

Session 6 – Stage 6 of Spiritual Hierarchy

February 23rd, 2014

Jai Swaminarayan! Sahajanand Swami Maharajni jai, Bapashreeni jai, Sadguruoshreeni jai, Swaminarayan Bhagwanani jai, tatha anant anadi muktoni jai!

A humble prayer in their lotus-feet and our Guru AMPP NarayanMama-LilaMasi's lotus-feet to augment this assembly with their divinity and grace, and to enhance our knowledge and guide us towards them.

Last week we build a foundation for understanding the spiritual world, and talked about:

- Transcendent and Immanent form of God or Anvay-Vyatirek Swaroop
- Self-Realization and God Realization or Atma-darshan and Prabhu-darshan
- Cause and Effect or Karya-karan bhaav
- Overview of hierarchy and cross references
- Three attributes
- Dual Nature of Universe

We will now continue our journey forward. Last week during the overview of hierarchy, we split the hierarchy into multiple stages. With our bottom-up approach, we will start with stage 6 and count down to 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Here is the tentative flow that we will take:

- Stage 6 in operation phase
- Stage 5 in operation phase
- Geographical and Astronomical measurements and mappings
- Stage 3 & 4 in operation phase
- Creation phase and Destruction phase
- Stage 2 & 1

So let's get started with Stage 6. For those on Webex, I have a detailed picture of Stage 6 of the hierarchy. This slide is created based on information in the Swaminarayan scriptures and other Hindu scriptures. We will also map other philosophies to this stage, along the way. We will also map scientific discoveries to establish credibility of Hindu scriptures.

Down at the bottom at the lowest level are the animals, birds and plants. Hindu philosophy says that they all have souls. First of all there is a huge debate that continually goes on in the scientific community whether or not plants can feel, or listen, or have intelligence. However, more and more scientists now believe that plants have intelligence too. Creepers are known to intelligently swing and sway towards a support till they finally grow long enough to reach it. The plants also are vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The non-vegetarian plants are known to develop techniques to capture prey. All this is now possible to know by high tech cameras and continuous photography. Also, plants that get enough love and care grow better than those that don't. Scientific research also shows that the plants in the houses of

dysfunctional families, do not grow as well, even if they are from the same nursery, as the other plants. So plants can feel and listen as well. Plants exhibit intelligence and feelings and are therefore living. It is just that their body type is different than ours and they are on a different evolutionary path than us.

There are a couple of examples that I remembered when talking about plants. Once Bapashree was holding an assembly or sabha under a tree and talking about supreme spiritual knowledge, and the tree laughed. There was no wind, and no other external influence – all of a sudden there was this sound coming from the tree. Everyone was surprised as to what was going on. Bapashree explained that the tree was happy that such an assembly sat under its shade and was therefore expressing its delight. This is not something that was made up by one or two people to augment Bapashree's grandeur. It happened in front of an entire assembly. Another incident is from the life of AM Sadguru Gopalanand Swami. He was once traveling to Rajkot and was seated where the Rajkot Swaminarayan temple is located. He held an assembly under the tree of a berry. Berry is not a common fruit in the US, but well relished in India. The berry tree is full of thorns. After talking about the supreme Lord and the supreme knowledge, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami got up and swung the edge of his upper clothing like a shawl to cover himself. The cloth got stuck in the thorns of the berry tree. Sadguru Gopalanand Swami looked at the berry tree and said, "You could not give up your nature, despite of great muktas sitting in your shade and talking about supreme lord." That very moment, the berry tree shed all its thorns. Even today that berry tree stands on the right hand side of the entrance of temple premise and does not have any thorns!

So even plants are alive, intelligent, they can feel, they can listen, and they can get liberated.

