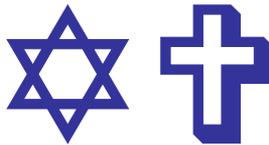




Chapter Four

Judaism and Christianity





The Roots of Christianity: Biblical Judaism

Christianity has its roots in the ancient religion of Biblical Judaism.¹ Ancient Judaism arose in Middle Eastern Asia.² For many centuries before the time of Jesus, the religious and political identities of the people of the Judaic tradition had been quite unsettled. The geographical basis of Judaism was originally the country that is today called Israel. This tiny sliver of land was located along major trade and travel routes connecting the empires of the continents that touch the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the land of Israel³ was invaded and ruled by various foreign powers throughout history.

The inhabitants of this land also experienced cycles of famine, causing periodic migrations to other territories. The early generations of the people of Judaism were made into slaves during their sojourn in Egypt, had been taken into captivity by Babylonian conquerors, and had experienced the destruction of their holy temples and towns at the hands of the Assyrians, the Greeks, and the Roman empires. These people of ancient Judaism are commonly referred to as the Jews.⁴

The Jews had been dispersed, partially re-gathered, re-combined and re-located several times. The people and their religious



traditions carry the marks of these disruptions and historical interventions. This can be seen in the texts of their Scriptures⁵ where layers of re-interpretation and re-application are compounded and recorded, as hopes alternated with national tragedies.

The Mosaic Religious System of Judaism: Exile, Liberation and Covenant

The core system of Biblical Judaism first crystallized during the years of the Exodus of the Hebrew tribes from Egypt where they had been enslaved. The history and tales of the formative years of Judaism are said to have been recorded by Moses. Moses was the prophet who facilitated the Jewish liberation from Egypt, led the people through the desert to their promised land, and also presented the people with the words of the covenant from their God.⁶ In their original and most basic form, this covenant was a list of laws inscribed on tablets of stone, what we today know as the Ten Commandments. These are the essential moral principles that govern the conduct of personal and social religious life. These moral codes, basic to all religions teach worship of one God and prescribe various rules such as not killing, not stealing, not lying, and not coveting.



Monotheistic Tendencies

The foundation of the early Mosaic religion was belief in a single transcendent deity who was revealed through the mediation of prophets. This deity was to be honored and obeyed. Various rituals were performed by a priesthood to atone for the sins of the people and to bring about their reconciliation with God. The task of the priests, similar to the *brahmins* in the *Vedic Dharma* was to mediate the religious rituals of temple service and animal sacrifices as proscribed in the Mosaic Covenant. Social consequences for disobedience were severe, including being stoned to death by the community and banishment from society. Rewards for loyalty and compliance were extreme as well.

Alternate Jewish Traditions

In addition to the core Mosaic tradition there arose multiple layers of interpretation and applications made by generations of Hebrew sages. These included the words of various Prophets, who often confronted the injustices and immorality of the rulers, and warned the people about mere external obedience to the rituals.



The Nature of God

The nature of God is revealed within the first chapters of the Hebrew Bible in the stories of the Creation. God in this tradition is transcendent just as *Brahman* in the *Vedic Dharma*. The God of the Jews is described as the cause of all that exists, which he brought into manifestation through the sound vibration of his Word.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1-3)

The Mystical Thread

There were threads of mystical and esoteric teachings woven into the tapestry of the Jewish religion, just as we see in the various religions of the world. Embedded even in the core stories about Moses, we read about his personal experiences of the deity. Moses expressed his visions of God in terms of light and sound.



The God who is transcendent also manifests his immanent presence to Moses as light and sound at the “Burning Bush” in the desert where he was tending his flock:

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” (Exodus 3:1-3)

Later, Moses meets with God on the top of Mt. Sinai. This experience is also related in terms of light and sound.

After his first encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, Moses tells the people and they experience the power and majesty of God’s presence.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. . . And the sound of the trumpet grew louder



and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (Exodus 19:9-19)

Centuries later we again hear of the mystical experiences of divine light and sound in the words of the prophets of Judaism. For example, the Prophet Ezekiel expresses his mystical vision in imagery that is reminiscent of the metaphysical visions of reality within the Santmat tradition.

I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.

Then there came a voice...brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:3-28)

The Prophet Isaiah had visions of the glory of God filling the earth, radiating the Presence of Yahweh through sound and light vibrations. Isaiah mediated the divine judgments against the false teachers and rulers of his day, who were spiritually ‘blind and deaf’ and sought to prevent the people from attaining spiritual development.



Prayer and Meditation

We also find in ancient Judaism that Moses emphasized the significance of hearing God. He gave the Israelites a *mantra* which is called the *Shema* from the Hebrew word ‘to listen’. This is the primary creedal statement in Biblical Judaism (and in Rabbinic Judaism even today):

Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God is One.

Moses also taught the people to meditate as a way of life in every action and intention, and to love God with a focused inner being (heart, mind, strength).

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words... shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

Historical Changes in Judaism

As happens over the course of history in all places, these ideals and expectations had to be modified and re-interpreted in response to life. The needs of the common people shape their



traditions, even as those in power choose the issues. By the time of the centuries preceding the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people were splintered into many factions and lived in geographically isolated groups. There was no central political leadership within Judaism after the Babylonian Captivity of 586 B.C.E. The land was occupied by a series of foreign powers, and the influences of multiple religious beliefs and practices led to divisions along lines of traditions ranging from magical superstition to legalistic obedience.

As we move closer to the time that Jesus was born to a Jewish family in Israel, we see an increasing prevalence among the common people to participate in practices of black magic and witchcraft, and to be influenced by false teachers and their false doctrines about sacrifices and strict laws of purification. Corrupt living and immorality became the norm among some of the Jewish sects.

