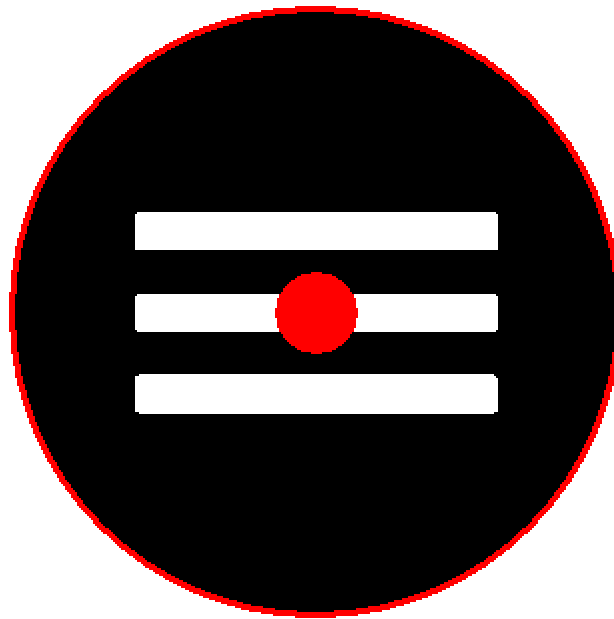


GOD IS AWARENESS

A New Primer in Hindu Tantric Theology



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CENTRAL TENETS OF TANTRIC THEOLOGY

**GOD IS AWARENESS,
AN AWARENESS UNLIMITED AND ALL-PERVASIVE,
TRANSCENDENT AND IMMANENT IN ALL THINGS.**

**THE AWARENESS THAT IS GOD CANNOT, IN PRINCIPLE,
BE THE PROPERTY OR BY-PRODUCT OF ANY THING WE
ARE AWARE *OF* - WHETHER MATTER, ENERGY, THE
HUMAN BODY OR BRAIN, OR A SUPREME BEING.**

ON THE CONTRARY:

**“THE BEING OF ALL THINGS THAT EXIST IN AWARENESS
IN TURN DEPENDS ON AWARENESS.”**

Abhinavagupta

**EVERYTHING IS AN AWARENESS – A UNIQUE AND
INDIVIDUALISED PORTION OF THE ULTIMATE,
UNSURPASSABLE AWARENESS
THAT IS GOD.**

GOD IS AWARENESS

'God' is not a being 'with' Awareness,

Just one among countless other such beings.

God IS Awareness - unbounded and all-encompassing.

God is within everything because Awareness is within everything.

There is nothing outside God, because there is nothing outside Awareness.

Awareness is not a property or by-product of our bodies, our brains or of any being.

Yet there is no thing - no body or being - that is not a portion of the Divine Awareness.

Therefore to truly recognise 'God' in all things is to recognise Awareness in all things.

God IS everything because Awareness is everything, - and because everything

Is a shape of Awareness, composed of the divine 'God-stuff' of Awareness.

Awareness is the divine source of all things - of all bodies and all beings.

Awareness alone is also absolute and divine Freedom - liberating us

From bondage to anything we happen to be aware OF.

So whatever you are currently aware of,

Just BE the Awareness of it.

THE OCEAN OF AWARENESS

Just as an ocean is the source of all the fish and other life forms within it, so is the Awareness that IS 'God' the source of all beings within it. All beings dwell WITHIN this Divine Awareness as all fish dwell within the ocean. And just as fish are formed from the very stuff of the ocean, so are all beings formed from the divine God-stuff of awareness. All the fish and life forms within the ocean are connected to one another through it, not just because they all dwell within it, but because they are all self-expressions of it. Similarly, all beings are connected to one another both outwardly and inwardly. They are connected outwardly because they all dwell within the Divine Awareness, and connected inwardly because the essential Self of each being is its nature as a Self-expression of the same Divine Awareness. Yet if God is the Divine Awareness, and this Awareness is compared in this way to an ocean, then it makes no more sense to think of God as a single BEING, than it does to think of the ocean as a single supreme FISH.

THE CO-CREATION OF GOD AND MAN

"The long road to finding God. Somewhere along the line, they [human beings] achieve Freedom by identifying with Shiva. The circle is complete - as once Shiva identified with them to give them freedom. As his selves or creations come to self awareness as him, he comes to self awareness as his selves."

Andrew Gara

In the beginning was that God who knows no beginning or end. That God which is not 'nothing' but is also no 'thing' and no 'being', for it is the source of ALL beings. This God is not a being 'with' awareness. This God IS awareness as such - infinite and unbounded.

