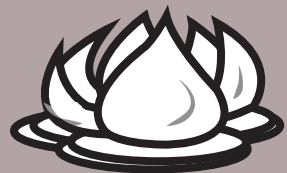




The Ten Primordial Masters

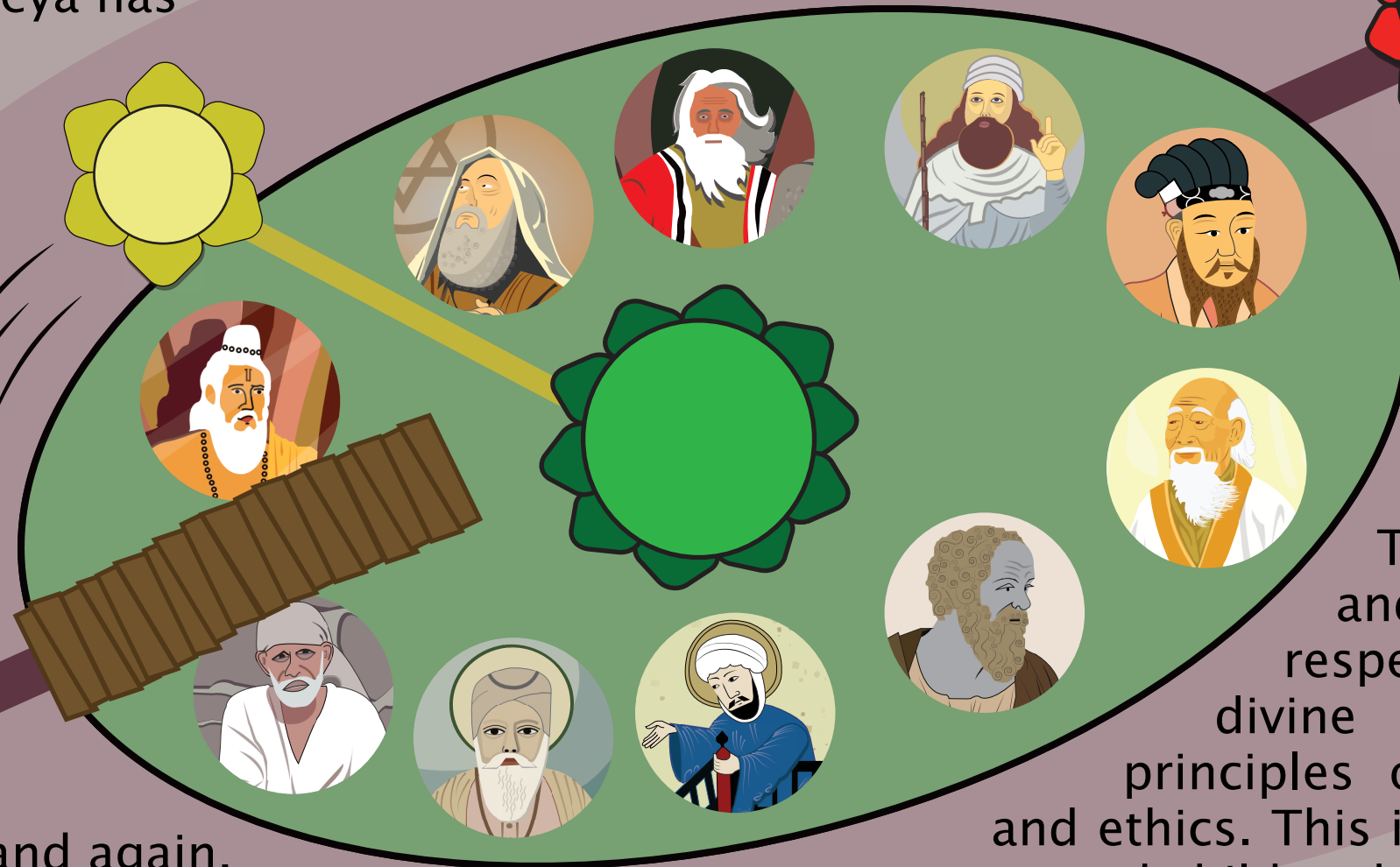
Rafael Sol



Dedicated to Shri Mataji



Shri Adi Guru Dattatreya has come to this world many times. Ten times, in different reincarnations, he came to change the course of humanity and to bring it back to the path of balance, towards righteousness and spirituality.