During this time, paradoxically, there also emerged other Jewish groups which emphasized extreme moral codes and almost obsessive outward conformity to the avoidance of any sign of sin. In the more legalistic sects, the Sabbath⁷ was considered so holy that anyone who did any work on that day, even collecting wood for fuel, could be sentenced to death. In other sects of the



time, the slaughter of hundreds of animals to be placed in the sacrificial fire was an important and holy element of religious practice. In the beliefs of some of the people, obedience to ancient rituals of animal sacrifice and the prescribed application of animal blood were essential to righteousness and worship.

The Wisdom Tradition

In the years when early Judaism was struggling to prevail in Israel, the religious systems of other world cultures were also undergoing transformations.⁸ In India, the ancient religions were being greatly influenced by the light of the teachings of both the Buddha and his contemporary, Lord Mahavira of the Jain tradition. In China, the wisdom of both Lao Tzu and Confucius were being spread. These great sages taught many similar themes, such as questioning the role of rituals in the inner journey, turning inward to seek the divine, and seeking social justice.

In Judaism, there was also a surge of spirituality as a new wave of prophets declared their messages across the land of Palestine. A renewed body of literature was emerging which came to be known as *Hochmah* (Hebrew for Wisdom) literature. In these writings many spiritual truths were expounded.



This Wisdom tradition within Judaism resonated with the teachings that were emerging in the other religions of the world at this time. The new thinking grew out of understanding that the whole universe operated according to divine law. One of the major principles of the way of Wisdom in all religious traditions is that a life of moral rectitude is better than one of merely conforming to ritual. A central tenet is that ‘a man reaps what he sows,’ a principle known as *karma* in the Indian traditions. A corollary of this teaches that it is better to remain poor than to become rich by oppressing others.

In Judaism this divine law is sometimes referred to as the Word (*Logos* in Greek; *Memra* in Hebrew) and the Teaching (*Torah* in Hebrew). In the Jewish Scriptures of the early Christian era this divine law is spoken of as the Way⁹ (*Derekh* in Hebrew). The inner kernel of the teaching is about the intentions of the heart and mind. Some of the most revered Jewish scholars and prophets of this time also claimed that the soul existed before this life, and taught that the soul came from God and would return to God.



The Essenes and Other Sects of Judaism

In Egypt and Palestine, sometime before the advent of Christ, there had come into existence a community of ascetics known as the Essenes.¹⁰ The Essenes can be understood in light of the Indian concept of a forest dweller, although the Essenes dwelt in desert lands near the Dead Sea. The term may have derived from a word that means holy, pious, or one who is silent. The Essenes are said to have set themselves apart from the commonly accepted religious boundaries of Jewish tradition. They saw the path of nonviolence as the correct way, and accordingly practiced vegetarianism. They were very disciplined in their daily activities, and worked hard for their sustenance. They lived communally and freely shared all food and material possessions. After performing their work, the Essenes spent their time in meditation and other spiritual practices which sought union with God. In these ways, the lifestyle of this sect was similar to the followers of the Buddha. Their written records indicate a belief in the immortality of the soul and the karmic principle.

During this same time period before Jesus many great scholars and social reformers were born in Palestine and Egypt. They studied the philosophical and spiritual texts of China, India,



Greece and Persia, and sought to reform the traditions of Judaism. One of these teachers was the son of Sirach, surnamed Jesus (a common name in this era). He spoke of God's omniscience and of the importance of a virtuous life of moral integrity. Ben (Hebrew for 'son of') Sirach taught that a life of virtue is characterized by compassion and is expressed through good deeds. Another contemporary Jewish reformer was the sage Hillel. He reminded the people of one of the central tenets of their ancient tradition, because they seemed to have forgotten it:

Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.

He also objected to the empty rituals of the priests. One of the greatest Jewish scholars of this period was Philo.¹¹ He lived in Alexandria, a center of Jewish life in Egypt. He studied Indian and Greek philosophy and wrote many volumes in which he interpreted these ideas in the context of Jewish thought. One of his most significant contributions is his treatise "On the contemplative life" in which he explicitly makes the case for moral integrity and its importance in leading a spiritual life.

Although there were so many reformers speaking out during these centuries of turmoil in Judaism, they were unable to significantly influence the common people or gain much support.



The Jewish people at this time were very fragmented socially and politically, as well as geographically. Israel was an occupied territory of the Greek and then Roman Empires. There was no legitimate King of the Jews, and there had not been one for a very long time. Government officials were appointed by the foreign powers, and even the priesthood of the Temple (which had been rebuilt in Jerusalem) was subject to manipulation by the powers in control.

Some of the dominant sects of Judaism at this time still insisted on old forms of ritual worship involving animal sacrifices. One of the most popular of these was based on the teachings of Shammai.¹² He was opposed to the reformers, and sought to suppress any signs of spiritual awakening or new thinking. His influence served to sustain the traditional ways of ritual worship.

At this time there also arose a great seeker of God named John. He was destined to have a significant role in the unfolding religious drama. John seems to have been deeply influenced by the Essenes as well as by Indian thought. He preached non violence and self control and lived a life of ascetic discipline near the Jordan River, outside of Jerusalem. Before instructing a spiritual seeker, John asked that they immerse in the waters of the river. This same custom is prevalent in India, where aspirants



are required to purify themselves before the spiritual initiation. The initiation by John has come to be known as baptism, meaning “to immerse in the water.” The rite of baptism derives from the traditional practice of ritual cleansing (*mikveh*) that was customary in many of the sects of Judaism. This ritual cleansing was a regular practice in the Essene communities and is recorded in many of their documents.

John proclaimed that the Kingdom God had promised, is the Kingdom of Heaven within you, and is available to the spiritual seeker. He explained to his followers that they would continue to suffer until they found this heavenly kingdom within. John taught that discipline of the senses was important, and he also modeled the practices of fasting and prayer. He taught that justice and moral rectitude were essentials of the true path of religion (*dharmā*). He spoke to the people about the ways of true reform and the attainment of salvation.

