

The Phenomena of Divine Light

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Chapter 2 The Phenomenon of Divine Light in Various Religions

2.1 The Divine Light in Hinduism

Hindus discovered very early in their history the presence of this divine phenomenon. The prayers of a Hindu philosopher: “Lead me from untruth to Truth. Lead me from darkness to Light. Lead me from death to Immortality.”¹ One of the most Hindu scriptures is *The Upanishads* that were compiled between 800 and 500 BC. It references to topics in religious mysticism. Clearly, the writers of these texts had witnessed the Divine Light and its ecstasy. One of the principal texts in this collection - *the Chandogya Upanishad* - tells us of what we are likely to encounter after we die. In a dialogue between Prajapati, one of the main characters, and the god Indra, we are told that “Our body is mortal. It has been appropriated by Death. But it is the standing-ground of that deathless, bodiless Self (Atman) ... that serene one, when he rises up from this body, reaches *the highest light*.”²

The ‘highest light’ that the emancipated ‘Self’ reaches Divine by nature. Divinity goes by many names in Hinduism (e.g., Indra, Vishnu, Siva, Purusha, Brahma, or Brahman). However, the tradition is very clear on the point that these are just different manifestations of one Divine reality. This divinity is “higher than the highest, greater than the greatest, and naturally brilliant.”³ Vishnu, so says the *Skanda Upanishad*, is the “Light of all Lights.”⁴ *The Kaivalya Upanishad* goes on to identify the One who is formless, wonderful, all-pervading, indestructible and Lord of all: “He only is Brahman. He only is Indra. He only is Vishnu. He only is Self-Shining.”⁵

The ‘real seat of Vishnu,’ then, dawns on man “as the form of light.”⁶ Brahman is seen as “the light of an endless sphere.”⁷ The “Brahman-OM” is “the highest light, the foundation and sovereign lord of all.”⁸ Brahma is light, says the *Maitri Upanishad*, and the mystic symbol OM is “a leader, brilliant, sleepless, ageless [and] deathless...”⁹ Brahma, ‘the limitless One,’ is that “shining form which gives heat in yonder sun... Unending are the rays of him.”¹⁰ Brahman is ‘self-shining,’ ‘self-luminous,’ and ‘shines by his own brightness.’ As He shines “does everything else shine after.”¹¹ As we find in the *Brahmarahasya Upanishad*,

¹ *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*: 1, 3, 28 in ALANNA KAIVALYA, *Sacred Sound, Discovering the Myth and Meaning of Mantra & Kirtan*, New World Library, California, 2014, p. 48.

² R.E. HUME, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1954, p. 272.

³ PATRICK OLIVELLE, *Samnyasa Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 225.

⁴ K. NARAYANASVAMI AIYAR, *Thirty Minor Upanishads*, n.p., Madras, 1914, p. 41.

⁵ AIYAR, p. 32.

⁶ *Sandilya Upanishad*, in AIYAR, p. 183.

⁷ *Mandalabrahman Upanishad*, in AIYAR, p. 247.

⁸ *Naradaparivrajaka Upanishad*, in OLIVELLE, p. 219.

⁹ HUME, p. 425.

¹⁰ *Maitri Upanishad*, in HUME, p. 435 & 443.

¹¹ *Vicharabindu Upanishad*, in SWAMI SIVANANDA, *Ten Upanishads*, P.O. Shivanandanagar: The Divine Life Society, 1973, p. 68, 203 & 226.



“Brahma is the Light of lights.
 He is Self-luminous.
 He is Supreme Light.
 He is ultimate light.
 He is an embodiment of Light.
 By His Light all else shines.”¹²

Another of the great scriptures of Hinduism is the *Bhagavad Gita*.¹³ It is one of the most important religious classics of the world. It is considered a religion book, which means it is all about relationship between God and Man.¹⁴

“The Bhagavad Gita is a mystic poem, dealing with the nature of the soul and body of man, man’s relation to God, and the way or ways by which man is to attain salvation. It is poetic, mystical, and devotional, rather than logical and philosophical. It contains many discordant doctrines; to try to unite them all in a consistent system is to do violence to its spirit. In this respect, it is like all Hindu speculative literature of its time and earlier, - particularly like the Upaniṣads, to which it is deeply indebted. Like them, too, it is practical in its attitude, seeking religious or philosophic truth not for its own sake but as a means of human salvation.”¹⁵

Arjuna saw the light like the splendor and the radiance of Supreme Spirit. The ultimate goal in most forms of Hinduism is to achieve liberation (*moksha*) from the material world. This can be accomplished in several ways or path: “The way of *karma*, or action, emphasises exercises that are designed to physically untangle the spirit from the body. The way of *jnana*, or knowledge, would have one consider the true nature of reality in order to gain the ultimate goal. The way of *bhakti*, or worship, allows one to pray either to a specific God or any number of gods, depending on the person and the situation in classical Hinduism.”¹⁶ According to this text, as with the *Upanishads*, the Light of the spiritual path is glorious and Divine: “If there should be in the sky, a thousand suns risen all at once. Such splendour would be of the splendour of that Great Being.”¹⁷

Experiencing Divine light is not only well recognized in Hinduism, but is one of its ultimate goals. “The essence of the Bhagavad Gita is the vision of God in all things and all things in God.”¹⁸ It is the vision of Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita: “If the light of a thousand suns suddenly arose in the sky, that splendour might be compared to the radiance of the Supreme Spirit. And Arjuna saw in that radiance the whole universe in its variety, standing in a vast unity in the body of the God of gods (BG 11.12-13).” In the battle of the Bhagavad Gita there is a great symbol of hope that he who has a good will and strives is never lost, and that in the battle for eternal life there can never be a defeat unless we run away from the battle. Love leads to Light, but the Light is not ours it is given to us, it is given to us as a

¹² SIVANANDA, 148.

¹³ “*Bhagavadgita*, (Sanskrit: “Song of God”) an episode recorded in the great Sanskrit poem of the Hindus, the *Mahabharata*. It occupies chapters 23 to 40 of Book VI of the *Mahabharata* and is composed in the form of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, an *avatar* (incarnation) of the god Vishnu. Composed perhaps in the 1st or 2nd century BC, it is commonly known as *the Gita*.” Cf. WENDY DONIGER, *Bhagavadgita*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bhagavadgita>, (access: 03.04.2017).

¹⁴ SWAMI NIKHILANANDA, *The Bhagavad Gita*, RamakrishnaVivekananda Centre, New York, 1944, p. 1.

¹⁵ FRANKLIN EDGERTON (ed.), *The Bhagavad Gītā*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 189.

¹⁶ BRIAN A. BAIN, *Divine Encounters, Light and Ecstasy in Religious and Near-Death Experiences*, <http://www.lovinglight.com/bbain/hinduism/hinduism.htm>, (Access: 05.05.2017).

¹⁷ WINTRHROP SERGEANT, *The Bhagavad Gita*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 1984, p. 464.

¹⁸ EKNATH EASWARAN, *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita: A Contemporary Guide to Yoga, Meditation, and Indian Philosophy*, Nilgire Press, California, 2011, p. 62.



reward for our love and our good work. Whoever encounters this extraordinary light achieves “incomparable bliss (BG 5.2)” and “the highest happiness is happiness beyond end (BG 6.27-28).”