This unbounded awareness alone is the ultimate and unsurpassable reality (Anuttara), for it is the very condition for our awareness of any specific thing or being, world or universe whatsoever - including our very awareness of ourselves, our bodies and mind, feelings and thoughts. This Awareness alone is therefore also the very essence of The Divine - of 'God'.

Yet within the womb of this Divine Awareness - the true meaning of 'Shiva' as the Great God or Mahadeva - infinite creative potentialities lie darkly hidden - this womb of potentiality or power being the great mother goddess or Mahadevi that is known as 'Kali'.

At first dimly sensed within the light of the Divine Awareness that is Shiva, these potentialities gradually took the form of ever clearer, more lucid and light-filled dreams - dreams of infinite potential worlds, infinite potential realities and infinite potential beings - individual consciousness or 'Jiva'.

Shiva not only embraced all these potential worlds and beings in the transcendent light of his unbounded awareness - but through that light automatically released them from the womb of the Great Goddess into free and autonomous self-actualisation, as Her autonomous powers of action or 'Shaktis'.

The countless individualised selves or Jiva that make up our physical world of human beings then evolved through a long road - one which led them to falsely believe that they were entities separate and apart from one another and from the Divine, beings whose womb or matrix was Matter or Energy and not The Mother and her power of potentiality.

The Jiva even came to believe that their physical actuality was the product of some cosmic accident and that even consciousness was their personal private property - not a uniquely individualised portion of the Divine Awareness that is Shiva.

Hypnotised by letting their awareness become focused and concentrated on their outer, physical reality, they gradually lost any sense of other planes or dimensions of reality and their awareness became restricted to their physical minds and bodies.

However, they also secretly yearned to feel again their connection with the darkness of the Divine Mother from whose womb they emerged, with the light of Divine Awareness that had released them from it, and with all those countless other planes and dimensions of awareness that the Great Mother Goddess and the Great God - Mahadevi and Mahadev - had jointly given birth to.

So began the long search among human beings to re-find 'God'. Along this way, great teachers showed them the way, teaching them through the wisdom of Yoga, Mantra and Tantra to identify with the pure Awareness that is the Divine - knowing that by doing so they would totally free their awareness from identification with their limited physical consciousness and all its contents.

The Divine, aware of this in advance, had already prepared the way by dreaming itself in the human form of Shiva. Yet as once that Divine Awareness had dreamt itself not just in the form of Shiva but that of each embodied human soul or Jiva, so now human beings began to dream of their own divine source, yearning to once again feel themselves and each other as a part of the Divine Awareness and not as separate and apart from it and each other.

As once the Divine Awareness had creatively dreamed them, so now they began to creatively dream its manifold forms, letting them freely emerge into the light from within the dark depths of their own maternal souls. Thus humankind gave birth to the gods as the gods had once given birth to them. Some of these gods represented the many faces, bodies and qualities of the Divine Awareness as such. Others represented only the limiting ego-awareness of human beings, their experience of themselves as souls bound to and bounded by their own bodies. For releasing them into freedom, Shiva had also allowed each individualised soul or Jiva to freely fall into the bondage of contracted awareness, forgetting its own source in the Divine. As a result, the Jivas found themselves needing to seek and re-find 'God' - the freedom of that unbounded, pure and Divine Awareness which transcends body and mind, transcends all limited identities and contents of consciousness.

God as Shiva is the Divine Light of a pure awareness that is inseparable from and yet quite distinct from all there is to be conscious or aware *of*- and can therefore simply De-Light in it.

Yet if the Divine experiences itself as a self or Jiva who has come to experience their self AS that very Awareness - as Shiva - the circle is completed. The delight of both Shiva and Jiva are conjoined as the absolute freedom (Moksha) and pure bliss (Ananda) of the Divine Awareness. *Both* now experience themselves as an Awareness that is neither 'dual' nor 'non-dual', neither separate nor indistinctly merged, but both distinct and inseparable - like two sides of a coin, or like two lovers in a permanent and unbreakable embrace.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam - are *theistic* and dualistic, asserting that God is a supreme creator being separate from 'His' creations. Buddhism is *a-theistic* and non-dualistic, denying the reality of a Supreme Being. It is also nihilistic in the essential sense - negating the existence of any fixed identities in the form of things, selves or beings and asserting that the highest truth is Emptiness or Non-Being understood as 'No-thing-ness'. Tantric theology understands the Divine neither as Being nor Non-Being; neither as a single Supreme Being nor as a multiplicity of beings but as that Absolute Awareness that is the source of all things and all beings. That Awareness is Absolute because it embraces not only all that is actual - all that has Being - but the reality of all that is potential. For 'Non-Being' is not simply 'Emptiness', 'Formlessness' - 'No-thing-ness' - but a womb of inexhaustible potentiality - the divine 'Mother' of all actual existing things. It is the Light of Awareness releases these potentialities into their own free and autonomous actualisation and Being.