The Descent of Lord Jesus

Jesus is considered to be the founder of Christianity. Jesus was born in a Jewish family and his teaching evolved out of Judaism.¹³



It is not known exactly when Jesus was born, but it is believed that it was between 4 B.C. and 6 C.E. As we have seen, the land of Israel was occupied by the Roman Empire at that time. The local Roman administrator for the Jews was Herod. The legends that have been told about the birth of Jesus speak about his mother Mary, who is said to have been born in the village of Nazareth. Mary was engaged to Joseph, who was a common carpenter. It is believed that Mary became pregnant before the marriage and that this was solely by the grace of God acting through His Spirit. It is central to the legend to the birth of Jesus that Mary was nonetheless still a virgin when she became pregnant. In the story, Joseph was divinely inspired and proceeded to marry Mary because he understood the divine origin of her pregnancy. During the later months of the pregnancy, it is told that Mary and Joseph traveled to the southern district of Judea in order to be counted in a census. When the couple arrived in the town of Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus.

The Childhood of Jesus

Little is documented about the early years of the life of Jesus, but we can imagine the lifestyle of this family. Joseph was a carpenter by trade and Mary took care of the household. We can



picture that Mary used to weave. The family perhaps lived in a small house where they carried out the typical daily routine of an average Jewish life in a village. It is also possible that Mary and Joseph taught the boy Jesus how to read and write. We can imagine as the boy grew older he perhaps attended services with his father at a local Jewish synagogue,¹⁴ and likely would have had some religious education. As the eldest son, Jesus would have looked after his younger brothers and sisters and also helped with the household tasks. From his earliest childhood Jesus was compassionate and always treated others with kindness. As Jesus grew older he would have learned the trade of carpentry from his father. It is thought by some that Jesus was a carpenter in Nazareth until the age of 30 when his public ministry began. We will discuss this again later and see some other possibilities of what Jesus did during those years.

From the tales that have been preserved in the traditions, it seems that all who knew Jesus in these early years were amazed by his truthfulness and honesty. In one of the historical records we are told that at the age of 12 Jesus went to Jerusalem with his parents to celebrate the Jewish festivals at the Temple. During this visit to Jerusalem Jesus was greatly affected by seeing the priestly rituals of animals being sacrificed. We can imagine that he would have been curious about the religious meaning of all the



activity, the loud screams of the countless animals that were being slaughtered, and the overwhelming smell and gore involved in the ritual use of the animal blood. According to the legend, his mind was cast into doubt concerning the merit of what he saw. The actual record of this episode does not include any details about the thoughts of Jesus on this occasion.

During the first century A.D. the major religious schools of Judaism were in Jerusalem. This is where the great Rabbis held public debates, proclaimed their interpretations of the scriptures, and educated students in their traditions of Judaism. A story is related in the gospels that on the occasion of a family visit to Jerusalem with his parents, when Jesus was 12 years old, he became involved in discussions with the Rabbis. While his parents were occupied with adult involvement in rituals and prayer, the young boy Jesus was pursuing spiritual understanding. Many days passed in this way as they were visiting Jerusalem. On their return home to Nazareth, the parents discovered that Jesus had not returned with their group. They immediately returned Jerusalem to find him. After searching for their son for three days they found him questioning and debating with the learned rabbis.



This story tells us that even as a boy of 12, Jesus was very resolved and sincere in his desire to know the nature of the Divine, and had an intense interest in studying with the Jewish teachers. It would be natural to assume that this desire to learn about Truth continued to grow. The scriptural record and legendary tales have no further information about the life of Jesus from the age of 12 until his baptism by John when Jesus was about the age of 30.

The Search for Truth

It seems that Jesus was by nature a keen observer of the social practices, and also had an interest in the religious teachings that set the tone of life in rural Israel. In general, the common Jewish people were oppressed by the domination of the Roman rulers, as well as by the false teachings and rigid standards of righteousness imposed on them by the priesthood in Judea. Jesus was a contemplative person. He pondered deeply the web spun by the priests declaring the requirements for animal sacrifice and the laws for personal purification. It seems that his thoughts and observations of the social conditions Jesus to help people out of this bleak situation. Attentively, he served others. Although, he could have lived the life of a householder, as was



typical for his day and age, he instead chose a life of social and spiritual service.

Many contradictions and ambiguities within the religious traditions of the time, which earlier prophets had noticed, were also noted by Jesus. For example, the Hebrew Scriptures contain multiple references to detailed requirements about the slaughter of animals for sacrifice. But there are also numerous declarations by the prophets that God desires compassion, and in fact prefers this to animal sacrifice.

God prefers love and compassion:

I desire compassion not sacrifice. I prefer the path of contemplation of God rather than the sacrifice of innocent animals. However, the people transgressed these true teachings of God just as Adam transgressed the command of God. They have distorted the teachings.

In the book of the Prophet Isaiah it is written:

God says: "You sacrifice many animals in My name. What is the use of killing these goats and lambs? Upon their slaughter I do not become pleased. I hate the smell of the sacrificial fire. Stop doing evil and learn to do good."

However, the *Hebrew Bible*, just as the texts of the Vedanta and other traditions, contains contradictory ideas. For example, there is a frequently quoted verse from the *Torah* which says 'an eye



for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ Unfortunately, this has often been interpreted out of context, and with retribution in mind.¹⁵ But even in Jesus’ time it was apparent that there were other verses of the Torah taught that people should not seek revenge. The underlying principle is that God always desires the welfare of all creatures.

We must keep in mind when studying the teachings of the religious leaders—prophets, saints, and mystics—do not search for ‘new’ truth. Rather, what they do is to simply remove the layers of dirt of accumulated misinterpretations that have corrupted the truth. The saints and prophets interpret the same eternal truth in a new light for their cultural context. The original truth must repeatedly be presented anew to suit the current age. Jesus faced two challenges. First, he would have to extricate the truth buried inside the fabricated norms of the prevalent tradition. Second, teaching the path of inner realization that is attained through self-control.