The Bhagavad Gita tells us that the path to Divine realization is through appropriate effort, concentration, and the renunciation of material concerns: “He whose self is unattached to external sensations, who finds happiness in the self, whose self is united with Brahman through Yoga, reaches imperishable happiness (BG 5.21).” Thus, continually disciplining himself, the Yogin whose mind is subdued goes to Nirvana, to supreme peace, to union with Me (BG 6.15) The Light of the spiritual path is glorious and Divine: “Such splendour would be of the splendour of that Great Being (BG11.12).” “This brilliance “illuminates the entire universe (BG 15.12).” Within the Divine light abides supreme peace and the eternal abode (BG 18.62).” That this light is divine in origin is abundantly clear: “I see thee without beginning, middle, or end; I behold thy infinite power, the power of thy innumerable arms. I see thine eyes as the sun and the moon. And I see thy face as a sacred fire that gives light and life to the whole universe in the splendour of a vast offering” (BG 11.19). Thy blazing is burning all this universe with Thine Own Radiance and filling all the universe with splendour, thy terrible rays consume it: “The flames of thy mouths devour all the worlds. Thy glory fills the whole universe. But how terrible thy splendour burns!” (BG 11.30)

Many Hindu scriptures convey expressions of this profound light of divine over and over again in a compelling, even awesome fashion. There is no doubt, however, that the experience of the supreme bliss and brilliance of the Divine Light is firmly rooted in the Hindu tradition.

2.2 The Divine Light in Buddhism

Buddhism grew out of Hinduism, beginning with a young man of the *Kshatriya* class named Siddhartha Gotama. Siddhartha is a *Sanskrit* personal name which means ‘He Who Achieves His Goal’. The Sanskrit family name Gautama means ‘descendants of Gotama’. Gotama was born around 563 BC, in northern India.¹⁹ Although not a Brahmin, the lad saw fit to contemplate the nature of Ultimate Reality, and attained perfect enlightenment. From this point on he was known as “**the Buddha - the enlightened one.**”²⁰ Like Hinduism, Buddhism sets as its ultimate goal the achievement of a profound mystical experiences, but Buddhism has always claimed that anyone can and should achieve this, so that another person could be helped along the path.²¹

There are two school in Buddhism, Mahayana and Theravada.²² In the 8th century texts of the *Mahayana*, the light of Buddha is said to be “beautiful, extremely powerful, incompara-

¹⁹ CRISTIAN VIOLATTI, *Siddhartha Gautama*, Ancient History Encyclopedia, https://www.ancient.eu/Siddhartha_Gautama/, access (02.11.2017).

²⁰ NEW WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Buddha>, access (02.11.2017).

²¹ BRIAN A. BAIN, *Divine Encounters: Light and Ecstasy in Religious and Near-Death Experiences*, <http://www.lovinglight.com/bbain/buddhism/buddhism.htm>, (02.11.2017). “The Buddha taught a path to salvation that requires coming to complete awareness of the self and its myriad self-centered desires, or “cravings,” that bind us to suffering and keep us in ignorance. He taught the way to discipline and deny the body, the egoistic self, and any sort of self-seeking, in order to achieve a state of complete selflessness (anatta) or ‘emptiness.’ In attaining the state that is absolutely empty, the seeker becomes unified, free of desires, able to live a fully awakened existence. Gotama rejected the whole Hindu class and caste system, and promoted enlightenment for everyone.”

²² *Ibid.* “In the largest school, Mahayana, individuals can pray to a Buddha to enlist help along the spiritual path. In the older school, Theravada, prayers are considered meaningless, because the Buddha does not exist as some sort of god, but as a state of being. The Mahayanists counter that the Theravadins might be correct



ble, infinite splendour and infinite brilliance.”²³ The body of Buddha issues forth ‘brilliant rays,’ and is called the “King of Light.”²⁴ These images were applied to a mythological account of the Buddha’s birth. When the newborn Buddha was first “gazed at, though of such surpassing brightness, he attracted all eyes like the moon. With the radiant splendour of his limbs, he extinguished like the sun the splendour of the lamps; with his beautiful hue as of precious gold he illumined all the quarters of space.”²⁵

Buddhist schools and texts that refer to a Divine Light do so about a cosmic, God-like Buddha. The *Dhammapada*, dating as far back as the 6th century BC, tells us that “the sun shines by day, the moon shines by night; continually, day and night, does the luminous Buddha shine.”²⁶ Other texts tell us that “the brilliance of Buddha’s light is measureless.”²⁷ Buddha, “the Great Enlightened One is brilliant and highly bright.”²⁸ The Enlightened Teacher Buddha has illuminated all nations with “the bright light of the doctrine and thinking in the brightness.”²⁹ Buddha is the “World Honoured One and Light Brightness.”³⁰ In a very famous passage from the *Lotus Sutra*, written around the 3rd century CE, we read that:

“The Buddha emitted a light from between his eyebrows, manifesting signs that are rarely seen. This light illumined the eastern direction, eighteen thousand Buddha lands. One could see how these Buddha lands adorned with numerous jewels, shone with hues of lapis lazuli and crystals, was due to the illumination of Buddha’s light.”³¹

The brilliance of the Buddha’s light is often said to be indescribable.

“The Buddha of Immeasurable Life has eighty-four thousand features; each feature has eighty-four thousand secondary attributes; each secondary attribute sends forth eighty-four thousand rays of light; each ray of light shines out over the world of the ten quarters; and those sentient beings who are mindful of the Buddha are embraced (by that light), never to be abandoned.”³²

The *Flower Ornament Scripture*, written between 359 and 710 CE, contains an overwhelming number of references to the Buddha as a Divine Light. The scripture said that “the Buddha is a boundless treasury of light. A great assembly all saw the Buddha’s body emit a hundred trillion infinities of inconceivable great lights.”³³ To quote just a few examples:

ultimately, but if prayer and worship help a person achieve enlightenment, then such practices should not be discouraged.”

²³ E.B. COWELL (trans.), “The Land of Bliss,” in *The Buddha-Karita of Asvaghosha*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1894, p. 28-29.

²⁴ E.B. COWELL (trans.), *Amitayur-Dyana Sutra: Meditation on Buddha-Amitayus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1894, p. 180-185.

²⁵ COWELL, p. 6.

²⁶ WOODILLE ROCKHILL, *Udanavarga: A Collection of Verses from the Buddhist Canon*, Trubner & Co., London, 1883, p. 199.

²⁷ HSUAN HUA, *Amitabha Sutra*, Buddhist Text Translation Society, San Francisco, 1974, p. 31.

²⁸ BUNNO KATO, YOSHIRO TAMURA, and KOJIRO MIYASAKA (trans.), “Innumerable Meanings Sutra,” in *The Three Fold Lotus Sutra*, Kosei Publishing, Tokyo, 1986, p. 6-7.

²⁹ NICHOLAS POPPE (trans.), *The Diamond Sutra*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1971, p. 145.

³⁰ KUMARAJIVA (trans.), *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*, vol. 6, Buddhist Text Translation Society, San Francisco, 1980, p. 1116.

³¹ BURTON WATSON (trans.), *Lotus Sutra*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p. 18.

³² MEIJI YAMADA (trans.), *Lotus Sutra*, Ryukoku University Translation Centre, Kyoto, 1984, p. 35, 57 & 59.

³³ THOMAS CLEARY (trans.), “Ascent to the Palace of the Tushita Heaven,” in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 1, Shambala, Boulder, 1984, p. 510-511.