Moving on to animal kingdom, a common belief amongst scientists is that there has been an evolution in the animal kingdom – which includes sea creatures, flying creatures and land creatures. This evolution happened from a single microorganism and that human being has evolved as part of that evolutionary process. So science agrees that some animals are more evolved than the others. Now in Hinduism there is a distinction on atonement based on the type of creature one commits violence to, and the type of violence committed. More evolved a creature, higher is the atonement for violence against it. Therefore hurting a plant is not the same as hurting an ant which is not the same as hurting a dog. Why is that? AMPP NarayanMama used to say that every living thing, every life form, has the scope and potential to progress on the path of spiritualism. And just a few minutes back we saw with the example of trees that even they are capable of getting liberated. The possibility for a primitive lifeform to do that is lower than that of an evolved life-form. When we commit violence, we commit violence against that probability of progress and freedom. Therefore more evolved a creature, higher is the degree of atonement.

So AMPP NarayanMama used to say and has also written in a book is that all the good thoughts from all the religions that are aligned with our thinking, are welcome. A very broad-minded and open perspective, and he always encouraged additional reading and understanding of other religions as well, so that we could understand Swaminarayan philosophy better. There is a very interesting book published by BAPS institution on Karma and its mysteries, and Punarjanma, cycle of birth and re-birth. If an English version is available, it is an intelligent read. I did not get a chance to look up if there was an English version available, but if there is, it is a knowledgeable read. The author has done a very good

comparison of Karma and its mysteries and Punarjanma, in the book. It is worth reading. In that book, the author mentions that the animal world other than humans, is a birth that the soul gets due to the fruits of karma or deeds done in the human birth. There is no new karma-bandhan or new bindings that come in effect in an animal birth. So while there is no new karma-bandhan coming into existence, the behavioral patterns and evolutionary level of an animal body define how much spiritual progress, if at all, can be achieved in an animal body.

In our Hindu natal charts – janma-kundali, there is something called “yoni” which depicts the type of an animal we are. This essentially says what animal characteristics or behavioral patterns will be exhibited by us, and gives us an indication of what our strengths could be. It however also shows, that if we do not keep the related negative instincts in check, it could lead to a similar animal body in the next birth. So if we are vicious and ready to bite whoever gets close to us, we may get a next birth as a snake, and so on. Similarly, Chinese also have animal years and they cycle every 12 years. Talking about natal charts, I have to add here the fact that natal charts are governed by the planets and constellations and that’s where the limit is. They are limited. God is a greater. Let’s move on from animals to humans which is the next level in the hierarchy.

AMPP NarayanMama also used to say that human beings did not evolve from apes. They came into existence as human beings. That is supported by other Hindu scriptures which say that Lord Brahma created the first human and named him Manu. Ancient Egyptians also believed that. In fact, in present day Iraq there are remains of Sumerians. Sumerians believed that human beings were genetically engineered by Annunaki to mine gold. Yet another mention that humans not being part of normal evolutionary process. All three – Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in the Adam and Eve story that they were directly created by God on the 6th day, till God finally rested on the 7th day.

There is a fossil finding that shows that homo sapiens (human beings are scientifically categorized as homo sapiens in the animal kingdom. I think there is a sub-category, and we are homo sapiens sapiens) walked with dinosaurs. There are other similar findings where homo sapiens walked with Neanderthals. May be the army of apes who could speak and communicate in a language, mentioned in Ramayan, were actually Neanderthals working closely with humans! That does not sound so far-fetched now that science has established this possibility. So human beings are particularly different and as AMPP NarayanMama used to say, came to Earth directly as humans, not through any evolutionary process. In fact, some scientists now believe that humans being have hidden genetic code which would prove that they came to Earth as humans and were not part of the evolutionary process.

We have spent a lot of time in this category talking about mind, body and soul. So lets continue forward – the next level is that of Dev – also called deities or demi-gods. The dual opposite (we have talked about the dual nature of existence) of the deities or the demi-gods are the demons. Demigods and demons are mentioned in all the polytheist religions and cultures of the world. Polytheist religions are those that believe in multiple deities. I want to clarify one thing. In many of the monotheist scriptures, polytheists are referred to as Pagans. Pagan is a word that is used to imply polytheism, but has a little bit of negative connotation to it, because of the way it was originally defined. We will not go into the history of language, but we will continue to use the word polytheist or polytheism rather than pagan.

