



Readings in Eastern Religions

Second Edition



Edited by

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and
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All of us hope that this book will introduce its readers to the depth and richness of the source scriptures of the Eastern religions.

INTRODUCTION



THIS ANTHOLOGY WAS ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED for use in the introduction to Eastern Religions in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary. The existing anthologies did not suit the structure of our introductory course, so our intention with this volume was to create a volume that served our purposes and addressed a number of concerns regarding existing anthologies. The concerns we had then are still relevant and so are repeated here.

Given the drastic rise in the costs of printing and publication, most anthologies have become too expensive for students in introductory courses. In part this is a function of the size of most available anthologies. To be sure, there are relatively inexpensive anthologies available for a tradition like Hinduism or a country like India. Generally speaking, however, anthologies covering South and East Asia tend to be large and expensive.

Frequently, anthologies attempt to cover too much territory. Consequently, the excerpts provided are much too short to give a proper flavour of the excerpted text or the particular development it is supposed to represent. This becomes a serious problem in the case of stories that are meant to be told as much as possible in their entirety. The evocative power of a story simply does not come through well in the case of short excerpts, nor does the flavour of a text for that matter. While the approach of many short excerpts may provide better coverage of the broad sweep of a tradition, it does not provide a good sense of texts, stories, or even specific development within a tradition.

Too frequently, anthologies are governed by a bias towards doctrinal materials or, as students might put it, dry teachings. This is, we think, a peculiarly Western bias in religious studies. Traditions are much more colourful and gripping than an emphasis on doctrinal elements alone would suggest. There are, after all, colourful stories and anecdotes that present the heart of a tradition at least as well as the sermonic, discourse, and philosophical aspects of a tradition. And stories are much more memorable and gripping.

The arrangement of the excerpts is both chronological and thematic. It has been our experience that a thematic arrangement alone is not particularly good for students at the introductory level. It seems that religious developments as seen through primary texts are more memorable and understandable if they can be seen or read within a historical framework. Harold Coward was responsible for the sections on Hinduism and Jainism, Eva K. Neumaier prepared the Buddhist selections, and Ronald Neufeldt the readings for Sikhism and the Chinese and Japanese traditions.

The chapters themselves are designated by traditions. The first chapter, on Hinduism, includes excerpts from texts such as the *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Upanishads*, *Laws of Manu*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Devi-Mahatmyam*, and medieval poet-saints, emphasizing topics such as creation, death, sacrifice, *dharma*, the Absolute, and knowledge of the Absolute. An excerpt on Hindu ethics and *dharma* has been added to this second edition.

The second chapter is devoted to the lengthy story of the son of Mriga, taken from the *Jaina Sutras* in order to illustrate concerns central to Jainism—the misery or frustration of life when seen correctly, and the vows necessary for liberation from repeated cycles of misery.

The third chapter, devoted to Buddhist developments, is systematically arranged according to the refuge formula (Buddha, doctrine, community). Each topic is illustrated through excerpts taken from Hinayana and Mahayana sources, thus making the change in doctrinal ideas clear. Excerpts are taken from the Pali Canon, the Mahayana Canon in its Tibetan and Chinese version, and the commentarial works by Buddhist masters of India, Tibet, and the Far East. Furthermore, the development of Buddhist thought in Tibet is illustrated through selections from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the “pastoral” writings of Tibetan monk-scholars, and tantric sources.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the Sikh tradition, highlighting the *Adi Granth*, in particular the hymns of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, whose teachings were and still are the formative influence for Sikh beliefs. The second edition includes an excerpt from the Sikh *Rahit Maryada*, a document dating from 1950.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 deal with religious developments in China. Chapter 5, on *Early Chinese Thought*, includes selections from *The Book of Odes*, *The Book of History*, and the *I Ching*. Chapter 6, on Confucian thought, emphasizes the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi/Hsuntzu*, and later neo-Confucian developments. Chapter 7 emphasizes philosophical and religious Daoism/Taoism, in particular the thought of *Laozi/Lao tzu*, *Zhuangzi/Chuangtzu*, and *Gehong/Ko Hung*. For the second edition we have added an excerpt from Ge Hong/Ko Hung to represent developments in religious Daoism. Chapter 8 deals with the thought of Mao Zedong/Mao tse Tung, emphasizing his hope for a future without evil. The chapter on Mao Zedong has been renamed "Chinese Communist Thought," and includes an expansion of the material on Mao.

Chapters 9 and 10 deal with Japan. Chapter 9, on Shinto developments, deals with early mythology, early institutions and rituals, medieval Shinto, Shinto revival, and the disestablishment of Shinto. Chapter 10 highlights two developments, Tenrikyo and Sokka Gakkai, in the so-called "new religions" phenomenon in twentieth-century Japan.

Throughout the anthology, a concerted effort has been made to present more than the usual short excerpts. That is, as much as is possible, larger excerpts have been offered in the hope that the students will get a better feel for significant developments within traditions. We are well aware that this means something is lost with respect to offering students an idea of the over-all breadth of a tradition.

As much as is possible, doctrinal elements have been combined with story in the hope that the traditions will come alive for the students, in the sense that the teachings will be seen more as live options rather than museum pieces that are no longer relevant for today's world. It is hoped that this collection will aid students to enter, at least partially, into the traditions presented.

In putting the first edition together, it had been our hope that this anthology would prove useful beyond the context of our own courses. This hope, it seems, was a realistic one. Thus, this second edition. A number of changes have been made, however. The first edition lacked a section on Ch'an/Zen developments. These have been added to the second edition. In the case of Daoism, the first edition included only Laozi and Zhuangzi. In this edition we have added excerpts from the writings of Ge Hong, representing the central concerns of so-called religious Daoism. Also in this second edition we have expanded the introductions that appeared in the first edition and have added new introductions in order to provide a better sense of the context for the excerpts and a better sense of historical developments.

NAMES AND TERMS IN
ASIAN LANGUAGES



THE SACRED LANGUAGES OF THE EAST, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese—to name only those relevant to this collection of texts—are written in scripts that are different from the Roman alphabet. In order to render words of these languages using Western equipment such as word processors, a system was created that permitted an accurate transformation of the indigenous characters into Roman characters. This process is called transliteration, or romanization. As most Asian scripts use more than twenty-four letters, additional signs—diacritical marks—are added to a normal Roman letter to indicate that in this combination the letter carries another connotation. This method is necessary when working with the original languages.