“The Buddha’s great light of knowledge illumines all lands in ten directions. The Buddha-body is peerless, it has no compare; Its light shines throughout ten directions. Traversing all realms of existence for countless ages, His light is everywhere as pure as space. Emanating inconceivable nets of lights. Everywhere purifying all conscious beings. All the lights in the world cannot match the light of a single pore of the Buddha. This is how inconceivable the Buddha’s light is.”³⁴

“The great ocean of worlds has no bounds; Its circumference of jewels is pure and multicolored. Made of masses of diamonds, also raining beautiful jewels, their jewel atmospheres are unique and different, radiating pure light beautifying everywhere.”³⁵

“Buddha emanates a great light. That light touches all with its glow, pervading the whole cosmos.”³⁶

“The Buddha sits on the site of enlightenment. Pure and clear is his great radiant light, like a thousand suns emerging, illumining all over space, illuminating the world with light that has no end. Behold the Buddha’s body with webs of light so pure, willing the ten directions.”³⁷

“I see the great pure light of Buddha’s ocean of worlds calmly realizing enlightenment, pervading the whole cosmos. The Buddha’s body emanates great light with physical forms boundless and totally pure, filling all lands like clouds from each hair pore appear clouds of light, filling all space, emitting great sound: All dark places are illumined, causing the pains of hells to disappear.”³⁸

“One light illumines boundlessly, filling all lands in the ten directions, causing all worlds to gain great brightness.”³⁹

Many other Buddhist texts also identify the Buddha as a super-brilliant being of light. In the *Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, we find that the “Buddha’s radiance none shall be able to succeed.”⁴⁰ The Buddha’s body is said to be of a “wonderful brightness.”⁴¹ “The brilliance of a trillion suns, moons and pearls are outshone by the pure lights emanating from the mouth of Sakyamuni Buddha.”⁴² “The lights of the World-Honoured One illuminate all the countless Buddha-lands throughout the ten directions. The brilliance of the sun and the moon cannot bear comparison with the brilliance of the *Tathagata* (Buddha).”⁴³

The Tibetan *Book of the Dead*, written in the 8th century CE described the near-death experiences. After we die, we can expect to encounter the ‘Clear Light of Reality.’ When we do, we are advised to “try to abide in that state because the radiance of the Clear Light of Pure Reality is naturally void...the All-Good.”⁴⁴ The Tibetan text tells us that “in that state being experienced by thee, in an unbearable intensity, voidness and Brightness inseparable.

³⁴ THOMAS CLEARY (trans.), “The Wonderful Adornments of the Leaders of the World,” in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 1, Shambala, Boulder, 1984, p. 82-83.

³⁵ THOMAS CLEARY (trans.), “The Flower Bank World,” in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 1, Shambala, Boulder, 1984, p. 204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

³⁷ THOMAS CLEARY (trans.), “Vairocana,” in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 1, Shambala, Boulder, 1984, p. 257.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 262-264.

³⁹ THOMAS CLEARY (trans.), “Ten Practices,” in *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, vol. 1, Shambala, Boulder, 1984, p. 483.

⁴⁰ LEON HURVITZ (trans.), *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1976, p. 127.

⁴¹ W.E. SOOTHILL, *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1930, p. 242.

⁴² GARMA C.C. CHANG (ed.), “On Emptiness” in *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras: Selections from the Maharatnakuta Sutra*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1983, p. 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ W.Y. EVANS-WENTZ (ed.), *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Oxford University Press, London, 1960, p. 92-95.



The Voidness bright by nature and the Brightness by nature void. The Brightness is inseparable from the Voidness.”⁴⁵ Further, we are told that “thine own consciousness shining, void and inseparable from the Great Body of Radiance, hath no birth, nor death, and is the Immutable Light (Amitabha Buddha). Recognizing the voidness of thine own intellect to be Buddhahood, and looking upon it as being thine own consciousness, is to keep thyself in the divine mind of the Buddha.”⁴⁶

The supreme happiness is felt when one encounters this ‘Buddha-light.’ “His light, pure and immense, makes all sentient beings feel joyful in body and mind.”⁴⁷ The *Flower Ornament* Scripture details this theme extensively. Seeing the ‘Pure Light’ gives rise to joy. The appearance of the Buddha causes all to give up suffering and attain peace and bliss. The exceptional joy and happiness of those who encounter the Buddha is told:

“The Buddha in vast eons past amassed an ocean of joy, endlessly deep; therefore, all who see him are glad. The Buddha showers the rain of truth without bound, able to make the witnesses greatly rejoice; supreme roots of goodness are born from this. Such is the realization of Exquisite Light. All who see or hear receive benefit, causing them all to dance for joy. In the past Buddha cultivated an ocean of joy, vast, boundless, beyond all measure; therefore, those who see are all delighted to save all beings in all the worlds: This is the liberation of Blissful Happiness. I see the independent power of Buddha, his light filling the universe causing delusions to vanish and joy to abound: This is what’s seen by Immutable Light.”⁴⁸

“Illumined by the Buddha’s light, all beings are peacefully happy; all pains of existence cleared away, their minds are full of joy. Everyone’s paying reverent respect, all greatly joyful at heart gazing at the King of Truth.”⁴⁹

Buddhism encourages its followers to attain a certain state of being, one in which the distinctions between Ultimate Reality and man become obscured. In Buddhism, however, this goes by different names: *Nirvana*, the Void, Emptiness, Nothingness, Buddhahood, even the Buddha himself. Each of these names are often associated with feelings of supreme bliss, and radiating a pure, brilliant light. In each case, we can also see that this phenomenon of divine light has left the impression that this is the ultimate object and meaning of Buddha life.

2.3 The Divine Light in Taoism

Taoism is an ancient religion that developed in China, where tradition states it was founded by *Lao-Tzu* (also commonly written Laotzi), a legendary and possibly mythical sage who reportedly lived in the 6th century BC.⁵⁰ There is also substantial evidence indicating that the founders of Taoism drew upon even older traditions in China connected to the Religion of the Sun that extended back thousands of years earlier.⁵¹

At the heart of Taoism is the concept of the ‘*Tao*’ (or ‘*Dao*’, Chinese: 道; *pinyin*) itself, which is similar in concept to the ‘Brahman’ of Hinduism.⁵² It represents the unknowable

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴⁷ GARMA C.C. CHANG (ed.), “On Pure Land,” in *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras: Selections from the Maharatnakuta Sutra*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1983, p. 348.

⁴⁸ CLEARY, p. 84-128.

⁴⁹ CLEARY, p. 258.

⁵⁰ KING SHU LIU, “The Origin of Taoism” in *The Monist* 27, no. 3 (July 1917), p. 377.

⁵¹ Cf. JUSTIN NORRIS, *Cultures Descended from the Civilization of the Sun*, <https://www.spiritualsun.com/lost-civilization-sun/descendants#Taoism>, (access: 02.11.2017).

⁵² BELSEBUUB & ANGELA PRITCHARD, *The Path of the Spiritual Sun: Celebrating the Solstices & Equinoxes*, Mystical Life Publications, New York, 2017, p. 104.



and unmanifest source of creation, which words cannot truly describe. Tao/Dao or *pinyin* is a Chinese word signifying ‘way’, ‘path’, ‘route’, ‘road’, ‘choose’, ‘key’ or sometimes more loosely ‘doctrine’, ‘principle’ or ‘holistic science’.⁵³ Within the context of traditional Chinese philosophy and religion, “the Tao is the intuitive knowing of ‘life’ that cannot be grasped full-heartedly as just a concept but is known nonetheless through actual living experience of one’s everyday being.”⁵⁴

The most famous book of Taoism is *Tao Te Ching*. It was written by the great Chinese spiritual adept *Lao Tse* about 2500 years ago. *Tao Te Ching* is one of the most fundamental textbooks on the philosophy and methodology of spiritual development.⁵⁵ The phenomenon of Divine Light is described as Tao that manifest Itself. Light is the Origin of everything.

