mortifications, study, and devotion.

Yogic technique proper begins with the third step, *asana*, sitting in the proper posture. The **hathayoga** sutras describe innumerable possible *asanas*. The most famous of these postures is the lotus position, with the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh, with the chin resting on the chest and eyes focused on the nose. The purpose is to reduce physical effort and strain, and to achieve a sense of physical weightlessness so that consciousness is no longer troubled by the presence of the body.

The fourth step is the breathing discipline that eliminates respiratory effort and, again, reduces bodily activity to a few rhythmical processes. Now the yogi approaches the state of consciousness peculiar to sleep and the fifth step, the withdrawal of all senses from external objects. Mircea Eliade describes this withdrawal:

> Motionless, cadencing his respiration, fixing his eyes and his attention on a single point, the yogi experimentally steps outside the profane modality of existence. He begins to become autonomous in relation to the cosmos; he is no longer troubled by outer tensions; sensory activity no longer projects him outward toward the objects of the senses; the psychomental stream is no longer governed by distractions, automatisms, and memory: He is "concentrated," "unified." This withdrawal beyond the cosmos is accompanied by a plunge into the depths of himself . . . [He] surrounds himself with increasingly powerful defences—in a word, he becomes invulnerable.[19]

The yogi no longer is distracted and troubled by sensory activity and now can concentrate the mind, which is the beginning of the final, closely linked exercises leading to release. Concentration is fixation of *thought* on a single point with the help of an external object. It brings the mind to rest by emptying it of all else. It is called "conscious *samādhi*," or *samādhi* "with support." The mind is like the calm surface of a pond. The transition from concentration to meditation requires no new technique. Meditation is the seventh step and is described by Patañjali as "a current of unified thought," free from all uncontrolled objects or associations. In meditation, a person is not conscious of consciousness; however, in meditation the yogi can be interrupted by stimuli. In the eighth and final stage of *samādhi* "without supports," the yogi is invulnerable. The word ***samādhi*** means union, absorption, a full comprehension of being. It is spoken of as an unconscious trance, but this conveys too negative an impression. *Samādhi* is a state of superconsciousness. While it presupposes all the earlier disciplines and is not a gift of grace, it comes nevertheless without effort. It is like a rapture. Eliade describes it as follows:

> It would be wrong to regard this way of being of the spirit as a mere "trance" in which consciousness was devoid of all content. [It] is not the "absolute void." . . . For, on the contrary, the consciousness is saturated at that moment by a direct and total intuition of being. . . . The yogi attains to deliverance: a "death in life." He is *jivanmukta*, "the man delivered in life." He no longer lives in time and under the control of time, but in an eternal present.[20]

The paradoxical nature of the release (*moksha*) achieved by *samādhi*, the "emptying" of being that at the same time is the "filling" of being in union or unity, is compared with other goals of salvation below. Suffice it to say here that it is one type of "rebirth" into a new, yet primordial sacred order.

Theravada Buddhism

We learned in Chapter 10 that in Theravada Buddhism, liberation from suffering (***dukkha***) comes through the cessation of craving (***tanha***), which is the cause of human unease and pain. The Fourth Noble Truth preached by the Buddha was the way leading to cessation of suffering, what he called the ***Eightfold Path*** leading to ***Nirvana.*** This Middle Path (because it avoids the extremes of either pleasure-seeking or ascetic self-mortification) is a form of spiritual formation or therapy consisting of eight components:

1. Right understanding
2. Right aspiration
3. Right speech

4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

The eight elements in Buddha's path to enlightenment are not practiced in the previous numerical order; rather, they are developed together, each assisting in the cultivation of the others. Together, they promote the three essentials of Buddhist discipline: *ethical conduct*, especially compassion (*karuna*); *mental discipline* (*samādhi*); and *wisdom* (*prajna*). Buddha insisted on the preliminary discipline of right association, since a person cannot expect to develop attitudes conducive to concentration and wisdom if he or she associates with others whose habits thwart spiritual progress.

Right understanding involves a deep or "penetrating" knowledge of the Four Noble Truths because these truths explain things as they really are, free of all illusion. Right aspiration involves a single-minded intention to be free of selfishness and desire, ill-will, and violence. Right speech, action, and livelihood are especially conducive to ethical conduct. Right speech includes abstention from (1) telling lies, (2) engaging in slander and backbiting, (3) using harsh and abusive language, and (4) indulging in idle speech and gossip. Disciples must become aware of how often they deviate from true and compassionate speech and why they do so. Right action involves a person's motives and intentions as well as outward behavior. Especially important is abstention from killing, stealing, and illegitimate sexual intercourse. A person's actions should be helpful and contribute to the welfare of others. Right livelihood reveals the radical character of Buddha's message. The disciple cannot expect to achieve liberation while engaging in a livelihood that brings harm and suffering to others. Five trades are specifically prohibited: trading in arms, in living beings, in flesh, in intoxicating drinks, and in poison. Neither may a person engage in military service or the work of a hunter. All permitted trades must be engaged in without deceit or usury (i.e., lending money for interest). The moral conduct that is here called for is an indispensable basis for all further spiritual development. These actions and virtues would be goals of many followers of the Theravada Path. It is the expectation of the Theravada monk to devote his life in pursuit of the final three paths.

Mental discipline is included in these final three categories of the Eightfold Path: Right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Effort calls attention to the fact that liberation requires tremendous willpower and perseverance, especially in preventing and suppressing evil thoughts and actions, and in nurturing and maintaining good thoughts and actions. But effort must not be hurried and fretful. It must be like the ox pulling itself out of deep mire; effort involves patience, a single-minded diligence without anxiety.

The Buddha admonished his disciples: "Be mindful!" Right-mindfulness is not an occult mystical state. By mindfulness, the Buddha meant *attentiveness*, a diligent awareness regarding the activities of the body, the sensations, and the mind. To be mindful is to increase the intensity and quality of attention, to see things as they really are, purged of all falsehood. The numerous forms of

mental discipline or meditation are discussed in detail by the Buddha in the discourse entitled *Satipatthanasutta (The Setting Up of Mindfulness)*. It includes meditation on breathing and prescribes the yogic posture of sitting cross-legged. This and other yogic disciplines are proposed to develop concentration in preparation for the several stages of deep meditation necessary for achieving "penetration" or liberating insight, including the realization of Nirvana. In the fourth stage of meditation all sensations have disappeared and the person rests in a state of equanimity and pure awareness. Illusion and craving are now overcome. With the extinction of desire (*tanha*) and attachment, the Absolute Truth, Nirvana, is realized: "deathlessness, peace, the unchanging state."

While the ways proposed by Pantañjali and the Buddha are based on different and even conflicting metaphysical doctrines, they are one in insisting that the path to salvation is through the cultivation of the mind by meditation and in the achievement of insight or enlightenment. It is a strenuous discipline of self-help. During the last days of his life, the Buddha underlined this point:

> And whosoever, Ananda . . . shall be an island unto themselves, a refuge unto themselves, shall betake themselves of no eternal refuge, but holding fast to the truth as their island and refuge. . . . it is they, Ananda, who shall reach the very topmost height—but they must be anxious to learn.[21]

At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that the religions of the world offer a variety of "ways" or paths of deliverance from the suffering, the moral guilt, estrangement, and finitude that characterize human life. Furthermore, we noted that the great traditions include, in one form or another, all the classic ways—that is, of faith, devotion, disciplined action or duty, and meditation and spiritual insight. The "ways" are not exclusive, and the life of any single believer—especially the great saints and sages—may reflect all these patterns of religious experience and response. However, each way does often appeal to a quite different religious need and spiritual temperament. Therefore, it is quite natural that some persons and some cultural settings would regard a particular path or discipline as especially responsive to their religious requirements and their understanding of Ultimate Reality.

