

Krishta, the Good Shepherd

This article explores a broad perspective of Jesus the Christ, not just the cornerstone of Christianity, but a unifier of religions, understanding the true meaning and significance of His teachings.

In the hearts of every true Christian, the famous following words of St. Paul resonate strongly.

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians).

The Son of God, who came to this Earth to preach love, deliver us from our sins, was crucified, died for our sins, and rose alive on the third day, and ascended to heaven - This is the Christian perspective of Christ. How about other faiths?

Surprisingly, the Quran mentions Jesus Christ, far more frequently than Mohammed, placing Him as a Messenger and Prophet of God Allah. Regarding the Crucifixion and Ascension, the Sura An Nisa, in Quran 4:17-158 states this:

That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah";- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:- Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise;-

Archaeological evidences from the period of King Kanishka of India show how the king, a staunch Buddhist, placed Christ on the same pedestal as the Buddha, having released coins of the two great souls.



Such a perception of Christ, as the second Buddha, is in line with those in the Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh, Hemis, Leh, Lhasa and other areas high in the Himalayas. This was reflected in the Russian author Notovitch's account of Christ, when interacting with the lamas and monks of these monasteries. In fact, Notovitch claimed that the monastery of Hemis contains scrolls about the life of Jesus, particularly the period between the age of 13 and 28, where Christ supposedly visited India, particularly Rajasthan, Puri, Nalanda, Rajagraha, Varanasi and Kashmir, where He familiarized with the scriptures of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. The veracity of the scrolls and thus Notovitch's claim has been validated by many, including Swami Abhedananda, a colleague of Swami Vivekananda.

Issa is a great prophet, one of the first after the twenty-two Buddhas; He is greater than any of the Dalai Lamas, for He constitutes a part of the spirituality of the Lord. It is He who has instructed you, who has brought back frivolous souls to God, who has rendered you worthy of the blessings of the Creator, who has endowed each creature with the knowledge of good and evil. His name and His deeds have been recorded in our sacred writings, and, whilst reading of His great existence spent in the midst of erring people, we weep over the horrible sin of the pagans, who assassinated Him after putting Him to the most cruel tortures.

Among the Hindu scriptures, the most clear reference to Christ is from the Bhavishya Purana, Pratisarga Parva Chaturyuga Khanda 19:17-32.

Once upon a time Shalivahana, the subduer of the Sakas went towards Himatunga and in the middle of the Huna country (Hunadesh - the area near Manasa Sarovara or Kailash mountain in Western Tibet), the powerful king saw an auspicious man who was living on a mountain. The man's complexion was golden and his clothes were white. The king asked, 'Who are you sir?' 'You should know that I am Isha Putra, the Son of God', he replied blissfully, and am born of a virgin. I am the expounder of the religion of the mlecchas and I strictly adhere to the Absolute Truth.' Hearing this the king enquired, 'What are the religious principles according to your opinion?' Hearing this questions of Shalivahana, Isha putra said, 'O king, when the destruction of the truth occurred, I, Masiha the prophet, came to this country of degraded people where there are no rules and regulations. Finding that fearful irreligious condition of the barbarians spreading from Mleccha-Desha, I have taken to prophethood'. Please hear, Oh king, which religious principles I have established among the mlecchas. The living entity is subject to good and bad contaminations. The mind should be purified by taking recourse of proper conduct and performance of japa [meditation on the chanting of the holy names of God]. By chanting the holy names one attains the highest purity. Just as the immovable sun attracts, from all directions, the elements of all living beings, the Lord of the Surya Mandala [solar planet], who is fixed and all-attractive, and attracts the hearts of all living creatures. Thus by following rules, speaking truthful words, by mental harmony and by meditation, Oh descendant of Manu, one should worship that immovable Lord'. Having placed the eternally pure and auspicious form of the Supreme Lord in my heart, O protector of the earth planet, I preached these principles through the mlecchas' own faith and thus my name became 'Isha-Masiha'.

In addition to this reference, there is also the legend of a folk song often sung in Bengal among the Nath tradition, as mentioned by G.D.Savarkar in His book on Jesus. There Isa or Jesus is mentioned as the Guru's Guru, who went to the Middle East. This is in concordance with the Nath Namavali Sutra verified by Sri Vijaya Krishna Goswamiji, contemporary of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, which records Jesus as the Nath Yogi Isha Natha, disciple of Chetana Natha. The article "Seventy Years" in magazine Pravasi, in Magha month of Bengali year 1333 states the following about Ishanatha.

A truly divine soul who has captured the hearts of different religions in different ways, how does one view Jesus Christ? How does one understand the true meaning and significance of Christ's teachings?