“One cannot cognize Tao only by speaking about It. One cannot name by a human name that Origin of the sky and the earth Which is the Mother of everything. Only those who are free from worldly passions can see It, and those who have such passions can see only Its Creation. **Tao and Its Creation are One in essence, though They are called by different names. The passage which exists between Them is a doorway to all that is miraculous.**” (*Tao Te Ching*,1)

“Tao looks like a void. Yet, it is omnipotent! It is in the Depths. **It is the Origin of everything.** It controls everything. It pervades everything. It manifests Itself as shining **Light**. It is the Subtlest! It is the Main Essence of everything! **One cannot describe Its origin, for It is Primordial.**” (*Tao Te Ching* 4)

“Make *emptiness* in yourself complete and achieve full calm! Let everything around you move by itself! Let everyone bloom spiritually and advance to cognition of their *true Essence*! Those who have cognized their true Essence achieve full calm. Thus, they attain the common *Abode of All Those Who Have Attained It*. One’s presence in this *Abode* has to become constant. The One Who has achieved this goal is called *Enlightened, Perfect, and the Possessor of the Higher Wisdom*. That *Abode* is also called *Heaven*. This is *the Abode of Eternal Tao*. Tao is non-corporeal. It cannot be caught by anyone. Thus, it is invincible.” (*Tao Te Ching* 16)

“If earthly rulers rule in calm and harmony, people too are calm and peaceful, and they do not aspire to anything outside this wellbeing. On the contrary, if earthly rulers act with irritation and aggressiveness, then people begin to suffer. Then wellbeing is replaced with troubles and calamities. And people begin to seek the way out, and some of them find it by coming to non-doing and becoming immersed into **the Light of Infinite Tao**. Thus, luck and happiness may result from affliction. As we can see, happiness and unhappiness give birth to each other. The wise are always calm, gentle, and just. They do not want to take anything away from others. They are selfless and do not harm anyone. **They are honest and live in harmony with Tao, with nature, and with other people. They are bright but do not glitter.**” (*Tao Te Ching* 58)

“In order to serve Tao successfully by helping other people, one needs to be able to preserve and to accumulate the power of the consciousness. This requires renouncing everything that wastes this power. Such a renunciation at the higher stages of the Path helps one to grow one’s own Power of *Te*, which can become inexhaustible and can help one to cognize Tao completely. And **Tao is the Eternal and Infinite Primordial Foundation of every man and of the entire material world.** The way that unites man with this Foundation is called *root*.” (*Tao Te Ching* 59)

⁵³ MEL THOMPSON, *Eastern Philosophy*, Hodder Education, London, 2012, p. 153.

⁵⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tao>, (access: 03.11.2017).

⁵⁵ Dr.VLADIMIR ANTONOV, *Tao Te Ching – Divine Way of Spiritual Heart, Comtemporany Knowledge about God, Evolution, and The Meaning of Life. Metodology of Spiritual Development*, http://www.swami-center.org/en/text/taoism/page_01.shtml, (access: 03.11.2017).



Taoist texts state that from the uncreated Tao, creation emerged, a process attributed to the interaction of three cosmic forces, simply called the ‘One’, ‘Two’, and ‘Three’⁵⁶ or in other sources as “*Yin, Yang, and the Central Harmony.*”⁵⁷ **The Three Pure Ones** (Chinese: 三清; *pinyin*: *Sānqīng*) also translated as **the Three Pure Pellucid Ones**, the **Three Pristine Ones**, the **Three Divine Teachers**, the **Three Clarities**, or the **Three Purities** are the **Taoist Trinity**, the **three highest Gods** in the Taoist pantheon. They are regarded as pure manifestation of the Tao and the origin of all sentient beings. From the Taoist classic *Tao Te Ching*, it was held that “The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.”⁵⁸ All of these deities are divine emanations of celestial energy, pure cosmic *qi*.

Lingbao Tianzun (靈寶天尊, ‘**Lord of the Numinous Treasure**’) is also known as the “Supreme Pure One” or “The Universally Honoured One of Divinities and Treasures”.

“In terms of worldview, the emergence of the *Shàngqīng* revelations signifies a major expansion of Taoism. Where the celestial masters had added the pure gods of the Tao to the popular pantheon, *Shàngqīng* enlarged this to include an entirely new layer of existence between the original, creative force of the Tao, represented by the deity ‘*yuan shi tian wang*’ (heavenly king of primordial beginning), and created world as we know it. This celestial layer consisted of several different regions, located both in the far reaches of the world and in the stars, and imagined along the lines of the ancient paradises *Penglai* (a legendary land of Chinese mythology) and *Kunlun* (a mountain or mountain range in Chinese mythology, an important symbol representing the divinity). It was populated by various divine figures: pure gods of the Tao who were emanations of original cosmic *qi*; immortals who had attained celestial status through effort and the proper elixir.”⁵⁹

Qi is divine spark of life or vital life force. Light is also considered essential for life. “In Chinese philosophy, the ethereal substance of which everything is composed. Early Daoist philosophers and alchemists regarded it as a vital force associated with breath and bodily fluids and sought to control its movement within the body in order to achieve longevity and spiritual power.”⁶⁰ Yinyang as *Qi* (Vital Energy) and everything is embedded in *yin* and embraces *yang*; through *chong qi* (vital energy) it reaches *he* (harmony).



The forces of Yin and Yang are also depicted visually in the famous “Yin-Yang” symbol, which Yin-Yang represents the dual polarities that give rise to all creation as well as the cycles between darkness and light that occur both in the heavens and on a personal level dur-

⁵⁶ GIA FU FENG & JANE ENGLISH (trans.), *LAO TZU- Tao Te Ching*, Vintage Books, New York, 1997, p. 26.

⁵⁷ ISABELLE ROBINET, “Cosmogony: Taoist Nations” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), Routledge, London, 2007, p. 49.

⁵⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Pure_Ones, (access: 02.11.2017).

⁵⁹ LIVIA KOHN, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*, Three Times Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, Pennsylvania State University, 2011, p. 1532.



ing the process of spiritual transformation.⁶¹ Taoists held that “a divine light exists within”⁶² and that the aim of spirituality is “to develop this potential and achieve immortality.”⁶³ Achieving this aim, according to Taoist texts, is a gradual process requiring disciplined spiritual practice (self-observation, awareness, concentrative meditation, breathing exercises, and visualization).

In the “*Tao Song Soul Mind Body Transplant – Permanent Treasures to Increase the Power of Your Tao Song*” is said that the Divine and Tao are creators and manifester. Everything has a soul, a mind (consciousness), and a body (energy and matter).⁶⁴

“Divine Soul Mind Body Transplants are permanent treasures that will accompany the recipient forever. Everyone has parents, loved ones, friends, and colleagues. They are our *yang* companions. When we receive Divine Soul Mind Body Transplants, they become our divine *yin* companions. After our physical life ends, these treasures will continue to accompany our soul for all your future lifetimes. Therefore, Divine Soul Mind Body Transplants are permanent divine treasures.

Tao Soul Mind Body Transplants come from the Source. Similar to Divine Soul Mind Body Transplants, the Source can create Tao Soul Mind Body Transplants for a system, organ, part of the body, and cells or for a particular quality, such as Tao love or Tao compassion. The Source can create anything. Whatever we can imagine, the Source can create. Whatever we cannot imagine, the Source can also create.

