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# Fruit from the Garden of Wisdom

by

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## 3. Religious Awakening

The stage of religious awareness which is generally known as animism regards Nature as inwardly filled with certain intelligent spirits, thus making every part of Nature a living act of some hidden purpose and intention. The awe and fear that almost always follow immediately from the recognition of spirits indwelling Nature summon a corresponding feeling of respect and adoration that one feels in regard to these angelic causes working behind Nature. The initial form in which this respect for the "above" is manifest, in practice, is ritual, characteristic of every religious behaviour.

Features known as taboo, totem and fetishism, are generally associated with the earliest forms of religious awakening, taboo meaning the prohibition to go near or come in contact with anything that one regards as endowed with a repelling power or unholy influence, totem being usually an animal connected with a community of people, or even an object so connected, determining the welfare of the community, such as the cow, the peepul tree, or a sacred stone, which are said to be endowed with powers of this kind, and fetish being an object considered as an abode of a superior spirit or power.

The stage which is known as Spiritism considers these indwelling spirits behind Nature as not just lodged in things and phenomena but having the ability to move about and work according to their will, doing good when they are pleased and harm if they are displeased. This stage effloresces into the acceptance of there being many gods in the heavenly world, a stage which historians of religion call polytheism, in which condition of the religiously oriented mind the spirits behind the different workings of Nature are adored as the powerful gods inhabiting a celestial kingdom above the world superintending directly the phenomena of all creation. In the Veda Samhitas we

find Mantras for prayers addressed to different gods. In the Vedas, however, we can find representations of every stage of religion from the initial natural adorations to the highest conceptions of the Absolute. The multitude of gods follows from the fact of the many-sidedness and manifold workings of Nature, each performance or event in Nature being controlled by a soul-force within it, a god working through its embodied form. Many things require many controllers, and they are gods because they are not in this world, their abode being in heaven. The exploits of these gods become the sources of mythology and epics connected with an important stage in the development of religious consciousness. Mankind, even today, is in this stage of religion and we will find no religion in the world without its mythological stories and its epics glorifying vigorously the power and knowledge of its angels and gods. The human mind might feel stifled and find itself in a state of barrenness if mythology and epic are to be removed from the field of religion. Primarily, it is emotion that takes the upper hand in religious practice, and it is this that explains the need for mythology and epic literature.

In a stage which historians call henotheism a particular god is considered as the highest god, raised above all other gods in the hierarchy of the pantheon. There is also the grouping of gods (Visvedevas) into a single body of divine power.

Theism is the affirmation of the One God as the transcendent and immanent creator of the universe. The necessity for affirming the Supreme God arises on account of its being necessary to bring the multiple gods into a harmonious relation among them, without which internal coordination the gods would remain as isolated localities of unrelated essences, not excluding even a contending and superseding tendency among them. Since the universe cannot be regarded as consisting of segregated bits of matter and spirit, the need for a universal connecting link arises. The gods cannot be really many, they have to be phases of the operation of the One God. This Great God is proclaimed in ecstatic language of poetry in the Purusha-Sukta, Hiranyagarbha-Sukta, Visvakarma-Sukta, Skambha-Sukta, and Varuna-Sukta of the Veda-Samhitas. The Nasadiya-Sukta of the Rig-Veda affirms an absolute beginning of things, the origin of the universe as being beyond the concepts of even existence and non-existence. Religion is the reaction of the total man to the total reality. There can be only one such

Supreme Reality, in which every individual soul, and everything, has to find itself wholly.

The highest form of religion is known as monism, which overcomes some of the limitations involved in the concept of God as the Supreme Person, which is the way in which theism defines God. Monism is the affirmation of the Absolute which is above the Personality concept, because the concept of the Person cannot be dislocated from the concept of limitation as if in a universe of Space and Time. The Absolute can only be designated as That Which Is. Here the religious consciousness reaches its highest peak of attainment.

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