Having looked at several specific examples of these classic "ways," we are now prepared to examine the actual goals of salvation or enlightenment that are envisioned by the world's religions, for they, too, are various.

Goals of Salvation and Liberation

Overview

In the Latin West, the word *salvus* was used to suggest that salvation is a process of healing, of making whole. However, the biblical Hebrew word that is most commonly translated as salvation implies a lack of constraint and conveys the sense of a deliverance or redemption. ***Salvation*** is, then, the process of being delivered, redeemed, or liberated from an enemy, danger, ignorance, sin, pollution, finitude, or "the Devil's barter"—whatever is considered evil or threatening.

The scholar Gerardus van der Leeuw describes salvation as "Power experienced as Good." He points out that it implies a range of concepts such as "whole, complete, perfect, healthy, strong, vigorous, well-being, as contrasted with suffering and misery, and in some connections bliss, both earthly and heavenly."[22] The breadth of meaning conveyed by salvation is extraordinarily wide. In addition, the experience of salvation can be considered from a number of perspectives. Many religions understand it as both a personal and a cosmic process or event. Moreover, salvation is both a present reality and a future hope; it is described as involving not only the individual but also the community. Furthermore, it is a condition portrayed both as this-worldly and as a wholly transcendent, other-worldly state of affairs.

Despite the numerous meanings that can be given to the word *salvation*, one thing stands out as certain. Salvation or liberation is the essential goal of religion. Religion is the means, the vehicle, or the process by which we are delivered from the profane world's disorder, meaninglessness, and evil. It is religion that redeems us from social chaos and establishes our cosmos. On the personal level, it is the means by which we are freed from all those conditions that threaten and limit our very being. Salvation and liberation are so central to the nature of religion that one writer has defined religion simply as "a means to ultimate transformation."[23]

Our analysis begins with entirely this-worldly, humanistic conceptions—for example, in the contemporary psychotherapeutic "cure of souls" and in some Eastern spiritual therapies, such as Zen Buddhism. A second form of salvation looks beyond personal psychic wholeness to a future but *this-worldly* liberation of the entire social order through the coming of a Utopian or Messianic Age. A very different conception of salvation is found in those religions that look to salvation in a future *other-worldly* afterlife, conceived either as a rather insubstantial "shade" of the physical self, as a disembodied immortal soul, or as one or another form of resurrected body. We will review these various ideas in ancient Egypt and Greece, as well as in Judaism and Christianity at the beginnings of the Christian movement. Belief in a Heaven and a Hell is not, of course, uniquely Christian or even Western, and we will look at depictions of Paradise in Muslim and in Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, as well as in Christianity. The mystical, yet rather different, concepts of the Beatific Vision and of Eternal Life as a present reality are also examined.

The last mode of salvation explored is that associated with Hindu Vedanta and certain interpretations of Buddhist Nirvana. In both instances, meditation and concentration are seen as leading to the release or to the absorption of the self in union with Brahman or Nirvana—a state of perfect emptiness, or imperturbable and inexpressible bliss.

PSYCHIC WHOLENESS AND A RESTORED SOCIAL ORDER

We begin with concepts of salvation that are radically this-worldly, nontheistic, and entirely humanistic. Many thoughtful contemporaries reject the belief that the amelioration of evil and human sorrow is dependent on powers or agents

that are transcendent of human life itself. Nor do they believe that hope should be placed in a future, other-worldly salvation. The cosmos as such, they believe, is meaningless—the accidental collocation of atoms—and all is finally destined to extinction. This view is expressed with feeling and force by Bertrand Russell in his celebrated essay "A Free Man's Worship":

> No heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.[24]

The cosmic pessimism of Russell's vision did not and has not inevitably given rise to personal or even historical despair. On the contrary, it has shocked many persons into an acute need to shape their own meaning in life. "I for one," writes the philosopher E. D. Klemke, "am *glad* that the universe has no meaning, for thereby is *man all the more glorious*. I willingly accept the fact that external meaning is non-existent . . . for this leaves me free to *forge my own meaning*."[25]

For Russell and Klemke, the amelioration of personal suffering and social conflict rests entirely on the application of human reason and creativity. However, it would be stretching the word to claim that Russell's humanistic creed is religious. His confidence in the improvement of individual life is cautious, and his hope for society is equally guarded, if not altogether skeptical. Russell's convictions are thoroughly humanistic but hardly utopian.

There are humanists, however, who hold out a vision of the future for individuals and society that is both deeply spiritual and **utopian.** The twentieth century in the West has witnessed what Philip Rieff calls "the triumph of the therapeutic," the transference of the "cure of souls" from a priest to the psychotherapist and from the church to the "encounter group." The latter, like the former, offers opportunities for confession, resistance to temptation ("ego strength"), heightened awareness, and reconciliation with one's fellows. Psychological therapy appears to offer our scientific age a means of liberation and healing without the traditional theological constraints of dogma and church authority, or belief in a life after death. Salvation is here and is now. The psychoanalyst Erich Fromm refers to the religious dimensions of the psychoanalytic cure of souls as those that enable the individual "to gain the faculty to see the truth, to love, to become free and responsible . . . the wondering, the marveling, the becoming aware of life and of one's own existence."[26]

The religious character of the therapeutic movement is evident in organizations such as Transcendental Meditation, the Esalen institutes, Transactional analysis, Integrity therapy, transpersonal therapy, Scientology, and numerous other forms of popular therapy. Closely related to these spiritual psychologies is the new interest in Eastern religions, especially Yoga, Taoism, and Zen. What they share in common is the romantic feeling of the pleasure to be found in the joys of the body and the earth, a confidence in the feelings, a positive attitude,

an interest in the present, and a distrust of institutional religion and what they see as the inhibitions or "uptightness" of the Protestant work ethic. Among the early gurus of the new therapeutic were Alan Watts (Zen), Fritz Perls (Gestalt therapy), Carl Rogers (sensitivity training), and the psychologist ***Abraham Maslow*** ("peak experiences").

More recently a number of writers working in the field of mind-body medicine and healing have written popular works on religion and spirituality. Perhaps chief among them is the Indian physician, writer, and TV personality (living in the United States since 1970) Deepak Chopra (1946–). Chopra has devoted his career and his prolific writings and films to mind-body holistic medicine and spiritual healing. In 1980 he discontinued the practice of traditional Western medicine, turning to the methods of the Indian Maharishi Yoga's transcendental meditation; to the holistic, alternative medicine practices of Ayurveda; and to herbal remedies. In 1985 Chopra established the Maharishi Ayur-Veda Health Center for Behavioral Medicine and Stress Management. Among his more than forty books and films are *Creating Health: Beyond Prevention, Toward Perfection* (1985), which quickly launched his celebrity as a leading figure in alternative medicine; *Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontier of Mind-Body Medicine* (1989) and *Journey into Healing: Awakening the Wisdom Within You* (1994). Chopra's many activities—books, films, lectures, novels, healing centers, and herbal medicine production—all have focused on ancient Indian Yoga and medicine, thus arousing the skepticism of many mainline Western physicians. Yet his popularity continues among the denizens of New Age alternatives to Western thought and practices. Whether Chopra's mind-body spiritual techniques will continue to attract devotees or decline in popularity, as have others, remains to be seen. Abraham Maslow's psychological explorations into "peak experiences" appear to many as more universal and credible. More, then, needs to be said about Maslow's humanistic spirituality.