Tao Soul Mind Body Transplants carry Tao frequency and vibration, which transforms the frequency and vibration of all life in countless planets, stars, galaxies, and universes ... carry Tao love which melts all blockages and transforms all life ... carry Tao forgiveness, which brings inner joy and inner peace ... carry Tao compassion, which boosts energy, stamina, vitality, and immunity ... carry Tao light, which heals, prevents sickness, purifies and rejuvenates soul, heart, mind, and body, transforms relationships, finances, intelligence, and more, and brings success to every aspect of life.”⁶⁵

Wan Ling Rong He (All souls join as one). *Wan* means ‘ten thousand’, which in Chinese represents ‘all or every’. *Ling* means ‘soul’. *Rong He* means ‘join as one’. The Soul World has a Light Side and a Dark Side. The Light Side includes buddhas, saints, healing angels, ascended masters, gurus, lamas, and all kinds of spiritual fathers and mothers in all layers of Heaven. The Dark Side includes demons, monsters, and ghosts.

All souls joining as one means that all souls on the Light Side and the Dark Side join as one. This is not easy at all. To meld them together requires unconditional love, forgiveness, compassion, and light. The Light Side and Dark Side are opposites. Selflessness and selfishness are a pair of opposites. Selfishness is the Dark Side. Selflessness is the Light Side. To meld them together is difficult. Conflict and harmony, war and peace are also pairs of opposites. Conflict is the Dark Side. Harmony is the Light Side. To meld them as one is not easy.

Wan ling rong he is to meld all of the Light Side and all of the Dark Side as one. It will take the greatest effort of all humanity and all souls to achieve this final goal in the Soul Light Era. How can we achieve this goal? Apply divine love, forgiveness, compassion, and light.

“Divine love melts all blockages and transforms all life.

Divine forgiveness brings inner joy and inner peace.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁶² ISABELLE ROBINET, “Syncretism” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), Routledge, London, 2007, p. 23.

⁶³ FARZEEN BALDRIAN-HUSSEIN, “Neidan” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), Routledge, London, 2007, p. 765.

⁶⁴ ZHI GANG SHA, *Tao Song and Tao Dance*, Atria Books, Toronto, 2000, p. 48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



Divine compassion boosts energy, stamina, vitality, and immunity.

Divine light heals, prevents sickness, and transforms every aspect of life, including relationships and finances.”⁶⁶

There is a practice to meld the Light Side and the Dark Side with a Chant: “Divine love, divine forgiveness, divine compassion, and divine light meld the Light Side and Dark Side.”⁶⁷

When a person does meditation, divine energy flows down to the practitioner; filling him with Divine Light, Love, and Power. The practitioner becomes a channel of this Divine energy.

“Spiritual aspirants who have practiced this meditation for quite sometime may experience being enveloped by dazzling, sometimes blinding light. In addition, practitioners may experience divine ecstasy and bliss, and a feeling of oneness with all creation. This has been a common experience among advanced yogis and saints of all religions, and can be verified through their holy scriptures.

This blinding, brilliant, and dazzling light is known as *Heaven Ki* in Taoist yoga, or the pillar of light in ancient Jewish Kabbalah traditions. To the Indian yogis and saints, they call this pillar of light, the Antakharana, or spiritual bridge of light. The Christians refer to it as the descent of the Holy Spirit, symbolized by a pillar of light with a descending white dove. The white dove represents the coming down of divine energy. The descent of the divine energy causes the temporary expansion of the practitioner’s major chakras and inner aura. But if this meditation is practiced daily for a year, then the expansion may become permanent.”⁶⁸

2.4 The Divine Light in Confucianism

Confucianism emphasizes harmony within human society and promotes a form of etiquette which a civilization can achieve astounding and fulfilling spiritual and material greatness. This etiquette is the natural result of education and one may learn of and practice right behavior with immediate benefit.

Confucius was a great teacher born in China 550 BCE. Confucius was not a god nor even a divine sage. Speaking of himself, he said: “*The Master said: As to be a Divine Sage or even a Good Man, far be it for me to make any such claim, far be it from me to make any such claim.*” (VII, 33) And he added: “*I for my part am not one of those who have innate knowledge. I am simply one who loves the past and who is diligent in investigating it. A Divine Sage I cannot hope ever to meet; the most I can hope for is to meet a true gentleman.*” (VII, 19, 25)⁶⁹

The major teachings of Confucius refer to a concept of *li*, which is a Chinese word meaning “offering” but which refers to formal ritual. Confucius loved *li* and used it as a means to inspire participants to profound accomplishments; at the same time, he sought to create the society which could appreciate, rather than simply perform, *li*. A related concept is that of *ren*, which is both a feeling of love for others and the attribute of benevolence. Within Confucianism, a person who is *ren* practices *li*. This lifestyle benefits society in measurable ways, while granting personal success and spiritual fulfillment to the practitioner. The core value in Confucianism might be politeness. Confucianism regards each person’s active involvement in a community as being the means to fulfillment. Civility is a matter of respecting fundamental relationship (Child’s obedience to parent’s proper upbringing. Subject’s good

⁶⁶ ZHI GANG SHA, *Tao I: The Way of All Life*, Atria Books, Toronto, 2000, p. 4-7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Ricardo B. Serrano, *Return to Oneness with the Tao*, Holistic, Vancouver, 2011, p. 90.

⁶⁹ ARTHUR WALEY (trans.), *The Analects of Confucius*, Bradford and Dickens, London, 1956, p. 127, 128, 130.



morality to ruler's benevolence. Wife's fidelity to husband's adoration. Young's respect to old's guidance. Friend's constancy to more-experienced friend's concern).

Confucius' firmest and most frankly stated religious convictions related to heaven, or *t'ien*. The Mandate of Heaven or *Tian Ming* (Chinese: 天命; *pinyin*: *Tiānmìng*) is a Chinese political and religious doctrine used since ancient times to justify the rule of the Emperor of China. According to this belief, heaven (天, *Tian*) - which embodies the natural order and will of the universe - bestows the mandate on a just ruler of China, the 'Heavenly Son' of the 'Celestial Empire.' "If a ruler was overthrown, this was interpreted as an indication that the ruler was unworthy, and had lost the mandate. It was also a common belief that natural disasters such as famine and flood were signs of heaven's displeasure with the ruler, so there would often be revolts following major disasters as citizens saw these as signs that the Mandate of Heaven had been withdrawn."⁷⁰ The Mandate determines whether an emperor of China is sufficiently virtuous to rule; if he does not fulfill his obligations as emperor, then he loses the Mandate and thus the right to be emperor. Thus, he must have a power of heaven.

He looked upon heaven as the source of his power, a heaven that had entrusted him with a sacred mission as a champion of the good and true in China's culture. Confucius generally thought of heaven as an impersonal, ethical force, a cosmic counterpart of the ethical sense in man, a guarantee that somehow there is sympathy with man's sense of morality in the very nature of the universe. *The Great Learning*, one of the so-called four books of Confucianism, teaches that only as persons are transformed into true manhood can the world move toward peace:

"If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character.

If there be beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home.

If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation.

If there be order in the nation, there will be peace in the world."⁷¹

Confucianism had been adapted to Japanese needs and this meant that the practical dimensions of Confucianism were emphasised at the expense of its more philosophical deliberations. "In parting with Zhu Xi's dogmas and taking the subjective heart/mind of Wang Yangming as the foundation of Confucianism, Tōju took Japanese Confucianism forward into a new arena, one in which inner experience and personal happiness took precedence over external investigation and universal principles. Tōju called the innate moral senses 'the inner light' or the 'Divine Light of Heaven', and believed that it was only this light, not anything else, that guided one's life."⁷²

"Though the Tokugawa government supported the Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi, Zhu's opponent, Wang Yang-ming, also won adherents. *Nakae Toju* (1608-48) had studied Zhu Xi's writings for many years, but on discovering the work of Wang Yang-ming he became convinced that Wang's intuitive approach was superior to Zhu's rational 'investigation of things.' Nakae particularly stressed Wang's idea that in each person was an innate moral sense. This meant that one did not have to be a scholar to become a good person. Nakae called this inner sense the '*Divine Light of Heaven*', and his teachings emphasized a personal god called the Supreme Lord Above.