“... the gods were never dethroned in India. They were not disintegrated and dissolved by criticism and natural science, as were the deities of the Greeks ... The gods of Homer became laughable, and were ... later regarded as incompatible with the more spiritual and ethical, later concepts of divinity ... India, on the other hand, retained its anthropomorphic personifications ... to assist the mind in its attempt to comprehend what was regarded as manifested *through* them ... What is expressed through the personal masks was understood to transcend them, and yet the garb of the divine *personae* was never actually removed. By this tolerant, cherishing attitude a solution of the theological problem was attained that preserved the personal character of the divine powers for all the purposes of worship and daily life, while permitting an abstract, supreme and transcendental concept to dominate for the more lofty, supraritualistic stages of insight and speculation.”

“No one who is not himself divine may successfully worship the divinity. Having become the deity one should offer sacrifice to it.” [Ghandarva Tantra] The identity of the hidden nature of the worshipper with the god worshipped is the first principle of the Tantric philosophy of devotion [Bhakti].

Heinrich Zimmer

“Once upon a time a sannyasin entered the temple of Jagganath. As he looked at the holy image he debated with himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed his staff from left to right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him; he concluded that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. He understood that God had form. Thus he understood that God has form and, again, is formless.

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that is was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Awareness. The image [Murti] was Awareness, the altar was Awareness, the water-vessels were Awareness, the door-sill was Awareness, the marble floor was Awareness – all was Awareness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss – the Bliss of Satchitananda (Being-Awareness-Bliss). I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him I also saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother.”

Shri Ramakrishna

There is a timeless quality about Saivism - which preceded Hinduism as we know it today - that sets it apart from the modern faiths on the planet such as Christianity and Islam. Of course, we know that the founders of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were all good Hindus. Saivism is so very ancient that it appears among the first civilizations unearthed by archeologists ... There never was a time when Saivism ... did not exist on the planet. Other religions trace their lineage to a man, to a founder, to a messiah or a theologian. Saivism does not. It has no founder because it was not founded by man. It is coexistent with man. That makes Saivism unique, different from all the religions and sects that followed it.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

FROM ATHEISM TO NOOTHEISM

Shaivist Tantric Theology is *not* a form of polytheism. Nor is it monotheistic. Instead it is monistic – asserting the divinity and unity of a single divine reality – awareness. It recognises that God which is awareness along with its multiple manifestation and personifications – both human and divine. The ‘gods’, like all beings are personifications of the divine absolute that is awareness. In this sense Tantric theology it can be described as essential nootheistic, from the Greek *noos* – awareness.

- **Atheism**, strictly speaking, is not disbelief in God. It is disbelief in the existence of God as a BEING.
- **Theism** is the belief that God exists as a BEING.
- **Monotheism** is the belief that God is ONE supreme BEING separate from the world and other BEINGS.
- **Polytheism** is the belief in a plurality of Gods, each of which is a divine or trans-human BEING.
- **Hentheism** (from the Greek ‘hen’ meaning ‘one’) is the belief that God is the ONENESS of all beings or ‘BEING’ as such.
- **Henotheism** is a form of polytheism resting on the belief in one supreme BEING or God ruling over all other gods and beings.
- **Pantheism** (from the Greek word ‘pan’ meaning ‘all’) is the belief that God IS the world - is ALL BEINGS.
- **Panatheism** (‘Buddhism’) is the belief that NO BEINGS exist, because everything is in a constant state of BECOMING.
- **Panentheism** (from the Greek words ‘pan’ and ‘en’, meaning ‘all’ and ‘in’) is the belief that all BEINGS dwell IN God, and that God dwells IN all BEINGS.
- **Nootheism** (from the Greek *noos* - ‘awareness’) is a form of ‘panentheism’ that identifies God with that absolute and divine Awareness from and within which all BEINGS constantly ‘BE-COME’ or ‘COME-TO-BE’.

