

# Tat Twam Asi



This Sanskrit saying is, perhaps, the pithiest and most complete theological statement ever uttered. Translated it simply says, “Thou art That.” However, to unpack this truth would, as St. John the Evangelist says at the end of his gospel, involve writing more books than the world could contain.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread; so the following essay is an attempt to explain that phrase.

We claim that we are made in God’s image and likeness; and, indeed, there is much truth to that claim. But our theologians and religions have been much more industrious about making God in *our* image and likeness. That is why mystics insist on using Apophatic language when attempting to articulate their experiences of Source. Apophatic language is that which picks attributes (X, Y, Z...), traditionally ascribed to God, and then says, “X? God is not X; Y? God is not Y; Z? God is not Z.” So I will use that kind of language to unpack the title of this essay.

Person? God is not a person. In our hubris, we have imagined that the greatest compliment we can offer Source, is to make “him” a *person*, like us; albeit a Super-person. This is the same simplistic technique your cat employs by laying a mouse at your feet as you watch TV. He is so fond of you that he is not merely offering you a gift, or showing off his hunting skills, but rather is inducting you into honorary *cat-kind*. Our induction of God into honorary *human-kind* has allowed us, historically, to attribute all kinds of angry, punitive and cruel actions to him, and to justify our own use of violence and torture.

Creator? God is not a creator. The idea of “*creatio ex nihilo*” (creation out of nothing) conjures up a God who not only pulls white rabbits out of a tall hat, but also elephants, mountains, oceans and the duck-billed platypus. Plotinus, a third century Egyptian-born, Greek-speaking, Roman philosopher was, I believe, nearer the mark when he spoke about “*emanatio ab Deo*” (emanation from God). An acorn does not *create* an oak tree, rather the oak tree *emanates* from the acorn in various stages (roots, shoot, sapling, tree and, finally, the wise-old-leafy giant that offers hospitality to insects, birds, squirrels...). This is the actual meaning of the word “perfection”. Perfection, from the Greek word, *Telos*, is not a slavish, law-abiding, stainless-steel sinlessness; rather it is the radical commitment to developing one’s potential; the long, patient journey from possibility to actualization; Self-actualization. An oak tree is a self-actualized acorn; an Avatar is a self-actualized soul.

Micro manager? God is not a micro manager. God did not plot the route of hurricane Katrina in 2005, nor set a match to Mount St.Helens in 1980. He is not currently at his drawing board calculating logarithms to advance or prevent Global Warming. Nor is he collapsing the probability waves of Quantum Mechanics in order to produce outcomes of his choice. God is as excited about the evolutionary journey as we are, because it is only as incarnated entities that there *can be* evolution. Do you remember the word game, **20 Questions**, where one person is sent out of the room while the others choose an object? Then the “exile” comes back and has twenty questions to figure out what was chosen. John Archibald Wheeler, perhaps the most well known American physicist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, came up with a different version: one person is sent out of the room and the others decide not to choose anything! However, they do not tell that to the “exile” when he returns. He still is allowed twenty questions. But here’s the miracle: as long as the others give *consistent* answers to his questions, they can be forced into choosing an object. And that is how evolution works. It is the questions we ask of life, through our thoughts, words and actions that determine what tomorrow will bring. Even detours and diversions are allowed because God is “confident” that ultimately the journey which began lovingly in her womb will end lovingly in her heart. But we could save ourselves a lot of time and a lot of suffering if we

operated from love *now*, rather than backing into it through trial and error. If, however, we choose trial and error, the great feedback loop called karma helps us to learn.

Partisan? God is not partisan. The idea of God peering down into a boxing arena and deciding to give the victory to one pugilist rather than the other, or visiting an oncology ward and healing one person of cancer while allowing the other to die, is a holdover from the childhood of theology. Desperate to feel special we have come up with all kinds of religious self-delusions: “We are the chosen people” (the Jews); “Outside the Church there is no salvation” (Roman Catholics); “God intended all of the cattle of the world for us” (the Maasai). School and adolescence are normally a reality check for such narcissism. Are we there yet, as a species? No religion *owns* God, because no religion *understands* God; though God is at the heart of both the religious and the scientific impulses.

Lawman? God is not a lawman. Even before the Code of Hammurabi in 1750 BC, cultures have been convinced that God makes, bestows and enforces laws; he also punishes infractions on a sliding scale from mere wrist slapping all the way to invasions, conquests, exiles, death and even eternal damnation. Indeed, there *are* divine laws: Kosmic, which guide the workings of the metaphysical universe and Cosmic, which guide the operation of the physical universe. But compulsory attendance at Sunday mass, and separating kosher from traif are not among them. Neither are the Patriot Act nor Citizens United. The fundamentalist mindset of claiming God as the author of human, fear-based, greed-driven legislation, is a particularly sad diversion on our evolutionary journey.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was *with* God and the Word *was* God. And the Word became flesh - over and over and over again! Everything that exists is a Word of God made flesh - daffodils are, rivers are, mountains are, fruit flies are. Avatars are. Even your enemy is.

However, this Word of God, this Image of God, looks very different in different articulations. When your four-year-old does a stick-figure portrait of you and proudly presents it to you, it is no less your image than was the painting of the Mona Lisa to the subject who sat in da Vinci's chair. Don't confuse talent with love. The former is no match for the latter. While we may think that the emanation of a weaverbird demands

greater artistry from Source than does the emanation of a bacterium, Source is equally enthusiastic about both. The banana slug and the Avatar delight God equally.

So, to conclude where I started: we have insisted in making the ineffable “That” into an anthropomorphic “Who”. But a mystic might say, “God is that That that is That, long before we molded him into becoming that That that is Who.

Pity!

May God continue to hold you tenderly in the hollow of Her hand.

Namasté,

Tír na nÓg  
August 2012

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Seán". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "Tír na nÓg".