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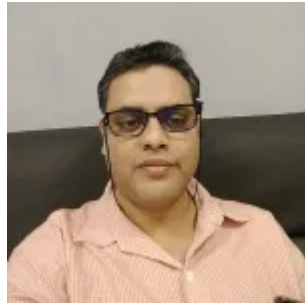
An Attempt at Interreligious Theologising

January 26, 2021 Team ICM Faith / Spirituality

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By Subhasis Chattopadhyay –

The term Hindu is a European construct based on outdated colonial geographical models. A more inclusive and actual term would be the Law(s) Eternal or, the Santana

Dharma. It is with this note of dissent about the nomenclature of what is popularly known as Hinduism that we begin to map a method to dialogue wherein my religion is not distorted under Western First world pressures. So what do the Laws Eternal state which are not found or even accepted by other religions?

1. The absolute presence of 'Ishwara'(Inner Controller) or, the 'Antaryamin' (That which is Within). That effulgent Being who is everywhere has become us. This is found in all branches of the Sanatana Dharma. Simply put, we are all with no exceptions divine not mimetically but really. Even theistic forms of the Sanatana Dharma gesture towards non qualified-nondualism, or, Advaita Vedanta. The *Tantras* and the *Agamas* too assert the reality of the One becoming the many. According to the Sanatana Dharma, there

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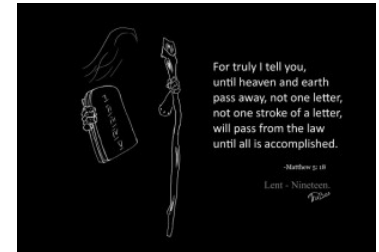
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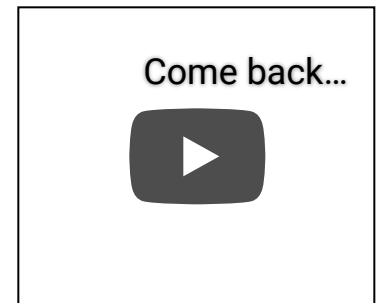
is no other way than to realize the Self within. So, the Sanatana Dharma does not admit of God as envisaged in any of the Abrahamic religions. Neither does it negate the foundational truth of the Self as do all branches of Buddhist and to an extent, Jaina, thought. The foundational structure of the Law(s) Eternal is the existence of the Self. We are Brahmavadins and not Mayavadins. We are Brahman qua *Ishwara*. The purpose of life then, is to look inward and not to become one with an external God. The purpose is to look inward to realise that we were never anything but That (Being).

2. The Sanatana Dharma stresses that Karma is real. This is not the theory of causality. Neither is it some sticky matter which sheaths our souls as the Jains believe. Karma is configuring the body-mind complex to a particular way of thinking which is autonomous. The Sanatana Dharma, contrary to perceived interpretations, admits of autonomy, which accounts for penalties needed for justification. The penalties are not punishments for sins. But rather, a working out of the myriad projections of the One over aeons. Within the Sanatana Dharma there is no place for eternal damnation or eternal salvation. Neither is time created ex nihilo. Nor do we see [time](#) as cyclical. But everything evolves and involutes. All of us were there, will be there and none of us are ever lost to any hell or attain to (any) heaven forever. The concepts of hell or heaven as understood in other religions are not admitted by us. So the word swarga (mistakenly thought as heaven) can be parsed as swa-varga or, one's own rightful place. There is no hell; but there are hellish



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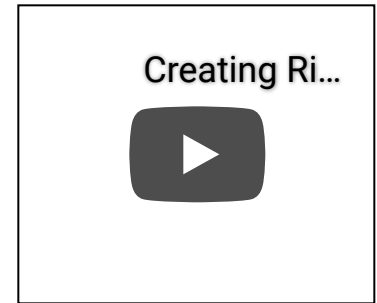
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worlds which are as real, or phenomenologically unreal, as this world. So no matter who you are, you do not need saving. You are already That (self-effulgent Being). So all Abrahamic religions believe in corporeality. The Sanatanta Dharma disagrees. We are non-corporeal beings. Remember, a soul too is corporeal.