A novice student of Eastern religions, however, will be confused by the complexity of this system. Therefore a simplified form of transliteration was adopted in this book. There are no diacritical marks. Instead, the consonants are given in a form that allows an English-speaking person to come to an approximately correct pronunciation without difficulty. The vowels should be pronounced like the vowels in Italian: a like the u in *but*, o like o in *nor*, u like oo in *roof*, i like i in *give*, e like e in *better*, ai like y in *my*, au like ow in *shower*. The reader will note that in the case of the section on Chinese traditions two systems of transliteration are used, the Pinyin and the Wade-Giles. In most instances the Pinyin spelling is given first, followed by the Wade-Giles. The older system, the Wade-Giles, is, however, left intact in the excerpts.



Hinduism

ONE



Hinduism

Scripture in Hinduism

HINDUISM IS FOUNDED UPON A SCRIPTURE that is judged to be essential to the realization of release, or *moksa*, the Hindu parallel to salvation. The Hindu scriptures are held to be without beginning—just as in the Hindu view the whole of the universe has existed without beginning as a series of cycles of creation going backward into time infinitely. Although the Hindu scripture is spoken anew at the beginning of each cycle of creation, what is spoken is identical with the scripture that had been spoken in all previous cycles, without beginning. The very idea of an absolute point of beginning for either creation or the scripture is simply not present in Hindu thought. A close parallel to this Hindu notion of the eternal presence of scripture is perhaps found in the Christian idea of *logos*, especially as expressed in the New Testament Gospel of John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

According to many Hindus, their basic scripture, the Veda, is authorless. The idea of an authorless scripture is logically consistent with the claim of its eternity, in that the identification of an author would indicate a historical point of beginning. Another consideration is that authors are human and thus capable of error. Being authorless, it is argued, therefore safeguards Hindu scripture from the possibility of human error. Some Hindu schools explicitly rule out the suggestion of God as the author of scripture, since God is seen by some scholars as being a human personification and thus also

open to error. While most Hindus are satisfied to think of their scripture as in some sense identified with or authored by God, one school, the Purva-Mimamsa, goes to the extreme of denying the existence of God as author to ensure that the errorless nature of scripture cannot be called into question. If even God is open to question as author, certainly humans cannot be seen as composers of scripture. The *rsis*, or seers, identified as speakers of particular Vedas, are understood to be mere channels through which the transcendent word passes to make itself available to humans at the start of each creation cycle. Thus the same *rsis* are said to speak the Vedas in each cycle of creation, and the very language in which the Vedas are spoken—Sanskrit—is itself held to be divine.

For the Hindu, the spoken or chanted scripture of the tradition is the Divine Word (*Daivi Vak*) descending and disclosing itself to the sensitive soul. The “sensitive soul” was the seer, or *rsi*, who had purged himself of ignorance, rendering his consciousness transparent to the Divine Word. The *rsi* was not the author of the Vedic hymn but, rather, the seer of an eternal, authorless truth. The *rsi*’s initial vision is of the Veda as one, which is then broken down and spoken as the words and sentences of scripture. In this Vedic idea of revelation there is no suggestion of the miraculous, or supernatural. The *rsi*, by the progressive purifying of consciousness through the practices of yoga, had simply removed the mental obstructions to the revelation of the Divine Word. While the Divine Word is inherently present within the consciousness of all, it is the *rsis* who first reveal it and in so doing make it available to help others achieve the same experience. The spoken Vedic words of the *rsis* act powerfully upon us to purify our consciousness and give to us that same full spiritual vision of the unitary Divine Word that the *rsi* first saw. This is *moksa*, the enlightenment experience, the purpose for which Hindu scriptures exist. Once the direct experience of the Divine Word is realized, the manifested forms (i.e., the words and sentences of the Veda) are no longer needed. The Vedic words and sentences function only as a “ladder” to raise one to the direct, intuitive experience of the complete Divine Word. Once the full enlightenment or *moksa* experience is achieved, the “ladder of scripture” is no longer needed; it is, however, useful for teaching others who have not yet reached release. This Hindu idea that scripture can and indeed must be eventually transcended is heresy to other religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For them, human limitations are such that even the most saintly person would get only part way up the ladder of scripture (Torah, Bible or Qur’an) and could never completely transcend scripture in the sense that most Hindus accept.

In addition to offering release, or *moksa*, Hindu scriptures, together with the Hindu legal texts, the Dharma Shastras, offer ethical guidance for the liv-

ing of our worldly lives. After examining the various categories of Hindu scriptures, our consideration of Hinduism will conclude with an exposition of Hindu ethics written by the contemporary scholar Vasudha Narayanan, who offers a woman's reading of the key ethical, or *dharma* (legal), texts relating to duties required of all humans, food, and cooking regulations, duties of the various caste groups, moral paradigms in the Hindu epics, and finally legal obligations relating to abortion and the new reproductive technologies. With her reflections, Vasudha Narayanan brings to our readings on Hinduism a contemporary ethics engagement from the perspective of a leading woman scholar in the religion.

With this basic introduction to the ways most Hindus approach their scripture, let us sample some of the basic Hindu texts. The dates given are from the perspective of modern critical scholarship. From the traditional Hindu perspective, such dating makes little sense since, as outlined above, the Divine Word the scripture manifests is held to be eternal and authorless. The Veda is divided into three layers. The Samhitas, or original hymns, spoken by the *rsis* (dated from 1500 to 900 BCE), the Brahmanas, or priestly commentaries, on the original hymns (dated from 1000 to 800 BCE), and the Upanishads, or philosophical commentaries, composed by teachers in forest communities to bring out the philosophical meanings of the original hymns (dated from 800 to 500 BCE).

