

The Christ of India



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By Swami Nirmalananda Giri

Essene Christianity

At the time of Jesus there were two major currents or sects within Judaism: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were extremely concerned with strict external observance of their interpretation of the Mosaic Law, ritual worship, and theology. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were very little concerned with any of these and tended toward a kind of genteel agnosticism. Today these two

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groups might be compared with the Orthodox and the Reformed branches of Judaism respectively.

There was also a third sect which both was and was not part of Judaism. They were the Essenes, whose very name means “the Outsiders.”¹ Whether they chose this name for themselves or whether it was applied to them by the disdainful Pharisees and Sadducees is not known. But that they were incongruent (even incompatible) to the normal life of Israel at that time is certainly known.

Their claims about their very existence was a controversial matter. For the Essenes averred that Moses had created them as a secret fraternity within Judaism, with Aaron and his descendents at their head. The prophet Jeremiah was a Master of the Essenes, and it was in his lifetime that they ceased to be a secret society and became a public entity. From that time many of the Essenes began living in communities. Isaiah and Saint John the Baptist were also Masters of the Essenes. Their purpose was to follow a totally esoteric religious philosophy and practice that was derived from the Egyptian Mysteries. As the grandson of the Pharaoh, Moses had been an initiate of those Mysteries and destined to ultimately become the head of the Egyptian religion.² These Mysteries were

¹ “Essene” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Chitsonim*—“the outsiders.” Since Philo and other Jewish historians used “Essene” in writing about them, that has become the common usage.

² It was common in Egypt for the eldest son of the Pharaoh to inherit the throne, and the next eldest son to be made the head of the Egyptian religion. Although Moses was the only son of the Pharaoh’s daughter, he was adopted and his bloodline was not known. For this reason he could not be Pharaoh, but he could be put into the position usually given to the second son.

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themselves derived from the religion of India: Sanatana—or Arya—Dharma.³ Because of this the Essenes had always maintained some form of contact and interchange with India—a fact that galled their fellow Israelites. Regarding this, Alfred Edersheim, in his nineteenth century classic *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, wrote: “Their fundamental tendency was quite other than that of Pharisaism, and strongly tinged with Eastern elements.”

The reality of this contact with India is shown in the *Zohar* (2:188a-b), a compilation of ancient Jewish mystical traditions and the major text of the Jewish Kabbalah. It contains the following incident regarding the knowledge of an illumined Rabbi concerning the religion of India and the Vedic⁴ religious rite known as the Sandhya, which is an offering of prayers at dawn and sunset for enlightenment.

“Rabbi Yose and Rabbi Hiyya were walking on the road. While they were walking, night fell; they sat down. While they were sitting, morning began to shine; they rose and walked on. Rabbi Hiyya said, ‘See, the face of the East, how it shines! Now all the children of the East [in India], who dwell in the mountains of light [the Himalayas], are bowing down to this light, which shines on behalf of the sun before

³ Sanatana Dharma means “the Eternal Religion,” and Arya Dharma means “the religion of those who strive upward [Aryas].” Both Arya and Aryan are exclusively psychological terms having nothing whatsoever to do with birth, race, or nationality. In his teachings Buddha habitually referred to spiritually qualified people as “the Aryas.” Although in English translations we find the expressions: “The Four Noble Truths,” and “The Noble Eightfold Path,” Buddha actually said: “The Four Aryan Truths,” and “The Eightfold Aryan Path.”

⁴ “Vedic” means that which is associated with the Vedas—the oldest scriptures of India, considered the oldest scriptures of the world, that were revealed in meditation to the Vedic Rishis (Seers).

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it comes forth, and they are worshipping it....Now you might say: 'This worship is in vain!' but since ancient, primordial days they have discovered wisdom through it."

Their contact and interchange with Indian religion–Brahminical practices in particular–were manifested in several ways among the Essenes:

1) They practiced strict non-violence.

2) They were absolute vegetarians and would not touch alcohol in any form. Nor would they eat any food cooked by a non-Essene. (Edersheim says: "Its adherents would have perished of hunger rather than join in the meals of the outside world.")

3) They refused to wear anything of animal origin, such as leather or wool, usually making their clothes of linen.

4) They rejected animal sacrifice, insisting that the Torah had not originally ordered animal sacrifice, but that its text had been corrupted–in regard to that and many other practices as well. Their assertion was certainly corroborated by passages in the scriptures such as: "Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?"⁵ "To what purpose [is] the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord:...I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats."⁶ "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices."⁷ The quotations from Isaiah are particularly

⁵ Psalms 50:13

⁶ Isaiah 1:11

⁷ Jeremiah 7:22

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relevant since he was himself the Master of the Essenes.

It was the Essenes' contention that the "animals" originally offered in sacrifice were symbolic effigies of animals that represented the particular failing or fault from which the offerer wished to be freed. (Appollonius of Tyana taught this same thing in relation to the ancient Greek sacrifices, and urged a return to that form. Long before that, in India dough effigies were offered in "sacrifice."⁸) In the Essene practice, each person molded the effigies with his own hands, while praying and concentrating deeply on the traits he wished to have corrected, feeling that it was being transferred into the image. The effigies were made of five substances: powdered frankincense, flour, water, olive oil, and salt. When these had dried, they were taken to the tabernacle whose altar was a metal structure with a grating over the top and hot coals within. The effigies were laid upon this grating and burnt by the intense heat. As they burned, through the force of the heat the olive oil and frankincense liquefied and boiled or seeped upward. This fragrant liquid was called "the blood" of the sacrifice. It was this with which Moses consecrated the tabernacle, its equipment, and the priests,⁹ not animal blood. And it was just such a "lamb" whose "blood" was sprinkled on the doorposts in Egypt.¹⁰

⁸ See page 42 of *Ganesha*, by Chitralkha Singh and Prem Nath, published by Crest Publishing House of New Delhi.

⁹ Exodus 24:6,8

¹⁰ Exodus 12:7

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For the Passover observance, the Essenes would bake a lamb effigy using the same ingredients—except for the frankincense they would substitute honey and cinnamon. (Or, lacking honey, they would use a kind of raisin syrup.) This was the only paschal lamb acceptable to them—and therefore to Jesus and His Apostles.

Consequently, the Essenes refused to worship in Jerusalem, but maintained their own tabernacle on Mount Carmel. They did not have an actual building on Mount Carmel, but a tent-tabernacle made according to the original directions given to Moses on Mount Sinai. They considered the Jerusalem temple unacceptable because it was a stone structure built according to Greco-Roman style rather than the simple and humble tabernacle form given to Moses—a form that symbolized both the physical and psychic makeup of the human being. Further, the Jerusalem temple was built by Herod who, completely subservient to Rome, disdained Judaism and practiced a kind of Roman agnostic piety. Because of this the temple was ritually unclean in their estimation. They placated the Jerusalem Temple priests by sending them large donations of money. On occasion they gave useful animals to the Temple in Jerusalem, but only with the condition that they would be allowed to live out their natural span of life.