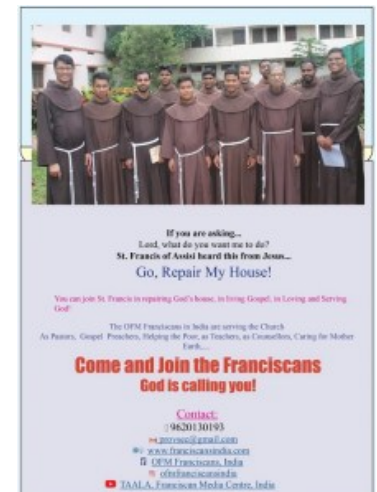
3. There are no radical evils or absolute goods within the Laws Eternal. Non-violence is not an absolute quality. Neither is violence always good. This is not moral relativism but these are foundational truths because this world as we see it is real to the extent that we perceive it as real. In short, we sublimate the world. For, we are That. This is not phenomenology or even idealism.
4. The Sanatana Dharma does not admit of an Incarnational event as a one off event. Because Incarnation means the crossing over of eternity with temporality. This is not religious relativism. To begin with, we are One who became and will become the many till the next involution. We will be there in the next evolution. And these involutions and evolutions are not synchronous events but are asymmetrical events which are occurring right now.
5. Finally, the Law(s) Eternal reject the arbitrary relation between the sign and the signified. Language is foundational and not arbitrary plays of signs.
6. The mind is not structurally scrutable within the Sanatana Dharma because the Purusha within is the Antaryamin and we reject all forms of structural stratifications of the mind.
7. Contrary to received wisdom the chakras are not nerve ganglions, neither are all located within the physical body.

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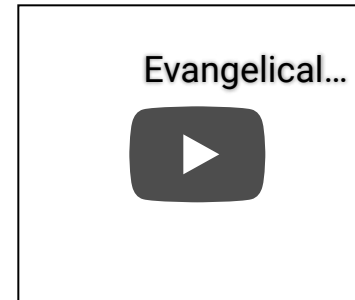


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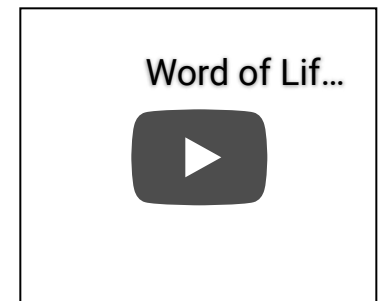
These are the foundational Truths of the Sanatana Dharma which have been revealed to us by no one human being. The *Manusmriti* is as much Sanatana Dharma as the Inquisition's rabid beliefs reveal the beauty of Catholic dogma. Neither are castes relevant to the Sanatana Dharma; they are relevant to the extent that black lives are often treated in Brazil by white police personnel as scum. I think it is best to accept these differences and then proceed on common grounds which might be the following:

1. Both the Sanatana Dharma and Catholic Christianity agree that there is a being (Being). So there is a foundational Truth. To say anything beyond this would be mere speculation. We both agree that there is the One. Unlike many others, we do not say that there is nothing. We start from here.
2. We as faith communities agree that there are indeed great injustices springing from evil thoughts leading to wrong actions and there happen to be great good (qualia) achieved by sacrificing lesser goods (*eudaimonia* of Aristotle). Again we have to start at this point. Then we need to think things through from our respective hermeneutical positions.
3. We both agree on the importance of the Word which Is and Was and will Be. Beyond this we diverge. So we have to fix on this commonality.

The Hare Krishna movement, and all other prominent movements within the Sanatana Dharma including the various well known cults of



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hero-worship are all structured around centralised superstructures which we acquired during our long history of colonisation. Many of these movements appeal to the Western mind because they are authoritarian with strict rules. But these rules have been negated within the Sanatana Dharma by thinkers ranging from Sri Utpaladeva to Sri Abhinavagupta to Sri Kshemraja. The Sanatana Dharma stresses marriage over celibacy not because it is akin to Protestantism. There is none to protest against. Nor is it better to marry than to burn. It is simply this; marriage is not a lower state than other choices in life. It is a first step towards recognising that one can indeed be two who form a monad.

References:

The *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, The *Yoga Sutras*, The *Mahanirvana Tantra*, the *Gheranda Samhita*. The *Tantraloka*.


Subhasis Chattopadhyay is a bibliophile; and has completed formal studies in the Bible and separately, in Hinduism from the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies. His Biblical studies were completed from the Pontifical Atheneum, Bengaluru. He writes on interreligious dialogues for us. His book reviews from 2010 to 2020 in Prabuddha Bharata have been showcased by Ivy League Presses. He earns his living by teaching English at the UG and PG levels in a non-community college in West Bengal; affiliated to the University of Calcutta. He

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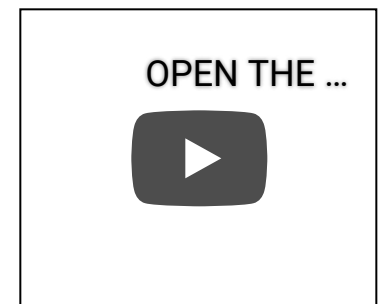
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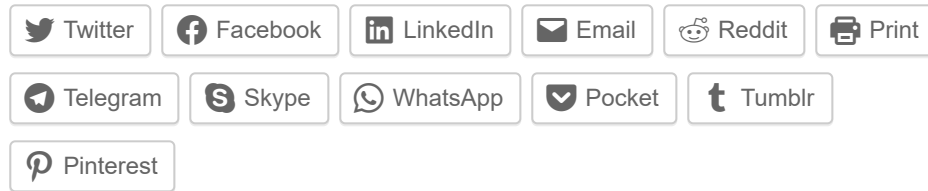


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