Samhitas

The four Veda Samhitas ("collection of hymns") are a primary source of Hindu literature. These four—the Rigveda Samhita, the Yajurveda Samhita, the Samaveda Samhita, and the Atharvaveda Samhita—have had a seminal influence on the religious, social, and cultural life of the Indian subcontinent. In the view of some modern scholarship, the Samhitas are thought to reflect the religious perception of the Aryans, who entered northwest India as conquerors around 1500 BCE, or earlier. Other scholars hold that the Aryans were native to India, first living in the Himalayan region and later migrating southward. Hindus identify the Samhitas as *sruti* ("learning which is heard"), and believe that the knowledge contained in them was directly revealed to ancient seers, or *rsis*, who in turn began the earthly transmission of this knowledge. Three other, mostly later, bodies of literature can also be regarded as *sruti*: the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads. Together the four collections comprise what is often referred to as "Vedic literature."¹

Rigveda

The Rigveda is the oldest of the Samhitas. Thought to have been composed between 1500 and 900 BCE, it is largely an anthology of poems addressed to various gods. While several forms of literature later drew their inspiration from the Rigveda, as well as from the other Samhitas, the importance of the text itself eventually came to rest principally in its ritual function, in which its lines were recited by priests as part of the liturgy.² While some modern scholars see these hymns as essentially polytheistic—in praise of many different gods—traditional Hindu scholars see the hymns to different deities as manifestations of the many different aspects, or faces, of the one Divine Reality, *Brahman*.

▼ CREATION

- 1 There was neither non-existence nor existence then; there was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. What stirred? Where? In whose protection? Was there water, bottomlessly deep?
- 2 There was neither death nor immortality then. There was no distinguishing sign of night nor of day. That one breathed, windless, by its own impulse. Other than that there was nothing beyond.
- 3 Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning; with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force that was covered with emptiness, that one arose through the power of heat.
- 4 Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that as the first seed of mind. Poets seeking in their heart with wisdom found the bond of existence in non-existence.
- 5 Their cord was extended across. Was there below? Was there above? There were seed-placers; there were powers. There was impulse beneath; there was giving forth above.
- 6 Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence is this creation? The gods came afterwards, with the creation of this universe. Who then knows whence it has arisen?
- 7 Whence this creation has arisen—perhaps it formed itself, or perhaps it did not—the one who looks down on it, in the highest heaven, only he knows—or perhaps he does not know.

(*Creation Hymn* 10.129)³

- 1 The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers.
- 2 It is the Man who is all this, whatever has been and whatever is to be. He is the ruler of immortality, when he grows beyond everything through food.
- 3 Such is his greatness, and the Man is yet more than this. All creatures are a quarter of him; three quarters are what is immortal in heaven.

Brahmanas — The Shatapatha Brahmana

Sacrifice, in the early Indian traditions, was thought to have the vital function of generating the power needed to maintain universal order.¹⁷ Through their elaborate explanation and systematization of the four Veda Samhitas, the Brahmanas became essential manuals for performing the complex rituals and sacrifices of this period. Composed between 900 and 700 BCE, these texts provide valuable information on the activities of the priesthood and are a rich source of myth and legend.¹⁸

The concern of the Brahmanas both to detail a ritual's proper execution and to establish its scriptural basis is evident in the following passage from the Shatapatha Brahmana.

▼ **FOURTH BRAHMANA**

The Agnihotra or Morning and Evening Libations; and the Agny-Upasthana, or Homage to the Fires

- 1 Prajapati alone, indeed, existed here in the beginning. He considered, "How may I be reproduced?" He toiled and performed acts of penance. He generated Agni from his mouth; and because he generated him from his mouth, therefore Agni is a consumer of food: and, verily, he who thus knows Agni to be a consumer of food, becomes himself a consumer of food.
- 2 He thus generated him first of the gods; and therefore [he is called] Agni, for agni [they say] is the same as agri. He, being generated, went forth as the first; for of him who goes first, they say that he goes at the head. Such, then, is the origin and nature of that Agni.
- 3 Prajapati then considered, "In that Agni I have generated a food-eater for myself; but, indeed, there is no other food here but myself, whom, surely, he would not eat." At that time this earth had indeed been rendered quite bald; there were neither plants nor trees. This, then, weighed on his mind.
- 4 Thereupon Agni turned towards him with open mouth; and he [Prajapati] being terrified, his own greatness departed from him. Now his own greatness is his speech: that speech of his departed from him. He desired an offering in his own self, and rubbed [his hands]; and because he rubbed [his hands], therefore both this and this [palm] are hairless. He then obtained either a butter-offering or a milk-offering; but, indeed they are both milk.
- 5 This [offering], however, did not satisfy him, because it had hairs mixed with it. He poured it away [into the fire], saying, "Drink, while burning!" From it plants sprang: hence their name "plants." He rubbed [his hands] a second time, and thereby obtained another offering, either a butter-offering or a milk-offering; but, indeed, they are both milk.

- 6 This [offering] then satisfied him. He hesitated: "Shall I offer it up? shall I not offer it up?" he thought. His own greatness said to him, "Offer it up!" Prajapati was aware that it was his own [*sva*] greatness that had spoken [*aha*] to him; and offered it up with "*svaha!*" This is why offerings are made with *svaha!* Thereupon that burning one [*viz.*, the sun] rose; and then that blowing one [*viz.*, the wind] sprang up; whereupon, indeed, Agni turned away.
- 7 And Prajapati, having performed offering, reproduced himself, and saved himself from Agni, death, as he was about to devour him. And, verily, whosoever, knowing this, offers the *agnihotra* reproduces himself by offspring even as Prajapati reproduced himself; and saves himself from Agni, death, when he is about to devour him.
- 8 And when he dies, and when they place him on the fire, then he is born [again] out of the fire, and the fire only consumes his body. Even as he is born from his father and mother, so is he born from the fire. But he who offers not the *agnihotra*, verily, he does not come into life at all: therefore the *agnihotra* should by all means be offered.
- 9 And as to that same birth from out of doubt, when Prajapati doubted, he, while doubting, remained steadfast on the better [*side*], insomuch that he reproduced himself and saved himself from Agni, death, when he was about to devour him: so he also who knows that birth from out of doubt, when he doubts about anything, still remains on the better [*side*].
- 10 Having offered, he rubbed [his hands]. Thence a *vikankata* tree sprung forth; and therefore that tree is suitable for the sacrifice, and proper for sacrificial vessels. Thereupon those [three] heroes among the gods were born, *viz.* Agni, that blower [*Vayu*], and *Surya*: and, verily, whosoever thus knows those heroes among the gods, to him a hero is born.
- 11 They then said, "We come after our father Prajapati: let us then create what shall come after us!" Having enclosed [a piece of ground], they sang praises with the *gayatri* stanza without the "*hin*": and that [with] which they enclosed was the ocean; and this earth was the praising-ground.
- 12 When they had sung praises, they went out towards the east, saying, "We [will] go back thither!" The gods came upon a cow which had sprung into existence. Looking up at them, she uttered the sound "*hin*." The gods perceived that this was the *hin* of the *saman* [melodious sacrificial chant]; for heretofore [their song was] without the *hin*, but after that it was the [real] *saman*. And as this same sound *hin* of the *saman* was in the cow, therefore the latter afford the means of subsistence; and so does he afford the means of subsistence whosoever thus knows that *hin* of the *saman* in the cow.
- 13 They said, "Auspicious, indeed, is what we have produced here, who have produced the cow: for truly, she is the sacrifice, and without her no sacrifice is performed; she is also the food, for the cow, indeed, is all food."