In the gospel stories we see that Jesus felt a desire to have the association of a true teacher. He had heard about the ministry and teaching of John¹⁶ who was teaching and baptizing people at the banks of the Jordan River for the remission of their sins. Jesus approached John in his hut in the wilderness. He felt very



peaceful after listening to John's teachings and he desired to have John as his spiritual mentor. According to tradition, John took Jesus by his hand and immersed him in the water of the River Jordan. This baptism was the way of initiation into the teaching.

After his initiation, Jesus sought the quiet of the wilderness and spent time there in meditation and prayer. He fasted on one occasion for forty days. A story is told in the gospels about all the temptations that Jesus had to conquer within himself. He overcame all. Jesus attained a great spiritual awakening and his inner spiritual eye was opened. In some traditions it is said that Jesus also practiced the meditation of the divine inner sound.

Jesus is reported to have said:

See the door to heaven has been opened. The first sound I have heard was of such a nature that it sounds like a trumpet talking to me. It said, "Come this way. I will show you things ahead".

According the legend, Jesus further describes the inner experience:

I was in my soul (I left my body and came into the sound) and I heard the deep sound of the trumpet.

It would seem that at this point Jesus perhaps realized that the goal of his life was to teach the true path of liberation of the soul to the suffering people of his own country. He continued to go



to the wilderness and spend time in prayer and contemplation. John was very pleased with the spiritual progress and moral conduct of his disciple, Jesus.

During the years of John's ministry, the political situation in Galilee, a northern province of Israel, continued to deteriorate. Herod Antipas had been appointed to rule by the Roman government. He was a morally decadent individual who abandoned his wife in order to marry his brother's wife. John raised his voice against this moral outrage. When Herod heard about this public criticism of his private affairs he became greatly angered and had John imprisoned. John maintained his position and was unremorseful. Herod simply had John beheaded. In the gospel tale about this incident it is reported that Herod then paraded the head of John on a platter at one of his parties. Many Christians regard John as the first martyr of Christianity.

When Jesus heard of John's demise he became very saddened and retreated to seclusion in the wilderness for prayer and contemplation. Afterwards he began traveling from place to place teaching the message of John. From a common way of understanding this story, this was the beginning of Christianity.



Jesus' ministry mostly took place in the northern districts of Israel, around the village of Capernaum and the city of Tiberius. There were many people in this region that followed Jesus even from among the Gentiles.¹⁷ Jesus lived a humble and disciplined life. He wore simple clothing, walked barefoot, and slept under the starry sky. He rejected the comforts of an easy life of wealth and status, and instead embraced the lifestyle and fellowship of the people in the villages. Jesus regarded the life of non-attachment as a great virtue, and had meager possessions. He pursued the way of non-violence, and found that hurting anyone's heart was impossible for him. He was a living example of the axiom: 'Hate the sin but love the sinner.'

Jesus lived the life of his ideals, much like a Vedic *sadhu* or Buddhist *bhikshu* (monk). He was often considered to be a fool, or even worse, a nonbeliever. Frequently, he was flatly rejected by some of the Jews, and some even threw stones at him. He was evicted from several towns. Nevertheless, his actions and teachings had a great impact on the common people. He regularly healed people of their illnesses, depressions and superstitions, and was available to all who earnestly sought salvation from God. For this reason many people began to think of Jesus as the *Messiah*, calling him the Prophet and the Deliverer. The title '*Messiah*'¹⁸ literally means 'anointed One,'



and derives from the tradition of pouring oil over the body of a king or other personage being honored and inaugurated into office. The title always referred to a person who was recognized as the divinely appointed king or messenger of God's will. The title 'Christ' (*christos* in Greek) is commonly assumed to be the Greek translation of the Hebrew (Jewish) term *Messiah*.¹⁹

Jesus had a special love for the poor and for those who were suffering illness or injustice. He mingled and ate with them and taught them the path to peace and light. He healed many sick people with the power of his purity. He was kindhearted while at the same time he was able to stay detached. He used to refer to himself as the son of God and the giver of liberation to the world. Even so, he remained profoundly humble. Jesus loved God with all his heart and mind, and often spent entire nights in prayer and meditation.

Jesus spoke of the town of Capernaum as his very own. It was a town of illiterate fishermen. Many of the families from this village were his devotees. Simon and Andrew, two brothers who were devout followers, lived in Capernaum. Simon is the disciple who was later known as Peter. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, lived nearby. These followers from this small town were instrumental in spreading the message about Jesus and his



teachings in all directions. It is believed by many that Peter, James, and John received esoteric teachings from Jesus. Some think this private instruction from the Master was about the practice of inner meditation. Some even suggest that Jesus was quite familiar with Indian teachings of non-dualism as well as the Greek philosophy of the time.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ

The teachings of Jesus are universal in nature. Jesus taught many principles that are very similar to the Indian concepts presented in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Vedanta* texts, and also in the teachings of the Buddha. For example, people often asked Jesus how the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ would be established.

An Indian author, Sundarlal, elaborates on the teachings of Jesus:

First of all, man should know that humans and God are essentially one. The duality which we perceive is due to the veil of love for the world which creates this illusion of separation from True knowledge (unity of God and humans). The world as we perceive it is not real and it is a deception. God is ever living, eternal and is the truth. To remove this veil of ignorance, one must be detached from this world and should strive for the new life. One should develop control of the mind and learn from within how to discriminate between the truth and non-truth. One should ask for help from one who knows the path. This is the way to find unity with



God. One must understand that I am in all and all are in Me. All is God and God is in everyone. The all and God are one. The cosmic Soul participates in the [Kingdom of] heaven of God. This is the goal of human life, this is heaven, and this is liberation.