As a starting step, we need to reconcile the various faiths, and for this, we seek another divine soul, Adi Shankara, who within a short span of 32 years, not only mastered the highest Advaita philosophy of the Hindu Vedas, but also consolidated the religion into worship of six major deities as Shanmatha, established four Mutts in four geographical corners of the country. Traveling on foot from the coastal Kanyakumari to the lofty Kashmir in Himalayas, Adi Shankara engaged in several debates with many scholars within and outside Hinduism, and showed the highest truth of Advaita. Shankara's biography of Madhva cited in kamakotimandali site quotes:

At Bodh Gaya, the place where Lord Buddha attained Buddha-hood, there was a large temple which housed an image of Buddha. In course of time, the place had become a very sacred pilgrimage center for the Buddhists all over the world. Before this, the Acharya had declared Lord Buddha to be one of the ten incarnations of Sri Vishnu in his Dashavatara Stotra. Indeed it was through spiritual

practices following the Vedic path that Lord Buddha had attained the state of realization. The nirvana that he spoke of was not an empty state of mind but a state full of joy. Nirvana in the Buddhist theory as preached originally by Lord Buddha and Moksha according to Vedanta are synonymous. However, the later followers of Buddhism misinterpreted the teachings and gave a different account of Buddha's doctrine. The Acharya clarified this point and reformed many Buddhist sects.

What is this Advaita, so highly revered and praised?

In Advaita, the highest reaches of Hindu spirituality, the nature of reality is investigated. First the three states of human awareness as wake, dream and deep sleep are considered. Anything that exists unchanging in all three states alone can be considered real.

Consequently the body, mind and world, as well as the associated Ahankara or ego, do not exist in deep sleep and cannot be considered real. These are nothing more than a dream created by the illusion known as Maya.

The pure state of existence that is beyond all these, and is alone present in deep sleep, is the real Self or Atman. It is beyond the world and its sorrows, beyond birth and death, is True Existence Sat, Fundamental Consciousness Chit and Unalloyed Bliss Anandam.

Understanding and Realising one's true identity as the Self, and abiding in the Self, is the ultimate goal of human existence. This state is one characterised by absolute freedom from sorrows and miseries. Hence it is termed Liberation or Mukti or Moksha.

Thus, one understands that the Dharmic faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism etc all reconcile with the central Vedic truth of Advaita. But, can the same be said of the Abrahamic religions of the Middle East?

The answer to this is obtained from Mahaperiyava Chandrashekharendra Saraswathi, a great soul of the yesteryears, who was Acharya of the Kamakoti Peetham established by Adi Shankara in Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu. Voice of God, Volume 1, relates the following discourse by Mahaperiyava.

It is likely, though, that, with the passage of time, some stories or rites will become far removed from their inner meaning. Or, it may be, the inner meaning will be altogether forgotten. So it must be that, when new religions took shape abroad, after the lapse of thousands of years-religions not connected with the Vedic faith that is the root-the original Vedic concepts become transformed or distorted.

You must be familiar with the story of Adam and Eve which belongs to the Hebrew tradition. It occurs in the Genesis of the Old Testament and speaks of the tree of knowledge and God's commandment that its fruit shall not be eaten. Adam at first did not eat it but Eve did. After that Adam too ate the forbidden fruit. Here an Upanishadic concept (Rigveda Samhita 1:164:20-22, Mundaka Upanishad 3:1:1-2) has taken the form of a biblical story. But because of the change in the time and place the original idea has become distorted-or even obliterated.

The Upanishadic story speaks of two birds perched on the branch of a pippala tree. One eats the fruit of tree while the other merely watches its companion without eating. The pippala tree stands for the body. The first bird represents a being that regards himself as the jivatman or individual self and the fruit it eats signifies sensual pleasure. In the same body (symbolized by the tree) the second bird is to be understood as the Paramatman. He is the support of all beings but he does not know sensual pleasure. Since he does not eat the fruit he naturally does not have the same experience as the jivatman (the first). The Upanishad speaks with poetic beauty of the two birds. He who eats the fruit is the individual self, jiva, and he who does not eat is the Supreme Reality, the one who knows himself to be the Atman.

It is this jiva that has come to be called Eve in the Hebrew religious tradition. "Ji" changes to "i" according to a rule of grammar and "ja" to "ya". We have the example of "Yamuna" becoming "Jamuna" or of "Yogindra" being changed to "Joginder ". In the biblical story "jiva" is "Eve" and "Atma" (or "Atman") is "Adam". The Tree of Knowledge is our "bodhi-vrksa". "Bodha" means "knowledge". It is well known that the Buddha attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. But

the pipal (pippala) was known as the bodhi tree even before his time.