5) They interpreted the Torah and other Hebrew scriptures in an almost exclusively spiritual, symbolic, and metaphysical manner (as did the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo). They also had esoteric writings of their

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own which they would not allow non-Essenes to see. But even more objectionable to the other Hebrews was their study and acceptance of “alien” scriptures—the holy books of other religions—so much so that an official condemnation was made of this practice. In contrast to all those around them, the Essenes held a universal, eclectic view of religion.

6) Celibacy was prized by them, being often observed even in marriage, and many of them led monastic lives of total renunciation.

7) They considered their male and female members—all of whom were literate—to be spiritual equals, and both sexes were prophets and teachers among them. This, too, was the practice in Hinduism at that time, women also wearing the sacred thread.

8) They denied the doctrine of the physical resurrection of the dead at the end of time, which was held by some Pharisees—who usually believed in reincarnation—and later became a tenet of Mediterranean Christianity.

9) They believed in reincarnation and the law of karma and the ultimate reunion of the soul with God. This is clearly indicated by the Apostles asking Jesus about a blind man: “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?”¹¹

10) They believed that the sun was a divine manifestation, imparting spiritual powers to both body and mind. They faced the rising and setting sun and recited prayers of worship, refusing, upon rising in the morning, to

¹¹ John 9:2. See our publication *May a Christian Believe in Reincarnation?*

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speak a single word until the conclusion of those prayers. They did not consider the sun was a god, but a symbol of the One God of Light and Life. It was, though, felt that appropriate prayers directed toward the sun would evoke a divine response. (See Jesus' words to the king of Kashmir as recorded in the *Bhavishya Maha Purana* that are given later on.)

11) They believed in both divination and the powers of prophecy.

12) They believed in the power of occult formulas, or mantras,¹² as well as esoteric rituals, and practiced theurgy (spiritual "magic") with them.

13) They believed in astrology, cast horoscopes, and made "magical" amulets of plants and gems according to astrological aspects. They also believed that angels had taught Moses the practice of herbalism.

14) They believed that miraculous cures were natural extensions of authentic spiritual life.

15) They would wear only white clothes¹³ as a sign that they worshipped God Who is Light and were clothed by Him in light. This so provoked the other Israelites that praying in white clothing was prohibited by the Pharisees and Sadducees, and laws were drafted accordingly. (The Mishnah *begins* with such a prohibition.)

¹² Mantra: Sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains perfection or realization of the Self. Literally, "a transforming thought" [*manat trayate*], or more exactly: "a *transubstantiating* thought." A mantra, then is a sound formula that transforms the consciousness.

¹³ The disciples of Saint Thomas in India had a similar rule, only wearing white clothes in worship.

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16) They observed the identical rules of purity (shuddhi) as the Brahmins in India at that time, especially in the matter of bathing frequently.

17) They practiced the strictest adherence to truthfulness.¹⁴

It should also be noted that most of these Brahminical practices were observed by Buddhists as well, so it is not out of place to consider that the Essenes—and Jesus and His disciples—possessed the qualities of both Hindu and Buddhist religion.

From all this we can see why Edersheim states that “In respect of doctrine, life, and worship, it [the Essene community] really stood *outside* Judaism.” As a result of these differences from ordinary Judaism, the Essenes lived totally apart from their fellow Hebrews, usually in separate communities or in communal houses in the towns and cities. (The supposed “communal experiment” in the book of Acts¹⁵ was really a continuation of the Essene way of life. The Last Supper took place in just such an Essene “house.”)

The History of Isha Messiah—Jesus the Christ¹⁶

Among the Essenes of Israel at the threshold of the

¹⁴ Travellers in past centuries cited the strict adherence to truth by the Brahmins of India as a great and admirable wonder.

¹⁵ “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).

¹⁶ Much of what follows regarding the life of Jesus is based on historical documentation that we hope to eventually present in book form. Other statements regarding the life of Jesus are based on oral tradition that, of course, cannot be documented.

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Christian Era, none were better known or respected than Joachim and Anna of Nazareth. Joachim was noted for his great piety, wealth, and charity. The richest man in Israel, his practice was to divide his increase into thirds, giving one third to the temples of Carmel and Jerusalem and one third to the poor, keeping only one third for himself. Anna was renowned as a prophetess and teacher among the Essenes. Their daughter Mary [Miryam], Who had been conceived miraculously beneath the Holy of Holies of the Temple, had passed thirteen years of Her life as a Temple Virgin until her espousal to Joseph of Nazareth. Before their marriage was performed, She was discovered to have conceived supernaturally, and in time She gave birth to a Son in a cave of Bethlehem. His given name was Jesus (Yeshua in Aramaic and Yahoshua in Hebrew).

This Son of Miryam was as miraculous as His Mother, and astounding wonders were worked and manifested daily in His life—for the preservation of which His parents took Him into Egypt for some years where they lived with the various Essene communities there. But before that flight, when the Child had been about three years old, sages from India¹⁷ had come to pay Him homage and to establish a link of communication with Him, for His destiny was to live most of His life with them in the land of Eternal Dharma before returning to Israel as a messenger of the very illumination

¹⁷ “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matthew 2:1,2)

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that had originally been at the heart of the Essene order. Through the intermediary of merchants and travellers both to and from India, contact was maintained with their destined Disciple.

At the age of twelve, during the passover observances on Mount Carmel (not in Jerusalem), Jesus petitioned the elders of the Essenes for initiation—something bestowed only on adults after careful instruction and scrutiny. Because of His well-known supernatural character, the elders examined Him before all those present. Not only could He answer all their questions perfectly, when the examination was ended He began to examine *them*, putting to them questions and statements that were utterly beyond their comprehension. In this way He demonstrated that the Essene order had nothing whatever to teach Him, and that there was no need for Him to undergo any initiation or instruction from them.

Upon His return to Nazareth preparations were begun for His journeying into India to formally become a disciple of those Masters who had come to Him nine years before. The necessary preliminaries took something more than a year, but sometime between the age of thirteen or fourteen¹⁸, Jesus of Nazareth set forth on a spiritual pilgrimage that would transform Jesus the Nazarene into Isha the Lord, the Teacher of Dharma and Messiah of

¹⁸ Nicholas Roerich, in his book *Himalaya: A Monograph*, said that according to the Tibetan scrolls he found in 1925, Isha was thirteen when He left for India. The *Nathanamavali* of the Nath Yogis, which we will be considering later on, says that Isha reached India when He was fourteen.

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Israel.

The spiritual training of Jesus

In the Himalayan fastnesses Jesus was instructed in yoga and the highest spiritual life, receiving the spiritual name “Isha,” which means Lord, Master, or Ruler, a descriptive title often applied to God, as in the Isha Upanishad. Isha is also a particular title of Shiva.¹⁹

The worship of Shiva centered in the form of the natural elliptical stone known as the Shiva Linga (Symbol of Shiva) was a part of the spiritual heritage of Jesus, for His ancestor Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, was a worshipper of that form. The Linga which he worshipped is today enshrined in Mecca within the Kaaba. The stone, which is black in color, is said to have been given to Abraham by the Archangel Gabriel, who instructed him in its worship.