Maslow (1908–1970) was a leader of the movement known as "humanistic psychology." While he is critical of traditional religious supernaturalism, he recognizes that the human process of growth and "self-actualization" involves certain "***peak experiences***." These transcendent occasions that bring life new insight, joy, and creativity are not unlike those experiences described by the great religious mystics. In fact, Maslow believes that the older reports of prophets and saints "phrased in terms of supernatural revelation, were, in fact perfectly natural human peak-experiences."[27] The mystic ecstasy of a St. Teresa and the "peak experience" of a mother flooded with joy as she holds her newborn infant are essentially the same—what Maslow calls the "core-religious experience," or "transcendent experience." According to Maslow, most persons, but not all, experience peak or transcendent moments that are not simply "emotional highs" but genuinely cognitive, transformative events. These spiritual experiences are triggered, however, by entirely natural, even everyday occasions, such as engaging in an athletic contest, listening to waves crash against a rocky shore, watching a dance performance, or tending a flower garden. For Maslow, religion must be taken out of the narrow context of institutional churches, clergy, and dogma—a single department of life—and be recognized as a quality or state of mind achievable in almost any activity.

In his study of the peak experiences of a large number of individuals, Maslow discovered that they have many of the characteristics we associate with traditional religious experience. For example, "the whole universe is perceived as an integrated and unified whole . . . all of one piece and that one has a place in it . . . one belongs to it." This is accompanied by a new, total kind of visual concentration in which "things become equally important rather than ranged in a hierarchy from very important to quite important." The recognition of everything as equally valuable holds also for people: "The person is unique, the person is sacred, one person in principle is worth as much as any other person." This new cognition also "allows the individual to become more objective and detached, ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless, unselfish." Maslow furthermore has found that peak experiences change a person's sense of time and space. This person "may feel a day passing as if it were minutes or also a minute so intensely lived that it might feel like a day or a year or an eternity even."[28] The emotions of wonder, awe, humility, gratitude, creature feeling, and exaltation are often reported as the after effect of these unique occasions.

Maslow insists that genuine knowledge is attained in peak experiences. It is a new awareness that permanently affects a person's attitude toward life and death, "valuing reality in a different way, seeing things from a new perspective . . . the miraculous 'suchness' of things . . . which contrasts with what can only be called 'normal blindness.'" These natural peak experiences can therefore teach values and virtues previously thought to be the unique province of traditional religion: acceptance, unselfishness, seeing things under the aspect of eternity, reverence, love, and innocence.

Maslow believes that a psychologically healthy society is possible, and he envisions a utopia called Eupsychia. It will be brought about by a widescale application of psychotherapy.

> I am saying that if you examine human beings fairly, you will find that they themselves have innate knowledge of and yearning for goodness and beauty. . . . Our task is to create an environment where more and more of these innate instincts can find expression. This is what would characterize Eupsychia.[29]

A number of therapists also have discovered an ally in Eastern spiritual techniques and meditation. Erich Fromm, for example, sees important resemblances between psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism. The essence of ***Zen*** is ***satori,*** enlightenment or the acquiring of a new point of view. D. T. Suzuki, the foremost interpreter of Zen to the West, defines *satori* as "an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it. . . . Or we may say that with *satori* our entire surroundings are viewed from quite an unexpected angle of perception."[30]

Satori is a flashing, momentary intuition, like an uncoerced discovery that, like Maslow's peak experiences, overcomes our normal dualistic perception of the world, transforming the entire personality. While not fully explicable, the

instantaneous experience of *satori* is both authoritative and affirmative. It produces a sense of great release, joy, and exaltation that accompanies the breaking up of a person's dualistic, egocentric, acquisitive orientation. Suzuki describes the peculiar effect of *satori* as follows:

> All your mental activities will now be working in a different key, which will be more satisfying, more peaceful, more full of joy than anything you ever experienced before. The tone of life will be altered. . . . The spring flower will look prettier, and the mountain stream runs cooler and more transparent.[31]

Struck by the similarities between Suzuki's description of Zen and psychoanalysis, Erich Fromm characterizes the psychic import of *satori* in the following terms:

> I would say that it is a state in which the person is completely tuned to the reality outside and inside of him, a stage in which he is fully aware of it and fully grasps it. *He* is aware of it—that is, not his brain, nor any other part of his organism, but *he*, the whole man. He is aware of *it;* not as an object over there which he grasps with his thought, but *it*, the flower, the dog, the man, in its, or his, full reality. He who awakes is open and responsive to the world, and he can be open and responsive because he has given up holding on to himself as a thing, and thus has become empty and ready to receive. To be enlightened means "the full awakening of the total personality to reality" . . . to have attained a fully "productive orientation."[32]

The goal of salvation proposed by Maslow, Fromm, and other therapists concerned with "self-actualization" is thoroughly humanistic and this-worldly. Salvation is achieved not by recourse to transcendent powers or a sacred code of behavior but by calling on a person's own innate rational and creative resources. For these spiritual therapies, the deepest level of human healing and liberation takes place in the unleashing of the human potential for goodness and community responsibility, all of which come with genuine self-knowledge.

A Messianic, or Utopian, Age

There are religious faiths, both traditional and secular, that look beyond the mere psychic healing of individuals to a future, this-worldly redemption of the social order itself through the coming of a Messianic, or Golden Age. What these religions share is a view of salvation that is *future, this-worldly*, and *communal*. One example will suffice here: ancient Israelite eschatology.

Eschatology has to do with the end, or goal (the *telos*), of personal life or of history and not simply with its temporal conclusion (*finis*). Since the eschaton is often depicted as occurring in the future, eschatological beliefs are frequently mythological, that is, imaginative visions derived from past experience and present convictions about the nature of God or Ultimate Reality, and about humanity and the historical process. Whether consciously or not, as self-transcendent beings, we take some attitude toward the *telos* of life and history. In fact, the philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev ventured to claim that "it is only the future which gives human life meaning in the present." In any case, it is true that we do not decide *whether* we will have an eschatology; rather, we decide *which* convictions about life's goal we will embrace as most congruent with our experience and our deepest hopes.

Ancient Israel's Messianic Hope

It sometimes comes as a surprise to learn that the ancient Israelites did not hold a belief in individual life after physical death in the sense of personal self-awareness. They did, of course, believe in redemption, and it was a belief founded on certain religious convictions. Early Israel believed, first, that God had created the world for a purpose. The creation is essentially good but, because of Israel's "hardness of heart," it had forsworn God's purpose and his covenant commandments. Israel's God, Yahweh, had therefore afflicted Israel with "the rod" of his righteous anger: foreign oppression, even exile from the holy land of Palestine. Nevertheless, Yahweh's loving-kindness and his covenant with Israel were not forsaken, for he had favored Israel as his chosen instrument, "a light unto the nations," to bring redemption and peace to the world. God's purpose for creation could not, therefore, be frustrated forever; God's redemption would come in some future time. While Israel's hope for a future, earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity was complex and various, it took two distinct forms in the period between the great prophets of the eighth century B.C.E. and the domination of Israel by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans after 500 B.C.E. The earliest expression of Israelite eschatology is basically *nationalistic*.

Israel's Nationalistic Hope Israel's national hope was shaped by the belief in what was called the "***day of Yahweh.***" Initially, it was conceived as a period of unbroken prosperity and glory inaugurated by Yahweh's victorious overthrow of Israel's enemies. It was Israel's duty to worship Yahweh and Yahweh's duty to protect Israel. In the eighth century, however, this rather simple idea gave way to the prophetic vision of a coming kingdom of God comprised only of an ethically regenerated Israelite nation, a community joined together by its devotion to the divine Commandments. Prophets such as Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah stood in the Temple and before the kings, and rebuked the people for their unfaithfulness to the Covenant. They proclaimed that for Israel the "day of Yahweh" would not be light but darkness—a time of judgment on the nation. The land would be burned up; the people would be as fuel for a fire (Isaiah 9:19).

> And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,
> and the pride of men shall be brought low,
> And Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day.
>
> —*(Isaiah 2:17)*

However, Yahweh's purpose was not simply destructive. Through the nation's suffering, Isaiah saw Yahweh purging the moral dross so that Jerusalem might become a place of true righteousness:

> I will turn my hand against you
> and will smelt away your dross
> as with lye
> and remove all your alloy.