Again and again, he established the values of dharma, that is, the way to follow for the spiritual ascent of human beings.

We must cross the first stage of the journey, through the ocean of illusions, by meditation and detachment. Then we become our own teacher and our own student. When we respect dharma, the norms of a divine conduct, we integrate the principles of citizenship, respect, morals and ethics. This is what makes us a good friend, a good child and a good parent.



Raja Janaka

King Janaka lived around 5000 years BC, as King in Mithila (now Janakpur). He was a great scientist and an enlightened being. He was the father of Shri Sita, the wife of Shri Rama.

One day, King Raja Janaka sent a message to his people: "If there is a great sage, whether rich or poor, very educated or not, if he can teach me the knowledge of the Self, of my Spirit, let him become my teacher. Otherwise, I don't want to see him."

All the scholars of the time were frightened by these words, except for a young man called Ashtavakra, who went directly to the king. Ashtavakra said to the king, "First, let's go to the forest, to a pure place. Second, listen only to me, without even thinking about it."

So, they went alone to the forest and there, King Janaka sat down near his horse and remained silent, his eyes closed, without moving. He did not move even when his officers and ministers came to call him. It was only when Ashtavakra called him that he moved.

Ashtavakra said to him, "Many people have come. Why didn't you answer their calls?" The king said, "Thoughts, words and deeds are in my head, and I promised not to think. So, before I can use my head, I await your permission. What authority do I have to use my head without your permission?"

Ashtavakra then said, "You have understood the Spirit. It is not the thoughts in your head. It is always there in you, even if you do not think."

Another day, a young sage named Narada asked King Janaka, "Sire, how is it possible that you are detached from material goods when you live in luxury?"

King Janaka said, "It's very simple. I'll tell you this evening. Before that, you should follow me everywhere, holding this bowl of milk. Be careful not to spill a single drop!"

Narada did as he had been told, and followed the king everywhere. By the end of the day, he was really exhausted. "Please, O great King Janaka, answer my question now. I can't follow you everywhere and watch this bowl of milk at the same time."

King Janaka then asked, "What did you see while following me?"

"Nothing but the bowl," replied Narada, "I watched it all the time so as not to spill the milk."

The king exclaimed, "You did not see the ceremony given in my honor? Then the dance performance? Is it possible that you did not see anything?"

Narada said, "No, my Lord. I saw nothing at all. I was looking at the milk."

Then King Janaka replied, "I never see anything either. I put my attention on my Spirit so as not to forget my true nature, just like you with your milk."



Abraham

Abraham lived between 1800 and 1600 BC, and grew up in Ur in Mesopotamia. We know about his life through the stories told in the Bible and in the Koran.

At that time, people believed in idols, offered them sacrifices and performed various primitive rites. Despite these beliefs, solid faith in a single God had grown in Abraham since childhood.

When he was very young, while seeking to know the origin of creation, he sought advice from his father. The latter, who worked in a store where idols were sold, replied immediately, "It is this idol who created the world." Abraham didn't believe it. He went to ask his uncle who said to him, "It is the Moon and the stars which created the world." Abraham was still not convinced, because he felt that an all-powerful Being in heaven could have created the world: Yahweh.

And one day, finally, God spoke to him. "Leave your country, your people and your father's house and go to the country that I will show you. I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name big, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. I will curse those who curse you. And all the peoples of the earth will be blessed in you."

So, Abraham went with his wife and nephew Lot to the promised land of Canaan (located in present-day Israel). When a period of famine was declared, he and his wife went to Egypt, where they lived for a few years before returning to the land of Canaan.