Such worship did not end with Abraham, but was practiced by his grandson Jacob, as is shown in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Unwittingly, because of the dark, Jacob used a Shiva Linga for a pillow and consequently had a vision of Shiva standing above the Linga which was symbolically seen as a ladder to heaven by means of which devas (shining ones) were coming and going. Recalling the

¹⁹ Shiva: A name of God meaning “One Who is all Bliss and the giver of happiness to all.” Although classically applied to the Absolute Brahman, Shiva can also refer to God (Ishwara) in His aspect of Dissolver and Liberator (often mistakenly thought of as “destroyer”).

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devotion of Abraham and Isaac, Shiva spoke to Jacob and blessed him to be an ancestor of the Messiah. Upon awakening, Jacob declared that God was in that place though he had not realized it. The light of dawn revealed to him that his pillow had been a Shiva Linga, so he set it upright and worshipped it with an oil bath, as is traditional in the worship of Shiva, naming it (not the place) Bethel: the Dwelling of God. (In another account in the thirty-fifth chapter, it is said that Jacob “poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.” This, too, is traditional, both milk and honey—which Shiva promised Moses would flow abundantly in Israel—being poured over the Linga as offerings.) From thenceforth that place became a place of pilgrimage and worship of Shiva in the form of the Linga stone. Later Jacob had another vision of Shiva, Who told him: “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me.”²⁰ A perusal of the Old Testament will reveal that Bethel was the spiritual center for the descendants of Jacob, even above Jerusalem.

Although this tradition of Shiva [Linga] worship has faded from the memory of the Jews and Christians, in the nineteenth century it was evidenced in the life of the stigmatic Anna Catherine Emmerich, an Augustinian Roman Catholic nun. On several occasions when she was deathly ill, angelic beings brought her crystal Shiva Lingas which they

²⁰ Genesis 31:13

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had her worship by pouring water over them. When she drank that water she would be perfectly cured. Furthermore, on major Christian holy days she would have out-of-body experience in which she would be taken to Hardwar, a city sacred to Shiva in the foothills of the Himalayas, and from there to Mount Kailash, the traditional abode of Shiva, which she said was the spiritual heart of the world.

Isha's life in India

For the next few years the Himalayas became Jesus' well-travelled home. During part of that time Jesus meditated in a cave north of the present-day city of Rishikesh, one of the most sacred locales of India, and also on the banks of the Ganges in the holy city of Hardwar. In the years He spent in the Himalayas, He attained the supreme heights of spiritual realization.

Having attained perfect inner wisdom in the Himalayas, Jesus journeyed to the Gangetic plain to engage in the formal study that would prepare Him for the public teaching of Sanatana Dharma both in India and in the countries between India and Israel as well as in Israel itself.

First he went to live in Benares, the spiritual heart of India, the city most consecrated to the worship of Shiva and the major center of Vedic learning in all of India. During His time in the Himalayas, Jesus' endeavors had been centered almost exclusively on the practice of yoga. In Benares Jesus engaged in intense study of the spiritual teachings

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embodied in the Vedic scriptures—especially the books of spiritual philosophy known as the Upanishads.

He then journeyed to the sacred city of Jagannath Puri, which at that time was a great center of the worship of Shiva, second only to Benares. In Puri Jesus officially adopted the monastic life and lived some time as a member of the Govardhan Math,²¹ the monastery founded three centuries before His birth by the foremost philosopher-saint of India known as Adi Shankaracharya.²² There He perfected the synthesis of yoga, philosophy, and renunciation, and eventually began to publicly teach the Eternal Knowledge.

As a teacher Jesus was as popular as He was proficient in teaching, and gained great notoriety among all levels of society. However, because He insisted that all men should learn and be taught the meaning of the Vedas and their allied scriptures and began teaching the “lower” castes accordingly, as well as teaching that all could attain spiritual perfection without the intermediary of external, ritualized

²¹ The residence of Isha in the Govardhan Math proves that He was both an adherent of the Vedic religion and a Vedic monk (sannyasi) of the Shankaracharya tradition. In the nineteen-fifties, the former head of the Govardhan Math, and head of the entire monastic Swami Order of Shankaracharya, Jagadguru Bharat Krishna Tirtha, claimed that he had discovered “incontrovertible historical evidence” that Jesus had lived in the Govardhan Math as well as in other places of India. He was writing a book on the subject, but died before it could be finished. Unfortunately the fate of his manuscript and research is presently unknown.

²² Shankara: Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order.

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religion, He incurred the hatred of many religious “professionals” in Puri who began to plot His death.

Since “His hour was not yet come,”²³ He left Puri and returned to the Himalayas where He again spent quite some time in meditation, preparing Himself for His return to Israel. He also lived in various Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayan region, studying the wisdom of the Buddha.

Before beginning the long journey westward, instructions were given Him regarding His mission in the West and the way messages could be sent between Jesus and His Indian teachers. Jesus was aware of the form and purpose of His life and death from His very birth, but it was the Indian Masters who made everything clear to Him regarding them. They promised Jesus that He would be sent a container of Himalayan Balsam to be poured upon His head by a close disciple as a sign that His death was imminent, even “at the door.” When Saint Mary Magdalene performed this action in Bethany, Jesus understood the unspoken message, saying: “She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.”²⁴

Return to the West

Jesus then set forth on His return journey to Israel with the blessings of the Masters to thenceforth be a Dharmacharya,²⁵ a missionary of Arya Dharma to the

²³ John 7:30; 8:20

²⁴ Mark 14:8

²⁵ Teacher of Righteousness (Dharma), a title also used by the Essenes for their master teachers.

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Mediterranean world, which at that time was “the West.” All along His way, Jesus taught those who were drawn to His spiritual magnetism and who sought His counsel in the divine life. He promised that after some years He would be sending them one of His disciples who would give them even more knowledge and benefit.

Arriving in Israel, Jesus went directly to the Jordan where his cousin John, the Master of the Essenes, was baptizing. There His Christhood was revealed to John and those who had “the eyes to see and the ears to hear.”²⁶ In this way His brief mission to Israel was begun. Its progress and conclusion are well known, so we need not recount it here except to rectify one point after the next section.

Misunderstanding becomes a religion

Throughout the Gospels we see that the disciples of Jesus consistently misunderstood his speaking of higher spiritual matters. When he spoke of the sword of wisdom they showed him swords of metal to assure him they were well equipped.²⁷ When he warned them against the “leaven” of the Scribes and Pharisees they thought he was complaining that they did not have any bread.²⁸ Is it any wonder, then that he said to them: “Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? How

²⁶ Deuteronomy 29:4

²⁷ Luke 22:36-38

²⁸ Mark 8:15,16

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is it that ye do not understand?”²⁹ Even in the moment of his final departure from them, their words showed that they still believed the kingdom of God was an earthly political entity and not the realm of spirit.³⁰ This being so, the Gospels themselves must be approached with grave caution and with the awareness that Jesus was not the creator of a new religion, but a messenger of the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Religion he had learned in India. As a priest of the Saint Thomas Christian Church of South India once commented to me: “You cannot understand the teachings of Jesus if you do not know the scriptures of India.” And if you do know the scriptures of India you can see where—however well-intentioned they may have been—the authors of the Gospels often completely missed the point and garbled the words and ideas they heard from Jesus, even attributing to him incidents from the life of Buddha (such as the Widow’s Mite) and mistaking his quotations from the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Dhammapada for doctrines original to him. For example, the opening verse of the Gospel of John, which has been cited through the centuries as proof of the unique character and mission of Jesus, is really a paraphrase of the Rig Veda verse: “In the beginning was Prajapati, with Him was the Word, and the Word was truly the Supreme Brahman.”³¹ Having confused Christ with

²⁹ Mark 8:17,18,21

³⁰ Acts 1:6

³¹ *Prajapati vai idam agra asit. Tasya vak dvitiya asit. Vag vai paramam Brahman.*

Prajapati refers to God as Creator, and Brahman to God in His Absolute Transcendent Being.