- 14 This [word “go”], then, is a name of those [cows], and so it is of the sacrifice: let him, therefore, repeat it, [as it were] saying, “Good, excellent!” and, verily, whosoever, knowing this, repeats it, [as it were] saying, “Good, excellent!” with him those [cows] multiply, and the sacrifice will incline to him.
- 15 Now, Agni coveted her: “May I pair with her?” he thought. He united with her, and his seed became that milk of hers: hence, while the cow is raw that milk in her is cooked [warm]; for it is Agni’s seed; and therefore also, whether it be in a black or in a red [cow], it is ever white, and shining like fire, it being Agni’s seed. Hence it is warm when first milked; for it is Agni’s seed.
- 16 They [the men] said, “Come, let us offer this up!” “To whom of us shall they first offer this?” [said those gods]. “To me!” said Agni. “To me!” said that blower [Vayu]. “To me!” said Surya. They did not come to an agreement; and not being agreed, they said, “Let us go to our father Prajapati; and to whichever of us he says it shall be offered first, to him they shall first offer this.” They went to their father Prajapati, and said, “To whom of us shall they offer this first?”
- 17 He replied, “To Agni: Agni will forthwith cause his own seed to reproduce, and so you will be reproduced.” “Then to thee,” he said to Surya; “and what of the offered [milk] he then is still possessed of, that shall belong to that blower [Vayu]!” And, accordingly, they in the same way offer this [milk] to them till this day: in the evening to Agni, and in the morning to Surya; and what of the offered [milk] he then is still possessed of, that, indeed, belongs to that blower.
- 18 By offering, those gods were produced in the way in which they were produced, by it they gained that victory which they did gain: Agni conquered this world, Vayu the air, Surya the sky. And whosoever, knowing this, offers the *agnihotra*, he, indeed, is produced in the same way in which they were then produced, he gains that same victory which they then gained; indeed, he shares the same world with them, whosoever, knowing this, offers the *agnihotra*. Therefore the *agnihotra* should certainly be performed.

(*The Satapatha Brahmana, Agnihotra II, 1.4.1–18*)¹⁹ ▲

Upanishads

The Upanishads are the last collection of texts (circa 700 BCE) which can be classified as *sruti* in the Hindu tradition. Discussion of ritual, so central to the Brahmanas, becomes an issue of diminished importance in the Upanishads; some even go so far as to criticize the sacrificial tradition. Usually written as forest dialogues between teacher and student, they are the first Vedic texts to present liberation (*moksa*) from the world as a religious goal.²⁰ The Upanishads are generally speculative in tone. Each expounds upon one of the

Ninth Khanda

- 1 "Food, assuredly, is more than strength. Therefore, if one should not eat for ten days, even though he might live, yet verily he becomes a non-seer, a non-hearer, a non-thinker, a non-perceiver, a non-doer, a non-understander. But on the entrance of food he becomes a seer, he becomes a hearer, he becomes a thinker, he becomes a perceiver, he becomes a doer, he becomes an understander. Reverence food.
- 2 "He who reverences food as Brahma—he, verily, attains the worlds of food and drink. As far as food goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences food as Brahma."
 "Is there, sir, more than food?"
 "There is, assuredly, more than food."
 "Do you, sir, tell me it."

Tenth Khanda

- 1 "Water, verily, is more than food. Therefore, when there is not a good rain, living creatures sicken with the thought, 'Food will become scarce.' But when there is a good rain, living creatures become happy with the thought, 'Food will become abundant.' It is just water solidified that is the earth, that is the atmosphere, that is the sky, that is gods and men, beasts and birds, grass and trees, animals together with worms, flies, and ants; all these are just water solidified. Reverence water.
- 2 "He who reverences water as Brahma obtains all his desires and becomes satisfied. As far as water goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences water as Brahma."
 "Is there, sir, more than water?"
 "There is, assuredly, more than water."
 "Do you, sir, tell me it."

Eleventh Khanda

- 1 "Heat, verily, is more than water. That, verily, seizes hold of the wind, and heats the ether. Then people say: 'It is hot! It is burning hot! Surely it will rain!' Heat indeed first indicates this, and then lets out water. So, with lightning darting up and across the sky, thunders roll. Therefore people say: 'It lightens! It thunders! Surely it will rain!' Heat indeed first indicates this, and then lets out water. Reverence heat.
- 2 "He who reverences heat as Brahma—he, verily, being glowing, attains flowing, shining worlds freed from darkness. As far as heat goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences heat as Brahma."
 "Is there, sir, more than heat?"
 "There is, assuredly, more than heat."
 "Do you, sir, tell me it."

Twelfth Khanda

- 1 "Space, assuredly, is more than heat. In space, verily, are both sun and moon, lightning, stars and fire. Through space one calls out; through space one hears; through space one answers. In space one enjoys himself; in space one does not enjoy himself. In space one is born; unto space one is born. Reverence space.
- 2 "He who reverences space as Brahma—he, verily, attains spacious, gleaming, unconfined, wide-extending worlds. As far as space goes, so far he has unlimited freedom, he who reverences space as Brahma."
 "Is there, sir, more than space?"
 "There is, assuredly, more than space."
 "Do you, sir, tell me it."