Let's now look at some of the deities across polytheist religions. Each religion refers to Sun God, Moon God, Water God, Earth God, Wind God, Sky God, God of Thunderbolt, God of Rain. These are either God or Goddesses – every religion has a different way of looking at it, so I have to make sure I mention that, and so on. So the concept that these things are governed and dominated by more powerful entities than humans is common – be it in ancient Egyptians, or Romans, or Greeks, or Norse Gods, or Latin Americas, or American Indians. Secondly, though these deities dominate or govern some powers, they have a definite body or form. Their works or their effect is much larger than them, but they have a definite form. So while the Sun is the effect, there is a Sun deity in a human-like form and likewise with other deities.

There is a subtle indication here that is explicitly called out in some religions and not in others – and that is – since all these deities only control some parts of the nature or have only some powers, they are limited and there is some greater power above them. We will start using our corporate world example now. In software development, in a team we have a Developer or a software engineer, Tester or a QA engineer, technical writer, etc. Each of them has their own roles. To anyone who knows these engineers and their roles, would have an understanding that someone must be telling them what is needed in the market, someone must be making sure they are all working together towards a common goal. Someone must be making sure of technical consistency and data integrity. There must be some team lead or manager or managers sitting above them to tie things together.

Most polytheist religions believe that there is a God sitting above these deities – Egyptians called him Atum, and Atum in turn has Nun as its creator who rose from the waters of Chaos, Greeks called him Chaos and believe that he rose from oceans of creation, Chinese also call him to have risen from ocean of Chaos. So all in all, the most common belief is that someone rose from the waters/ocean of chaos and created the deities and the world that we live in. That is where the understanding of almost all the polytheist religions of the world ends. There is an interesting link talking about the theory of creation in different religions. I will share it in this week's slides. It is a quick and compact depiction of beliefs in different religions.

So a hierarchy of animals, humans, deities and a God is pretty much what we see in ancient religions of the world. Some also show a hierarchy within these deities – little differences in capabilities. But what about modern monotheist religions? As we discussed last week, these religions are most of the times also believers of only immanent form of God. Interestingly enough the three big religions today – Christianity, Islam and Judaism, originated from the same roots and have common prophets and angels. As soon as we dig a little deeper, we find that they all arose from the belief system of multiple Gods. There is a known historical fact that Islam was established by breaking all the polytheist temples in the Mecca area. I did not make this up. Search on the internet and we will find it as a historical fact. Similarly in Egypt, Akhanaten banned worship of all Gods except the Sun-God – Aten. So at the end of the day, even these societies or religions once upon a time, believed in multiple deities and a God who created those deities. Since the monotheist religions derived themselves from the earlier polytheist religions, their spiritual achievements and beliefs are also in the same vicinity. Since monotheists are primarily believers of immanent form of God, it is difficult to say exactly whose brilliance they tune in to, but they are in the same vicinity as the polytheist religions.

So let's come back to Hinduism. In Hinduism, like other polytheist religions, there are many deities – 33 crores or 330 million of them. Yes, we also have their population estimates! The first generation deities called Adityas are born from Aditi and Rishi Kashyap. The Adityas then later took their population forward, and it includes Indra, Sun, Moon, Fire, Wind, Water, etc. The birth of Adityas from Aditi is referred to as something happening through a cosmic matrix. There is no clear indication on what it means or its relevance, but there is a mention of cosmic matrix for the Adityas to be born. Aditi is the daughter of Prajapati Daksh – who is the mind-child of Lord Brahma, and Aditi is married to Rishi Kashyap. Rishi Kashyap is also a Prajapati, and is the son of Prajapati Marichi, who in turn is also a mind-child of Lord Brahma. Aditi is said to have had 83 sisters, 12 of whom are also married to Rishi Kashyap. Rishi Kashyap was given the responsibility to populate the world created by Lord Brahma. So with his wife Aditi, he created Adityas or Devs or Devatas or deities, with Dani – Daanavs, with Diti – Daityaas, Serpents with Kadru, Apsaras with Muni, and so on. Daityas population started with Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaaksh and Danav population started with Hayagriv and Kaalketu. Daityas and Daanavs together form what other polytheists religions call demons, and are the opposite dual of Devs.