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Jesus, things could only go downhill for them and their followers until the true Gospel of Christ was buried beneath two millennia of confusion and theological debris.

Return to India—not ascension

It is generally supposed that at the end of His ministry in Israel Jesus ascended into heaven. But Saint Matthew and Saint John, the two Evangelists that were eye-witnesses of His departure, do not even mention such a thing, for they knew that He went to India after departing from them. Saint Mark and Saint Luke, who were not there, simply speak of Jesus being taken up into the heavens. The truth is that He departed into India, though it is not unlikely that He did rise up and “fly” there. This form of travel is not unknown to the Indian yogis.

That Jesus did not leave the world at the age of thirty-three was written about by Saint Irenaeus of Lyon in the second century. He claimed that Jesus lived to be fifty or more years old before leaving the earth, though he also said that Jesus was crucified at the age of thirty-three. This would mean that Jesus lived twenty years after the crucifixion. This assertion of Saint Irenaeus has puzzled Christian scholars for centuries, but if we put it together with other traditions it becomes comprehensible. Basilides of Alexandria, Mani of Persia, and Julian the Emperor said that Jesus had gone to India after His crucifixion.

Some Buddhist historical records about Jesus

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A contemporary written record of the life and teachings of Jesus in India was discovered in 1887 by the Russian traveler Nicholas Notovitch during his wanderings in Ladakh. He had it translated from the Tibetan text (the original, kept in the Marbour monastery near Lhasa, was in Pali) and, despite intense opposition from Christians in Russia and Europe, published it in his book *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*.³²

As would be expected, the authenticity of Notovitch's book was attacked³³ and various articles written claiming that the monks of the Himis monastery, where Notovitch had found the manuscript, told investigators that they knew nothing of Notovitch or the text. But both Swami Abhedananda and Swami Trigunatitananda—direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna³⁴ and preachers of Vedanta³⁵ in America—went at separate times to the Himis monastery.

³² An online version of *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ* is available at http://www.atmajyoti.org/sw_unknown_life.asp.

³³ Immediately after the publication of the English edition of Notovitch's book, the British Government in India hired Moslems to go throughout Ladakh and neighboring areas posing as Hindus in search of further manuscripts about Jesus in India. They were to buy the manuscripts and bring them to their employers to be destroyed. Whether this shameful ruse succeeded we have no knowledge.

³⁴ Ramakrishna: Sri Ramakrishna lived in India in the second half of the nineteenth century, and is regarded by all India as a perfectly enlightened person—and by many as an Incarnation of God.

³⁵ Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana or the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa.

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The monks there not only assured them that Notovitch had spent some time in the monastery as he claimed, they also showed them the manuscript—part of which they translated for Swami Abhedananda, who knew from having read Notovitch’s book that it was indeed the same writing found in *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*. Subsequently, Abhedananda had the English translation of Notovitch’s text printed in India where the Christian authorities had until then prohibited both its publication or its importation and sale.

Swami Trigunatitananda not only saw the manuscript in Himis, he also was shown two paintings of Jesus. One was a depiction of His conversation with the Samaritan Woman at the well. The other was of Jesus meditating in the Himalayan forest surrounded by wild beasts that were tamed by His very presence. A copy made from his description is reproduced on the cover of this booklet.

Later, Dr. Nicholas Roerich, the renowned scholar, philosopher, artist, and explorer, traveled in Ladakh and also was shown the manuscript and assured by the monks that Jesus had indeed lived in several Buddhist monasteries during His “lost years.” He wrote about his own viewing of the scrolls in his book *The Heart of Asia*.

In 1921 the Himis monastery was visited by Henrietta Merrick who, in her book *In the World’s Attic* tells of learning about the records of Jesus’ life that were kept there. She wrote: “In Leh is the legend of Jesus who is called Issa, and the Monastery at Himis holds precious

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documents fifteen hundred years old which tell of the days that he passed in Leh where he was joyously received and where he preached.”

In 1939 Elizabeth Caspari visited the Himis monastery. The Abbot showed her some scrolls, which he allowed her to examine, saying: “These books say your Jesus was here.”

Robert Ravicz, a former professor of anthropology at California State University at Northridge, visited Himis in 1975. A Ladakh physician he met there spoke of Jesus’ having been there during His “lost years.”

In the late 1970s Edward Noack, author of *Amidst Ice and Nomads in High Asia*, and his wife visited the Himis monastery. A monk there told him: “There are manuscripts in our library that describe the journey of Jesus to the East.”

Toward the end of this century the diaries of a Moravian Missionary, Karl Marx, were discovered in which he writes of Notovitch and his finding of scrolls about “Saint Issa.” (Marx’s diaries are kept in the Moravian Mission museum. The pages about Notovitch and the scrolls have “disappeared” and their existence is now denied in an attempt to discredit Notovitch, but before their disappearance they were photographed by a European researcher and have been made public.)

From all this testimony we see that Jesus studied the Buddhist Dharma as well as the Hindu Dharma during His life in India.

Notovitch also claimed that the Vatican Library had

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sixty-three manuscripts from India, China, Egypt, and Arabia—all giving information about Jesus' life.

In 1812, Meer Izzut-oolah, a Persian, was sent to Ladakh and central Asia by the East India Company. Though religion was not his mission, he observed much and subsequently wrote in his book *Travels in Central Asia*: “They keep sculptured representations of departed saints, prophets and lamas in their temples for contemplation. Some of these figures are said to represent a certain prophet who is living in the heavens, which would appear to point to Jesus Christ.”

When Swami Abhedananda was in the Himis monastery doing his research on the records of Jesus life in India he was told by the abbot that Jesus had not departed from the earth at the time His Apostles saw Him ascend, but that He had returned to India where he lived with the Himalayan yogis for many years.

The Nathanamavali

The Bengali educator and patriot, Bipin Chandra Pal, published an autobiographical sketch in which he revealed that Vijay Krishna Goswami, a renowned saint of Bengal and a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, told him about spending time in the Aravalli mountains with a group of extraordinary ascetic monk-yogis known as Nath Yogis. The monks spoke to him about Isha Nath, whom they looked upon as one of the great teachers of their order. When Vijay Krishna expressed interest in this venerable guru, they read his life

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as recorded in one of their sacred books, the *Nathanamavali*.³⁶ It was the life of Him Whom the Goswami knew as Jesus the Christ! Here is the relevant portion of that book:

“Isha Natha came to India at the age of fourteen. After this he returned to his own country and began preaching. Soon after, his brutish and materialistic countrymen conspired against him and had him crucified. After crucifixion, or perhaps even before it, Isha Natha entered samadhi by means of yoga.³⁷

“Seeing him thus, the Jews presumed he was dead, and buried him in a tomb. At that very moment however, one of his gurus, the great Chetan Natha, happened to be in profound meditation in the lower reaches of the Himalayas, and he saw in a vision the tortures which Isha Natha was undergoing. He therefore made his body lighter than air and passed over to the land of Israel.