(Chandogya 7.7–12)²⁸ ▲

▼ **THE INSTRUCTION OF SHVETAKETU BY UDDALAKA CONCERNING THE KEY TO ALL KNOWLEDGE**

The Threefold Development of the Elements and of Man from the Primary Unitary Being

First Khanda

- 1 Om! Now, there was Shvetaketu Aruneya. To him his father said: "Live the life of a student of sacred knowledge. Verily, my dear, from our family there is no one unlearned [in the Vedas], a brahman by connection, as it were."
- 2 He then, having become a pupil at the age of twelve, having studied all the Vedas, returned at the age of twenty-four, conceited, thinking himself learned, proud.
- 3 Then his father said to him: "Shvetaketu, my dear, since now you are conceited, think yourself learned, and are proud, did you also ask for that teaching whereby what has not been heard of becomes heard of, what has not been thought of becomes thought of, what has not been understood becomes understood?"
- 4 "How, pray, sir, is that teaching?"
 "Just as, my dear, by one piece of clay everything made of clay may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just 'clay'—
- 5 "Just as, my dear, by one copper ornament everything made of copper may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just 'copper'—
- 6 "Just as, my dear, by one nail-scissors everything made of iron may be known—the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just 'iron'—so, my dear, is that teaching."

- 7 “Verily, those honored men did not know this; for, if they had known it, why would they not have told me? But do you, sir, tell me it.”
 “So be it, my dear,” said he.

Second Khanda

- 1 “In the beginning, my dear, this world was just being, one only, without a second. To be sure, some people say: ‘In the beginning this world was just non-being, one only, without a second; from that non-being being was produced.’
- 2 “But verily, my dear, whence could this be?” said he. “How from non-being could being be produced? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was just being, one only, without a second.
- 3 “It bethought itself: ‘Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself!’ It emitted heat. That heat bethought itself: ‘Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself.’ It emitted water. Therefore whenever a person grieves or perspires from the heat, then water [i.e., either tears or perspiration] is produced.
- 4 “That water bethought itself: ‘Would that I were many! Let me procreate myself.’ It emitted food. Therefore whenever it rains, then there is abundant food. So food for eating is produced just from water.”

(*Chandogya* 6.1–2)²⁹ ▲

▼ **The Unitary World-Soul, the Immanent Reality of All Things and of Man**

Ninth Khanda

- 1 “As the bees, my dear, prepare honey by collecting the essences of different trees and reducing the essence to a unity, as they are not able to discriminate I am the essence of this tree, ‘I am the essence of that tree’—even so, indeed, my dear, all creatures here, though they reach being, know not ‘We have reached being.’
- 3 “Whatever they are in this world, whether tiger, or lion, or wolf, or boar, or worm, or fly, or gnat, or mosquito, that they become.
- 4 “That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is reality. That is atman (soul). That art thou, Shvetaketu.”
 “Do you, sir, cause me to understand even more.”
 “So be it, my dear,” said he.

Tenth Khanda

- 1 “These rivers, my dear, flow, the eastern toward the east, the western toward the west. They go just from the ocean to the ocean. They become the ocean itself. As there they know not ‘I am this one,’ ‘I am that one’ even so indeed, my dear, all creatures here, though they have come forth from Being, know not ‘We have come forth from Being.’ Whatever they are in this world,

70 I am mad with love
 And no one understands my plight.
 Only the wounded
 Understand the agonies of the wounded,
 When a fire rages in the heart
 Only the jeweller knows the value of the jewel,
 Not the one who lets it go.
 In pain I wandered from door to door
 But could not find a doctor.
 Says Mira: Harken, my Master,
 Mira's pain will subside
 When Shyam comes as the doctor.

(A.J. Alston, *The Devotional Poems of Mirabai*,
 Nos. 4, 5, 7, 63, 66–70)⁵³ ▲

Hindu Ethics and Dharma

Having concluded our reading of the devotional poet-saints with the female voice of Mirabai, it is fitting that when we move to a consideration of ethics and *dharma* (the way Hindus live), it is to a leading Hindu scholar of today that we turn. Professor Narayanan is not only a leading scholar, she is also a mother, wife, and one who, in her own life, remains traditional while at the same time being fully modern. This she accomplishes through her sensitive reading of the ethics, or *dharma*, texts and her living of them in daily life as a North American Hindu woman of the twenty-first century.

Hindu Ethics and Dharma—Vasudha Narayanan⁵⁴

Although scholars have, in general, assumed that the word “religion” is a suitable term to describe the Hindu tradition,⁵⁵ it is commonly agreed that there is no category in Hindu thought and literature which is an exact fit for “ethics.” The general perception is that there is no formal discipline in Hinduism which has “an internally consistent rational system in which patterns of human conduct are justified with reference to ultimate norms and values.”⁵⁶ This does not mean that Hindus did not know about ethics or that they were immoral; it is simply that there is no discipline in Indian thought directly congruent with “ethics,” just as there is no Western area of inquiry which matches the Hindu category of *dharma*. Many articles and books have been written on Hindu ethics, but by and large they deal with selected aspects of what Hindus call *dharma*.⁵⁷

Hindus today use the word *dharma* (from the root *dhr*, “to sustain, to uphold”) to refer to religion, ethics, and moral behaviour in general and to

their religion in particular. The term *Santana dharma* (the eternal or perennial *dharma*) has been used to designate the Hindu tradition as a whole in the last two centuries. Indeed Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus all use the term *dharma* to indicate a wide variety of concepts and issues, and the word has some recognition in the Western world as well. In the last two centuries, the texts on *dharma* also formed the basis for formulating the administration of law in India.

As is true with most concepts and words, the meaning of *dharma* depends on the context; further, there have been changes in emphasis over the centuries. The Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English dictionary gives about seventeen meanings: *dharma* means religion; the customary observances of a caste, sect, etc.; law usage; practice; religious or moral merit; virtue; righteousness; duty; justice; piety; morality; sacrifice; and more. When used as a name, Dharma may refer to Yudhishtira, one of the Pandava brothers in the epic story of *Mahabharata*, or to Yama, his father. Yama, the god associated most commonly with death today, was known as the presiding deity of *dharma*.