TANTRA AS UNIFIED FIELD THEOLOGY

Awareness is not something that dwells ‘in’ us, bounded by our bodies. We ourselves dwell *in* awareness in the same way that objects exist in space. Both the physical space we sense around our bodies and the psychic spaces we sense within them are subjective spaces – the spaces of awareness within which we are aware of things and without which we could be aware of nothing. *We exist in awareness* – inner and outer – in the same way that the elements of our outer and inner world can only be experienced in spaces – inner and outer. All space being subjective, there is essentially only one space from which we emerge and in which we exist, an unbounded space of divine awareness. Christianity understood this ‘Awareness Principle’ through the metaphor of ‘The Kingdom’ that is both outside us and inside us. Buddhism understood it through the principle that form and the formlessness of space are inseparable. Kashmir Shaivism understood it through the principle of *Shiva-Shakti*. *Shiva* – the unbounded, bodiless space of divine awareness (*akula*) in which every body exists, and which embraces the totality (*kula*) of bodies that make up the “embodied cosmos” (Muller-Ortega) or *Shakti* of *Shiva*.

All awareness is awareness of things sensuous, bodily. Even the most abstract of thoughts has its own ‘body’ – its own sensuous shape and form. But the awareness of things bodily, including our own bodies, is not itself anything bodily, but is something essentially bodiless – like the formlessness of space. How then do bodily things form themselves in the first place? Because formless awareness that we perceive as empty space is not in fact empty but is a fullness of formative *potentials*. Such potentials – all potentials – only exist in awareness, and do so as potential shapes and forms of awareness. Formless awareness gives birth to form from these potentials. As the formlessness of space it shapes itself into bodily forms. *Shakti* is the very power and process of actualisation of these potentials – the bodiless,

formless awareness of *Shiva* giving form to itself into countless bodily shapes. We are such bodily shapes of awareness. As such we are not only formed from divine awareness space. We exist in that space as we exist in space itself. And that space exists within us just as we exist within it. We are each a unified space or field of awareness, our bodies a mere boundary between the awareness we exist within and the awareness that exists within us. To perceive an object with awareness is to perceive it in its place - in the surrounding space in which alone it stands out or 'ex-ists'. But look around at people – people you know and people on the street – and you will see something different. You will see from their bodies – indeed from the very look on their face - that they do not sense themselves as existing *in* awareness, just as they do in *space*. They feel their awareness as something that exists only within their body's fleshly boundaries – where even there it may be contracted to the narrowest of spaces in their heads. Spiritual 'enlightenment' is nothing but the *decontraction* of the sensed awareness space in which we exist and which exists within us – its outer expansion and inward expansion or 'inpanion'. The bounded inner space of awareness was named by the Greek word *psyche*, the Latin *anima*, and the Sanskrit *jiva*; the outer space by the Greek word *pneuma*, the Latin *spiritus*, and the Sanskrit *akasha*.

Every religion has its sacred places and spaces. Buildings are erected in such places to mark out and bound the sacred spaces within them. The word 'temple' (Latin *templum*) means such a consecrated inner space. A building such as a temple is also a shaping of space, one, which lends a specific quality both to the space within it and to the space of the landscape or cityscape in which it is set. The dome of St. Peter lends a different quality to the spaces within and around it to that of a Gothic cathedral, a Buddhist stupa or a Hindu temple. The same principle applies to the objects set within such holy spaces. They also, like the objects in our own homes, lend

a specific quality to the space in which they are set and have their place. Is there anything at all that can truly unite all religions, given the quite *different* quality of the awareness spaces they shape in such specific ways - through their languages and images, rituals and sacred places? The only thing that *could* unite them in essence would be a *unified field theology* of awareness - one, which recognises the embrace of divine awareness in space as such. The essential religious philosophy or 'theosophy' of The New Yoga, like that of 'Kashmir Shaivism', is such a unified field theology – comprehending the unity of outer and inner awareness space, of 'The Kingdom' outside and inside, of *pneuma* and *psyche*, of formlessness and form, of potentiality (*dynamis*) and its actualisation (*energeia*), of *akula* and *kula*, of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. Unified field theology, by virtue of offering a unified field theory of awareness and its expression as energy and matter, also unifies spirituality and science, psychology and physics. But being a unified field theory of awareness the heart of such a unified field theology must be *unified field awareness* as such. Through The New Yoga each individual can come to experience themselves as existing within divine awareness as within space. Similarly, they can come to experience that divine awareness within them - as their body's very inwardness of soul. By uniting the spatial fields of their awareness with one another, they can not only realise a state of decontracted and divine awareness for themselves - they can also unite their own fields of awareness with those of others. Conversely, it is by cultivating and experiencing field-resonance with the awareness of others that they can truly realise themselves – living in and out of *unified field awareness* that unites them with one another, inwardly and outwardly. Hence the New Yogic practice of pair meditation as *field-resonation* with the awareness of others. For it is above all "Where two or more are gathered in My Name" that the *unified field awareness* that is the very essence of divinity – *under whatever name* - can be most deeply felt, most broadly expanded and most powerfully embodied. A