The Upanishadic ideas transplanted into a distant land underwent a change after the lapse of centuries. Thus we see in the biblical story that the Atman (Adam) that can never be subject to sensual pleasure also eats the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. While our bodhi tree stands for enlightenment, the enlightenment that banishes all sensual pleasure, the biblical tree affords worldly pleasure. These differences notwithstanding there is sufficient evidence here that, once upon a time, Vedic religion was prevalent in the land of the Hebrews.

Thus one understands that even Judaism traces its roots to the Vedic truth of Advaita. This, one must bear in mind while exploring the life and teachings of Christ, who was born in the land of Israel.

Thus, the foremost of objectives for Christ was to revive the truths of the Advaita tradition which resonated in all Dharmic and Abrahamic faiths. In accordance with this, one finds verses in the Bible which record Jesus quoting Vedic Mahavakyas or concise statements of great import.

I and the Father are One (John 10:30)

This verse is a direct reproduction of the Mahavakya Aham Brahmasmi found in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which shows that the Atman or Self is the Absolute. Similarly another Mahavakya Tat Tvam Asi found in Chandogya Upanishad is also found among Christ's quotes.

I have said, Ye are Gods; and all of you are children of the most High (Psalms 82:6).

Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are Gods? (John 10:34).

Also, one finds references to Kundalini Yoga in John 3.

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

In this context one must understand that the references to serpent throughout the Bible corresponds to the esoteric tradition of Kundalini Yoga which views the fundamental life force in the form of a snake.

To start with the snake descends from the Sahasrara in the crown of the head, this corresponds to Adam and Eve tempted by the serpent and their Fall from heaven. In a normal human, the snake lies coiled and dormant in the root or Muladhara. Lifting the snake is spiritual progress, rising out through various energy centres, back to the Sahasrara. With this understanding, we look at Numbers 21:8-9.

8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

The pole refers to the body with various energy centers. Lifting up the serpent symbolises raising the Kundalini, which will save one from the serpent bite, which is an allusion to sensual temptations, similar to that of Adam and Eve.

Thus one understands that Christ mastered and taught Vedic Advaita.

But it is a well known fact that the truths of Advaita can be hard to grasp for the average human mind, and that it takes years, or even multiple births of effort, mind purification, meditation etc to attain the level of mindset required for Advaitic perception.

In accordance with this, Christ reserved the subtle truth of Advaita for only those disciples who had the capacity to grasp them. For the general public, His approach was to purify their minds through love and good character, which He preached in the form of parables.

10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables (Matthew 13).

It is in this context that Christ is viewed as a second Buddha, since most of their teachings on love, tolerance, forgiveness etc are similar. M.J.Borg has detailed in his account of the parallel sayings between Buddha and Christ.

Having understood the significance of Advaita in Christ's teachings, we then ask: what is the true meaning and significance of the lives and teachings of Jesus Christ?

To answer this, we first explore the very name Jesus Christ. Mahaperiyava had opined that Jesus or Yeshua was a name derived from Eesha, name of the Lord Shiva.

Christ was a Sadguru who mastered the truths of Advaita, attained Self Realization, and showed the path to others. In Indian culture, one sees no difference between such a Guru and God itself. Guru Sakshath Parabrahma says the Guru Stotram.

However in the Abrahamic faiths, suggesting that any individual human, however great, as God itself, is blasphemy. For this reason Bible refrains from calling Christ God, but rather as Son of God, in His likeness itself.

The word Christ is believed to be derived from Greek Christos, meaning anointed, representing that God chose Him for a particular mission.

However Christ can also be etymologically traced to Sanskrit Krishta, one of the names used for Lord Krishna even today in North India. This has been suggested by both Mahaperiyava and Srila Prabhupada, founder of ISKCON.

The words Krishna or Krishta eventually are derived from Akarshana meaning to attract. While Krishna refers to the particular process of attracting, Krishta refers to the state of having attracted. The reference to attraction can be seen in Christ's own words in John 12:32.

32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

Thus one can see hints at a possible connection between Krishna and Christ. What is the connection?

Krishna was Himself a Jagadguru who gave the world the magnificent teachings of Vedic truth in the Bhagavad Gita as a discourse to the Pandava Arjuna in the start of the Mahabharata war.

After 18 long chapters of detailed teachings on Karma, Bhakti and Jnana Yogas, Krishna offers His final parting teaching in Gita 18.66.

Forget all concept of Dharma (righteousness) and surrender to Me alone, I shall absolve you of all sins and liberate you, fear not.

This verse is the very crown of Bhagavad Gita, containing the essence of all teachings of the Gita and the entire Vedic literature. Called Charama Sloka, this verse is held central to the Sri Vaishnavas, followers of Ramanuja Acharya.