And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the beginning.

Afterwards you shall be called the city
of righteousness,
the faithful city.

Zion shall be redeemed by justice,
and those in her who repent,
by righteousness.

—*(Isaiah 1:25–27)*

Beyond the wrath of the day of Yahweh, the great pre-exilic prophets saw the dawn of a new era, inspired by the pious remnant of the nation Israel. They looked to God's agent, "the anointed one," a king who would come and restore the nation to its earlier glory under the great King David. The nations of the earth would beat their swords into ploughshares, and the desert would blossom like a rose.

Israel's Apocalyptic Hope With the Exile of the Jews to Babylon (593 B.C.E.), a shift in Israel's eschatological hope began to take place. Israel's earlier "foes from the north" were now envisioned as the hosts of Gog, that is, the mysterious forces of cosmic evil. The warfare with evil now is perceived as the final battle of history. (See also Chapter 11, "A Future, This-Worldly Theodicy.")

The prophetic oracles of the later postexilic writers are called ***apocalyptic*** (from the Greek *apokalyptein*, meaning "to uncover or reveal"). They are a form of eschatological vision that is especially prominent during times of persecution and historical pessimism. The postexilic Jews had become increasingly doubtful about Israel's worldly glory as, again and again, Israel felt her hopes crushed by the Persians, then by the Greeks under the Seleucid kings, and finally by the Romans with Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. Under the influence of these historical disasters, Jewish writers began to modify Israel's earlier nationalistic, optimistic eschatology into a vast, imaginative, pessimistic vision of the end time.

According to these apocalyptic writers, who were influenced by Persian dualism (see Chapter 8), this earth or "the present age," the scene of so much misery and suffering, is now under the dominion of evil powers, with Satan as their head. The Powers of Darkness are successfully warring against Yahweh and the angels of light. However, this present, evil state of affairs will not continue forever; God will intervene and vindicate his kingly rule. But, humanly speaking, there is nothing that can be done; God alone is able to destroy the powers that rule this present, evil age. The apocalyptic prophets were certain that the turning point between this age and the new aeon was near at hand; this age was moving relentlessly toward its predetermined final encounter and the victory of God's kingdom. According to these writers, it was vitally important to recognize the signs of the approaching end. It would be heralded, for example, by a series of "messianic woes" when satanic evil would reach a climax in the coming of an anti-Messiah. Nature would run amuck; there would be fire on the

earth, unnatural births, and cosmic disturbances (IV Ezra 5:4:12). Finally, the end would come when Satan is defeated and the faithful are rescued and exalted. *The Assumption of Moses*, a work contemporary with the New Testament, is a particularly good example of Jewish apocalyptic:

And then his [God's] kingdom shall appear throughout all
his creation,
And then Satan shall be no more.
And sorrow shall depart with him.
Then the hands of the angel shall be filled
Who has been appointed chief,
And he shall forthwith avenge them of their enemies.
For the Heavenly One will arise from his royal throne,
And he will go forth from his holy habitation
With indignation and wrath on account of his sons.
And the earth shall tremble: to its confines shall it
be shaken.
And the high mountains shall be made low
And the hills shall be shaken and fall.
And the horns of the sun shall be broken and he
shall be turned into darkness;
And the moon shall not give her light, and be turned
wholly into blood. . . .
And the fountains of waters shall fail,
And the rivers shall dry up.
For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone,
And he will appear to punish the Gentiles,
And he will destroy all their idols.
Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy. . . .
And God will exalt thee,
And he will cause thee to approach to the heaven of the stars,
In the place of their habitation.
And thou shalt look from on high and shalt see thy enemies
in Gehenna,
And thou shalt recognize them and rejoice,
And thou shalt give thanks and confess thy Creator.

—*(10:1–10)*

The ***Last Judgment*** is vividly portrayed in apocalyptic writings such as Daniel and IV Ezra. God comes forth as the "Ancient of Days," and he takes his seat on the throne, surrounded by his court of angels. The books that record the deeds of persons are brought in and the judgment is given. The righteous are raised to participate in the eternal messianic kingdom. The writers portray the life of the righteous variously. In Daniel, the kingdom is on earth, but in other writers it is depicted as the New Jerusalem brought down from Heaven. In I Enoch, the abode of the righteous is entirely transcendent in Heaven above. The fate of the ungodly is also variously portrayed, but in each case no longer as a neutral abode of the departed but rather as a place of eternal punishment: Sheol, Gehenna, the Furnace, or Abyss of Fire.

The agent of salvation also takes on new forms. A new savior emerges, a heavenly, supernatural figure called the ***Son of Man*** (Enoch 46:1–6, 48:2–10; and

IV Ezra 13), who comes to inaugurate the new age. In Daniel 7, the "one like unto a son of man" is a corporate figure symbolizing the "saints of the Most High," the righteous and faithful martyrs who bear witness that God is inaugurating his messianic kingdom in the end time.

We can see in these postexilic Jewish apocalyptic writings the appearance of themes—Son of Man, Last Judgment, Resurrection, and Heaven and Hell—that are common to early Christian literature, for example, in the Gospels and the Book of Revelation. These concepts certainly reflect a more radically transcendent and cosmic Jewish eschatology than was present in Israel's earlier nationalistic hope. However, the record shows that many schools of thought struggled within Judaism in the century before the Christian era. This-worldly, political messianism competes with more dualistic, cosmic visions, as is evident in the war of the Jewish **Maccabean** revolutionaries (168 B.C.E.) and the presence of the political **Zealot** party in Palestine in the first century of the Christian era. A psalm from the late Maccabean period reflects the continuing influence of Jewish political messianism:

> Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto
> them their king, the son of David,
> All the time in which thou seest, O God, that he may
> reign over Israel, thy servant.
> And gird him with strength, that he may
> shatter unrighteous rulers,
> And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations
> that trample her down to destruction.
>
> —*(Psalms of Solomon 15:21–25)*

At the dawn of the Christian era there arose a Jewish party called the Pharisees that, like the earlier **Hasidim,** practiced a strict devotion to the Law—including the dietary rules—that separated the Jewish community from the Gentile world. The Pharisees believed that Moses had laid down a body of oral law that was meant to guide the interpretation of the written Torah. This oral law, codified in the **Mishnah,** was later expanded into a vast library known as the **Talmud.** It was this Pharisaic or Talmudic Judaism that became the normative Judaism of the postbiblical era—and remains so today in Orthodoxy. Like the ancient Hasidim of Daniel's time, Talmudic Judaism looks with longing for the coming of the ***Messianic Age.*** However, Orthodoxy's devotion to the Torah has caused it to stand apart from radical forms of apocalypticism and political messianism. Furthermore, unlike certain movements within Christianity, Jewish belief in the resurrection of the body and a future life has not usually been thought of apart from participation in a redeemed messianic community. While the end time of history may look beyond the powers of history itself for the redemption inaugurated by the Messiah, the kingdom of God is essentially this-worldly. This is reflected in Israel's confidence that the coming Messianic Age will bring forth a new creation, a perfected world of redeemed men and women.