The principle teachings of Jesus [the Christ] are as follows:

1. Know the commandments of the Hebrew Scriptures: Do not kill (do not hurt anyone), do not steal, do not be a false witness, do not deceive, and honor your parents.
2. Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you.
3. If anyone shows animosity to you or inflicts injury on you, you should pray for their well being.
4. Do not take the life of another. He who takes the life of another is sure to be punished by God.
5. Do not commit adultery. But even if you look on another with lustful eyes, you have already committed adultery in your heart.
6. Beware of false prophets. They appear as sheep but inwardly they are fierce wolves.
7. Whoever tries to save one's own life will lose it. The one who sacrifices his life for the sake of my teachings will gain life. If a man loses his soul, even if he has gained the whole world, what is the use?



8. Do not hoard wealth in this world where worms and decay will destroy it. Instead collect your wealth in heaven where it will not decay or become tarnished and where thieves will not steal it.
9. Do not perform spiritual practices in a way which shows pride or arrogance. If one disregards this advice, no spiritual benefit will be given from the heavenly Father.
10. If a man says: “Lord, Lord” he will not necessarily enter into the kingdom of heaven. The person who will enter the kingdom of heaven is the one who acts according to the will of the heavenly Father.
11. If you truly desire something and ask for it, it will be granted. When you seek you shall find, when you knock it shall be opened to you.
12. Enter through the narrow gate, because the path and the gate which is broad and easy is the path to destruction. Many take this path. However, the narrow and difficult gate takes you to life. There are very few who walk on this path.
13. The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye becomes one then your whole body will be filled with light. If your eye is evil then your whole body will be filled with darkness. If the light which is in you is covered, how



great is that darkness! It is so, because the light which is in you, although covered or obscured, is greater.

14. In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word.

15. All has been created by the Word and without the Word nothing could be created.

16. In that Word there was life, and that life was the light of people's lives.

The Teachings of Jesus Christ and Santmat

From this review of the main teachings of Jesus it becomes clear that Jesus gave guidelines for moral as well as practical living. At the same time, he taught the inner mystical path for attaining unity with the Divine, similar to the path taught by various mystics, saints and prophets.

The Saints tell us that in our inner self reside the brilliance of the Divine manifested in the form the Divine Light and the Divine Sound. According to Santmat tradition, through spiritual practice, the seeker will experience both light and sound, which represent the Divine glory and the Divine Word. Through that Word the aspirant reaches God. The spiritual practice of focusing is known as *Driṣṭi yoga*. It involves bringing the vision of the



two eyes to one point of focus. The practitioner is, then, able to go through the ‘narrow gate’ (called the tenth gate, the third eye, or the *ajna charka*). At this point the practitioner comes out of the darkness and becomes established in light. Then through the technique of Sound *Yoga* the practitioner is able to hear many sounds, but then, leaving these sounds behind, the practitioner reaches the original sound (the Word). Through this Word all of creation came into existence and is maintained. At this point the *yogi* (the practitioner) merges with that Word and becomes one with God. Meeting with God, the person realizes the essential unity of soul and God. With this insight, all suffering ends. This is the “Kingdom of Heaven” which Jesus frequently refers to.

The teachings of Jesus and his followers correspond closely with the practices of Santmat. From the point of view of the teachings of Santmat, through the inner meditation practices Jesus entered the Kingdom of God. This is the path by which Jesus merged with the divine, thus becoming a son of God.

The New Testament records numerous teachings about the Divine Light:

*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.
John 1:4)*

*He was transfigured before them, and His face shone
like the sun, and His garments became as white as
light. (Matthew 17:2)*



He [John] came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. (John 1:7)

There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. (John 1:9)

I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life. (John 8:11-13)

I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light. (Acts 26:18)

In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

For God, who said "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

... giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. (Colossians 1:12)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who



loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (1 John 2:9-10)

And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them. (Revelation 22:5)

There are many other ways in which teachings of Jesus are similar to Indian saints and *mahatmas* (great souls). For example, Jesus emphasized the practice of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) for the serious seekers of the Truth. Indian sages often recommend a life of a life of pure moral purity, including sexual purity, for the seekers of the Divine. It is generally believed that the early disciples of Jesus refrained from the married life.

Another similarity is that Jesus did not desire to display the inner powers that were the source of his miracles. The Saints in the Santmat tradition generally desist the show of miraculous powers. Often Jesus was often challenged about the healings he performed, and he always responded by direction attention to 'His Father in Heaven', the true source for healing. However, beyond the clarity of his humility, it is certainly understood that his compassion is what made many sick people well.

It is also of importance to note that Jesus believed in life after the death of the physical body, just as is taught in the Vedic Way.



All of these traditions and stories were preserved after the death of Jesus. It has been thought by some that Matthew was the most learned among the first disciples. It is likely that Matthew would have treasured the memories of his Master's teachings, and it is thought that he became a spiritual teacher himself in order to transmit these teachings to other believers. The community that developed around Matthew's teaching preserved the stories he told about Jesus. These have been collected and recorded, and have come to be known as the Gospel of Matthew. There are many other versions of these Gospel stories that have been recorded. They were orally transmitted in the first decades, and some were written down and passed on through generations.

Jesus Travels to the Indian Subcontinent

Although there are many written stories and records, there are no known documented accounts of the life of Jesus between the ages of 12 and 30. There is a lack of any clear, systematic and sequential records from these years. But, there are many followers of Jesus, who are willing to consider new theories and possibilities concerning the life of Jesus. A prominent Russian scholar named Dr. Nicolai Notovich has been investigating these lost years of Jesus.



Dr. Notovich spent forty years doing research in the Middle East as well as in Europe. He has studied hundreds of temples, libraries, and ancient manuscripts that have been found throughout these lands. Dr. Notovich discovered some long abandoned records in a small monastery in the Angadys desert. These manuscripts indicate that when Jesus was 14 years of age he embarked on a journey which led him to Tibet and later to India.