“The day of his arrival was marked with thunder and lightning, for the gods were angry with the Jews, and the whole world trembled. When Chetan Natha arrived, he took the body of Isha Natha from the tomb, woke him from his samadhi, and later led him off to the sacred land of the Aryans. Isha Natha then established an ashram in the lower

³⁶ Regarding the Nath Yogis’ tradition, Sri Pal comments: “It is also their conjecture that Jesus Christ and this Isha Nath are one and the same person.” Perhaps they were the yogis with which Isha lived either before His return to Israel or after His secret return to India after His ascension.

³⁷ In samadhi yogis often leave their bodies, so it is not amiss to say that Jesus did indeed “die” on the cross.

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regions of the Himalayas and he established the cult of the lingam there.”³⁸

This assertion is supported by two relics of Jesus which are presently found in Kashmir. One is His staff, which is kept in the monastery of Aish-Muqan and is made accessible to the public in times of public catastrophe such as floods or epidemics. The other is the Stone of Moses—a Shiva linga that had belonged to Moses and which Jesus brought to Kashmir. This linga is kept in the Shiva temple at Bijbehara in Kashmir. One hundred and eight pounds in weight, if eleven people put one finger on the stone and recite “Ka” over and over, it will rise three feet or so into the air and remain suspended as long as the recitation continues.³⁹ “Shiva” means one who is auspicious and gives blessings and happiness. In ancient Sanskrit the word *ka* means to please and to satisfy—that which Shiva does for His worshippers.

The Bhavishya Maha Purana

One ancient book of Kashmiri history, the *Bhavishya Maha Purana*, gives the following account of the meeting of a king of Kashmir with Jesus sometime after the middle of the first century:

“When the king of the Sakas came to the Himalayas, he saw a dignified person of golden complexion wearing a long

³⁸ “The cult of the lingam” refers to the Shaivite branch of Hinduism. We will speak more on that later.

³⁹ I have met two people who have “raised the Stone of Moses.” One of them said that the number required to raise the Stone relates to their spiritual development—that he had raised it with only three others.

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white robe. Astonished to see this foreigner, he asked, 'Who are you?' The dignified person replied in a pleasant manner: 'Know me as Son of God [Isha Putram], or Born of a Virgin [Kumarigarbhasangbhawam]. Being given to truth and penances, I preached the Dharma to the mlecchas....O King, I hail from a land far away, where there is no truth, and evil knows no limits. I appeared in the country of the mlecchas as Isha Masiha [Jesus Messiah] and I suffered at their hands. For I said unto them, "Remove all mental and bodily impurities. Remember the Name of our Lord God. Meditate upon Him Whose abode is in the center of the sun."⁴⁰ There in the land of mleccha darkness, I taught love, truth, and purity of heart. I asked human beings to serve the Lord. But I suffered at the hands of the wicked and the guilty. In truth, O King, all power rests with the Lord, Who is in the center of the sun. And the elements, and the cosmos, and the sun, and God Himself, are forever. Perfect, pure, and blissful, God is always in my heart. Thus my Name has been established as Isha Masiha.' After having heard the pious words from the lips of this distinguished person, the king felt peaceful, made obeisance to him, and returned."⁴¹ The word *mleccha* is a powerfully derogatory term meaning one who is unclean, barbaric and abhorrent, an alien to all that is good and true. A mleccha is execrable on all levels of his being. The fact that Jesus would refer the Israelites

⁴⁰ One of the fundamental practices of Hinduism is the recitation twice a day of the Savitri Gayatri Mantra, a prayer for enlightenment directed to the Solar Power.

⁴¹ *Bhavisya Maha Purana* 3.2.9-31

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themselves as “mlecchas” and Israel as “the land of the mlecchas...where there is no truth, and evil knows no limits...the land of mleccha darkness” indicates that He in no way identified with either the people or the religion of Israel. He was fully a *Sanatana Dharmi*—follower of the Eternal Dharma.

Another Kashmiri history, the *Rajatarangini*, written in 1148 A.D., says that a great saint named Issana lived at Issabar on the bank of Dal Lake and had many disciples, one of which he raised from the dead.

When teaching in Israel, Jesus told the people: “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold,”⁴² speaking of His Indian disciples. For when Jesus came to the Jordan at the beginning of His ministry, He had spent more years of His life in India than in Israel. And He returned there for the remainder of His life, because in all things He was a Son of India—the Christ of India.⁴³

Master and disciple

In India it is often said that “the father is born again in

⁴² John 10:16

⁴³ “[Lord Jesus] disappeared at the ages of thirteen and reappeared in his thirty-first year. During this period, from his thirteenth to his thirty-first year, he came to India and practiced Yoga...Jesus left Jerusalem and reached the land of Indus in the company of merchants. He visited Varanasi, Rajgriha and other places in India. He spent several years in Hindustan. Jesus lived like a Hindu or a Buddhist monk, a life of burning renunciation and dispassion. He assimilated the ideals, precepts and principles of Hinduism. Christianity is modified Hinduism only, which was suitable for those people who lived in the period of Christ. Really speaking, Jesus was a child of the soil of India only. That is the reason why there is so much of similarity between his teachings and the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism.” (Swami Sivananda Saraswati in *Lives of Saints*)

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the son.” This ancient adage applies also to the worthy disciple—in him the master continues his work. This being so, the character and mission of Jesus the Christ of India can be traced in that of His Apostle Thomas.

Saint Thomas the Apostle in India

After the departure of Jesus from Israel and the empowerment bestowed on the Apostles at Pentecost, it was decided that they would separate and go throughout the Mediterranean regions teaching those who sought the revelation of their own Christhood. Accordingly, eleven of the Twelve Apostles and many of the Seventy determined through divination where they should go and preach the Good News of Christ.

One alone did not participate in this, and that was Judas Thomas, called “the Twin.”⁴⁴ His assignment had been given him by Jesus Himself. Thomas was to depart for India where He would be instructed by those who had taught Jesus before him. He, too, would study in the Himalayas, in Benares, and in Puri. For Jesus had destined him for a work completely unlike that of the other Apostles. He was indeed to become the “twin” of his Master, perhaps the most true in his likeness to Jesus both inwardly and outwardly. (It is a matter of record that Judas Thomas was also physically identical to Jesus. This was unusual but not impossible or

⁴⁴ Thomas is a nickname derived from the Syrian (Aramaic) word *t'omo*, which means twin. The Apostle's true name was Judas (as is recorded in the ancient Syriac Gospel texts), but it was not used in the Gospels so he would neither bear the name of the Betrayer nor be mistakenly identified with him by those who would only hear them read.