RESURRECTION, IMMORTALITY, AND ETERNAL LIFE

We do not give the activity much thought, but a unique feature of human life is the practice of burying our own dead. The practice suggests the special importance of death in human consciousness. Indeed, there is evidence from the caves near Peking that a half-million years ago our prehominoid forebearers possessed some sense of a life after death. Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon prehumans placed food and implements on their graves, and in the Neolithic Age, the chieftain was often buried with his wives and slaves. These practices show that our ancestors assumed some kind of afterlife. However, the earliest forms of survival were not what we think of today as an immortal soul or mind distinct from the body or a resurrected body. What survived was a "***shade,***" an insubstantial shadow image or double of the body. The common prehistoric view is described as follows:

> The shade was assumed to continue after death, generally in a dim underworld beneath the level of the graves, which were sometimes thought of as entrances to the nether world. The dead were often thought of as potentially dangerous to the living and needing to be either placated or tricked into quiescence. Sometimes, however, a chief or leader was imagined to go to a distant part of the earth, or up into the sky, and was venerated and perhaps in due course worshipped as a god. Some tribes have believed in a happier hunting ground beyond the grave. . . . But the much more general belief was in a descent into the lower world in which the shade carried on a gradually fading life until eventually it passed out of memory and existence. This was not a conception of eternal life, or immortality, but of ghostly survival . . . there was no thought of positive immortality.[33]

This lower world was called ***Hades*** or ***Sheol,*** a rather joyless underworld where the shade lived a half-conscious, twilight existence. In Homer's *Iliad*, the unhappy shade of Patroklos in Hades appears to Achilleus who in sorrow describes Patroklos's sad state as a soul or image with no real heart or life in it. All night long, the phantom of Patroklos stood over Achilleus lamenting and mourning. The Hebrew Sheol was similarly a dark, underworld cavern or pit, so cheerless and unwelcome that Job could cry:

> Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort
> before I go whence I shall not return,
> to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
> the land of gloom and chaos
> where light is as darkness.
>
> —*(Job 10:20–22)*

The use of words like *lamentation* and *gloom* might give the impression that Hades and Sheol were places of divine judgment and punishment like Hell, but this is not the case. In early Greek and Hebrew writings, Hades and Sheol represent a neutral underworld where the shades of the dead persisted, regretfully, at least for a time. Generally speaking, there was little sense of an ethical judgment

of the dead, one in which the wicked suffered retribution in Hell and the pious enjoyed the delights of a heavenly bliss. It was simply taken for granted that the self survives physical death. Since it was not a condition to which a person looked forward and had nothing to do with a person's moral rectitude or spiritual effort, existence in Hades or Sheol could hardly be regarded as a state of salvation or liberation, a genuine immortality or eternal life. Such a conception was present, however, in the Pyramid Texts in ancient Egypt as early as the third millennium B.C.E., long before Homer and the earliest Hebrew poets.

Immortality in Ancient Egypt and Greece

It was in Egypt that belief in a judgment of the dead and the related concepts of Heaven and Hell are first clearly recorded. The idea that a person's future life after death is conditioned by the person's present moral conduct is expressed in the Instruction for King Merikabe (Tenth Dynasty, circa 2150–2060 B.C.E.), in a warning given by a father to his son:

> The judges who judge the sinner, thou knowest, that they are not mild in that day, when they judge the miserable one, in the hour when the decision is accomplished. . . . Trust not in the length of years: they look upon the duration of a life as but an hour. Man remains after death and his deeds will be laid before him. . . . But who comes to them, not having sinned, he will be there as a god, free-striding as the Lord of Eternity.[34]

The later *Book of the Dead* vividly portrays the judgment carried out by the god Osiris, in which a man's heart is weighed in a scale against the feather of Maat, symbolizing truth. The text includes an impressively long list of 36 "negative confessions" in which the man pleads his sinlessness:

> I have not committed evil against men . . .
> I have not blasphemed a god . . .
> I have not killed . . .
> I have not defamed a slave to his superior . . .
> I have not defiled myself . . . [and so forth.][35]

The universal character of judgment and mention of the future abode of the righteous is described on a later tomb inscription of the priest Petosiris:

> The West is the abode of those without fault. Happy is he who arrives there! But none enters therein whose heart is not right in the deed of Maat. There is no distinction between rich and poor; he only counts who is found to be without fault when the balance and its burdens stand before the Lord of Eternity [the god Thoth].[36]

The Egyptian conception of life after death was a true immortality, but it was a future existence realistically conceived—that is, lifelike. The afterlife was not represented as a disembodied soul or mind, or as a resurrected spiritual body; rather, it was the survival as *ba*, an animated existence free from the human corpse but possessing the characteristics of real earthly life.

A quite different conception of an immortal soul emerged in Greece among the Eleusinian, Dionysian, and Orphic **mystery religions,** and within the philosophical schools. It reflects a radical dualism, both between the soul and its material body, and between this earth and the soul's heavenly home. For example, the later Greek Orphic cults taught a belief not only in the soul's immortality but also in the soul's transmigration—its fall from Heaven into its earthly embodiment and its return to its heavenly home.

The Orphic philosopher Pythagoras (circa 531 B.C.E.) taught that divine and immortal souls had fallen into material bodies in which they were now imprisoned. Salvation involved the cultic removal of the soul's taint, its rescue from its fallen state, and its return to its heavenly home. This Greek dualism had a significant influence on early Christianity (as did Jewish apocalyptic eschatology), but its influence was felt even earlier in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato. In his dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato writes,

> Some say that the body (*soma*) is the tomb (*sema*) of the soul, as if the soul in this present life were buried. . . . I think it most likely that the name was given by the followers of Orpheus, with the idea that the soul is undergoing whatever penalty it has incurred, and is enclosed in the body, as in a sort of prison-house, for safe-keeping . . . until the penalty it owes is discharged. . . .[37]

Plato's account of the soul's immortal, divine destiny is, however, divested of much of the earlier Orphic ritual and mystery. It is portrayed simply as life's most urgent moral challenge, namely, the perfecting of the human soul. According to Socrates and Plato, it is the philosopher's task—not that of an other-worldly savior—to free the soul from its bondage to the corruptible body and the world of mere appearances so that it may enjoy its true and eternal destiny. In the

A last judgment, "the weighing of the heart," from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. Behind the scales, the scribal god Thoth records the verdict. At the extreme right, a monster waits to devour the unjust soul. (*Source:* Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. Copyright The British Museum.)

Phaedo, Socrates points out the mortal seriousness that is implied in a belief in the soul's immortality:

> But there is a further point, gentlemen, which deserves your attention. If the soul is immortal, it demands our care not only for that part of time which we call life, but for all time; and indeed it would seem now that it will be extremely dangerous to neglect it. If death were a release from everything, it would be a boon for the wicked, because by dying they would be released not only from the body but also from their own wickedness together with the soul; but as it is, since the soul is clearly immortal, it can have no escape or security from evil except by becoming as good and wise as it possibly can. For it takes nothing with it to the next world except its education and training.[38]

Postbiblical Judaism and Christianity: Resurrection of the Body, Heaven and Hell, Eternal Life

We have observed that in the postexilic period (sixth century B.C.E.), Judaism's hope for salvation shifted from a this-worldly nationalism to an other-worldly apocalypticism, with its attendant concepts of a resurrection, judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Especially significant was the emergence of the complex idea of resurrection. We noted that in the postexilic period, resurrection was conceived sometimes as the establishment of the community of the righteous in a kingdom on earth; sometimes as a wholly renewed earth, a New Jerusalem; and sometimes as a purely spiritual, angelic body raised directly to Heaven.

All these ideas were current in Judaism at the beginning of the Christian era, but prominent was the belief in the ***resurrection of a spiritual body***. Jesus appears to have accepted this belief. It is reflected in his controversy with the Sadducees where he asserts that "when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). St. Paul, too, makes a distinction between the natural, fleshly body and the resurrected spiritual body (*soma pneumatikon*):

> There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. . . . So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. . . . It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.
>
> —*(I Corinthians 15:40–44)*

The New Testament texts that speak of the redeemed—the resurrected body—introduce two puzzles that the texts themselves do not easily resolve and that have produced an ongoing scholarly debate. The one issue is whether the spiritual resurrection involves a transformed body (both individual and corporate) here on earth—a new earth—or is to be understood as a heavenly body. The second question is whether the resurrection (and judgment) occurs immediately following the death of the individual or whether it is to come in some future time, at the "general resurrection" that precedes the Last Judgment. The New Testament passages reflect a tension between salvation (resurrection) conceived

as present and as future. The tension is present in the teachings of Jesus. He clearly proclaims a future judgment and Kingdom, as when he speaks of the Son of man coming in his glory, and that "before him all the nations will be gathered and he shall separate them from one another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:31–32). On the other hand, Jesus proclaims God's Kingdom as already a present reality in his healing the sick, raising the dead, and casting out the devils (Matthew 11:3ff, 12:28; Luke 10:18, 11:20). In the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Jesus speaks of Lazarus, the righteous beggar, as immediately carried off by the angels "into Abraham's bosom," or Heaven, and the rich man dying and, in the torments of Hell, lifting up his eyes and seeing Lazarus in Heaven and crying for Abraham's mercy (Luke 16:22–23).