While Dr. Notovich was searching inside a monastery called Hemis in Ladakh, he found a handwritten scroll in the ancient Pali language. In this text there is a detailed and lengthy description of Jesus' travels to Tibet and India. This account has since been published as "The Unknown Life of Jesus." The following story is an example of what is recorded in this manuscript:

When Jesus became the age of 13, his marriage negotiations began to be discussed. Jesus desirous of leading a life wholly dedicated to God decided to leave his home rather than be bound by marriage. Accordingly, he left his home as a seeker of Truth. He desired to learn about Buddha dharma. Joining a trader's caravan he first came to Sindh and later to (now what is known as) India. In India he stayed among many of the Jain teachers. He visited Jagannath, a pilgrimage place in India. For six years he journeyed to Rajgraha, Kapilvastu, Benares and many other pilgrimage places. He also studied the



Buddhist tradition from the monks of the day. Finally, through Nepal he went to Iran and thereafter returned to Israel. He then began teaching the life of truth, love, and non-violence.

(The above account is the abbreviated version of the 18 missing years in the life of Jesus.)

Many people are skeptical about this alternate account, and find it very hard to believe that it is based on facts. However, if we closely examine what Jesus actually taught, and think about this teachings apart from the conventional traditions that later developed, we can see that his teaching was of a very different nature from the other teachings of his time. It appears that Jesus taught a path which is universal in nature, and also corresponds closely to the teachings of Buddhism and Indian thought. The theory that Jesus may have traveled outside of Israel and may have experienced other religious teachings has some appeal when viewed in this light. Perhaps, there is more to consider. The traditional interpretations based on the accepted sources may not have the only claim to credibility. It is beyond the scope of this work, but it must be suggested that a more intensive analysis of this correlation would be most compelling.



Rising Voices of Mutiny

It would not be unfair to say that the teachings and methods of Jesus were like a revolution within the prevalent traditions of Judaism. Moreover, many of the common people of his time were dissatisfied with the rigid practices and dogma of some of the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Many were disgruntled by the injustices of a system that seemed to have become corrupt. There was great resentment toward some of the rabbis and scholars who paraded their righteousness in front of others, and claimed that outer conformity to their interpretation of the purity laws was of greater value than the attitude of a person's heart.

To be certain, the teachings of Jesus, which contained messages of love, peace and equality, were greatly savored by the common man. However, the Roman rulers and some of the Jewish priests found many of these teachings to be too threatening to their own selfish ends. For this reason, they viewed Jesus as the rival.

Jesus himself was repelled by the arrogance he saw in many of his fellow Jews. He was pained by the greed and materialism that had come to pervade the ritualistic sacrificial system of the Temple, and he was deeply offended by the practices of animal slaughter that had come to define worship. He publicly



confronted the priests at the temple during the time when multitudes of people had come there to celebrate the holy festivals. He interrupted the activities of the money changers and those who were selling the animals for the sacrifices, and accused the priesthood of turning the house of God into a den of thieves. This could have caused some of the worshippers to become disillusioned, and might have even resulted in loss of income for some. The pride, ego and arrogance of the priests, along with their corrupted and materialistic system, had been delivered a significant blow.

The Jewish religion before the Christian era was fundamentally an ethno-national entity grounded in the land of Israel. The worship structure was not thought of as a 'path to God' in the way that we today might think of spirituality. Rather, the priesthood and temple rituals were a surviving remnant of the ancient cultic expression of a people who already considered themselves to have been chosen by God. The sacrificial system was viewed from within Judaism as a response of obedience, and understood to be the only means of making atonement for the sins of the people who were already members of a relationship bound by covenant. Worship was essentially mediated through the priestly functions, fairly similar to the ancient Indian *Brahminical* system of ritual and sacrifice.



These religious premises did not fit well with the social conditions that had unfolded in the thousand years of historical complications since the era of the founding of the monarchy. Nor were these early layers of religion meeting the spiritual needs of a people in crisis. Ancient Biblical Judaism had been formulated during the generation of Moses and the exodus. The religious system had then assimilated the responses that arose to meet the challenges of forging an identity and a loyalty within an emerging political and social entity. By the first century of the new era, the ancient religion had been stretched to a breaking point.

The message that Jesus was proclaiming showed the people that God is everywhere, in everyone, and is the life of everyone. The revolutionary core of his teaching claimed that a true worshipper could worship God within himself. The Kingdom of Heaven is in the core of every heart. This worship would be worship of the Truth. Further, Jesus proclaimed that all good people are able to attain God—even sinners, prostitutes, and people who were not even Jewish. He openly taught and associate with the people from all walks of life—higher and lower; rich and poor.

These subversive ideas were intolerable to the orthodox Jewish leadership. In their legalistic adherence to the ancient commands



of Scripture, they were fixed on the external level of the appearance of behavior. From this legalistic perspective, the Sabbath was a holy day, and on it all work was prohibited and was therefore automatically judged to be sinful. According to some of the strict interpretations, it was even considered unlawful to show mercy and caring for the sick on the Sabbath. But at the same time, the orthodox understanding of the Law deemed animal sacrifice at the Temple to be acceptable at this day. Jesus spoke out strongly against this hypocrisy, and thus threatened and enraged the leaders of the Jewish Temple.

Furthermore, Jesus committed the ultimate blasphemy by referring to himself as the son of God, when these words were taken out of context and understood from a literalistic and legalistic mindset. To many of the Jewish leaders this was high heresy. All of these attitudes, and suspicions combined together to trigger an uproar among the orthodox people.