Time was passing, but Abraham and Sarah still had no children. They were old now. So, they decided to have one servant, Hagar, who gave Abraham a son called Ishmael (recognised as one of the patriarchs of the Islamic religion).

However, even though Sarah was more than 80 years old, God had promised them a child, and the child finally arrived. He was called Isaac. But God tested Abraham's faith. He asked him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac by killing him to prove his love. The faithful Abraham accepted. He was about to kill his son, when an Angel of God stopped his arm just in time. Abraham died at the age of 175 years.



Moses

The life of Moses, born in 1300 BC, is found in the Bible. At that time, the reigning Egyptian Pharaoh had ordered all boys under the age of two to drown in the Nile River, as it had been predicted that one of them would defeat him. To save Moses, his mother left him in a small basket drifting on the Nile. He was taken in secret by the daughter of the Pharaoh and grew up in the court of Egypt.

One day, Moses learned that he was not an Egyptian but a Hebrew. The Hebrews were now slaves. He killed an Egyptian guard while trying to save a Hebrew slave. So, he fled from Egypt and went to Midian, where he found refuge in the tribe of the priest, Jethro. He married his daughter, Sephora.

Many years later, God came to speak to him to tell him that he would be his messenger to save the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

Moses now had the power to work miracles. He went to the Pharaoh and asked him to let the Hebrew people go. Of course, the Pharaoh refused. Moses, to convince the Pharaoh of the existence of God and His Power, cursed the land of Egypt and launched the ten plagues. But the Pharaoh, who believed himself to be a living god, did not want to know anything. Finally, at the tenth plague, he allowed the Hebrews to leave.

As the people reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh made one last attempt to attack Moses and the Hebrews. They were tracked down by the Egyptian army and blocked by the sea. So God then manifested His omnipotence and allowed Moses to separate the waters by creating a passage so that they could cross the sea on dry land.

After escaping from Egypt, the Hebrews set out in search of the Promised Land, during a long time of wandering that is said to have lasted about 40 years.

Moses gave his people a long list of laws to help them lead healthy and moral social lives. Among these instructions he received from God on Mount Sinai are the Ten Commandments.

Moses died, before reaching the Promised Land, at the age of 120.



Zarathoustra or Zoroaster

Zoroaster was born in Persia (Iran) in 630 BC. He was an energetic and very intelligent young boy. At the age of 30, he went to fetch water from the river. As he entered the water, Vohu Mana, the angel of the Good Spirit, appeared to him and allowed him to see the divine Light of God, Ahura Mazda.

Dazzled, Zoroaster began to preach in the capital of his country a few years after his vision. There is only one omnipresent and eternal God, Ahura Mazda, who is good and who is Light.

But the people did not listen to him, and the priests violently rejected his message. Finally, he decided to go to other countries, accompanied by only 23 companions.

One day, at the age of 42, Zoroaster and his companions heard of the king of a nearby country, King Vishtaspa, who was said to be wise and just. When they arrived at King Vishtaspa's court, the king granted Zoroaster an audience and tested him to see if Zoroaster was really a sage.

"Why do you want to acquire Knowledge?" the king asked. Zoroaster said to him, "To acquire the knowledge of paying homage to God, I will meditate, as much as I can, to seek righteousness."

"And how are you going to fight the bad people?" asked the king. Zoroaster said, "There is only one way to overcome evil; that is to increase Good. There is only one way to eliminate darkness; that is to spread the Light."

King Vishtaspa wanted to know more. He asked, "And how is the one God going to help you?"

Zoroaster was very happy to explain how to pray to the Creator Lord: "Wise Lord, fulfil the desire of those who are just and who sincerely respect the principles of righteousness and good spirit. For I know that you always respond to the songs of love seeking a reward.

"The king was convinced and adopted this new religion of a single and good God. From that day on, Zoroaster was free to propagate his teachings in this country and in neighbouring countries. The teachings of Zoroaster have come down to us through songs called "gathas".