unified world religion cannot be achieved through ecumenical dialogues or doctrinal disputes, nor can it take the form of some eclectic or 'syncretic' religion. Neither theological liberalism and heterodoxy nor conservative orthodoxy and 'inquisitions' bear any relation to the type of genuine meditative *inquiry* required to research, rethink and refine the common source and essence of religious practices and symbols - in all their different historical and cultural forms. This common source and essence can only be found in the direct experience of unified field awareness. What the world requires now is a *new world religion* of the sort hoped for by Hermann Hesse, one based on a *newly thought* theology. This can only be a *unified field theology* which, whatever its historic roots, is based on a renewed experience of the divine as the *foundational* and *unified field awareness* in which all worlds arise and all beings dwell - as it dwells within them. The true body of the human being is a *unified field body* of awareness uniting three fields of awareness - a *field of exteriority* manifest as our awareness of the physical space around us, a field of interiority which we feel as the spacious inwardness of our own soul - and the field of *unbounded interiority* into which our own inwardness of soul leads. This field of unbounded interiority is also the *all-surrounding* field that constitutes the *soul world* as such - that which lies *behind* all that we perceive in the exterior space around us. It is *within* this field of unbounded and all-surrounding 'interiority' that all seemingly 'exterior' spaces of awareness - all space-time worlds - first open up. Our unified field body is the singular *field-boundary* of awareness uniting all three fields. Yet precisely *as* this very boundary it is itself essentially boundless - a *unified field awareness*.

THE WORSHIPFUL LIFE

The worshipful life is one in which at all times we identify with the very essence of the Divine – which is nothing but awareness.

That means learning to distinguish awareness as such from each and every thing we are aware of.

To do this we need only remember that our awareness of any thing or thought, sensation or perception, feeling or emotion, is not itself a thing or thought, not itself a sensation or perception, not itself an image or emotion. It is innately free of things and thoughts, sensations and perceptions, images and emotions.

The name 'Shiva' points to the truth that awareness is what 'lies behind' (SHI) all things and can therefore free us from or 'cut asunder' (SHVI) our attachment to any thing we are aware of.

That is why Shiva, as the light of pure awareness, is associated in the Tantric tradition with absolute Freedom.

Awareness transcends all that we are aware of. Only through identification with this 'transcendent' nature of awareness [Shiva] can we also take full delight in every thing and being that we are aware of - knowing it as a mirror and manifestation of the Divine Awareness, a unique shape and a unique face of that Awareness.

Only then can we experience the Divine Awareness as not only 'transcendent' (transcending each and every thing we are aware of) but also 'immanent' (present within each and every thing).

The name 'Shiva' does not denote a divine being or god 'with' awareness. For God as Shiva IS awareness – that Divine Awareness which is the source of all beings.

What the name Shiva does denote is a fundamental aspect of the Divine Awareness – its own self-recognition or 'I'-ness. For knowing itself in and as all things and beings, it is their very Self. And knowing our innermost Self or 'I' as identical with the Divine 'I' is the experience of 'Shiv-a-wareness'.

If meditation means identifying with the Divine Awareness that IS God, then the worshipful life consists in recognising that Awareness as our innermost Self or 'I', and in recognising that 'I' as identical with the 'I'-ness of the Divine - with Shiva.

THE WONDERS OF HINDU 'IDOL WORSHIP'

The belief that an icon or idol is a cruder, more naive or 'primitive' object of religious reverence or worship – or even an unholy object – is itself as crude as the belief that painting, sculpture and music are cruder or more 'primitive' mediums of expression of spiritual truth than the written or spoken word. In reality they can be wondrous mediums. As for the attack on idol worship by the Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – this is nothing if not hypocritical. For not only do they have their own idols – the Christian crucifix or the Muslim Kaaba for example. They also revere their own holy books as sacred *objects* in themselves – not only decorating them or filling them with iconic images but going so far as to effectively elevate them to the status of religious 'idols'. Thus in Jewish religious practice, the holy scroll of the Torah is consecrated, housed in a sacred chamber, veiled and unveiled, carried round in procession, its tassels kissed etc.

