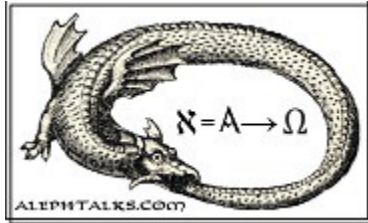


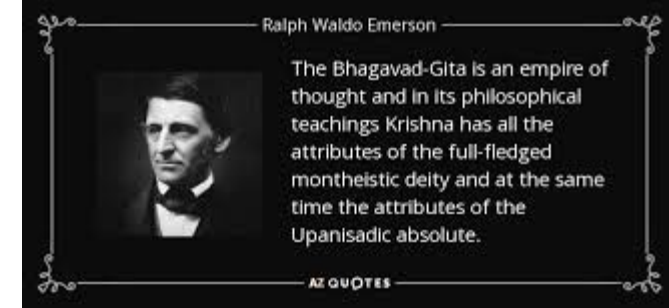
Mysticism: Where Science, Art, and Religion Meet



Subject Three
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Transcendentalism
©Aleph Talks, 2022



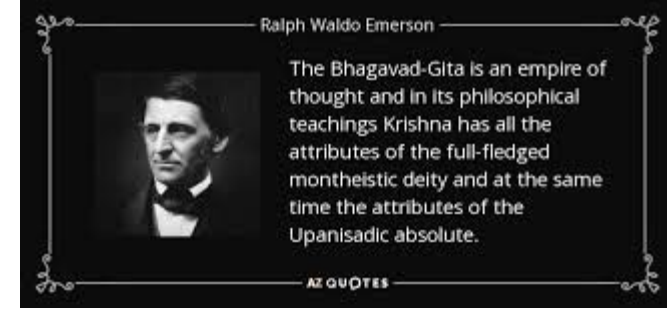
Ralph Waldo Emerson Biography



- Literature-Ralph Waldo Emerson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOkdFMw0pmk>
- The Art of Trusting One's Self-The Philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b04zs6QHWM>
- Ralph Waldo Emerson born on May 25, 1803; father dies 1811, graduates Harvard Class of 1821
- 1830: Becomes the sole pastor of church
- 1831: Ellen his wife dies on Feb. 8
- 1832: Emerson resigns his pastorate because of disagreements with over the administration of the Lord's Supper; on Christmas Day, he sails from Boston to Europe
- 1833: Arrives in Malta on Feb. 2 and travels throughout Italy, France (arriving in Paris on June 20), England (arriving in London on July 21), where he visited Coleridge and Wordsworth, and then to Scotland, where he met Thomas Carlyle, beginning a friendship that would include his becoming Carlyle's agent for books published in the U.S.; returns to New York on Oct. 9 and joins his mother in Newton Upper Falls

9/30/2020

Ralph Waldo Emerson Biography Continued



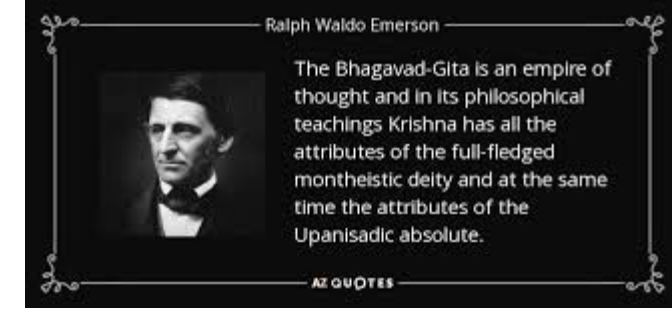
1834: Moves to Concord

1835: Marries Lydia Jackson and begins his career as a lecturer

1836: Helps to form what will be called “The Transcendental Club” and publishes his first book *Nature*

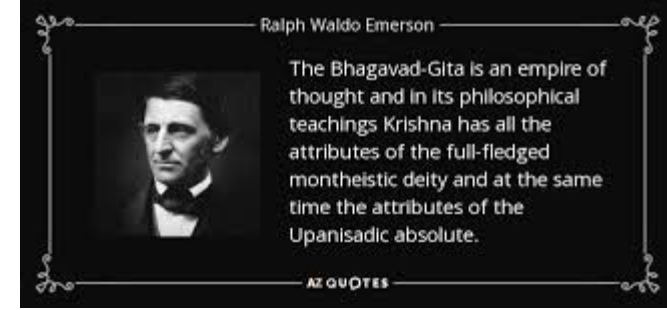
1837: Delivers address before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard (“The American Scholar”), which calls for an American literary independence

Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists: Robert Gross



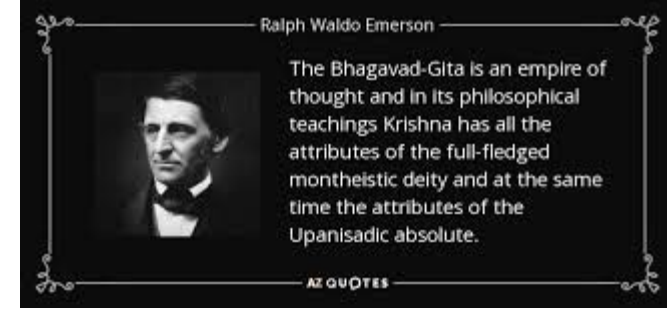
At the center of the ferment was Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was by no means the first person to articulate transcendentalist ideas—that distinction belongs to a now-forgotten coterie of young Unitarian ministers in and around Boston—but he was easily the most eloquent. “Our age is retrospective,” he proclaimed in his first major work, “Nature,” published in 1836. “It builds the sepulchres of the fathers . . . The foregoing generation beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we enjoy an original relation to the universe?” He was declaring a second American Revolution, this one aimed at the mind instead of the political establishment.to a life of solitude.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists: Robert Gross



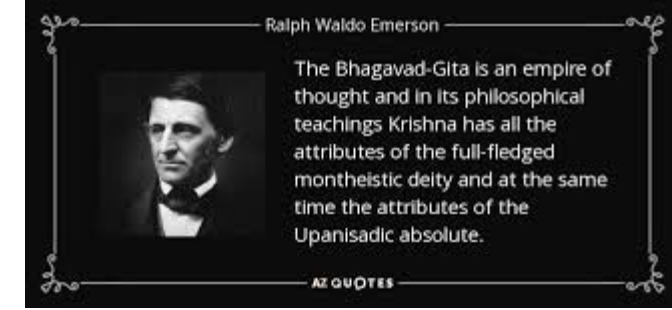
If Emerson had been the only person to make such an argument, he would probably have come down through the ages as a minor figure, a New England crank. But his words rallied others, and his influence among a group of intellectual fellow travelers quickly made him, as one 20th-century critic put it, “the cow from which the rest drew their milk.” Among his followers were Boston educator Bronson Alcott, father of Louisa May; Margaret Fuller, who transformed transcendentalist ideas into an early, potent treatise on American feminism; Walt Whitman, who read Emerson’s essay “The Poet” as a mission statement for his own poetic project; and, most famously, Emerson’s fellow townsman Henry David Thoreau, who took to heart the older man’s call to “go cherish your soul; expel companions; set your habits to a life of solitude.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists: Robert Gross



Although born and bred in Boston, Emerson moved to the small town of Concord after the death of his first wife at the age of 20 and his renunciation, soon after, of the Unitarian ministry. In so doing, he was returning to the home of his grandfather, a member of that “foregoing generation” he had decried in “Nature.” Here he could think and write, intermixing these activities with planting pear trees or walking to Walden Pond. And here, in his tall white house on the Cambridge Turnpike (now a tourist attraction), he hosted a collection of acolytes and disciples and oddballs whom one friend called “Waldo’s Menagerie,” describing an afternoon during the peak of transcendentalism when she “looked in the parlour . . . and saw him sitting in that circle,—it gave me a feeling of horror—men with long beards, men with bare feet.”

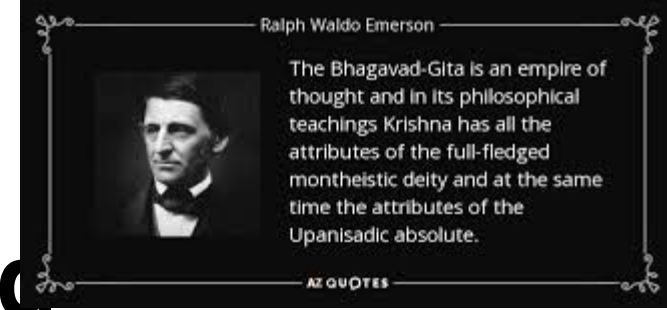
Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists: Robert Gross



There was discord in Concord. The village, founded as the first inland settlement of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, had gradually fallen away from the communitarian ideals of the Puritans, a process that accelerated in the 19th century. By 1820, as business came increasingly to reward enterprising individuals and as congregants searched for a personal religion, the town adhered to the sort of individualism addressed in Emerson's most famous essay, "Self-Reliance." Transcendentalist philosophy, while considered with quizzical bemusement by the majority of the town, nevertheless articulated a form of self-development nearly every citizen would have embraced.

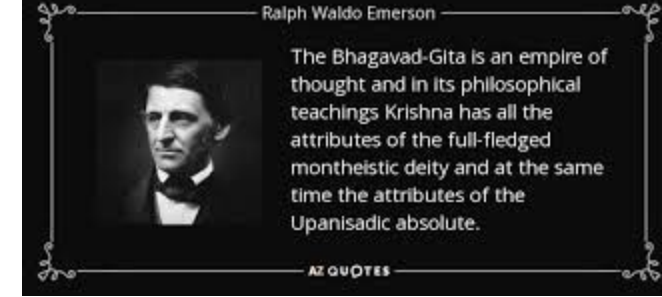
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Divinity School Address Background



