

LEVERAGE ON THE PROBLEM

From inside the knot, the view is quite wholesome, not to mention facile. The first obvious observation is that the strands are wrapped together. It is a knot in one place, not two. In fact, there would not be a knot if the strands were not intertwined in the same locality. The strands are already related as a knot. This may seem too obvious a point for submitting to one's august intelligence, but I hold that in the simple fact lies a profound truth: which is that the strands belong together naturally, of necessity. One is not foreign to the other. They are of the same family, the same order of things. The knot is of Providential Origin.

We are speaking of a person, Jesus, not of two people. The whole point of the quest for the historical Jesus is that in this one Person all the contradictions and differences meet and are subsumed. This has to be kept in mind: we are talking about one personality, not several. The knot is before us, not elsewhere. We are in its midst, not distinct from it.

The second obvious observation is that the knot can be untied. This, too, may seem the affirmation of a simpleton, but it, too, contains a profound truth: which is that we are dealing with matters which lie well

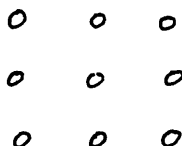
within the powers of human cognition. We do not have to throw up our hands with the pseudo-poet and declare that "never the twain shall meet." That is the response of a genuine simpleton (Pace, Kipling).

J. S. Bach was asked why he was so much a finer musician than his contemporaries. He replied that he worked harder than the rest. That was all. In his opinion, anyone who worked hard could be a great musician. It is the same here. He who declares a knot intractable, he who declares a conundrum unresolvable, is really declaring himself lazy. He who ridicules an ideal as "the counsel of perfection" is consulting his own fears. Like the sun, the human intellect is designed for probing into every dark cave and crevice -- with a little bit of effort -- and rendering everything bright and cheery. The effort has to be made. The yearning has to be intense. The work has to be steady and stealthy. These qualities of character are developed by only a few courageous souls who win the prize which others proclaim unattainable.

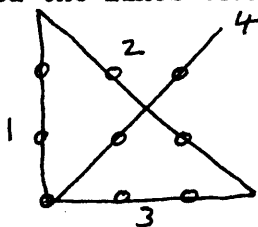
The knot can be untied.

Finally, we observe that the knot has to be gotten partly outside of for gaining leverage on its strands. This fact is not so well-known. Certainly it is not obvious to an ignoramus. But it is an old law: never accept a problem in exactly the terms in which it is handed to you -- except in the case that you wish to be done in. Expand beyond the terms of the problem so that you can approach it fresh and free. Realize that you must face the problem with more freedom of manoeuvre than it tells you you have. Knots are notorious tyrants. Do not accept the impudence of the knot. It is not going to have the final word. Get some leverage on it from beyond it.

There was once a puzzle that we children passed around. It looked like this:



We were told to connect all the dots with four straight lines without lifting pen from paper and without retracing any line. We began lining this way and that and kept missing a dot or two. The harder we tried the desperater we got until, finally, we asked someone who knew the puzzle how to solve it. Then we watched the lines being drawn, very carefully, thus:



We recognized our mistake instantly: we had been lining within the boundaries of the puzzle, within the terms of the problem. We needed to exceed those boundaries by a fraction in order to solve the problem. It was a lesson some of us never forgot.

For untying the knot represented by Islamic and Christian perceptions of Jesus of Nazareth and God, that is, of Jesus as aspirant and Jesus as God, the same principle must apply. The German Schoolmen were already pointing the direction to the needed leverage 200 years ago. I do not think they got to the key, at least not in any large numbers, but they were headed in the right direction: toward India.

Subsequent work in Biblical exegesis by Christian German Schoolmen shows all of the doubts and suspicions raised but little enough of the sense of

right direction and priority. In fact, Christian German scholarship right up to the present time, but with some notable exceptions, is astonishing for its inability to warm to anything that savors of genuine spiritual yearning. One is frequently left with the feeling that for a Christian German scholar the religious texts are odious to behold and onerous to examine -- but that their income depends on their scholarship so they do it regardless, however distasteful.

But this was not the flavor of German scholarship, at least in its non-Christian apotheosis, some years ago. The movement toward India was as positive as it was prescient. The search for genuine spiritual roots was as earnest as it was exemplary. And it was focused in the right direction: Vedic culture. This must be our direction, also. Vedic culture is the lever for resolving our problem, for extracting the strands so we can untie the knot.