What distinguishes the Abrahamic faiths from Hinduism and other 'Dharmic' religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, is not their rejection of idol worship as such therefore, but rather their exclusive iconisation and idolisation of *the word* – not least in its concrete, material manifestation as the stone tablets of Moses. The idolisation of a Holy Book is a recognition of the truth that it is more than a material artefact of paper and ink. Similarly however, there is more to a temple, cathedra, synagogue or mosque than brick or stone, more to music than man-made material instruments and the sound vibrations they produce, just as there is more to a painting than its pigments, more to a great religious sculpture or 'idol' than wood, stone or bronze or some idle fancy of the sculptor. That is why, in the Hindu tradition, worship of sculpted idols (Pratima) is no mere religious

prop for the illiterate, the ignorant or the spiritual neophyte, even though there may be some who consider it so. For as Swami Sivananda writes:

“[Only] a pseudo-Vedantin ... feels that his Advaita [non-duality with the divine] will evaporate if he prostrates [before an idol]. Study the lives of the Tamil Saints ... They had the highest Advaitic realisation. They saw Lord Shiva everywhere, and yet they ... prostrated before the idol and sang hymns ... The idol in the temple was all Chaitanya or consciousness for them. It was not a mere block of stone.”

And yet there *are* indeed sacrilegious forms of idolatry - two of which in particular dominate today's world. One is the 'bibliolatry' of literalist religious fundamentalisms - which take the words of their sacred texts literally, never going beyond their 'letter' to their many-layered meanings or polysemous 'spirit'. This is like mistaking the menu with the meal. The other form of sacrilegious idolatry is what Marx called "the fetishism of the commodity" and "the monotheism of money" - in other words the religion of consumerism, which makes idols of branded products and uses glossy media icons to promote their worship. An advertising mantra such as "Real chocolate. Real feeling" says it all - showing how manufacturers seek an almost religious feeling of devotion to their brands and iconic logos by a purely artificial association with the entire range of authentic human feelings and values, from love to spirituality - even worship itself.* Just as Hinduism offers an alternative to the global disarray and conflicts brought about by the Abrahamic religions, so does genuine religious idol worship offer an alternative to - and a powerful weapon against - the religious fetishism, idolisation, and pseudo-spiritualisation of crass material commodities, whether chocolate, skin creams or cars. Even religious icons and idols are today reduced to the status of mere decorative items, whether sacred African carvings or statues of Buddha on the suburban mantelpiece of the bourgeoisie.

From a Hindu perspective, meditation of a 'Murti', whether in the form of an image, symbol or three-dimensional idol, no more negates an acknowledgement of God's formless or invisible omnipresence in all things than does carrying round and studying an artefact of paper and ink in the form of a Holy Book such as the Bible or Koran. On the contrary, precisely by virtue of its tangible, material form, the Murti makes it easier to experience the presence of the divine in all things, to understand that things are just as much symbols of the divine as words are, and to come to a direct experience of things (and not just the words with which we name them) as the manifest word of the divine, its material metaphors, its solidified speech. The Murti does not hinder but offers a far more direct route to a living experience of the essence of the divine, revealing it as something neither formless and immaterial nor reducible to a particular form, but rather as a dynamic relation between formlessness and form - in tantric terms, the relation between pure awareness (Shiva) and its innate power (Shakti) of formative activity and material manifestation.

The multiplicity of human forms taken by icons, idols or 'murti' of the Hindu gods does not imply any sort of 'anthropomorphic' idea of God of the sort that belongs exclusively to the Abrahamic religions - with their claim that Man was made "in the image of God". In contrast, the human form given to Murtis of the Hindu gods is designed to awaken the worshipper's experience of their own human bodily form as a fleshly embodiment and expression of 'spirit' - of that higher 'air' or 'aether' of awareness (Akasha) that ensouls all bodies as their vital breath (Prana) and from which matter itself is formed. This aether may be perceived only as the seemingly empty space 'in' which the Murti stands as a mere object. In reality space itself (Kha) pervades every object in it, just as it itself is

pervaded by the aether of which all objects are formed. As the physicist Paul Dirac noted: “A place is nothing; nor even space, unless at its heart – a figure stands.” The sacredness of the space in which the Murti stands is both distinct and inseparable from it. It is what allows the Murti to stand out or ‘ex-ist’ in its sacrality, just as it is the presence of the Murti that makes the space around it sacred, offering an experience of the divine aether of awareness (Akasha) surrounding and pervading it.