⁷⁰ KALLIE SZCZEPANSKI, "What Is the Mandate of Heaven in China?" in *Thoughtco* (December 4, 2015), <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-mandate-of-heaven-195113>, (access: 10.11.2017).

⁷¹ JAMES LEGGE, "The Great Learning" in *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1960, p. 263-264.

⁷² XINZHONG YAO, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000, p. 132.



Nakae was also impressed by Wang's emphasis on action. Discussing or even understanding virtue were not sufficient: goodness had to be expressed in deeds."⁷³

Under Confucian political philosophy, a good ruler takes care of his subjects, rather than satisfying personal desires. In other words, he serves the culture that he leads rather than serving his own needs. The ruler who abused his power through lack of responsibility to his subjects went against the Will of Heaven or Divine Light. If he went against the Will of Heaven, then he lost Heaven's Mandate and was subject to overthrow.

Nakae Tōju (1608-48) had studied *Zhu xi's* writings for many years, but on discovering the work of *Wang Yang-ming* he became convinced that *Wang's* intuitive approach was superior to *Zhu's* rational "investigation of things." He particularly stressed *Wang's* idea that in each person was an innate moral sense. This meant that one did not have to be a scholar to become a good person. **Tōju** called the innate moral senses 'the inner light' or the 'Divine Light of Heaven', and believed that it was only this light, not anything else, that guided one's life. What *Tōju* did not succeed in was the unification of the notions of subjective experiences and social reforms so that personal happiness could have been guaranteed by institutional structure.⁷⁴ Discussing or even understanding virtue were not sufficient: goodness had to be expressed in deeds. The popularity of Nakae's philosophy helped spread Confucianism as a form of religion in Japan.⁷⁵

Pound⁷⁶ had the notion of light came from the medieval philosopher *John Scotus Erigena*, whose famous dictum, 'all things that are are lights,' is a recurrent theme in *The Cantos* (LIIX/449). From *Erigena's* Neoplatonic perspective, the world is a theophany of divine radiation, in which God is light and his creations are lights; divine creation is thus God's act of manifesting himself in his creatures. Pound seems to be more interested in the 'corporeal' dimension of the light metaphor. In his long essay on *Guido Cavalcanti*, who in Pound's view was also influenced by the light philosophy, Pound approvingly quotes from *Etienne Gilson's* 1925 book on medieval philosophy: 'Light is a very subtle corporeal substance and it is almost incorporeal. Its characteristic properties are to engender itself perpetually and to diffuse itself spherically and instantaneously about a point. This extremely tenuous substance is also the stuff of which all things are made, it is the primary corporal form and some people call it corporeality.' In quoting this passage Pound clearly points to his inclination to characterize light in terms of its materiality.⁷⁷

Pound's 'discovery' largely relies on his reading of the Chinese character *ming* (bright). In Confucian works, *ming* does not carry the heavy philosophical weight perceived in it by Pound, but the character is indeed often used in contexts where the transcendental supreme intelligence is the topic, such as in the mention of *Dao* in the opening paragraph of *Da xue* (*ming de*, 'illustrious virtue'), or in the description of *Tian* in *Zhong yong* 26.5 (*gao ming*, 'high and bright'). Pound discovers the linkage between Confucianism and Neoplatonism, then, in this contextual significance of *ming*. Thus, he states: "The sun and moon, the total light process, the radiation, reception and reflection of light, hence, the

⁷³ DOROTHY HOUBLER & THOMAS HOUBLE, *Confucianism*, Chelsea House, New York, 2009, p. 77.

⁷⁴ XINZHONG YAO, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2000, p. 132.

⁷⁵ DOROTHY & THOMAS HOUBLER, *Confucianism*, Chelsea House Publisher, New York, 2009, p. 77.

⁷⁶ In the summer of 1923, *Ezra Pound* (1885-1972), the American poet then self-exiled in Paris, wrote a poem dedicated to the Chinese sage *Confucius* (c. 551-479 BCE). The poem, now known to Pound's readers as the Confucian canto, ends with three memorable lines that encapsulate Pound's almost lifelong commitment to Confucianism

⁷⁷ FENG LAN, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity*, University of Toronto Press, London, 2005, p. 176.



intelligence. Bright, brightness, shining. Refer to Scotus Erigena, Grosseteste and the notes on light in my *Cavalcanti*? (Con, 20). Such a perception informs Pound's consistent strategy of superimposing the Neoplatonic vision of light on Confucian metaphysics in his translations. For example, Pound translates a key *Zhong yong* passage on *the Dao of Heaven* in the following way:

"From these hidden seeds it moves forth slowly but goes far and with slow but continuing motion it penetrates the solid, penetrating the solid it comes to shine forth on high. The celestial and earthly process pervades and is substantial; it is on high and gives light, it comprehends the light and is lucent, it extends without bounds, and endures" (Con, 181-3)

Pound interpreted the character *zhi* (wisdom) in his typical etymographic manner. The character consists of two components: *zhi* (knowledge) and *ri* (sun). Pound's line underscores his consistent recognition that religion is a mode of enlightened knowledge, or rather, a cognizance of the divine light. In other words, the innate desire to understand the source of divine creation forms an important part of human nature.⁷⁸

Pound's spiritual belief system precisely because the notion denies the reality of earthly existence and deprives human beings of the chance for self-perfection, leaving them as powerless, sinful creatures at the mercy of a mysterious transcendental force. In Confucianism, the way towards redemption lies in education in the form of self-cultivation rather than in salvation by an external force. The relationship between human nature and education is persuasively elucidated in Pound's version of the first paragraph of *Zhong yong*: "What heaven has disposed and sealed is called the inborn nature. The realization of this nature is called the process. The clarification of this process [the understanding or making intelligible of this process] is called education."⁷⁹

Pound's inborn nature, a proper rendering of the Chinese term *xing* (intrinsic nature), designates the primordial nature of humanity originating from Heaven. Since Heaven in Confucianism is essentially benevolent, it is inconceivable that the inborn nature of humanity could contradict the Dao (Pound's process) of Heaven. The way to regain this heavenly origin is through cultivating human nature, bringing to light what human beings have been endowed with by Heaven, namely the four beginnings of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom.⁸⁰ In the *Cantos*, Pound's celebration of such Confucian heroes characteristically marks the height of his spiritual quest, a moment of joy and triumph when the poet witnesses the ascendance of the sage-kings in the glory of the divine light, testifying to the perfect union between humanity and Heaven.⁸¹

2.5 The Divine Light in Islam

Islam means "submission, submission to the word of God (*Allah*)."⁸² An individual who thus submits is a Muslim. The holy book of Islam, **the Qur'an**, contains clear and specific references on the subject. The Islamic tradition is rich in references to a Divine Light. Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, received instruction from a revelation that occurred around the turn of the seventh century CE.⁸³ A voice came to him and said, "Read!" Muhammad, being illiterate, responded to the voice that he could not read. The voice said that "it is the Lord Most Bountiful who teacheth by the pen, [who] teacheth man that which he knew

⁷⁸ FENG LAN, *Ezra Pound and Confucianism: Remaking Humanism in the Face of Modernity*, University of Toronto Press, London, 2005, p. 155.