The Evening of Life

There were many people who were jealous of Jesus' popularity with the masses. At the time of the Passover²⁰ holiday, according to the custom, Jews from all over Israel, and even from the nearby lands of the *diaspora* (dispersion), gathered in



Jerusalem to celebrate. Although the ministry of Jesus had primarily taken place in the northern regions of the Galilee, on this particular Passover he and his disciples had come to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Multitudes of Jews, therefore, heard about the teachings of this itinerant rabbi Jesus from Nazareth, who was said to preach with authority. The stories of his message, rumors about the miracles he performed, and tales about his own personal example had various effects on people. Many were intrigued. Revolutionary possibilities filled the air in the crowded city. Civil unrest and dissension among the crowds was further aroused by a diverse group of rebels, political activists, and prophets, each with an appealing solution to the misery and chaos. The social fabric of Jewish society was pulling at the seams. All of this was taking place under the military occupation of a puppet government. The Jewish ruling class was itself also subject to this foreign authority. Peace and survival were the desires of all.

There were many who were threatened by the teachings and personal example of Jesus' life as he did not observe the Jewish laws and customs. They labeled him a traitor to the Jewish religion. It was the custom for the leaders of the priests to convene²¹ to discuss political and religious situations. They



gathered together to evaluate their options in responding to the mounting crisis in Jerusalem. It sounded to them as if Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God. In addition to sounding like religious blasphemy to their ears this term also had political²² implications: the term ‘Son of God,’ the “Anointed One,” evoked images of the legitimate King appointed by God to rule Israel. So the council determined that Jesus should be eliminated. However, they realized that Jesus had many followers among the people and considered that a revolt could arise if they killed him outright.

The New Testament records²³ the inner workings of the plan they devised. They manipulated Judas, a close disciple of Jesus, by contriving to pay him thirty pieces of silver in exchange for his identification of Jesus to the authorities. The betrayal was to be enacted by Judas placing a kiss on Jesus. Thus the priests involved the Roman soldiers in the capture of Jesus, and had Jesus brought as a prisoner to be judged by the Roman Governor. As the plot unfolded, Jesus had to endure a night of physical and mental torture at the hands of the Roman soldiers. Then in the morning he was brought before the Roman court to be tried by the governor, Pilate.



At this trial the Jewish priests accused Jesus of many wrong doings and presented many false witnesses. Even so, after Pilate, heard all their testimony he declared that he found no guilt in Jesus. The priests however aggressively pressed their demand for a death sentence. Pilate considered Jesus to be without sin but was nevertheless concerned that an out-and-out riot might occur if he released Jesus, and so he yielded to the desires of the accusers.

Jesus was condemned to hang on a cross until death. It was the custom to allow the condemned to have a great amount of alcohol prior to execution to alleviate some of the pain. Jesus refused this sedative, and the Roman soldiers proceeded to nail him to a wooden cross. Jesus cried out from the cross:

*O Lord, why have You forsaken me? Please forgive
These people; they don't know what they are doing.*

The compassionate Jesus forgave his tormentors even as he was dying on the cross.

The New Testament Gospels offer details about the day of the execution. It is said in these stories that when the soul of Jesus left his body the skies darkened and the earth quaked. At this same moment, the forty foot curtain partition that prevented the



common people from entering the inner sanctum of the Temple was miraculously split down the middle.²⁴

In some traditions these events took place on Friday, April 3rd, 29 C.E. It is believed that the body of Jesus was buried in a tomb, but on the third he became alive again. The New Testament tells that the Risen Jesus remained with his close disciples for forty days, disclosing a deeper spiritual knowledge to them. He then ascended to heaven in their sight.²⁵

A Hymn of Thanksgiving

*Give thanks to the Lord,
Because he is good, his love is eternal.
Give thanks to the greatest of all goods; his love is
eternal.
Give thanks to the mightiest of all lords; his love is
eternal.
He alone performs miracles; his love is eternal.
By his wisdom he made the heavens; his love is eternal.
He made the sun and the moon; his love is eternal.
The sun to rule over the day; his love is eternal.
He gives food to every living creatures; his love is
eternal.
Give thanks to the God of heaven; his love is eternal.
(Psalm 136: 1-9, 25-26)*



¹ Biblical Judaism is to be distinguished from other commonly known designations of Judaism, such as ‘the religion of the Jews,’ Rabbinic Judaism, and *Kabbalah*. Each of these stems from a different point in the rich history of development of this religion. Biblical Judaism is based on the *Torah* of the Hebrew Scriptures, traditionally attributed to Moses. This is the primary source for the religious and historical roots of the Christian religion, before there was a ‘Christ’. The significance of the ‘*Messianic* expectation’ only emerges in the context of the interpretations and traditions of Biblical Judaism.

² The term ‘Middle East’ is used in various ways in different contexts, but generally refers to the geographical area of the Near East or Southwest Asia. From the perspective of India, the Middle East is thought of as Western Asia.

³ According to Jewish tradition and scripture ‘Israel’ is the name given by God to the patriarch Jacob. In this tradition, God identified Jacob as the chosen son of Abraham who would inherit the Promised Land of Canaan. When the descendants of Abraham conquered and took possession of this land, it came to be called Israel. The same geographical area is also referred to as Palestine from alternate political and historical points of view.

⁴ The terms ‘Jew’ and ‘Jewish’ are of recent construction. Most often these terms are used anachronistically, reading back into history through Christianized and modern categories. The words derive from the tribal and territorial name Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). In the time of Jesus’ ministry, the first century C.E., the Temple, the priesthood, the religious rulers and the scholars were centered in Jerusalem, which was in the region of Judea. It was common practice for Israelites who lived in other districts (and even other countries) to refer to the leaders and teachers of the Temple-based religious system as the ‘Judeans’. Later, this term was translated outside of its original context as ‘the Jews’.

⁵ The Hebrew Bible is commonly called the Old Testament from a Christian perspective, which assumes that Christianity is the new and improved revelation known in the “New” Testament. The two collections of Scripture together are often referred to as “the Bible.”