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even unknown, since he was a cousin of Jesus—as were most of the Apostles.)

So overwhelming did his task seem to Saint Thomas that he tried to avoid this mission. Yet it was not long before a government official from India came to Israel to find an architect for his king, who wished a palace built by an artisan from the land of the renowned Hiram Abiff, whose construction of the Temple of Solomon was known throughout the world. Jesus manifested in a physical body and sold Saint Thomas to the man as a slave, giving him a signed document to that effect! When confronted with this document, Saint Thomas abandoned his resistance and left for India where he did in truth follow the steps of his Master and become His “twin” in all things. In the life of Saint Thomas written by the Christian Gnostic Bardaisan (based on letters written by Saint Thomas—perhaps to his Persian disciples), he is referred to as: “Twin brother of Christ, apostle of the Highest who shares in the knowledge of the hidden word of Christ, recipient of His secret pronouncements.” Regarding the records of Jesus’ life that he found in the Himis monastery, Notovitch wrote this interesting remark in relation to Saint Thomas: “[The scrolls] may have actually been spoken by St. Thomas, historical sketches having been traced by his own hand or under his direction.”

In the Himalayas Saint Thomas was reunited with Jesus until he was sent for study to Benares and Puri. While Saint Thomas was in Puri, happily studying and teaching the

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Vedic wisdom, he received the inner call to return to “the West” for the impending departure of the Virgin Mary from this earthly life. Just as he had been separated from his brother Apostles for a special mission, so he was in the final hour of the Virgin’s life. For he did not reach Ephesus in time to be present at Her going forth from the body, but only came there on foot the third day after Her burial. As he was approaching Her tomb unawares, he was astounded to see Her radiant living body emerge from the stone sepulchre and ascend. Realizing that She had finished Her span of life without his presence, and fearing that he would never see Her divine form again, he cried out to Her in anguish of heart, imploring Her not to leave him desolate. Looking upon him with loving tenderness, the Virgin took from Her waist the belt She habitually wore and threw it down to him with words of blessing. Then She arose from sight, ascending to the same glory as Her Son.

Carrying the precious relic of Her belt, Saint Thomas hastened into Ephesus and announced to the grieving Apostles and all those gathered in the Mother’s house that She, too, was risen from the dead into heavenly life. Whereas he had doubted the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and had received proof of its reality by touching the resurrected body of his Lord, now it was Thomas who gave physical evidence that Mary, too, was “alive for evermore.”⁴⁵

Saint Thomas took the Virgin Mother’s belt with him to

⁴⁵ Revelation 1:18

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India, and there it became the most valued treasure of his disciples, whose descendants in time came to be known as “Saint Thomas Christians.” A few centuries ago, in times of upheaval in India, it was taken into Syria, where during subsequent troubles in that country it disappeared. About thirty years ago the present head of the Syrian Jacobite Church, Patriarch Zachariah, felt an intense urge to find the belt, and began studying the ancient records concerning it. Noticing that one of the handwritten books he consulted had an unusually thick binding, he was inspired with the thought that the belt might be hidden there. Cutting it open, he found the prize, whose simple touch began to work great miracles. Most of the belt has been returned to India and enshrined in a great church where every Saturday (the day sacred to the worship of the Mother aspect of God in Hinduism) thousands of Christians, Hindus, and Moslems gather for the sacred Eucharist (Qurbana) and prayers to the Virgin. The miracles granted are beyond number. When I visited the shrine one Saturday as the guest of its administrator, Bishop Gregorios—who preached on the subject of the concept of Mahashakti⁴⁶ in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam—I witnessed this wonderful demonstration that it is worship and not theologizing that can unite the adherents of all religions in love and harmony.

Before returning to India for the fulfillment of his commission from Jesus, Saint Thomas went to visit the

⁴⁶ Mahashakti (Supreme Power) is a Sanskrit term applied to the Divine Feminine aspect of Divinity. The bishop spoke of Mahashakti being the same as the Holy Spirit, and the Virgin Mary as a perfect reflection of the Holy Spirit.

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Essene communities of Israel, urging that some of them come with him to India to both escape the imminent destruction in Israel by the Romans. Many did so, and a company of Essenes⁴⁷ headed by Saint Thomas arrived in South India (Kerala) in 52 A.D. A Hindu Brahmin family near the town of Palur, Kerala, has a document of family history wherein it is written: “In the Kali year 3153 [52 A.D.] the foreigner Thomas Sannyasi came to our village and preached there.” It is noteworthy that Saint Thomas is described as a Hindu monk (sannyasi), which he would have to have been if he truly followed in the steps of Jesus. In Kerala He formed several communities as the nucleus of the Ishanni Sampradaya⁴⁸—but not as a religion separate from Vedic Dharma.

Ancient records say that frequently Jesus was seen in South India and mistaken for Saint Thomas. He and Saint Thomas were sometimes seen speaking together. Apparently Jesus occasionally came down from His Himalayan abode to visit Saint Thomas and supervise his work.

The disciples of Saint Thomas

⁴⁷ These Essenes started several villages in the same area. At the end of the twentieth century those sites were excavated and many coins like those found in the Qumran caves were unearthed.

⁴⁸ A sampradaya is a lineage of spiritual teaching stemming from an enlightened teacher, such as the Vaishnava Sampradaya, Madhavacharya Sampradaya, Shankara Sampradaya, etc. Since their teaching originated with Jesus (Isha), the disciples of Saint Thomas were the Ishanni [“of Jesus”] Sampradaya.

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By their own preference the disciples of Saint Thomas were usually referred to in India as “Ishannis.” This means “of Isha,” just as Lutheran means “of Luther.” Although Jesus’ Aramaic name was Yeshua, in India He was known as Isha. Perhaps Ishanni could awkwardly, but accurately, be translated “Jesusites” or “Isha-ites.” Some Indian scholars such as Swami Abhedananda make the conjecture that either Ishanni is actually a derivation of Essene (Essenes), or that the Essenes themselves were called Ishannis, “Isha” in their case being a reference to God “the Lord.” This would certainly reveal their Vedic spiritual roots.

In his commentary on the Gospels, Paramhansa Yogananda wrote: “It is important to note the difference between Jesus the man and Jesus the Christ. Jesus was the name of the man. The Sanskrit origin of this name is found in the word ‘Isha,’ or Lord of Creation. Mispronounced by travellers in many lands, and being used in many different languages, the word ‘Jesus’ came to be used in place of Isha.”

Nearly all those who accepted the teachings of Saint Thomas were devout Brahmins⁴⁹ of the highest level (Nambudiri and Nair) who continued their Vedic religious observances, but did so according to the principles Isha and Saint Thomas had received as disciples of the Masters of Wisdom. Those of other castes did the same, becoming

⁴⁹ Even today, many Saint Thomas Christians wear the “sacred thread” (*yajnopavita*) that is the distinctive mark of Hindu Brahmins.