⁷⁹ FENG LAN, p. 157.

⁸⁰ FENG LAN, 157.

⁸¹ FENG LAN, p. 183.

⁸² WALTER HAZEN, *Inside Islam*, Lorenz Educational Press, Missouri, 2002, p. 14.

⁸³ Cf. LAROUSSE (edt.), *Religions of the World*, Peter Bedrick Books, New York, 2000, p. 54.



not” (Qur’an Surah Al ‘Alaq, 1-5). Then the voice said, on two separate occasions, “O Muhammad, thou art God’s messenger, and I am Gabriel.”⁸⁴ The vision accompanying this voice was exceptionally bright, so much so that Muhammad had to turn away his face “from the brightness of the vision....”⁸⁵ The Qur’an is quite specific about who would be the source of this kind of Light: **“Allah is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. Light upon Light, Allah guideth unto His light whom he will.”** (Qur’an *Surah An-Nur*, 35).

Muslims call God *Allah*. “Allah is the one and only God, the creator of the universe.”⁸⁶ He is the same God who has revealed himself to, and is worshipped by, Jews and Christians. Muslims accept “the legitimacy of the Jewish and Christian scriptures.”⁸⁷ However, according to Muslims, the final and perfect sacred book is the Qur’an. Allah let “His word and will be known through a revelation to the prophet Muhammad, who recorded, in the Qur’an, everything that Allah had revealed to him.”⁸⁸ While Muslims differ on some points of belief, they generally believe that “Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets which includes Moses and Jesus.”⁸⁹ Thus Muslims consider Jesus to be inspired by, but not the incarnate son of, God. But then not even Muhammad was perfect, according to Islam, only Allah is. Likewise, written traditions about the prophet are contained in a collection known as the *Hadith*. Hadith is one of various reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

The phenomena (phenomenon) of Divine Light according to the mystical tradition of Islam is known as Sufism. Sufism is “mystical islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge of God.”⁹⁰ The Sufi tradition of Islam makes frequent reference to the vision of a Divine Light and experience with God. As with the Qur’an, the poetry in this Sufism tradition is an exquisite expression of the Divine presence that the Sufi encounters. In Sufism, “we find not only visions of the Light, but also frequent descriptions of the joy that so often accompanies this vision.”⁹¹ As a mystical tradition, Sufism is “that form of Islam that emphasizes the need for a direct experience with God.”⁹² Sufis frequently dwell on the identification of God (*Allah*) with the Light. For the 13th century Sufi Muhyiddin ibn ‘Arabi, “God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth.”⁹³ God is “the embodiment of light, and the source of all illuminations.”⁹⁴ Sufis routinely describe “an experience with a Light once a devotee reaches a certain level of contemplation, usually accompanied by intense feelings of ecstasy.”⁹⁵ Hussein Nasr offers a few introductory examples that will help to illustrate: “The Essence of the First Absolute Light, God gives constant illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into existence, giving light to them by its rays. Everything in the World is derived from the Light of

⁸⁴ THOMAS PATRICK HUGHES, *Dictionary of Islam*, W.H. Allen, London, 1885, p. 133.

⁸⁵ MOHAMMED M. PICKTHALL, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, New American Library, New York, 1998, p. 10.

⁸⁶ TALIB SAMAT, *The 99 Most Eminent Names of Allah*, Utusan Publications, Kuala Lumpur, p. 1.

⁸⁷ JOHN PHILBRIC HASTY, *Harrold’s Choice*, Xlibris Corporation, New York, 2013, p. 148.

⁸⁸ IFTIKHAR AHMED MEHAR, *Al-Islam*, Islam Press, USA, 2003, p. 201.

⁸⁹ ALLEN WEBB, *Teaching the Literature of Today’s Middle East*, Routledge, New York, 2012, p. 12.

⁹⁰ ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL, Sufi Islam, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sufism>, (access: 05:05:2017).

⁹¹ MUHAMMAD HISHAM KABBANI, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition*, Islamic Supreme Council of America, Fenton, 2004, p. 526.

⁹² http://www.adishakti.org/his_light_within/the_light_islam.htm, (access: 05:05:2017).

⁹³ Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240), in ISMAIL HAKKI BURSEVI, *Fusus al-Hakkim*, Vol. II, Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, Oxford, 1987, p. 319.

⁹⁴ Ibn ‘Arabi, quoted by Prof. MUHAMMAD ENAMUL HAQ, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, Asiatic Press, Dacca, 1975, p. 399.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*



His Essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation.”⁹⁶ The experiences of sufism about God like living in heaven, so said: “I take refuge in the Light of Thy Glorious Countenance which illuminates the heavens.”⁹⁷ The light of the divine exceeds the artificial light of the world: “O God, thou art hidden from us, though the heavens are filled with Thy light which is brighter than the sun and the moon.”⁹⁸ “There is naught in the Universe save one Light! It appears in a variety of manifestations. God is the Light; its manifestations, the Universe.”⁹⁹

The Divine Light is not like any other light, however. “It is unlike anything ordinary people see from day to day. Even more than that though, the phenomenon is really beyond description.”¹⁰⁰ Sufis Ibn ‘Arabi has recourse to poetry to describe the indescribable: “When one perceives the Divine Light fully, everything else disappears. The person then realizes that this is really the very light of the Absolute [God] as such...Ocean’s a drop from my pervading Sea, Light but a flash of my vast Brilliancy.”¹⁰¹

The 13th century Indian Sufi Maneri tells us that God’s “very brilliance blinds me to whatever descends.” This Light is “a thousand times more luminous than that of the sun.” Mansur al-Hallaj lets us know that once one becomes aware of the presence of God and His Light, there is no turning back: “You understand our God is a consuming fire. The rose opens to the light, the Narcissus leans to the shade...But at some point, His Light penetrates our eyes, destroying our shades... If we are roses we are drawn to light. We do not think about the end. There is none.” Furthermore, Yusuf Ali says:

“**Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.** The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: The Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.”

2.6 The Divine Light in Christianity

The good news of Christianity is about “God’s saving designs for humanity as a whole.”¹⁰² It is not just good news for Christians but also for the salvation of the universe. Christians proclaim that “Jesus Christ is as the center, summit, and fullness of all revelation.”¹⁰³ As with other major religions of the world, Christianity has many literatures (has many writings) that deal with Divine Light. The Christian New and Old Testament has several references that identify God as Light.

In the introduction to the Gospel according to John the Apostle, we find that there was a man sent from God whose name was John (the Baptist) as a witness of Light.

“We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you too may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete. This is what we have heard from him and are declaring to you: **God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all.** If we say that we share in God’s life while we are living in

⁹⁶ HUSSEIN NASR, *Three Muslim Sages*, University Press, Cambridge, 1963, p. 69.

⁹⁷ CONSTANCE E. PADWICK, *Muslim Devotions*, SPCK, London, 1961, p. 62.

⁹⁸ KENNETH CRAIG (ed.), *The Wisdom of the Sufis*, New Directions, New York, 1976, p. 33.

⁹⁹ Dr. MIR VALIUDDIN, *The Quranic Sufism*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1977, p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ BRIAN A. BAIN, *Divine Encounters, Light and Ecstasy in Religious and Near-Death Experiences*, <http://www.lovinglight.com/bbain/islam/thesupreme.htm>, (access: 05.05.2017).

¹⁰¹ Ibn ‘Arabi, Lama’at, quoted by A.J. ARBERRY, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics in Islam*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1968, p. 103.