⁶ The Hebrew Scriptures refer to the Supreme Deity as *YHWH*, the consonants of the Hebrew verb ‘to be,’ commonly pronounced *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah* in later transcriptions. Modern Jews often refer to God as *HaShem*, literally ‘the name’ in Hebrew. The name for the deity has been, and still is, a major religious issue in many branches of Judaism. Pronunciation of the name of God is forbidden by many, and is even considered blasphemous by some. In modern American Judaism it is unacceptable to write the English word, and the practice is to instead write ‘G-d’. It was common in ancient texts to substitute the holy name with less potent forms, such as *Adonai*, which means Lord or master. It is also common to refer to the deity by the attribute that is demonstrated in a Biblical narrative. There are hundreds of names that have been canonized.



⁷ The Sabbath, traditionally celebrated on Saturday, is a holy day set apart by divine decree in the earliest Scriptures. It is to be a day of rest dedicated to the worship of God.

⁸ Scholars of religious history refer to the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. as the Axial Age. At this time there seems to have been a spiritual awakening around the world. The spiritual teachers who emerged during this pivotal time are the founders of most of the major world religions that we know today.

⁹ This profound idea about the divine law (similar to *dharmā*) which acts from within all creation and consciousness, has often been greatly misunderstood by both by Jews themselves, and critics from outside of Judaism. It has been misinterpreted and caricatured as legalistic obedience to external laws (*nomos* in Greek) of righteousness.

¹⁰ The Essenes were a religious sect of Judaism that flourished from the second century B.C.E. to the first century C.E. in Qumran, a plateau in the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea. The origin of the name is debated, but may derive from the Greek word for holy, or from an Aramaic dialect term for pious. In their writings, the Essenes refer to themselves as the “Sons of Light”.

¹¹ The writings of Philo (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.) are considered to be the most important surviving documents from the period of Hellenistic Judaism: *The divine Logos...is the helmsman and governor of the universe. The whole creation, this entire world perceived by our senses (seeing that it is greater than any human image) is a copy of the Divine Image. The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Logos; and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it. The everlasting Logos of the eternal God is the very sure and staunch prop of the Whole. He it is, who extending himself from the midst to its utmost bounds and from its extremities to the midst again, keeps up though all its length Nature's unvanquished course, combining and compacting all its parts. For the Father Who begat Him constituted His Logos such a Bond of the Universe as none can break. But the shadow of God is his Word [Logos], which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow, and, as it were, model, is the archetype of other things.*

¹² Shammai (c. 50 B.C.E. – 30 C.E.) was a Jewish sage known for his opposition to the spiritual teachings of Hillel. The school of Shammai interpreted the Law (*Torah* of Biblical Judaism) extremely rigorously. They emphasized the external behavior of deeds rather than the intent of the heart. The great debates between Hillel and Shammai are recorded in rabbinical texts.

¹³ All of the words and works that we now know of this Jewish prophet-teacher were originally oral traditions shared between various groups of Jews in the century when the Temple in Jerusalem was once again destroyed by a foreign



empire. Later these stories were collected and recorded and preserved in multiple versions which are now considered to be sacred history. The foundational stories about the life of Jesus (the gospels) are contained in the books of what has now come to be called the New Testament of the Bible. The spiritual ideas were at first molded into a new sect of the Jewish religion by Jewish interpreters and teachers, such as Paul, who revealed the meaning of the events as they had come to understand them after the death of the prophet.

¹⁴ The synagogues were small gathering places for Jews in the villages. Most of the people were not able to travel regularly to the central place of ritual worship at the Jerusalem Temple. The sacrificial cult did not take place on a local level. The synagogues were places where local sages, called rabbis, would teach and lead the people in prayer, singing, and worship.

¹⁵ Exodus 21:24 read in context shows an intention to limit vengeance. This verse is quoted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount when he urges his followers to turn the other cheek when confronted by violence (Matthew 5:38-39). Christian interpretations often unwittingly criticize the intent of these words in the Hebrew Bible without understanding Biblical Judaism in its own context in a pre-Christian era. Mahatma Gandhi added another layer of response when he commented: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and the whole world would soon be blind and toothless."

¹⁶ Several versions of the traditional stories indicate that John and Jesus were cousins.

¹⁷ From the Jewish perspective, all non-Jewish groups of people are known as Gentiles.

¹⁸ The term *Messiah* originated in the Near East where the kings were anointed with oil as part of the coronation ceremony. The title is found in several texts in the Hebrew Scriptures, both in the historical records of kings and in prophetic speeches. The Persian king Cyrus is called God's Anointed when he is selected to be an instrument in God's dealings with Israel.

¹⁹ The major distinctions in the underlying meanings of the terms *Messiah* and *Christ* reflect deep and complicated issues that reach beyond the purposes of the present discussion.

²⁰ The Passover was a feast memorializing the escape from slavery in Egypt. It required the sacrifice of a perfect male lamb whose blood was then applied to the doorpost of the house to identify the faithful family..

²¹ The council was called the Sanhedrin. See Acts 5:34-39 for a sample of the record in the New Testament.

²² The Jewish council reasoned that if Jesus was also inferring that he was the expected deliverer, the Prophet like Moses whose appearance had been prophesied, then it would be expedient, and righteous for these leaders of Israel to pronounce their judgment by condemning Jesus to death. It is even recorded



in the historical text in the book of Acts that one of the priests observed that it would be a good idea to sacrifice one man rather than the whole nation.

²³ For further details see the versions of the gospel stories about the arrest of Jesus, the trials Jesus endured, his sentencing and the crucifixion, found in these chapters in the gospels: Matthew 26 and 27; Mark 14 and 15; Luke 22 and 23; John 18 and 19. A good summary can be viewed in Luke 22:47 – 24:53.

²⁴ The significance of this curtain lies in its symbolic role as the Veil which separates the people from the Holy of Holies. In ancient Biblical Judaism, only the High Priest was ever permitted to enter into this most sacred place. For details see for example Luke 23:44-46.

²⁵ See for example Luke 24:1-53; Acts 1:1-10.

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