Confucius

Confucius was born in Lu state in China in 551 BC, into an aristocratic but poor family. At the age of three, his father died and his mother raised him and encouraged him to study at the age of 15. But his mother died when he was 23, which forced him to give up working at the court of his state, because he had to follow the traditional mourning which lasted for three years. He therefore returned to the study of ancient rites and texts.

At that time, corruption and war reigned in China. To change society, he decided to teach traditional values because he believed that education could transform people. Students began to gather around him. Then Lu's sovereign went into exile, and Confucius also fled the country. It was only at the age of 50 that he was able to return. He then became the Minister of Justice and advisor to the Prince of Lu.

However, this success provoked jealousy and hostility from other people in the King's Court. At 56 years old, Confucius was once again forced to flee. But from place to place, from princes to princes, nobody wanted to hear about education. So, he left, accompanied by his students.

Day by day, he improved his teachings. He created the example of the honest man. "The honest man," he said, "is not a saint. The saints are born and remain saints, while the honest man becomes a saint by study and self-discipline. A man of quality improves his education by observing traditional rites."

He also wanted to convey the idea of balance, of the middle ground to achieve happiness. "The Middle is what does not lean towards any extreme; to recognise what is extreme is to know the Middle as a point of balance."

"Balance is the law of Heaven. Achieving it is the rule of life for the honest man ... Some reach equilibrium in a single stroke and others in 100 strokes. Some reach equilibrium in 10 strokes and others in 1000 strokes. This is a rule of life that is certainly accessible to men. The ignorant can therefore become intelligent and the weak strong."

"To respect the principles of one's nature is to approach harmony. And for that, you have to act towards others as you would like others to act towards you."

Seven days before dying, in 479 BC, he had a premonitory dream of his death. His only concern was that he had not convinced the princes. However, later, his teachings deeply influenced culture and civilisation in China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.



Lao Zi or Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu was born around 500 or 600 BC in China. Who was he really? We do not know, but his name is an honorary title which means Venerable Master.

At the age of 160, tired of seeing the townsmen live without respect and without morals, he left for a spiritual retreat in the west of China. When he arrived at the west gate of a small town, he was recognised by a guard who immediately asked him to instruct him. "O noble master, give me a testimony of your wisdom."

Lao Tzu said, "He who knows does not preach; he who preaches does not know."

The guard then replied, "But how am I going to learn?"

Lao Tzu said, "I will tell you about the Way and the Virtue, which are the true masters of the noble man. I call it Tao. But the Tao that we can talk about is not the eternal Tao."

"So show me, O master, how to find wisdom," begged the guard, kneeling.

"Stop thinking, and it will be the end of your worries. What difference is there between yes or no? What difference is there between success and failure? Should we estimate what others think and avoid what others avoid?" replied the master.

"It's a bit difficult to understand. Who should I follow?"

Then Lao Tzu explained, "Nature has no desire; without desire, the heart calms down; in this way everyone is calm... A strong wind never lasts long; nor does heavy rain. If the ills of nature do not last, why should the ills of man last?"

"So, you must not love in order not to suffer," replied the guard.

"No," said Lao Tzu, "compassion is the best weapon and the best defence. If you want to establish harmony, compassion must surround you like a fortress. Give love for hate."

Here is the legendary origin of Tao Te Ching, the great book of the Way and Virtue. It is a collection of poems written in classical Chinese language, with rhymes and short verses for rhythm.

The Tao is the Absolute, the union of opposites, the union of being and non-being, of masculine and feminine principles, of light and shadow, of strength and weakness.

These oppositions are represented by Yin and Yang: Yin is the feminine, the intuitive, sensitive side, while Yang is the masculine, the rational side. The Tao is the harmonious union of the two parts.

If Confucius wanted to change society through education, Lao Tzu wanted people to change in themselves. These are the two internal and external aspects that humanity must develop, and to change, one must become aware of this universal feminine energy that created the world, the Tao.