It appears that for Jesus and the early Christians salvation was understood in terms of the resurrection of the spiritual body and, furthermore, that they considered it as "already fulfilled" for those who were "in Christ"—that is, those who had died to the old self and were now raised to a life in Christ who had inaugurated the new age. Paul writes, "Behold *now* is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2); old things have passed away, those in Christ are "new creatures." The Fourth Gospel similarly speaks of the eschaton as realized, as a present reality. John records Jesus as proclaiming, "Verily, verily I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

This having been said, it is nevertheless true that the New Testament also envisions the Kingdom of God as a future event, as "not yet consummated." The Christian is thus living "between the times"—salvation is already present, but it is yet to be fulfilled on the Last Day. This tension between salvation as a present reality for those "in Christ" or "in Paradise" immediately on death and an entirely future salvation realized at the time of the Last Judgment has remained through the centuries.

After the second century C.E., however, interest in Christ's second coming and the coming of the general resurrection and final judgment faded in the popular consciousness. It was to be reawakened in times of social suffering and injustice, as we have seen, for example, in the preaching of Protestant millenarianists in the sixteenth century. However, by the early medieval period, the belief that each individual was judged at the time of death and the soul translated immediately to its eternal reward or punishment became the prevailing view.

Belief in a future life in ***Heaven*** or in ***Hell*** has been of decisive importance in shaping the Western moral imagination—at least until recently. The classic portrayals of Hell—in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example—describe the fate of the damned in the most vivid imagery. In fact, the portrayal of the suffering of the damned in some second-rate Christian literature is so graphic as to be morally offensive. In a literary master like Dante, however, the *Inferno* serves as a ghastly and horrific moral parable. Dante depicts Hell as a dark and frightening abyss: a steaming and stinking place, with howling winds, frightening cold, frenzied, tortured bodies, shrieking, and groaning. He portrays each sinner being punished in a manner appropriate to his or her sin.

In the Christian tradition, Heaven is not painted—with some exceptions—in quite the vivid colors as is Hell. In fact, with the decline of belief in a literal Hell in modern times, Christian discourse about a heavenly life has been rather guarded. In traditional devotional literature and in hymns, the picture of Heaven took two forms. One is the more homely vision of the family of saints reunited in Paradise. It is a place of light, peace, and joy, with no more sorrow or pain, where the faithful join in worship before the Throne of God. Such representations of Heaven, or Paradise, are not unique to Christianity; they are common in all theistic religions, including Islam and Mahayana Buddhism. Islamic eschatology is similar in certain respects to that in the Bible. It portrays a trumpeter announcing the Judgment Day; the angels bringing forth the Throne of the Lord, and the opening of the Book of Deeds. The unbelievers and the unrighteous are cast into the eternal fire of Gehenna, and the righteous are translated to Paradise, "the Gardens of Bliss." No subjects are mentioned more frequently in the *Qur'an* than are the Day of Judgment, Gehenna, and Paradise. And in Islamic literature, they are described in the most vivid language, none more so than Paradise. The following is a vision of Allah in Paradise. It describes in rich imagery Allah's palace garden and the joys of the heavenly feast:

> This [Allah's palace] gate is of green emerald and over it are curtains of light of such brightness as almost to destroy the sight. . . . Its soil is of finest musk and saffron and ambergris, its stones of jacinths and jewels, its little pebbles and rubble are of gold, while on its banks are trees whose limbs hang down, whose branches are low, whose fruits are within easy reach, whose birds sing sweetly, whose colours shine brightly, whose flowers blossom in splendour, and from which comes a breeze [so delightful] as to reduce to insignificance all other delights.
>
> Then orders will be given that they [the righteous] be served the finest kinds of fruit such as they never before have seen, and they will eat of these fruits and enjoy thereof as much as they desire. . . . Then orders will be given for them to be clothed with garments [of honor] the like of which they have not seen even in Paradise; and of such splendour and beauty as they have never before had for their delight. . . . So they will fall down before their Lord in prostration and deep humility saying: "Glory be to Thee, O our Lord. In Thy praise Thou art blessed and exalted, and blessed is Thy name."[39]

Earlier we observed that the Mahayana Buddhist schools made provision for the fact that not all individuals are capable of achieving liberation by the difficult road of transcendental meditation and wisdom. The new path took the form of faith and devotion to personal Buddhas and Bodhisattva saviors. In the Pure Land schools of China and Japan, these saviors occupy numerous Paradises, or Pure Lands, where the faithful are reborn. The most famous is the ***Western Paradise of the Buddha Amitabha.*** A favorite subject of religious art, Amitabha (Amida) is depicted seated on a lotus throne in the Western Heaven, flanked by his attendant Bodhisattvas, including Kuan-yin, the Goddess of Mercy. The following extract is from the popular Sanskrit *Description of the Happy Land* (second century C.E.):

> **15.** This world Sukhavati [the Pure Land], Ananda, which is the world system of the Lord Amitabha, is rich and prosperous, comfortable, fertile, delightful and crowded with many Gods and men. And in this world system, Ananda, there are no hells, no animals, no ghosts, no Asuras, and none of the inauspicious places of rebirth. . . .
>
> **16.** And that world system Sukhavati, Ananda, emits many fragrant odours, it is rich in a great variety of flowers and fruits, adorned with jewel trees, which are frequented by flocks of various birds and sweet voices. . . .

"The Last Judgement" by Jan Van Eyck, 1441. Christ appears as Judge, accompanied by his saints. The dead rise from their graves on earth, the righteous ascending to Heaven and the unrighteous descending to eternal Hell. (*Source:* Jan Van Eyck, "The Last Judgement." Oil on Canvas. Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1993 (33.92b).)

Amida (Amitabha) descending from the Western Paradise, accompanied by 25 protective Bodhisattvas. Amida is embarked on a journey to assist the souls of devotees. (*Source:* Raigo, "Amida descending from the Western Paradise." Courtesy of The Seattle Art Museum, Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection, 34.117.)

18. And nowhere in the world-system Sukhavati does one hear of anything unwholesome, nowhere of the hindrances, nowhere of the states of punishment, the states of woe and the bad destinies, nowhere of suffering. And that, Ananda, is the reason why this world-system is called the "Happy Name."[40]

A rather different and less familial conception of the heavenly life is given in depictions of the ***Beatific Vision.*** It has played an important role in Roman Catholic piety and is the image of paradise envisioned by the great Christian mystics. As the words imply, the Beatific Vision is the direct, unmediated vision of the Godhead. In traditional Catholic spirituality, there are levels of sanctity as well as levels of punishment, and the direct vision of God is reserved for the highest purity. It is the simultaneous intellectual perception of all things in God, an Eternal Present. It is not a vision of nature transfigured, as in Zen Buddhist *satori* or nature mysticism; rather, it is a direct vision of God, of Infinite Love, face to face.

In the Beatific Vision, the self is united with God and yet is *not* God, in contrast to the isolation or extinction of the self in Vedānta and other forms of monistic liberation. The self dies to the old ego and is transformed into a new creature, "oned with God."