This preliminary set of meanings gives us some indication of the parameters of the concept and practice of *dharma*. The word *dharma* appears in the early vedic texts several times. In many later contexts, it means "religious ordinances and rites," and in others it refers to "fixed principles or rules of conduct." In conjunction with other words, *dharma* also means "merit acquired by the performance of religious rites" and "the whole body of religious duties." Eventually, the predominant meaning of *dharma* came to be "the privileges, duties and obligations of a man [or woman], his [or her] standard of conduct as a member of the Aryan community, as a member of one of the castes, as a person in a particular stage of life."⁵⁸ Texts on *dharma* both described and prescribed these duties and responsibilities and divided up the subject matter into various categories.

Dharma is said to deal with behaviour, justice, and repentance/atonement rites. Other classifications are more elaborate. Pandurang Kane, the pre-eminent writer of the history of *dharma* in the twentieth century, starts his second volume on the subject with "The Topics of *Dharmashastra*." He cites dozens of traditional books on *dharma* and proceeds to list the domains of this concept. His list covers about twenty-four topics and includes the duties of the classes/castes of society; the sacraments from conception to death; the days when one should not study the *Vedas*; marriage; the duties of women; the relationship between husband and wife; ritual purity and impurity; rituals for ancestors; gifts and donations; crime and punishment; contacts; inheritance; activities done only at times of crises; mixed castes; and more. If one goes through the texts carefully, one will also find discussions on the geographic areas of the world most fit for a human being to lead a righteous and meritorious life (i.e., northern India), and on charity and

discussion of women's duties (*stridharma*). The longest discussions focus on marriages, death rituals, food laws, and caste regulations.

*Food Regulations*⁶³

Right eating is not just a matter of what one can eat or should avoid; in the texts on *dharma* as well as in orthoprax houses, it involves issues like the caste and gender of the cook (preferably male and high caste, or the lady of the house, except when she is menstruating); the times one may eat (twice a day, not during twilight times, eclipses, or a wide variety of other occasions); not eating food cooked the day before; and so on. In earlier times, other directives were also in vogue. In attention to detail, some of these regulations equal or even surpass those given in many legal texts of other traditions. The order of food courses in a meal; the direction in which the diner must sit (preferably facing east or north); how much one may eat (the number of morsels depends on the stage of life); the materials out of which the eating vessels should be made; what is to be done with leftover food—are all topics for discussion, and many of these directives and more have been followed for centuries.

There were several strict rules regarding with whom one may dine (best to dine alone!). Silence was recommended for the time of dining except to inquire about a guest's needs. Most texts said—and this was followed until probably the mid-twentieth century—that one may dine only with people of the same caste and with people one knew. It was believed in many circles that one shares the sins of the people with whom one dines—especially if one sits in a single row with them. Through the centuries, we see Hindus from many communities visiting shrines of other religious traditions; but many seldom ate with anyone other than their own caste and community. Even until the time of India's independence (when there was a general effort to introduce more “socialistic” and “democratic” practices such as inter-dining), college food services in the hostels (dormitories) in South India were divided along simplified caste lines; most commonly seen were the dining halls for *brahmans*, with separate ones for non-*brahman* (vegetarian) and non-*brahman* (non-vegetarian).

The greatest amount of space in *dharma shastra* discussions of right eating is spent on forbidden foods, which varied between different time periods and between authors. It is generally agreed that most people ate meat, even beef, possibly up to the beginning of the Common Era. It is a matter of some controversy whether Indians ate beef during the time of the *Vedas* and whether the cow was a protected animal; however, it seems to be fairly well accepted that most Indians ate other kinds of meat and fowl then. It is remarkable that a whole culture seems to have slowly given up eating meat—

condemning abortion, and despite notions of embryonic life, *karma*, and so on, decisions about abortions are less likely to be made according to scriptural injunctions than according to how much a child, particularly a female child, is wanted by the couple.

The religio-legal texts that condemn the willful killing of a fetus have very limited bearing on daily life. Many Hindus are not even aware of the *dharmasastras'* pronouncements, and many who are so aware apparently find it easy to ignore them. In other words, the *dharma* texts simply have not had the compelling authority that religious law has had in some other religious traditions. Just as there were selective ways in which the caste system played out in Hindu societies through the centuries, despite the rigid pronouncements of the texts on the duties of each caste, birth technologies have been used selectively by Hindus.

Hindu *dharma*, thus, has been and continues to be a dynamic tradition, reinventing itself constantly, but within certain parameters. As in any other tradition, incongruous practices may exist side by side. The same rocket scientist who works with NASA may also be doing ancestral rituals on new moon days; the woman who utilizes new reproductive technology may also have ritually purifying baths after every menstruation. In transmitting and adapting the old and in assimilating the new, the tradition lives up to its name of the eternal or *sanatana dharma*.

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Notes

- 1 J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Hindu Sacred Literature," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., 932–33.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 936.
- 3 Wendy Donigen O'Flaherty, trans., *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (1981; rpt. Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1983), 25–26.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 30–31.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 35–36.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 43–45.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 49–50.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 57–58.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 66–67.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 89–92.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 99.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 149–51.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 213–14.