Our goal is not to study all the Purans, Samhitas, Ved and Shreemad Bhagwat, and Shrutis in great details. So we will not go into further details of life and times of Prajapati's, Saptrishis and their families. Whoever is interested in reading more, as I always say, there is a wealth of information available on the internet. For our purpose of understanding Swaminarayan philosophy, we will not go into those details. But let's draw the analogy here that just as Egyptians, Greek's and Roman's have a family tree of Gods, Hinduism also has a family tree of Lord Brahma. All of family tree of Lord Brahma, since it is under MulMaya, has the distinction of body and soul. For example, the Sun is the effect, there is a Sun deity in a human-like form, and the human like form of Sun deity, also has a soul residing in that body.

In Hinduism, while Rishi Kashyap is responsible for populating Lord Brahma's worlds, he did not populate the human race. Human race was populated by another mind-child of Lord Brahma – Manu. Manu is the origin of the words Maanav, Man, etc. The family tree of Manu had lesser access to physical worldly powers than the family tree of Rishi Kashyap, but we are gifted with the ability to progress spiritually. There is one life-story of Manu that is very interesting – Jews, Christians, and many religions in the world have this story as well. Not only that, there are archeological evidences showing that there was a world-wide deluge many years ago. Manu was asked to build a boat and load it with all the species of the animals and plants in the world. He followed the command and built a boat, loaded it. And Lord Vishnu's Matsya-Avatar steered the boat to Sumeru mountain at the time of deluge. It was a world-wide deluge. This is very close to the Noah story. Jews have a similar story. The archeological findings showing a world-wide deluge now prove that these stories are not made up, but are depictions of real life events. An establishment of the scriptures being truthful. One big question in this story is – did Manu really load all the animals or just their genetic code – something to speculate about 😊

Now, Lord Brahma not only seeded the life as we know it, but also created 14 worlds or 14 loks, for all of us to live in. For ease of communication, I will continue to use the word Lok, since it is usually tied with the name of the world. What we live in is called Mrutyulok. As seen on Webex, there are 6 Loks that are higher than Mrutyulok and 7 that are lower than Mrutyulok. Lord Brahma lives in Satyalok, which is at the top. Below Satya lok are Janlok and Taplok where the sages & rishis reside. Below that is Maharlok

where the souls of the deceased ancestors reside. Romans had a similar concept and they called them Manes. Chinese also worship the spirit of their ancestors. So I have used Manes as a translation for "Pitri". Below that is Swarglok, or the Heaven where the deities – lineage of Kashyap Rishi and Aditi reside. Below Swarglok is Bhoovarlok – I mentioned that there are hundreds of millions of deities, and not all reside in Swarglok. The deities of lower powers reside in Bhoovarlok. Then is the Mrutyulok where we reside. Below Mrutyulok are Atal, Vital and Satal with Daanav and Daitya – the lineage of Dani and Diti & Kashyap rishi reside. Below that is Talatal, Mahatal, Rasatal, where the ghosts, spirits, nocturnal animals reside. The last one is Patal where the serpents reside.

The big question is, where are these worlds? The answer that AMPP NarayanMama gave me some 25 years ago was that they are in a different dimension that is not visible to us, and is subtle in nature than our world. AMPP NarayanMama and PP Jitukaka also mentioned that these worlds are intertwined. Today, science is agreeing with them and saying that there could be other universes in other dimensions that we cannot see. The scientific basis for that is that there are 4 universal forces – the electromagnetic force, the strong force, the weak force and the gravitational force. 3 of them are equal in strength and align with the computations and calculations as to how strong these forces should be and they are balanced as well. However, gravitational force based on computations, should actually be very strong than what it is. It should be much stronger. This is not just Earth's gravitational force but gravitational force in the universe. Scientists believe that the only way this can happen is if there are other intertwined worlds or dimensions that we cannot see or perceive and the gravitational force is split or distributed across those worlds. One thing I want to clarify is that the worlds above and below do not mean up and down. Above and below means higher or lower in terms of freedom, powers, comforts, values, qualities, ethics, etc.