Yet just as a spiritual text or scripture may in itself be more or less superficial or deep in meaning, and the ‘letter’ of its word a more or less distorted human expression or translation of its wordless inner meaning or ‘spirit’ - so too can a Murti be more or less crudely or beautifully crafted as an expression of spiritual truth. It is no accident that the most wondrously powerful Murtis, particularly in the form of sculptures, are not just ‘objects’ of reverence, worship or even meditation but show the very gods they represent *in states of meditation*. A Murti of this sort is not just a particular divinity given a characteristic human form that enables one to recognise, name and worship it as this or that ‘god’. Instead its form is spiritually crafted to reveal the nature taken by the human form when it itself becomes an *embodiment* of particular states and qualities of meditative union with God – with the divine as such.

Murti meditation is not ‘worship’ understood as mere ‘obeisance’ to a particular divinity through its image. Nor is it even meditation ‘of’ the divine in the form of a particular divinity. It is co-resonance with a divinity - one whose image is crafted in such a way that its whole bodily form and bearing itself embodies a profound resonance with the divine as such.

“Even as you can catch the sound waves of people all over the world through the radio receiving set, it is possible to commune with the all-pervading Lord through the medium of an idol. The divinity of the all-pervading God is vibrant in every atom of creation. There is not a speck of space where he is not.” *Sivananda*

Just as a radio is more than a box of electronic parts but a vehicle of transmission, so is a Murti. And just as the images on a television screen are not inside the ‘box’ itself but relayed to it from without, so is the Murti itself an embodied transmission of spiritual truth carried on the waves of the divine-cosmic aether. Meditation of its bodily form (Rupa) is a way of entering into resonance with it, a resonance that can be tuned to different frequencies and ‘channels’, and that result in feeling experiences, visions and ‘hearings’. It was such hearings (‘Shruti’), borne of meditative inner silence, that first inspired the *words* of the Vedas, and all the world’s holy scriptures.

To those capable of entering into deep inner silence and resonance with the Murti – on any number of different wavelengths of spiritual attunement - its visible form will transform before their eyes. It will cease to be a mere object of their worshipful gaze, but communicate wordless wisdom to them through its own gaze. Indeed it will also speak to them directly - in the form of ‘hearings’ transmitted to their inner ear. To come to know the divine through meditating the Murti of a chosen divinity is a truly profound and ever-new experience - an inexhaustible source of revelations, and not the mere repetition of a prescribed ritual. The Murti itself ceases to be a mere image or ‘idol’ of a divinity. Instead through it, the divinity itself becomes one’s most intimate partner and most revered Guru in meditating, understanding and experiencing the divine – capable of answering one’s deepest personal or religious questions through the knowing awareness it embodies and transmits, both in inner silence and through the word, inwardly heard.

‘Puja’ – ritual worship - is unthinkable without ‘Murti Darshan’ – sitting in the presence of the Murti and using one’s whole body and all its senses to resonate with the awareness it embodies and transmits. Through *co-resonance*, ‘idol worship’ becomes an experience of the particular truth of Tantric Puja – that ‘to worship a god is to become that god’.

“Regular worship, Puja and other modes of demonstrating our inner feeling recognition of Divinity in the idol unveils the Divinity latent in it. This is truly a wonder and a miracle. The idol speaks. It will answer your questions and solve your problems. The God in you has the power to awaken the latent Divinity in the idol ... Puja makes the idol shine with Divine resplendence. God is then enshrined in the idol ... the idol will perform miracles. The place where it is installed is at once transformed into a temple.” *Sivananda*

As Sivananda also reminds us, a Sanskrit word for meditative contemplation is ‘Upasana’ – which simply means ‘sitting near’. The meaning and value of Murti meditation in ritual worship or Puja derives from the basic act of ‘sitting near’ the Murti of a god or divinity – for doing so brings us into the nearness and presence of God and Divinity.

“Upasana is approaching the chosen ideal or object of worship by meditating on it in accordance with the teachings (Shastras) and the Guru ... Upasana helps the devotee to sit near the Lord or to commune with him. It purifies the heart and steadies the mind. It fills the mind with ... pure love for the Lord. It gradually transmutes man into a divine being.”