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- 14 van Buitenen, "Hindu Sacred Literature," 936.
- 15 Win. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 16.
- 16 Ibid., 17.
- 17 van Buitenen, "Hindu Sacred Literature," 936.
- 18 de Bary, *Sources*, 19–20.
- 19 Julius Eggeling, trans., The Satapatha-Brahmana, part 1, *Sacred Books of the East*, 12 (1882; rpt., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972), 322–27.
- 20 David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism: A Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 14–15.
- 21 de Bary, *Sources*, 24–25.
- 22 Robert Ernest Hume, trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (2nd rev. ed.; 1877; rpt., Madras: Oxford University Press, 1968), 107–109.
- 23 Ibid., 111–12.
- 24 Ibid., 112–13.
- 25 Ibid., 113–14.
- 26 Ibid., 114–17.
- 27 Ibid., 117–19.
- 28 Ibid., 254–57. The progression continues through memory, hope, life-breath, truth, thought, faith, activity, pleasure, and plenum until the soul, or self (*atman*), is reached in the Twenty-sixth Khanda.
- 29 Ibid., 240–41.
- 30 Ibid., 246–49.
- 31 Ibid., 391–93.
- 32 Ibid., 409–11.
- 33 Ibid., 399–400.
- 34 Ibid., 362–63.
- 35 de Bary, *Sources*, 212–13.
- 36 van Buitenen, "Hindu Sacred Literature," 938–39.
- 37 G. Ehler, trans., *The Laws of Manu*, *Sacred Books of the East*, 25 (1886; rpt., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), 1–8.
- 38 Ibid., 24–25.
- 39 Ibid., 74–75.
- 40 Ibid., 198–205.
- 41 Sir Edwin Arnold, trans., *The Song Celestial* or Bhagavad Gita (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1939), 1–16.
- 42 Kinsley, *Hinduism*, 25–26.
- 43 Makhan Lal Sen, trans., *The Ramayana of Valmiki* (2nd rev. ed.; New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978), 146–49.
- 44 Kinsley, *Hinduism*, 17.
- 45 Arnold, *Song Celestial*, 60–73.
- 46 Sen, *Ramayana*, 340–48.
- 47 Wendy Donigen O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit* (1975; rpt., Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1982), 238.
- 48 Vasudeva S. Agrawala, trans., *The Glorification of the Great Goddess* (Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1963), 37–41.
- 49 de Bary, *Sources*, 348.

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- 69 Daniel H.H. Ingalls, "Dharma and Moksha," *Philosophy East and West* 7, 1 (1957), 41-48; and J.A.B. van Buitenen, "Dharma and Moksha," *Philosophy East and West* 7, 1 (1957), 33-40.



New Religions

TEN



New Religions

SINCE THE 1800S, Japan has experienced the growth of new religions, many of which became popular and grew rapidly in organization and numbers following World War II. While these traditions are usually referred to as new, it should be noted that some have been in existence for more than a century. A case in point is Sokagakkai, a movement that traces its inspiration to the thirteenth-century founder of Nichiren Buddhism. In general these movements were characterized by charismatic founders whose teachings tended to be syncretistic and aimed at everyday concerns. Two such movements are Tenrikyo and Sokagakkai. Tenrikyo, founded by Miki Nakayama (1798–1887), shows traces of Shinto and shamanism. Sokagakkai, founded by Makiguchi Tsunebaro (1871–1944), takes its inspiration from the Lotus Sutra as this was understood and interpreted by Nichiren.

Tenrikyo

▼ THE LIFE OF THE FOUNDRESS¹

“I am the Creator, the true and real God. I have the preordination for this Residence. At this time I have appeared in this world in person to save all mankind. I ask you to let Me have your Miki as My living Temple.”

Quite unprepared for such a revelation, her husband Zenbei was much surprised to hear it, and so were all those present, his family, relatives, and the exorcist Ichibei who was at prayer. Needless to say, they had never heard of such a god as “the true and real God,” so that they could not give a ready consent to the

demand to offer Miki as the Temple God. While at a loss what to do, Zenbei remembered a series of quite strange happenings which occurred one after another during the last year. It started on October 26, 1837, when the eldest son Shuji, who was then seventeen years old, was sowing barley as usual in the field with his mother. Meanwhile, he suddenly began to suffer from a severe pain in the left leg, so severe that he wished to return and barely managed to get home.... Of course, Shuji, who was the dearest son to his parents, was at once put under medical treatment, but it did not seem to have any effect upon him. Being advised to send for an exorcist and to have him pray, they sent a servant to the exorcist Ichibei in Nagataki village and asked him to exorcise the pain of Shuji. Then miraculously the pain left him, but the next day it began to attack him again. Again they sent a servant to Ichibei to have him exorcise Shuji and then the pain stopped again. But on the next day it was the same again. On the third day the pain left him at last, and he was well for about twenty days, when again his leg began to ache severely. Now Zenbei went in person to Ichibei in Nagataki village, and was given the advice to hold a ritual of exorcism called *yosekaji* at home. So coming back, Zenbei, calling in Ichibei and Soyo of the Magata village, held the ritual in the household. Ichibei offered an earnest prayer and tried to practise a curing with Soyo as the medium, who stood still, in her hands two sacred staffs from which cut-paper was hanging. Then the pain in the leg suddenly left Shuji. But in about half a year, he began to suffer from the pain once more. So he held the ritual of *yosekaji*, and he got well. However, he felt the pain again. Thus he repeated it as many as nine times a year.

Meanwhile, the ninth year of Tempo came, and it was at ten in the evening of the 23rd of October, when the three of the family began to have a severe pain respectively, Shuji in the leg, Miki in the loins, and Zenbei in the eyes. They at once sent for Ichibei, who was found to have been at the house of a family named Inuri in the same village on that day. Ichibei came and was surprised to find things quite serious. He was asked to offer incantations and prayers as soon as possible, but unfortunately he was not prepared for it. So that night he went back and early the next morning he came again to perform incantations, and sent for Soyo who was to become the medium, but she was out and nobody knew where she was. There was no other way but to have Miki stand with the sacred staffs in her hands and to offer prayers and incantations through her. Now Ichibei offered his prayers in earnest. Zenbei, reflecting back upon the outline of the happenings in that way, could not but feel that there was something behind it all.

However, they could in no way give a ready consent to the demand put under the name of the original God, so he made up his mind to reject the demand, saying that there were many children to be brought up, and that he was so busy as a village official that he could not afford to offer Miki as the Temple of God, and that if he was a god who would save people in the world, he was

Zadankai Discussion Meetings

Zadankai, discussion meetings, are held daily wherever the Sokagakkai members live. Meetings are held every day with 20–30 members or sometimes even more than 50 attending. They talk about the True Buddhism and encourage one another so that all attendants deepened their faith. To the non-believers who attend the meeting, members try to explain fully how True Buddhism can improve human life. Naturally, the discussion meeting is filled with a cheerful atmosphere and hope for constructing a brighter future.