The next logical question is how extensive is the span on these worlds? It is only in Hindu scriptures that these time estimates are given to 10 raised to -10 of second all the way up to hundreds of billions of years, and space estimates all the way up to the size of galaxies. It will be better if we look at all of them together to understand the big picture, rather than individually. So, in a couple of weeks when we talk about the geographic and astronomic measurements, we will cover how extensive is the span of those worlds.

Many scriptures confuse Brahma the creator and Brahman the brilliance of the soul. Some interpret the shloka "Aham Brahmaasmi" as "I am identified with Lord Brahma" rather than "I am a soul." Atma or soul and the creator of 14 loks, God Brahma are two very distinct entities. Now here is an interesting observation – no references anywhere – just my personal observation – Egyptians called the God who created the universe "Atum". It sounds very similar to "Atma." In fact people who cannot pronounce partial syllables like the 'ta' in Atma, pronounce it like "Atama". When we put this together with the confusing of Brahma and Atma, it could be that in Egypt, Brahma was referred to as Atama or Atum.... It all of a sudden adds up! "Atum" was created from "Nun" who in turn was created from ocean of chaos. The word "Nun" could be a linguistic derivation of "Narayan"- "Naran"- "Nun". Vairaj Purush who created Lord Brahma in his naval lotus, is also called "Narayan", who resides in the ocean. I found this correlation very interesting. May be Egyptian belief system had its roots in Hinduism too! Again, this is just my own personal observation and speculation. There are no references found around it.

Now whenever something is created, it needs to be operated and then eventually phased out or destroyed. When a software is developed and it is deployed, it has to be maintained with bug fixes and new functionality, and in the end, the software phases out and is replaced with a new version or a new product. This also fits the dual nature of the existence – whatever is created is destroyed. So while Brahma is the creator, the ongoing maintenance is done by Lord Vishnu and eventually phasing out of the creation, any cleanup of the creation is all done by Lord Shiva. The divine abode of Lord Vishnu is said to be Vaikunth and that of Lord Shiva is said to be Kailash. The Trinity works in tandem for generation, operation and destruction of everything under their control. Whenever, there is a need to course correct, they intervene by either showing up directly, or manifesting through a birth or a body – what we call Avatar, or just inspiring some people or situations as a medium to help their devotees. Lord Vishnu is known to intervene using different manifestations or Avatars. These Avatars are more powerful than the children or Rishi Kashyap – the deities and the demons. Lord Shiva is known to manifest through others and inspiring people and situation to aid his devotees. Lord Brahma intervenes only when someone calls for help and is known to show up directly.

One interesting observation is we need knowledge for creating something new and Lord Brahma's consort is Goddess Saraswati – Goddess of knowledge. We need wealth for operations and Lord Vishnu's consort is Goddess Lakshmi – the goddess of wealth. We need Power for destruction and cleanup and Goddess Shakti, consort of Lord Shiva, is Goddess of power. Secondly, the work of creation involves a lot of activity, thinking and desiring or aspiring. It is therefore dominated by Rajas. Lord Brahma is therefore a Rajasik God. The work of destruction involves lot of use of force, darkness, etc. It is therefore Tamas oriented and Lord Shiva is a Tamas-oriented God. Maintenance and ongoing operations involve a lot of patience, problem understanding and problem resolution. It is therefore dominated by Sattva and Lord Vishnu is a Sattvik God.

All the deities and the trinity, and their consorts are known to be bound by the power of the mantras. In Mahabharat, Kunti is able to meet Sun, Dharmaraj, Wind, and Indra merely through the power of mantras. She was even able to transfer 2 such mantras over to Madri – so the mantras were not tied to a person, but had the power in themselves. What it essentially means is that the vibrations generated through chanting of these mantras, have the ability to not only tune frequencies in to specific deities but also bind them into fulfilling a wish or a desire by use of that frequency of communication. There are so many stories where the Trinity and their consorts are known to have been bound to give a boon due to penance and meditation or the power of mantra of the devotees. When they appear in front of the devotee, they many-a-times are known to make statements like “I have to.....” rather than “I am pleased and therefore....” There are many incidents when Lord Brahma has had to give a boon to his devotee, the results of which later had to be course corrected by Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. There are several incidents mentioned in Purans where Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva have depended on each other to resolve an issue. No one of the three is able to resolve the issue individually. This dependency has led them to be worshipped together as a trinity.

