The Mayaverse

A COMMON THEME ACROSS RELIGIONS

Monday, October 24 is Diwali, a festival observed by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and some Buddhists, to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness and knowledge over illusion.

In comparison to the infinite and complex reality we face, the cognitive ability with which we are endowed is limited. What we believe as the absolute truth is merely built on a database of societal conditioning, personal biases (such as confirmation bias), limited information and knowledge, as well as our individual genetic predisposition.

Western monotheistic religions claim we are perceiving an entirely illusory version of the world until we reach the kingdom of heaven. However, earthly life is not meaningless nor without consequence. What we do within the bounds of our illusory state still matters.

Ancient teachers like Plato, Confucius, and Lao Tzu stressed the importance of self-inquiry and unlearning common assumptions about reality that contribute to life's illusions.

Hindu philosophy believes that due to the powerful cosmic force of maya which literally means illusion, the soul identifies with the temporary body and starts clinging to attachments and worldly pleasures which are transient. The greatest illusion is not recognizing that we all are droplets of the same divine ocean which resides in each and everyone of us.

Across religions, statements about the illusory nature of the world are misinterpreted and taken to mean that the universe itself is entirely unreal and does not exist. The world is an illusion not because it does not exist but because it constantly changes from moment to moment. Due to the limited perception of our senses, we are unaware of constant transformations all around us including the daily changes in our own body since our birth. We consider our world as permanent and even though we see death and decay as inevitable parts of reality, we live as if we are immortal.

As children we may have believed in Santa Claus or in ghosts, but as we grow older, different realities take over. Thus, reality is highly malleable. The problem lies when we persist under our individual illusions and delusions.

QUOTES

Christianity

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

—The New Testament (1 James 4:14), Christian text

Budhism

"The basic teaching of Buddhism is the teaching of transiency, or change [...] Because each existence is in constant change, there is no abiding self. In fact, the self-nature of each existence is nothing but change itself, the self-nature of all existence. There is no special, separate self-nature for each existence."

— Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Buddhist monk and teacher

Islam

"Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children [...] And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion."

— Qur'an (57:20), Muslim text

Baha'i

"The world is like the vapor in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion."

—Bahá'u'lláh, Baha'i prophet

Hinduism

"There is no transcendental reality even in the creation that consists of the sky and so forth. For as it was established above (Vedanta Sutras 2.1.14), the entire expanse of the phenomenal world is mere illusion. The phenomenal world consisting of the sky and so forth has a distinct and stable form only until one sees that its very self is the ultimate reality."

— Shankara, Hindu theologian

Confucianism

"To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge."

— The Analects (2:17), Confucian text

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Akhil Gupta

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