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equally observant with their Brahmin brothers. Acknowledging this fact, Cardinal Eugene Tisserant wrote in *Eastern Christianity in India*: “Christianity was introduced in Malabar [Kerala] and accepted spontaneously without changing the indigenous character of the inhabitants.” So strict and correct were they in their Brahminical character and observance that they were frequently asked by the other Hindus to perform the rites of purification (*shuddhi karanam*) for defiled objects and even of Hindu temples.

It may sound odd, if not outright fantastic, that Lord Isha and Saint Thomas—both “foreigners”—would be preaching Vedic Religion to the Indians, but at that time only a minority of Indians were followers of the Vedas, most being either Buddhists or Jains—the latter being of far greater numbers than the Buddhists, and often confused with them. Those who did honor the Vedas were nearly all mere ritualists [*karma khandis*] who knew nothing of their spiritual or metaphysical side, and even denied its existence. Consequently Arya Dharma was really unknown to them. So both Isha and Saint Thomas had a legitimate mission in India—the same that was earlier carried on so ably in Kerala by the great Adi Shankaracharya, to whose monastic order they belonged. Also, at that time it was understood that no one was really a foreigner or outsider in relation to the Vedic revelation which was in actuality Manava Dharma, the natural religion of humanity. Even more, since it was considered that the human race had

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originated in India, there was no one on the face of the earth who could not claim India as his home.

Spiritual Character of the Ishanni Sampradaya

Most of the distinctive traits of the Essenes listed at the beginning of this booklet were also held or practiced by the Indian disciples of Saint Thomas. The Ishannis observed these things because of two factors. Firstly, they were all Brahmins—most being either Nambudiri or Nair Brahmins, the most classical of all Brahmins. Secondly, a large number of Hebrew Essenes who believed in Christ emigrated to India at the urging of Saint Thomas. (Archeological excavations of their settlements in South India indicate that most of them came from the Qumran Essene community.) These two currents of *the same* religious tradition—i.e., Sanatana dharma—were thus (re)united in the Ishannis and their descendents.

Tamil historical records contemporaneous with Saint Thomas say that he taught “a Buddhist religion.” This was no doubt because of Saint Thomas’ espousal of the Advaitic philosophy of Shankara (who himself was often accused of being a Buddhist by the ritualists) which contrasted with the usual form of Hinduism at that time which was extremely bound up in external rituals and the use of religion to attain utterly materialistic goals. But Saint Thomas and the Ishannis were an integral part of Vedic, or Aryan, religion (dharma). Even though they would have primarily described themselves as Ishannis, they would

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have meant it in the sense of a current (sampradaya) or sect of Hinduism, such as the Shaivite, Vaishnava, Shakta, or Ganapatya sects of Hinduism. Although these sampradayas specially a particular form of God and observe distinct customs as a consequence, they would all consider themselves to be fundamentally followers of Sanatana Dharma, the religion based on the Vedas and the teachings of the Vedic Seers known as Rishis. And the great majority of their customs and spiritual doctrines would be absolutely identical and harmonious with one another.

The Ishannis *never* referred to themselves as Christians. Only after tremendous persecution had devastated their tradition did the descendants of the Ishannis begin calling themselves “Saint Thomas Christians”—a complete misnomer that revealed their abandonment of the spiritual heritage they had received from Jesus and Saint Thomas. For the pittance of “Christian” identity and security (and even life itself in many instances) they traded their divine birthright, betraying Isha Masiha, the Christ of India, disciple of the Vedic Rishis and Gautama Buddha Whose teachings contain quotations from the Veda, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Dhammapada.

(It should be noted that the only books of Jesus’ teachings accepted by the Ishannis were the Gospel of Saint Matthew, which Saint Thomas brought with him on his return to India, having received a copy from Saint Matthew, and the writings of Saint Thomas himself. These latter were completely destroyed by the Portuguese Christians in the

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sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The “New Testament” was completely unknown to them.)

How the Ishannis became “Christians”

In Mylapore near modern Madras, the Apostle Thomas was pierced with a lance on December 19, 72 A.D., and died on December 21. He was buried nearby, and his tomb became a place of pilgrimage. (In 1292 Marco Polo visited his tomb and took some of the red-colored earth from there. Upon his return to Venice he healed many people with it according to his own testimony.)

The spiritual family of Saint Thomas continued and grew. The Ishanni Sampradaya spread throughout India, though never of large numbers. It is remarkable, but historical records indicate that there was no region of India in which the Ishannis were not represented, though they were mostly in South India. In 1430, Nicholas di Condi in writing of his travels in India said that the Ishannis “are scattered over India like the Jews with us.”

Because Christians from the West claimed to revere Jesus and Saint Thomas, the Ishannis always received them with friendliness. At the coming of the Europeans in large numbers, however, this began to change, culminating in a full-scale persecution by the Portuguese colonialists, who first came to India in 1498. Terrible pressures were brought to bear on the Ishannis to “convert” to the Christianity of the Westerners.

This came to an appalling climax in the last year of the

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sixteenth century when the Portuguese Roman Catholic Archbishop of Goa, Alexius Menezes, asked that the Ishannis assemble in the town of Diamper and bring their ancient books containing the teachings of Jesus and Saint Thomas⁵⁰ upon which they based their ideas and practices so they might be “examined.” Believing that the Europeans wanted to sincerely discover the authentic teachings of Jesus and Saint Thomas, they did so. Their chagrin was unbounded as they found themselves surrounded by Portuguese soldiers who forced them at gunpoint to surrender their precious manuscripts, which were then burned in their presence at the order of the Archbishop.⁵¹

Not only were the books brought to Diamper destroyed, Archbishop Menezes went from place to place searching for Ishanni books and burning entire libraries in many places—even in areas where the Portuguese had no political power whatsoever. These treasures were sought out and destroyed because they revealed how utterly alien institutional Christianity was to Jesus and His teachings. Further, they expressed the correct view of Isha as a “son of God” by

⁵⁰ What about the so-called Gospel of Thomas? It has been conjectured that it was compiled by the Ishannis after Saint Thomas’ death. But any copies must have been burnt by the Portuguese. Whether the Coptic text is an accurate translation from the Indian text cannot be known.

⁵¹ In *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, the Roman Catholic author S.G. Pothen writes: “What history will not willingly forgive is the literary holocaust which was carried out on the authority of this decree, when all books that could be laid hands on were consigned to the flames. It was comparable in many ways with the vandalism of Omar, who by similar wanton destruction ordered the noble library of Alexandria to be consumed by flames.”

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attainment and not as the creator God incarnate as the Christians held.

Since their precious texts were destroyed, what historical proof do we have that the Ishannis were followers of Vedic Dharma and not some obscure type of Christians—as the Portuguese sought to make them? Ironically, Archbishop Menezes himself supplies us with the evidence. He drew up an official list of the Ishannis' "crimes"—and that gives us the picture. Here are some of their practices condemned at Diamper.

1) Many Ishannis conducted schools. These not only included instruction in Sanskrit, the Vedic language, they also maintained shrines for the students in which images of the various deities were kept and worshipped, instruction in ritualistic worship of the tutelary deities of the students' families being part of the curriculum.