Understanding of this verse follows from the understanding that God's Will alone prevails throughout, and man is not capable of any action independently. This truth is revealed in Gita 3:27.

All actions are done by God's Will alone in the form of Prakriti, or the modes of nature. Only an egoistic ignorant fool thinks he is the doer of actions.

This is also echoed in the Lord's prayer taught by Christ in Matthew 6.

9 This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Thus, Sharanagathi, or complete, unconditional surrender is the essence of Krishna's teachings. However this is only possible with complete faith and trust in the Lord. The Lord is thus seen as the attractor, Akarshana or Krishna.

What happens when one surrenders unconditionally to the Lord? Gita says He will liberate us from sins. This is the very concept of Christ, as we shall see now.

Why did Christ die on the Cross? The best answer is from the Bible itself in Romans 4:25.

25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Jesus died for our sins. But, which sin? It is said that no human is perfect; humans perform many sins throughout their life. But the biggest of all is the original sin.

Original sin arises from Adam and Eve eating the apple and falling from heaven. Because of this, every human is born in sin.

But, let us recollect the explanation given by Mahaperiyava quoted earlier. Eve, alias the Jiva, eats the apple; ie it indulges in the worldly desires and temptations caused by Maya. The tree is the knowledge of good and evil. But such knowledge that one performs good and evil rests on the underlying thought that one has an individuality of his own and that he is the performer. This thought is the Ahankara or ego.

Because of this, one is caught in the worldly entanglement, seeing himself performing actions, and reaping consequences both good and bad. One is then caught in the cycle of righteousness and constant pressure to maintain one's morality and reputation. Thus, the Ahankara is the original sin, one that appears even in birth itself.

If a human performs a sin by His own body and mind, he can atone and possibly compensate. However, how is anybody to atone for a sin he was born itself in? The only solution for original sin is repentance and surrender to the Lord. This is the sin Christ died for.

Since all actions are performed only by God's Will, it is He alone who can destroy this original sin. All we need to do is surrender to Him completely as Gita 18.66 says.

If we do surrender, what will He do? He will take our sin upon Himself and die on the Cross. Let us look at the significance of crucifixion as explained by Ramana Maharshi in Talks of Ramana Maharshi, Talk 86.

Christ (Son of Man, the human) is the ego. The Cross is the body. When the ego is crucified, and it perishes, what survives is the Absolute Being ie God ("I and the Father are one":John 10:30) and this glorious survival is called Resurrection.

We now recollect St.Paul's monumental claim that Resurrection, the Raising of Christ, is the singular foundation of the entire Christian faith. The Bible clearly tells that Christ was raised into Heaven and sat beside the Throne of God. This can also be seen in Acts 7.

55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

What does this mean? It doesn't mean that Christ was raised high into the skies and clouds and beyond to some place where God resided on a golden Throne. Rather, one must observe what Christ Himself said in Luke 17.

20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

This tallies well with Ramana's explanation. Christ's Resurrection is Self Realization indeed, and not some physical ascension up the skies.

This is why Stephen had to be full of the Holy Ghost to look at the Heavens. It was not looking up physically but spiritually.

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. 22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelations 3).

This in Christ's own words, tells how He bestows the glorious Resurrection of Self Realization to all those that overcomes the original sin.

Thus, to summarize, we understand that **The Absolute God came down to Earth as Krishna the attractor, and His final teaching was that man leave off all notions of righteousness and surrender unconditionally to Him. This Krishna Himself later came as Krishta, the Christ Jesus, to show how, once we surrender to Him, He takes our original sin of Ahankara upon Himself, lays down His life in crucifixion to kill this Ahankara, and rises again in glorious Resurrection of the Pure Being, culminating in Self Realization, which is the ultimate liberation.**

What is required of us, His disciples, is unconditional surrender. This is likened to how a herd of sheep follow a shepherd, blindly, through full trust, with no thought or decision of their own.

Thus, we are the sheep and Krishta is the Good Shepherd, as Christ Himself narrates in John 10:11-18.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep, and scatters them. The hired hand

flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn't care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd. Therefore the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down by myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. I received this commandment from my Father.

Christ also narrates the parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke 15:3-7, with similar context.

He told them this parable. "Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends, his family and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that even so there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

Thus we can clearly see the main mission of Jesus Christ: it was to recover the lost sheep, the ones that surrendered to Him, take their sins upon Himself, and liberate them.

Thus where Krishna left, Krishta started. The key here is unconditional surrender.

*The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.*

*My soul He doth restore again
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for His own name's sake.*

*Yea, tho' I walk in death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.*

*My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.*

*Goodness and mercy, all my life,
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.
(Psalm 23)*

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