Practitioners of the contemplative life point out that a foretaste of the Beatific Vision is achievable here and now when the personal will becomes one with the divine will. When this occurs, ***Eternal Life***—or Paul's experience that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)—is not a condition of the soul translated to an other-worldly heaven but instead is a present, perfected, or divinely transformed existence, wholly devoted to the divine will.

The contemplative does not leave the world but enters into it as a servant of the divine will. The test of a genuine contemplative vision, attested to by all theistic mystics, is a transformed, egoless life in the world, penetrated by the divine spirit. It is, writes the Catholic monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968),

> an experience of mystical renewal, an inner transformation brought about entirely by the power of God's merciful love, implying the "death" of the self-centered and self-sufficient ego and the appearance of a new and liberated self who lives and acts "in the Spirit."[41]

To this point, we have surveyed a variety of representations of salvation that are common to theistic belief. It remains to describe the most radical form of self-transcendence. This is the monistic conception of liberation in which personal identity is extinguished or overcome in a state of nondualism—in which *atman* and Brahman are One. This is best illustrated in Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophy and in some interpretations of Buddhist Nirvana.

SAMĀDHI, NIRVANA AND ŚŪNYATĀ

In Chapter 8, we noted the movement in Indian religion from polytheism to pantheism and then to monism, especially in the *Upanishads*. In these texts, the unifying principle of the universe is called Brahman, the ultimate sacred power or world-ground. Since the power that works in everything cannot consist in parts or be subject to change, according to some Indian sages, it follows that everything is essentially Brahman, entire and indivisible. Ultimately, nothing exists other than Brahman, including the soul (*atman*) that *is* Brahman: Atman and Brahman are One. There is only the One, without a second. Vedanta philosophy expressed this monistic doctrine with utterances such as "I am Brahman" and "Thou are That."

Hindu *Samādhi*

As we saw in Chapter 8, the philosopher Śankara was the formative and most influential exponent of a thoroughgoing nondualism (*advaita*). He taught the

nonexistence of the self as a separate entity. According to Śankara, belief in finite individuality is due to *avidya* (ignorance of reality), and the goal of ***Advaita Vedānta*** is release (*moksha*) from the illusion of a self or "I" and union with the Infinite without individual consciousness.

To achieve the self's ***moksha***, we have seen that Vedānta proposes a series of ascetic disciplines similar to those required in Sankhya-Yoga. Beginning with certain moral rules regarding such things as unselfishness and bodily cleanliness, it proceeds to disciplined postures of the body, to breathing exercises, to concentration, and to meditation. If successful, the candidate then progresses to the final goal of *samādhi*, or perfect absorption. The word ***samādhi*** means "to put together," "to unite," or "to compose." Vedānta, however, does distinguish two kinds of *samādhi:* (1) *savikalpa samādhi*, which is absorption with full consciousness of the duality of the perceiver and the perceived, and (2) ***nirvikalpa samādhi***, perfect nondual absorption, which is totally devoid of any consciousness of a distinction between perceiver and perceived. In the first instance, the self remains aware of the blissful union with Brahman. As in the case of the Christian Beatific Vision, the subject enjoys the supreme ecstasy of union with the Infinite. However, this is not the highest goal in *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the One-without-a-second. Since it is the One without predicates, and therefore ineffable, it is the bliss of silence.

Nirvikalpa samādhi comes only when the mind is at complete rest, reposed in the changeless One: "As a lamp sheltered from the wind, that does not flicker." This final state, being without distinctions or predicates, is ineffable. And yet Vedānta uses many images to attempt to suggest it. One is the image of salt in water: "Just as when salt has been dissolved in water the salt is no longer perceived separately and the water alone remains, so likewise the mental state that has taken the form of Brahman, the one-without-a-second, is no longer perceived, only the Self remains."[42]

The liberated person would be entirely freed of the phenomenal world if it were not for the momentum of *karmic* actions that continue to carry him or her along. The liberated person therefore remains associated with a body, but in an imperturbable state of changeless serenity. Past, present, and future time are transcended; the person is indifferent to all actions, good or evil.

Being imperturbable, the liberated *sow* no new *karma*, and, therefore, the effects of the residual past *karma* slowly fade. When the vestigial shell of the body falls away in death, the liberated person achieves a supreme isolation, a "bodiless liberation." According to the *Vedantasara*, "then at last, when the remainder of karma has been exhausted . . . the life-breath dissolves into the Highest Brahman, which is inward Bliss."[43]

Buddhist Nirvana and Śūnyatā

The paths to liberation taken by the Indian yogi and the Buddhist monk share certain family resemblances. Both emphasize the discipline of "sitting" or meditation. Both perceive liberation as a "release" or "extinction" of the illusory, phenomenal self. And yet for all these similarities, Buddhist Nirvana is described in what appears to be more positive, world-affirming terms.

Nirvana In Theravada Buddhism the goal of the ***arhat***, or fully enlightened one, is the Absolute Noble Truth of ***Nirvana.*** According to Buddhism, this Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the entire world. Everything is conditioned, changing, and impermanent, including the "self." To realize this truth without illusion involves the extinction of craving and the cessation of desire, which is Nirvana. The *Sanyuttanikāya* speaks of Nirvana simply as "the stopping of becoming" and as "the getting rid of craving."

It would be incorrect, however, to think of Nirvana as the *result* of the extinction of craving. Nirvana is neither the cause nor the effect of anything. Nirvana *is;* it is unconditioned. This point is made by Buddha's disciple Nagasena in the famous dialogue *Questions of King Milinda*. It is possible to point out the path to the realization of Nirvana but, Nagasena insists, it is not possible to show a cause for its production:

> "Could a man, who with his natural strength has crossed in a boat over the great ocean, get to the farther shore?" "Yes, he could"—"But could that man with his natural strength bring the farther shore of the great ocean here?" "No, he could not."—"Just so one can point out the way to the realization of Nirvana, but one cannot show a cause for its production. And what is the reason for that? Because the dharma, Nirvana, is unconditioned . . . not made by anything."[44]

Because it is unconditioned, Nirvana is beyond all conception and description. Buddha refused every request for a positive description, insisting that it was "incomprehensible, indescribable."

Because Nirvana is literally inconceivable and the Pali word for Nirvana (*Nibbāna*) means "blowing out" or "extinction" (of a lamp), Nirvana is often thought of as a purely negative state, a nothingness. However, such a nihilistic view is a misconception, as is frequently pointed out by Theravadin scholars. While Nirvana is extinction, it is important to recognize that it is the negation of lust, hatred, illusion—the extinction of the finite self or ego-consciousness. While often using negations to describe it, Buddha nevertheless speaks of Nirvana as a positive reality: "O bhikkhus, there is the unborn, ungrown, and unconditioned. Since there *is* the unborn, ungrown, and unconditioned, there *is* escape from the born, grown, and conditioned."[45] Similarly, the *Sanyuttanikāya* describes Nirvana in a series of positive terms, including "the stable," "the excellent," "the blissful," "the security," "the cave of shelter," "the stronghold," and "the refuge."[46]

Since the *arhat* has purified the mind and no longer craves either becoming *or* extinction, he or she clings to nothing in the world, knows that all is impermanent. The *arhat* has realized Absolute Truth, Nirvana, in this life itself:

> He who has realized the Truth, Nirvana, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all "complexes" and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others. His mental health is perfect. He does not repent the past, nor does he brood over the future. He lives fully in the present. . . . He is joyful, exultant . . . free from anxiety, serene, and peaceful. And he is free from selfish desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, pride, and all such "defilements. . . ." His service to others is of the purest, for he has no thought of self. He gains nothing, accumulates nothing, not even anything spiritual, because he is free from the illusion of Self, and the "thirst" for becoming.[47]

Theravadin schools do differ, however, in their view of what happens to the *arhat* after death. One view holds that the *arhat* has no reexistence, even in Nirvana, after death.