Discussion meetings, a traditional activity of the Sokagakkai, have been conducted since the days of first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. In those days, his home was the meeting place. In the days of second president Josei Toda, also, it was through discussion meetings that he embarked on the reconstruction of the Sokagakkai.

President Ikeda promoted all his Gakkai activities around the traditional *Zadankai*. He also made it a rule to read the Goshō (the collection of Nichiren Daishonin's works) for those present. Thus the foundation for the Sokagakkai's development into its present position was established by the three successive presidents with the discussion meetings as its foundation.

Some might think it easier to promote the propagation of a religion through propaganda—for example, by holding large-scale meetings rather than *Zadankai* which are attended by only a limited number of persons. In reality, however, the small discussion meetings are the best and the surest way for propagating the True Buddhism. One will clearly understand this if he considers that the fantastic advance of the Sokagakkai stemmed from the *Zadankai*. ▲

Notes

- 1 Readings taken from H. Byron Earhart, *Religion in Japanese Experience: Sources and Interpretations* (Encino and Belmont, CA: Dickenson, 1974), 238–49.



Glossary

Permissions

GLOSSARY



ahimsa (Sanskrit) non-harming, non-violence

akshara (Sanskrit) letter of the Sanskrit alphabet

arahat see *arhant*

arhant (Sanskrit) “noble one,” a Buddhist saint who has realized nirvana through the help of a Buddha (Hinayana), a Buddhist saint who has penetrated the doctrinal truth and is absorbed in deep meditation, but who has yet to achieve unrestricted compassion and omniscience in order to achieve nirvana (Mahayana)

ashrama (Sanskrit) the [four] stages of life in Hinduism

asrava (Sanskrit) influx of karma (Jainism), the mind-contaminating influences

asura (Sanskrit) demi-gods similar to the Titans in classical mythology

atman (Sanskrit) the true self, soul, soul monad

bhakti (Sanskrit) devotion

bhavana (Sanskrit) “cultivation of the mind” in Buddhism; the term identifies the various methods to discipline, control, and focus the mind

bhikkhu (Pali *bhikku*, Sanskrit *bhiksu*) the Buddhist monk who lives from alms given to him

bodhi (Sanskrit) enlightenment as realization of final truth

bodhicitta (Sanskrit) “mind of enlightenment” as the characteristic of a bodhisattva, that is to devote all one’s efforts to the realization of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings

- bodhisattva* (Sanskrit) “a person committed to achieve enlightenment,” the historical Buddha before his enlightenment, a person before the realization of buddhahood, the ideal of Mahayana
- bo[dhi]* tree, a fig tree under which the Buddha sat when he achieved enlightenment
- brahmacari* (Sanskrit) a student of the *Samhitas* and dedicated to *brahman*; later, the first stage of a holy life
- brahmacairya* (Sanskrit) celibate and “pure” life of a religious person
- buddha* (Sanskrit) the Enlightened One, the Awakened One, honorific title of the founder of Buddhism
- devi* (Sanskrit) goddess
- dhamma* see *dharma*
- dharma* (Sanskrit) Hinduism: “ordained duties”
- dharma* (Sanskrit; Pali *dhamma*) in Buddhism: (1) the doctrine; (2) the truth; (3) element-like entities which form clusters which the unenlightened person perceives as “things” and “living beings”
- dharma shastra* (Sanskrit) genre of legal literature
- duhkha* (Sanskrit *duhkha*, Pali *dukkha*) “suffering,” the first noble truth in Buddhism, better translated as dissatisfaction
- guru* (Sanskrit) spiritual teacher
- i* (Chinese) righteousness, Confucianism
- jina* (Sanskrit) “conqueror,” a name given to the Buddhas because of their conquest of the world of suffering and wrong views, and to the Jaina *Tirthankaras* because of their transcending the river of suffering
- kalaratri* (Sanskrit) the cosmic night at the end of an aeon, frequently identified with Durga
- kami* (Japanese) divine beings of Shintoism
- karman* (Sanskrit) act, ritual, future effect of one’s deeds
- khanda* (Sanskrit) section of a book
- koti* (Sanskrit) ten millions
- lama* (Tibetan *bla ma*) = Sanskrit *guru*
- li* (Chinese) unit to measure distance, equivalent to a mile
- li* (Chinese) ritual, proper behaviour, propriety as the moral guideline in Confucianism
- maharatri* (Sanskrit) the night in which the world is totally destroyed
- mara* (Sanskrit) personification of forces adverse to the achievement of enlightenment in Buddhism
- ming* (Chinese) fate, destiny
- moharatri* (Sanskrit) the night at the end of this world
- moksha* (Sanskrit) in Hinduism, liberation from the world
- mukti* (Sanskrit) release from earthly bonds

- sutra* (Sanskrit; Pali *sutta*) "thread," short stanzas suitable for memorization
- svadhā* (Sanskrit) originally a libation of melted butter poured into the sacred fire for the ancestors; later the word replaced the actual offering
- svaha* (Sanskrit) an exclamatory expression which concludes prayers; similar to amen
- tian/t'ien* (Chinese) "heaven" as primary moral force governing the course of the world as well as the conduct of virtuous people; nature in Taoism
- tathagata* (Sanskrit) "who has come like those before," an expression used by the historical Buddha to refer to himself after he had obtained enlightenment
- tathata* (Sanskrit) suchness, a term of Buddhist philosophy defining true reality
- tripitaka* (Sanskrit; Pali *tipitaka*) "three baskets," the three collections of texts which constitute the Buddhist canon
- varna* (Sanskrit) "colour," caste
- vashatkara* (Sanskrit) the *hotar's* incantation when the *adhvaryu* throws the offerings into the sacred fire
- wen* (Chinese) "ornament" as accidental features
- wuwei/wu-wei* (Chinese) "no action," prime concept of Taoism as avoiding actions which are against the natural flow of things
- xiang/hsiang* (Chinese) form, Taoism
- xu/hsu* (Chinese) vacuous, Taoism
- xuan/hsuan* (Chinese) the deep and profound, identifying the primordial base of existence in Taoism
- yang* (Chinese) the principle of the bright, dry, hot, day, summer, sun, outside, and the male, complement of yin
- yin* (Chinese) the principle of the dark, wet, cold, night, winter, moon, inside, and female, complement of yang

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