Socrates

Socrates was born around 470 BC, probably in May near Athens in Greece. He came from a wealthy family, and this enabled him to study philosophy. He served in the army of Athens and fought in two battles. Socrates was very strong and very courageous, and that is why he was part of the elite of soldiers.

At the age of 35, he began to teach, in the street, in gymnasiums, stadiums, shops, to all those who wanted to talk with him. Philosophy for him was a way of life. He walked the streets of Athens, dressed simply, without shoes, and spoke with everyone.

"I come among you, young and old, to try to convince you that you should not care about wealth, or anything else, but only about your soul, so that it becomes as good as possible. Virtue does not come from wealth, but from virtue itself comes wealth and all the benefits for the people, both in private and in public life."

Sometimes he could remain standing and motionless for several hours. This was his way of practicing meditation, called "dialogue with oneself", a method of the philosophers of Antiquity.

Later, he married Xanthippe at the age of 50 and they had three sons. As he was still not attracted to wealth, luxury and comfort, he continued to give his lessons for free, even if his students were often very wealthy.

"The desire for possessions is the cause of all wars, discords, battles. It is the body which gives birth to them because of its passions. And if we are occupied in seizing riches, it is the body whose slave we are."

His success attracted the jealousies of those who sold their educated skills for a very high price. When he was 70 years old, three people tried him and accused him of "not recognising the same gods as the state, of introducing new deities and of corrupting the youth." However, their real motives were political in nature. He was sentenced to death by drinking a poison called hemlock. He refused the help of his friends who wanted him to escape.

Why did Socrates accept his judgment? Socrates was not afraid of death because he knew that the soul is immortal.

"The soul of anyone who feels intense pain or pleasure believes that what caused this intense emotion is the only reality, real and obvious, when this is not at all the case."

He had lived in righteousness and wanted to die in righteousness. He believed that philosophy is a spiritual way of living in harmony with virtue.

A few days after his death, the Athenians repented and mourned, closed schools and theatres and condemned his accusers.



Prophet Muhammad

Muhammad was probably born in 570 in the Arab city of Mecca. He belonged to one of the great noble families, the Hashim Banu, but was not very wealthy himself. Muhammad lost his mother at the age of 8 and was raised by his uncle.

He became a caravan driver. Then at the age of 25, he married Khadija, a wealthy and older woman who had been divorced and was then a widow. They were happy for 25 years and had 6 children, but only four daughters survived. Among them was the young Fatima Zahra.

One day, in 610, when Muhammad was 40 years old, he received a first Revelation from the Archangel Gabriel called Jibril, in the cave of Hira where he was going to meditate. God, or Allah, thus dictated to him the verses of the Koran for 25 years.

At first, people had to hide to practice his teachings. Khadija was the first person to accept Islam, and for the first three years, only his relatives knew about it.

Muhammad spoke of a religion dedicated to the exclusive worship of the one, indivisible God of the Bible revealed by Abraham. Indeed, the Koran praises the merits of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Mary, or Maryam, is called "Our Lady" or "Sayyidunâ" by Moslems.

"Allah chooses Maryam from among all the women of creation. (Remember) when the Angels said: 'O Mary, surely Allah has put you above all the women of the worlds' (Koran Surah 3-42). She even has a whole surah, Surah 19.

However, the government in power did not like the idea of a single compassionate God because they traded with the idols. Then in 619, with the death of his uncle and his wife Khadija, Muhammad lost his two precious supports in the city of Mecca and was forced to flee the first time so as not to be killed. He later returned to Mecca, but in 622, the Muslims had to emigrate to Medina. This flight, called the Hegira, marked the year 0 of the Muslim calendar. It was the start of a period of wars.

In January 630, the Prophet Muhammad conquered Mecca with an army of ten thousand faithful without opposition from its inhabitants. Two years later, he died in Medina.

Muhammad, having been poor although of noble lineage, could neither read nor write. It was 40 years after his death that the Koran was edited by the same man who had killed Hazrat Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, and the husband of his daughter, Fatima Zahra. Then he had their two sons, Hassan and Hussein, murdered.