Yet for those to whom ‘meditation’ is merely a method of steadying the mind and calming the soul, and not also a matter of feeling the Divine from the very *heart* of one’s soul – a medium of *living relationship* uniting the Self with a divine Other - such spiritual words will mean nothing without Upasana - sitting in the nearness of a material Murti, and experiencing it in all its wonders. For the sitter or Upasaka, after the ritual process of lighting

oil lamps and scenting the air with incense, the meditational process begins with ensouling their own body and breathing with ever-greater awareness, particularly those regions of their body that feel tired or tense, muddled or dissonant in tone. The sitter then ensouls the body of the Murti with their own awareness, using their own body to outwardly sense and resonate with it from without and within. In time the Murti will in turn ensoul the inwardness of the sitter's body from within and from without - allowing them to feel their own fleshly form as no less a manifestation of the divine-cosmic aether around them than the material form of the Murti itself. Union with the divinity ensouling the Murti comes to a climax when the worshipper kneels to touch the foot of the Murti, and peer up at its face allowing an even more powerful direct transmission of awareness from it - one that will pervade if not overwhelm the body and mind of the worshipper, bringing with it not only a culmination and ultimate consecration of the union they have experienced through the sitting, but an experiential answer to the deepest questions they may have felt or consciously meditated in the course of it.

The word 'worship' derives from the Indo-European root *wer* or *uer* - 'to turn'. The turning point in idol worship comes when the worshipper first turns to outwardly face and/or inwardly sense the Murti, and then in turn to be turned - transformed - by it.

Notes:

* An advertisement (2007) showing dark-skinned neo-Mayan tribe worshipping the image of a leading branded ice-cream bar and ending with the slogan 'I am a worshipper'.

References:

Swami Sivananda *The Philosophy and Significance of Idol Worship* Divine Life Society 1960

WHAT IS 'GOD'? A NEW TANTRIC THEOLOGY

God *is* Awareness.

God is not a supreme being 'with' awareness.

God is not any being or 'subject' of consciousness that has awareness as its private property.

God is not any 'object' of consciousness that has awareness as its property, product or by-product.

God is not 'a being' (any thing that 'is') at all, whether in the form of subjects or objects.

God is not 'Being' with a big 'B' (the 'is-ness' of things).

God is not any existing 'thing' – even such a thing as 'love'.

For “The Being of all things that exist in Awareness in turn depends on awareness.” Abhinavagupta

Awareness cannot – in principle - be the property, possession, product or by-product of any thing or being we consciously experience or are aware *of* - whether beings, human or divine; forces, natural or supernatural; matter or energy, bodies or brains,

On the contrary, everything that is – all things and beings, all individual subjects and objects of consciousness – have their source in the Awareness that is God, and are nothing but shapes taken by that Awareness.

Awareness as such – pure awareness – is both inseparable and distinct from anything we are aware of - from its own myriad planes, patterns, shapes and qualities.

Being both distinct but inseparable from all its manifestations, God – Awareness - is both transcendent of all things and immanent within them all.

The very 'Being' or 'Is-ness' of Awareness itself is nothing but the pure Awareness of Being and of beings.

It is also an Awareness of Non-Being – not as Nothingness, but an infinite realm of Potentiality.

Potential realities, in principle, have any reality except in subjective Awareness - as potential shapes, patterns and planes of Awareness.

The Awareness that is God transcends Non-Being as well as Being, embracing as it does the reality of all that is Potential as well as all Actual beings and realities.

Creation is an on-going dynamic process whereby God – as an Awareness of all Potential beings, constantly and automatically releases them into Actuality - into their own autonomous process of Actualisation.

Awareness of Potentiality is the starting point of all Actualities – all that is - the very ground of Being and of beings.

The emergence or actualisation of any actual being or world of beings from Awareness of potentiality, automatically multiplies the number of possible or potential worlds and beings.

God is that Awareness within which all potentialities latent with Non-Being, including all worlds, all being - and all their potentialities of awareness - are constantly ‘coming-to-be’, constantly ‘be-ing’ actualised.

God does or creates nothing. For God is nothing but that Awareness, which simply but continuously and eternally *lets* all beings Be, thus allowing them to become all that they potentially Are.

All beings are ever-changing, individualised portions of the Awareness that is God, and thus innately divine.

Just as there can be nothing ‘outside’ space so there can be nothing ‘outside’ awareness and nothing outside ‘God’.

The awareness or ‘subjectivity’ which is God, and outside which there is nothing, is *not* that that awareness which is taken property of individual beings or ‘subjects’.

God is not a localised, personal subject that has or possesses awareness, but is Absolute Subjectivity – an unbounded and Ultimate Awareness that is the source of all individualised beings or subjects.