2) Those Ishannis who did not send their children to schools administered by Ishannis sent them to be educated by other Hindu Brahmins who also taught them the standard Brahminical rites, observances, and beliefs, including ritualistic worship of the various deities.

These two points demonstrate that the Ishannis were orthodox Hindu Brahmins.

3) It was the custom of all Ishannis to worship and make offerings in Hindu temples.

4) The Ishannis were often sought after for the performance of various Hindu rites, especially exorcism.

5) Many of the Ishannis officially enrolled themselves in

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Portuguese territories as Nair Brahmin priests. (Oddly, the Diamper objection to this was not for a religious reason, but because it supposedly made them liable to be called up for military service.)

6) The Ishannis had the custom of adopting as many orphans as they could. (This was a distinctive custom of the Essenes, also. What was found objectionable in this by the Portuguese was not made clear.)

7) As it is the Hindu custom to name their children after deities, the Ishannis naturally were accustomed to sometimes name their male children “Isha.” This was violently condemned by the church authorities.

8) The Ishannis all pierced their ears. (Horrors!)

9) The Ishannis bathed several times a day in accordance with Brahminical custom.

All these points can be summed up quite accurately: the Ishannis were not Christians!⁵² They were followers of Jesus and Saint Thomas—which the Portuguese were not. (Somehow the Synod of Diamper forgot to complain about their wearing the sacred thread and keeping the Brahminical tonsure.)

The history of the destruction of the Ishanni Sampradaya and the erecting in its place of contemporary “Saint Thomas Christianity” is so tangled and obscure that

⁵² Christian visitors to India in the very early centuries of the Christian era insist that the Ishannis had “lost their sacraments and priesthood.” The truth was, they never had them—in the Mediterranean Christian sense—for they were all priests, being Brahmins, and subscribed only to the initiatory and sacramental Hindur rites known as samskaras.

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no one can write it with any assurance. So it must suffice to say that by persecution, wiles, and blandishments the Ishannis were mutated into acceptable “Christians” and alienated from their nation and their religion. They have, however, aslways refused to proselytize in the Christian manner, and for that are respected by the Hindus. Some of the Saint Thomas Christians even today continue to consider themselves Brahmins, wear the sacred thread, wear rudraksha beads (sacred to Shiva), and participate in Hindu worship. Nearly all the priests know Sanskrit and read the Hindu scriptures. (A Saint Thomas Christian priest once remarked to me: “You cannot understand the teachings of Christ unless you know the scriptures of India.”) Theologians and bishops have told me personally that there is a movement to throw off all alien influences and return to their Ishanni roots. But since that would involve a rejection of Christianity and a full return to Hinduism, it does not seem likely. So many uneasily continue to be “neither fish nor fowl” in spirit.[Father Jacob Kurian, teacher of theology at the Kottayam (Saint Thomas Christian) seminary in Kerala, had this to say to Christine Chaillot, the author of *The Malankara Orthodox Church*: “We should feel that we have an Indian role to play and we should present to the world a specific picture of our church. We cherish so much the [fact] that we could build our Christian tradition on the foundations of the Sanatana Dharma. Of course, there is the foundation laid by Christ and the Apostles and the long spiritual tradition of

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Christianity. But the theological tradition of the Indian Church has to be in line with the Indian philosophical tradition, which is not necessarily only the Hindu one, but also that of the Buddhists, the Jains and other non-Christian traditions which also contribute to the Indian philosophical tradition....When Christians adopt this attitude of Sanatana Dharma which incorporates all truth, they will be able to overcome all anxiety regarding syncretism.”]

Oddly—but justly—enough, as Christians the descendants of the Ishannis have been more implacably persecuted and pressured by both Catholics and Protestants than their Hindu Ishanni forbears. That history is as bizarre as it is irrelevant to this study.

The witness of history

Early on we considered the Shaivite roots of Jesus. Ishanni history bears this out.

The Ishannis revered Jesus and Saint Thomas as great acharyas (teachers) like Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhavacharya—never as gods to be worshipped.⁵³ Rather, they were identified as Shaivites, worshippers of Shiva, no doubt because of their connection with the philosophical tradition of Shankara. At the time of Jesus and Saint

⁵³ This is why Cardinal Tisserant could (uncomprehendingly) write: “It does not seem, however, that the Indian Christians were ever greatly concerned with the great Christological disputes of bygone days.” That was because the doctrinal controversies, alterations, and aberrations of Mediterranean Christianity meant nothing to them as followers of Arya Dharma according to the teachings of Isha and Saint Thomas.

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Thomas, Shaivism was something very different from what it is now in India. "Shiva" did not mean the mythological ascetic with matted hair, smeared with ashes, riding on a bull, and married to the daughter of King Himalaya. "Shiva," which literally means "He Who is All Bliss and the Giver of Happiness," was considered a name of the Absolute Being and often carried the connotation of God as Infinite Light. It was not the name of a "god." Originally Shaivism was that philosophy which now is called Advaita Vedanta, and Yoga was its prime characteristic.

Ishanni tradition said that Saint Thomas built a temple in Nilackal, presently a completely deserted area. Recent excavations in the area of Nilackal have revealed that a kind of Hindu temple city existed there at the time of Saint Thomas and that the Ishanni temple had been built within the compound of the Mahadeva (Shiva) temple as a subsidiary temple. This demonstrates that Saint Thomas and his followers were viewed as a Shaivite sampradaya (sect) of Hinduism. (As mentioned, some Saint Thomas Christians still wear rudraksha beads, a mark of worshippers of Shiva.)

In 345 A.D., when the ruler of Carnellur gave the suburb of Muziris to the Ishannis for their exclusive use, they renamed it *Mahadevar Pattanam*, the City of Mahadeva (Shiva). The king laid the first brick for the Ishanni temple that was built there, and upon its completion he led the first service of prayers to be conducted there. This would not have been done if the Ishannis were not themselves Hindus.

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Eventually an Ishanni kingdom, with Mahadevar Pattanam as its capital, was established.

Whenever a child reached the age of three years the Ishannis always had a Brahmin pandit come to their home and symbolically begin his formal education by guiding the child's fingers to trace the mantra *Om Sri Ganapataye Namah*—"I bow to Lord Ganesha"⁵⁴—in a plate of rice before which a ghee lamp was burning that had previously been worshipped as an emblem of the goddess Saraswati. (This is still the custom among the Saint Thomas Christians, but the mantra is now usually *Hari*⁵⁵ *Sri Ganapataye Namah*.)

We can confidently say that in reality the Ishanni Sampradaya, in its fidelity to its heritage from the Lord Isha and Saint Thomas, was a legitimate segment (sampradaya) of Vedic Religion (Hinduism), vastly differing from what is commonly known as Christianity.

⁵⁴ Ganesha, the son of Shiva, is the Hindu deity that is depicted with the head of an elephant. He is always worshipped before any undertaking, including, in this instance, the beginning of education.

⁵⁵ Hari is a name of the god Vishnu, the Preserver in the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. It is interesting that many of the very old Ishanni temples in South India have golden "dharma towers" in front of them just like those in the temples of Vishnu.

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The “Jesus Cave” near Vashishtha Guha on the banks of the Ganges River in the Himalayas.

The Christ of India



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