Additionally, lets look a little bit into when Brahma started populating the universe. This is mentioned in padmapuran and shreemad bhagwat. Very soon Brahma realized that he cannot do this on his own. So He first created 4 mind-sons – Sanat, Sanak, Sanatan, Sanandan. He asked them to help in the task of

populating the universe. However, they were all small kids and refused to indulge into any activity. So Brahma created the 7 Rishis – called Saptarishi – Agastya, Atri, Bhardwaj, Gautam, Jamdagni, Vashishtha, and Vishwamitra. The list varies a little in different references, but let's stay with one mentioned here. These 7 sages gathered all the knowledge and everything, but again, did not want to indulge into the activity of creation. Lord Brahma then created the Prajapati mind-children like Marichi, Daksh, etc. to populate and run the 14 worlds. So creating the right people to populate the 14 worlds was an iterative process. Some stories also say that there were failed experiments/attempts in creation before one finally worked out. This concept is very similar to creating multiple prototypes of software before one version finally brings it all together and is releasable to the customer. Prototype approach is known in other engineering branches as well. I guess the knowledge of iteratively evolving is embedded in our genes, by the very creator of the 14 worlds.

There is also a reference that Lord Shiva cut-off 5th head of Lord Brahma because Lord Brahma got immensely enamored by Goddess Saraswati. Lord Shiva also banned worship of Lord Brahma because Lord Brahma lied. There are similar examples from life and times of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, which show that they exhibit similar behavioral patterns as us and are not free from them. This is not something that I have created on my own. This is what the scriptures say.

So let's take all this one step forward – deities created by Lord Brahma, dependency of the Trinity on each other, Trinity and deities and their consorts bound by mantras, trinity using an iterative and trial-n-error approach to create universe, trinity also subject to behavioral patterns weaknesses, all but points to one thing – they are not complete, they are not independent, they cannot do all and they do not know all. Just like a Engineering lead, a QA lead, etc. have higher degree of power than engineers, but they still cannot do all and cannot know all. So there must be a manager bringing it all together.... There must be a governing deity bringing it all together.

We are almost at the top of the hour. Before we wrap-up I want to share one incident from AMPP NarayanMama's life. Once at the Divine Mission in Amdavad, there was a celebration. When AMPP NarayanMama was physically present, we did not celebrate his manifestation day as he would not allow it. So it must have been manifestation day of Lord Swaminarayan, or Abaji Bapashree or some other religious function. The function was the next day and the previous evening the sky was filled with dark clouds and it was raining continuously. It seemed like the sitting area, kitchen, all will be drenched to accomplish anything the next day. AMPP NarayanMama listened to the devotees who were describing all the problems to him. He got up, walked out, looked up at the sky and said, "Go away. Do not spoil this celebration." In no time, the clouds disappeared and the sky cleared. PP Jitukaka tells me that later on AMPP NarayanMama told him that Indra, the God of rain and thunder, had started shivering when he asked Indra to go away. There are similar incidents in the life of Shree Abaji Bapashree and Shreeji Maharaj Himself. I thought this was relevant to the spiritual stratum we talked about today, so shared it. People who haven't seen this happen – the sky clearing out in no time, may call it a weather pattern, but for those who experienced it, know how different this was.

Today we started walking through the hierarchy and covered plants, animals, humans, deities, demons, 14 worlds, and the trinity. Next week we will continue talking about Trinity and some scientific

discoveries that align with some of the stories written in our scriptures, and then move on to Vairaj Purush. We will continue to 24 elements and Stage 5, time permitting. Jai Swaminarayan to all

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