One notable fruit of the German interest in Vedic culture is Lama Anagarika Govinda, a scholar of high achievement, an intellectual of unsurpassed excellence, a German national and a Tibetan Buddhist, living in a Tibetan monastery since young manhood. In fact, our Vedic lever will be, in part, Tibetan.

Vedic culture is man's most ancient culture and civilization. The Vedas themselves are man's most ancient and affluent spiritual texts. The written record of Indian history far exceeds in antiquity the written record of any other civilization, past or present. There is nowhere a written record of humankind which antedates the Ramayana, except the Vedas

themselves. When we are speaking of Vedic culture, therefore, we must cognize or at least be aware of the immense span of time about which we are talking. Egypt, China, Sumer, Africa, Australia -- these are but recent twigs on the great Tree of Life whose roots lie south of the Himalayas. It does some good for a person to pause long enough, to explore deeply enough, to marvel carefully enough at this vast organism called Vedic culture to get a feeling of its grandeur and indestructibility.

It is called Sanathana Dharma, the Eternal Righteousness or Right Conduct. It has been built up over countless millenia by incomparable heroes of spiritual experiment and exploration. The thrill, the excitement, the tantalizing, tingling enchantment of high adventure -- this is the inheritance of India's saints and sages, this is one's experience of Vedic culture. All the lust for romance, all the greed for happiness, all the anger at obstructions in the way, all the fear of what next, all the pride of who and what one is find in Vedic culture their final focus and finale. Vedic culture is the biggest "Yes" and the biggest "No" known to man. Vedic culture is both the fundamental and the supreme expression of every urge, every emotion, every thought, every word and every deed of which man is the capable heir and executive.

To say all this is not to speak in derogation of one's own civilization of birth. Far from it. It is of the nature of fire that a million lamps can be lit from one flame without diminishing that one's brilliance in the least. What makes India special and unique is that whereas other civilizations allow the flame of their lamp to get blown out by the winds of fortune and duress, the saints and sages of India have erected around

the flame of Vedic culture such a sure and indomitable protection that no force or exigency in this or any other world can or ever will blow it out. That is why Vedic culture is called Sanathana, Eternal.

We have a paradigm of this phenomenon in Western monasticism. Every monastic order has gone through decline and renewal, every one of them has stood by helplessly as its light flickered faintly and then blew out in the storms of worldly entanglements, to be relit again when God saw fit -- every one, that is, but one: the Carthusians. This minuscule band of indomitable opportunists was founded by a little-known Saint named Bruno. His idea was to make a monk's life so rigorous, so austere, so saturated in lonely asceticism that the senses could be brought permanently under control, the mind permanently reduced to impotency and the heart permanently established in communion with its Resident. In this aim Bruno was successful. And the basis of his success was the same as that of the success of all the great saints and sages, including Indian ones: renunciation of the body and its cravings, detachment from the mind and its whimsy. St. Bruno was not the only Western monastic founder to discover this secret of success in life, but he did manage to instill it more deeply and protect it more securely than his brother and sister founders did, with the possible exception of St. Teresa of Avila, whose Spiritual Preceptors ^(St. Jerome and) were St. Peter of Alcantara, a genuine Franciscan.

Well, in India not just one small order but a vast congregation of saints and sages has labored for millenia to protect and expound the priceless heritage which is Vedic culture. They have, furthermore, been assisted in their efforts by God Himself, Who has taken birth in India many times,

in various Guises, for watering the roots of faith and strengthening the foundations of Sanathana Dharma. This fact of the Incarnations of God, such as Rama and Krishna, is, perhaps, not so widely understood here in the West. Few have even heard the stories of these Avatars of the Lord, and of those who have, a mere handful regard them as historical records. But, if 200 million cows do not know that plenteous grass/grows just over the hill, yonder, this must be attributed to their ignorance, their fate, their lack of inquisitiveness, or to the fact that there is plenty of grass growing right under their feet. And in the last case mentioned, it does not matter, really, that they know that the grass under their feet has come to them compliments of the seed-grass growing just over the hill, yonder. It does not matter, that is, unless they are deliberately engaged in searching out the seed-grass itself, as we are here.

India is the spiritual seed-granary for mankind. She is the Flame from which all the religions of mankind have been lit. She is the Mother-Lode which aspirants from all times and climes come to mine, to get the pure gold of Wisdom and Power. From her store-houses the seeds of love are carried to distant quarters, the modes of happy living spread to the ends of the earth. The Avatars of the Lord are no small factor in the preparation and distribution of the seeds. In fact, they are the Seed.