¹⁰² AVERY DULLES, *Revelation and the Religions*, Quaker Universalist Fellowship, New York, 1999, p. 5.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*



darkness, we are lying, because we are not living the truth. But **if we live in light, as he is in light, we have a share in another's life, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.** If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and truth has no place in us; if **we acknowledge our sins, he is trustworthy and upright, so that he will forgive our sins and will cleanse us from all evil.**" (John 1: 3-9).

Furthermore, John the Apostle stated that God is "spirit" (John 4:24), and that he is "light" (1 John 1:5, 7; cf. 1 Tim. 6:16). God is also "He who lives par excellence" (Matt. 16:16, 63; John 6:51; 1 John 1:1-2). Above all, God is "love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Certainly, these words must first be understood in terms of "the salvific manifestation of God in Christ: in the face of a world of hate and darkness and death, Christ offers us the path of liberation."¹⁰⁴

The Christian tradition is "a whole focus on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of a man named Jesus."¹⁰⁵ This fundamental belief in Jesus' triumph over death leads Christians to believe that "Jesus was and is indeed the Son of God, and has the power to grant anyone eternal life."¹⁰⁶ Jesus Christ is True Light. Jesus spoke to the people and said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). But we know that "The Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). According to John, Christians must have that Light because "while you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). We should find life in Him because "if we say we have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). In Jesus is manifested that which is from all eternity. It is the truth of the divine life, the life that comes from the Father, and which the Son and the Holy Spirit share in fullness. The biblical understanding of God indicates that divine perfection consists in giving and in love. Love is the ultimate meaning of divine self-possession; love expresses this perfectly. In the Canticle of Zechariah, we read: "**In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.**" (Luc 1:78-79)

Now, let us furthermore look at the identity of Jesus as the Divine Light. The Transfiguration of Jesus is an event reported in the New Testament when Jesus is transfigured and becomes radiant in glory upon a mountain. Jesus and three of his apostles (Peter, James, and John) go to a mountain to pray. On the mountain, "**Jesus begins to shine with bright rays of light.**" (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Peter 1:16-18; John 1:14). Jesus was transfigured before them; his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as the light. At that point, the prophets Elijah and Moses appeared, and Jesus began to talk to them. A bright cloud appeared, and a voice from the cloud was heard to say: "**This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him**" (Mark 9:7). The Transfiguration not only supports the identity of Jesus as the Son of God, but the statement 'listen to him', identifies him as the messenger and mouth-piece of God. This is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Thomas Aquinas considered the Transfiguration "the greatest

¹⁰⁴Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Letter SALVIFICI DOLORIS*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/hlthwork/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html, (access: 15.05.2017)

¹⁰⁵ RICHARD FERGUSON, *A Real-Life Christian Spiritual Journey*, iUniverse, Bloomington, 2011, p. 209.

¹⁰⁶ JOEL OSTEEN, *Hope for Today Bible*, Simon and Schuster Press, New York, 2009. p. 1185.



miracle in that it complemented baptism and showed the perfection of life in Heaven.”¹⁰⁷ In Christian teachings, “the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment, and the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place of the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth.”¹⁰⁸

Only because the luminous center from which all rays proceed, Christ, “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), has shone in the center of history, can man have an undeserved, if inchoate, “participation in the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). It is only “in his light,” that “we see light” (Ps. 36:9; 1 Cor 13:12). Christ is “the light” (John 8:12) that clarifies what preceded him and guides what follows him. He is, in a sense, the beginning and center of time, because without meaning there is no time.¹⁰⁹ This “center”, then, is not a geographical location but rather the divine and human person, “the Lamb slain for man’s salvation” (Rev. 5:6) in whom God in his immemorial (eternal) plan (*mysterion*) desired to “reconcile all things to himself” (Col. 1:19). When the apostle Peter was in jail, God sent a liberating angel, “*and a light shone in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise quickly. And his chains fell from his hands*” (Acts 12:7).

That Light was Jesus, the Word of God, the Son of God, who also was God. The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was “*the brightness of [God’s] glory, and the express image of his person*” (Heb. 1:3). The Book of Acts says that Paul was on his way from Jerusalem to Syrian Damascus with a mandate issued by the High Priest to seek out and arrest followers of Jesus, with the intention of bringing them back to Jerusalem as prisoners for questioning and possible execution. One day, Saul came upon a remarkable sight. The journey is interrupted when Paul sees a **blinding light**, and communicates directly with a divine voice.

“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked.

‘**I am Jesus**, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So, they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.” (Acts 9:3–9)

This experience had quite an influence on Saul, as it resulted in his conversion to Christianity. From Paul’s experience, we know that Jesus Christ is the Light of God. He is the Ultimate Reality that has come into the world and gives His light to invite all sentient beings through the way of following His Light.

The mystics of the church see the divine light in their life experience. St. John of the Cross, a mystic and a church poet in the 16th century wrote in *The Dark Night of the Soul*, in the framework of the spiritual life struggle: “**Why, if it is a divine light (for it illumines souls and purges them of their ignorances), does one call it a dark night?**”¹¹⁰ The mystic answers this by way of analogy:

¹⁰⁷ NICHOLAS M. H., *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, Ashgate, New York, 2003, p. 100.

¹⁰⁸ DOROTHY LEE, *Transfiguration*, Bloomsbury Academic, Melbourne, 2004, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ T. S. ELIOT, *Four Quartets*, Harcourt Brace & World, New York, 1971, p. 23.

¹¹⁰ KIERAN KAVANAUGH, OCD (ed.), *St. John of the Cross: Selected Writings*, Paulist Press, New York, 1987, p. 201.



“...the clearer and more obvious divine things are in themselves, the darker and more hidden they are to the soul naturally. The brighter the light the more an owl is blinded; and the more one looks at the brilliant sun, the more the sun darkens the faculty of sight, deprives it and overwhelms it in its weakness. Hence when the divine light of contemplation strikes souls not yet entirely illumined, it causes spiritual darkness.... This divine and dark light causes deep immersion of the mind in the knowledge and feeling of one’s own miseries and evils; it brings all these miseries into relief so that the soul sees clearly that of itself it will never possess anything else....”¹¹¹

Among his contemporaries, Teresa of Avila provides us with a wonderful metaphor of the Divine Light. Teresa wants us to know about the beauty and glory of the vision of God, and the consequences of rejecting Him: “consider what it would mean to this so brilliantly shining and beautiful castle, this pearl from the Orient, this tree of life planted in the very living waters of life (that is in God) to fall into mortal sin; there’s no darker darkness nor anything more obscure and black.”¹¹² St. Teresa tells us that “the brilliance of this inner vision is like an infused light coming from a sun covered by something as sparkling as a properly cut diamond.”¹¹³ It is as if one were “shown another light so different from earth’s light that if he were to spend his whole life trying to imagine that light, he would be unable to do so.”¹¹⁴ We encounter this light in the “Interior Castle” - the soul. The soul can reflect the radiance of God “as is crystal capable of reflecting the sun’s brilliance.”¹¹⁵

In the hymn of evening prayer, Sunday in the week of Easter is said: “O Trinity of blessed light, O Unity of princely might, the fiery sun now goes his way, shed Thou within our hearts Thy ray.” Jesus Christ is the Light of Divine who illuminates the world. He is the divine light that leads souls to God.

“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross!
Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God, the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11)

¹¹¹ KAVANAUGH, p. 202.

¹¹² KAVANAUGH, p. 39.

¹¹³ KIERAN KAVANAUGH, OCD (ed.), *St. Teresa of Avila: The Interior Castle*, Paulist Press, New York, 1979, p. 157.

¹¹⁴ KAVANAUGH, p. 136.

¹¹⁵ KAVANAUGH, p. 39.