> The old craving exhausted, no fresh craving rises,
> Freed from the thought of future becoming
> They like barren seeds do not spring again,
> But are blown out just like a lamp.[48]

According to this interpretation, at death the *arhat* is freed from the round of *samsara*, or rebirth, and is fully extinct. Nirvana, then, is a purely blissful psychological state of the living *arhat*. A person has realized Nirvana when he or she has extinguished the "self" of the Five Aggregates that cause craving and pain.

The alternative view denies that Nirvana is simply a psychological state of the living *arhat;* rather, it is the infinite supramundane Reality to which the *arhat* is joined or oned at death. In death, the "self" is dissolved, leaving only the "unborn," the "not-become," the "not-compounded." This conception is the state of undifferentiated unity. It is deathlessness, and not the immortal soul's ecstatic Beatific Vision.

Śūnyatā With the emergence of the later Mahayana schools of Buddhism in India, conceptions of the ultimate goal of Nirvana were reconceived to challenge implicit notions of Nirvana as a *substantive* ultimate reality, as a state of monistic at-one-ment. In the second century C.E., the Indian Buddhist philosopher ***Nāgārjuna*** developed a philosophy of "emptiness" (śūnyatā). He accepted the traditional teaching that human suffering is rooted in the illusion of a real, immutable personal self or *ātman*, and that the goal is the realization of the no-self (*anātman*).

Nāgārjuna warns, however, of assuming Nirvana to be a substantive reality, a true essence. That is, the error of thinking of Nirvana as possessing a wholly independent or nonrelational identity. On the contrary, Nāgārjuna insists, Buddhism teaches that all *entities* are dependent and, therefore, do not possess a substantive essence or reality. Even Nirvana is *not* ultimate reality; it is only *conventionally* real, possessing a relational, hence dependent, reality since it does depend upon its opposite, *samsāra*, or the world of suffering. Because Nirvana, like all other things, is dependent, it is not ultimately real, only conventionally so.

But neither should Nirvana be interpreted negatively as absolute nothingness—as some Theravada texts seem to imply. The realization that all things, even Nirvana, lacks essential reality is the key to the cure for ignorance, that is, the grasping for *any* ultimate entity, since all things are "empty." All conventional reality is *interdependent;* all duality must, therefore, be rejected. Samsara is, then, the *location* of Nirvana. We *see* conventional reality in an "empty" manner, as "the way things really are." For Nāgārjuna this manner of seeing the world—through meditation practices and moral living—has crucial practical implications, for it counters our tendency to see the world in an illusionary manner. And because awareness of the "emptiness of all things" teaches the interdependence of all things, it teaches compassion and patience, that is, the Bodhisattva path.

The earlier Theravada schools that focused on the severe cultivatism of nonattachment to the self and the world was, paradoxically, a form of attachment to one's own individual Nirvana. The Bodhisattva path, however, is "no path," "no attainment" of Nirvana. Rather, it is a true seeing of the interrelationships of all things and a freeing of the mind of anxious illusions, hence the capacity for selfless actions of compassion.

From this review of concepts of salvation or liberation, certain resemblances can be seen in the blissful sense of liberation and egolessness produced by "peak experiences," in Zen *satori*, in eternal "life in Christ," in the Beatific Vision, and in Buddhist Nirvana and ***Śūnyatā.*** And yet there appear to be unbridgeable differences between the theist's conception of an immortal soul or resurrected body reunited with the divine through the loving action of a transcendent, personal God and the atheistic or monistic doctrines of liberation which hold that the self and ultimate reality are, finally, One and the same, or all notions of an ultimate reality are a pure illusion. But, even here, in current interreligious dialogue the question is raised whether it is possible to reconcile even these apparent contrary claims.

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42. *Vedantasara of Sàdananda*. Cited in Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York, 1957), 432.
43. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, 446.
44. Edward Conze, ed., *Buddhist Scriptures* (Baltimore, Md., 1968), 158–159.
45. *Udana*, 80. Cited in W. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 37.
46. *Sanyutta-Nikāya*, IV. Cited in Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 435.
47. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York, 1962), 43.
48. *Sutta-Nipata*, 235. Cited in Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, 436.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the major features of Luther's experience of being liberated and "made righteous" by grace through faith. Include his understanding of the role of the law—that is, good works that are commanded—of grace, and of the true motivation for doing good works.
2. Describe the several features that characterize the way of devotion discussed in this chapter.
3. The lives of the three "twice-born" castes of Hinduism are encompassed by numerous social and ceremonial duties, all of which are devoted to knowledge and liberation. Describe the four classes, or castes, of Hinduism and the four stages of life that are elaborated in the Hindu *Code of Manu*.

4. The Islamic tradition includes all of the classic "ways" to salvation, but it is viewed as normatively a religion of *Shari'a*, of ethical and ritual duty. Describe the five "pillars," or principal obligations, expected of the faithful Muslim.
5. In Judaism, redemption or the sanctifying of life is by means of *halakhah*, that is, those laws and commands relating to all aspects of life, including the keeping of the Sabbath and the yearly festivals. Indicate the main features of some of the Jewish observances and what they signify or commemorate.
6. The way of action or obligation is based, in part, on the insight that we humans are shaped by our daily or habitual gestures and activities. Would you agree that religious enlightenment or the sanctifying of life would be difficult, if not impossible, without the routine of sacred obligation?
7. The way of meditation and insight is a difficult path requiring a series of physical and mental disciplines. Without having to refer to every step (or the Sanskrit and Pali terms), describe the major practices or components of Patañjali's yoga technique to achieve *samadhi*, and the Buddha's Fourth Noble Truth, that is, the Eightfold Path to Nirvana.
8. How does *eschatology* relate to *soteriology?*
9. What analogies, if any, do you see between such "therapeutic" experiences as Maslow's "peak experiences" or Zen enlightenment and more traditional religious experience?
10. Characterize Israel's early, this-worldly political hope. How does it differ from the apocalyptic motifs that began to appear in Israelite prophecy after the Babylonian exile?
11. Theistic religions have conceived of salvation in this-worldly terms and also in terms of a postmortem life of a personal soul or a resurrected body. Contrast such concepts of survival as *ba*, the Greek immortality of the soul, the biblical resurrection of the body, and eternal life. How do earlier portrayals of Sheol differ from later depictions of Hell? How does the heavenly Beatific Vision differ from more familial portrayals of Paradise or Heaven in the Christian and Islamic traditions?
12. The highest goal of Hindu Vedantic liberation is *nirvikalpa samādhi*, or perfect, nondual absorption. Can you indicate how *samādhi* differs from either the Beatific Vision or a dreamless sleep or trance?
13. What is Nirvana? How is the term *extinction* to be understood in Theravada Buddhism?
14. Mahayana Buddhist philosophers, such as Nāgārjuna, revise some Theravada views of Nirvana. Attempt to describe Nāgārjuna's concept of "the emptiness of all things," and his critique of earlier concepts of Nirvana.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

For general discussions of the classic ways of faith, devotion, obligation or duty, and insight, see the following:

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PIKE, NELSON. *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992. Also, see articles on mysticism in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed, 9. Macmillan, 2005, pp. 6334–6359.
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THERA, NYANAPONIKA. *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. London: Rider, 1969. Exposition of Theravada meditation.
UNDERHILL, EVELYN. *Mysticism*. New York: Dutton, 1961.
ZAEHNER, R. C. *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957.

For general accounts of salvation and life after death in the world's religions, see the following:

BRANDON, S. G. F. *The Judgment of the Dead*. New York: Scribner's, 1969.
———. *Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

HICK, JOHN H. *Death and Eternal Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976. This study is especially thorough and lucid, and includes a valuable bibliography.

For conceptions of eschatology, resurrection, immortality, and eternal life in the Abrahamic religions, see the following:

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For comparative studies of mysticism, see the following:

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