The "sacred haddith" are the words of the Prophet or Suna. They were compiled more than 150 years after his death. These are advices on how to live according to the moral principles of Allah: "God is merciful to those who are merciful to others." (Haddith of the Prophet)



Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 in present-day Punjab in Pakistan, near Lahore. Very early on, Nanak received a literate education, learning Sanskrit and Persian. A precocious child, he was a natural dreamer, much to the despair of his father. Several stories show that his father was trying to turn his son's attention to worldly affairs.

Once, his father, Kalou, asked him to work on their land, but instead, Nanak meditated in the fields.

"You are lazy, Nanak," said his father. Guru Nanak replied, "I am not idle. I am busy looking after my own fields."

"Where are your fields then?" asked Kalou. Guru Nanak replied, "My body is a field. My mind is the plowman. Virtue is culture. Modesty is water for irrigation. I have sown the earth with the seed of the Lord's sacred name. Satisfaction is the harrow of my field. Humility is the hedge. The seeds will germinate in a good harvest with love and devotion. Happy is the house which profits from such a harvest!"

Guru Nanak married Mata Sulakhni, and they had two sons. He devoted himself to his family for a few years, and then people began to recognise his divine qualities. He was encouraged to travel and was given material support to do so.

At about 30 years old, he left for long trips to India and beyond, to Medina, Turkey and Arabia. He spoke with all people, without distinction of rank or caste, to give a message of love from God. He understood that there were neither Hindus nor Muslims, just men loved by God. It was then the birth of the Sikh religion.

One day a disciple asked him, "But what must we really ask of God to draw near to Him?"

Guru Nanak replied: "Love God as the lotus loves water, as the bird Chatak loves the rain, as the woman loves her husband. Make divine love the feather and make your heart the writer. If you repeat the name of God, you live. If you forget it, you die. Open your heart to Him."

After years of traveling and preaching, Guru Nanak settled with his family in Kartarpur. He died on September 22, 1539 at the age of 69. His teachings are gathered in the Adi Granth, the sacred book of the Sikhs.



Sāinath

Sāinath's birth is a mystery. No one knows where or when he was born, or even if Sāinath is his real name. He is believed to have been found at the age of 4 or 5 in the village of Selu in Maharashtra, India, in 1859.

A stranger arrived in the village of Shirdi around 1870, aged about 16, dressed in traditional fakir attire and practicing yoga exercises. Imagine the astonishment of the villagers! At first, they took him for a nice fool, because he lived alone and slept on the floor. Then Sāinath settled in an abandoned mosque, where he kept a fire and an oil lamp permanently lit. He lived on gifts which he gave back to the poorest of the people.

One day, lacking oil for his lamp, he asked a group of young people to give him some.

"Ah, but here it is," said one of them. But he laughed at Sāinath and only gave him water.

Very calmly he went home. The young stupid men followed him to spy on him. They saw him put a little water in his lamps and they lit up! Then, filled with shame, they understood that they were before a saint and asked him to forgive them. Sāinath was cheerful, as forgiving was easy for him.

Soon, many devotees came to see him from all over the country, attracted by his miracles. They began to call him Shirdi Sai Baba because "Sai" means "Muslim saint", and "Baba" means "father" in Hindi. Shirdi was his place of residence.

Even though he had never studied, he was very familiar with Islam and Hinduism and their sacred texts. He was a vegetarian, like the Brahmins, but also wore simple clothes according to Muslim custom. He declared himself to be both a Fakir and a Brahmin, and believed in the unity of religions.

He used to give people what they asked for, even if they never came back to see him.

He said, "I give my people what they want, so that they start to want what I really want to give them."

He was never strict or severe but he was extremely patient.

"If you stretch out the palms of your hands towards me in devotion, I will be immediately with you, day and night. Even if I am not physically with you, I know what you are doing beyond the seven seas. Go where you want, in the wide world; I am with you."

He left this world on October 15, 1918, while sitting among his disciples in deep meditation.