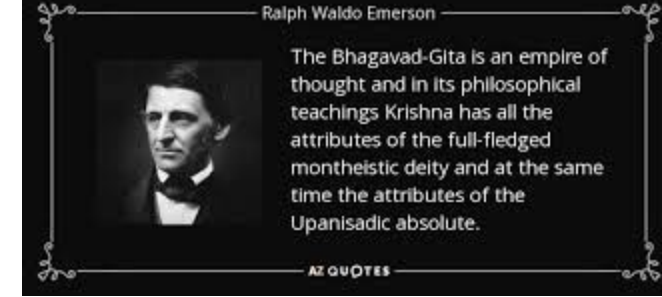
- <https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hds/1st-100/hds/19th-century-emerson>
- A quotation from: **Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*. Vol 5. Edited by Merton M. Sealts. Cambridge : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 471. [Print Only]:**
- 1 April [1838]. Cool or cold windy clear day. The Divinity School youths wished to talk with me concerning theism. I went rather heavy-hearted for I always find that my views chill or shock people at the first opening. But the conversation went well & I came away cheered. I told them that the preacher should be a poet smit with the love of the harmonies of moral nature: and yet look at the Unitarian Association & see if its aspect is poetic. They all smiled No. A minister nowadays is plainest prose, the prose of prose. He is a Warming-pan, a Night-chair at sick beds & rheumatic souls; and the fire of the minstrel's eye & the vivacity of his word is exchanged for intense grum-bling enunciation of the Cambridge sort, & for scripture phraseology.

Emerson Divinity School Address



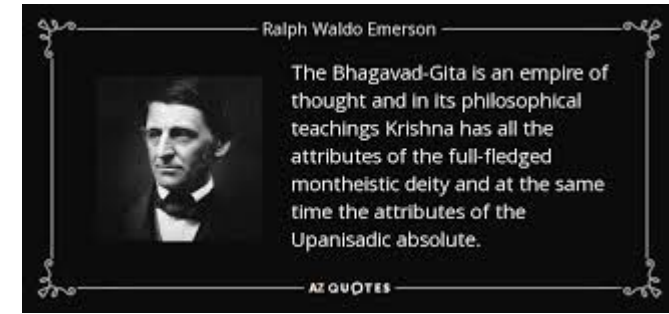
- A quotation from **History of Harvard Divinity School, 1827-1913** [Print Only]:
- July 15, 1838: This evening Rev. R. W. Emerson preached a sermon to the Senior Class. The Chapel was very much crowded, and the discourse listened to with profound attention
- After the address was delivered on July 15, the students were undecided what action to take. On July 16, B. F. Barrett, W. D. Wilson, H. G. O. Blake, F. A. Whitney, and R. C. Waterston signed a letter to Emerson asking for his manuscript and stating that they differed in opinion as to whether it should be published, or printed merely for discretionary circulation, but would follow his advice on this point. On July 19 Simmons, Blake, and Wilson, the original committee, wrote him that some of the class did not assent to his views but that all thanked him. On July 20 Wilson acknowledged a letter from Emerson and stated that it had been decided merely to print, not publish, three hundred copies of the address.

Emerson Divinity School Address



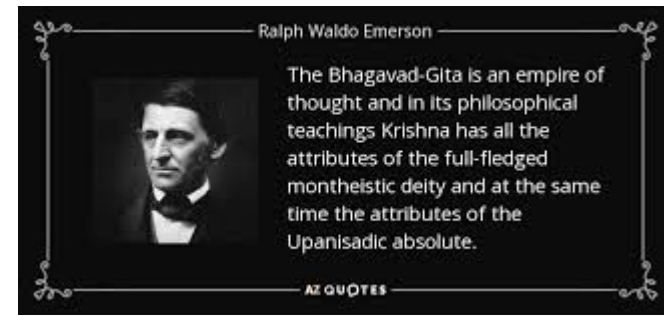
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Emerson Divinity School Address



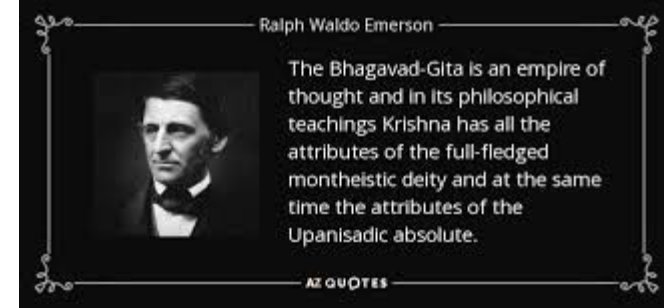
- God Within You: Emerson's Harvard Divinity School Address
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgQRz9Oc-Mw>
- https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_address_delivered_before_the_senior_class_in_Divinity_College
- Emerson draws upon
 - the physical reality of the present moment in opening
 - the lushness of nature in high summer and acknowledges the perfect loveliness of the physical world. Man under the summer stars is like a young child, and the world is his toy
- But Emerson quickly turns away from the material and takes up universal laws, which dwarf the significance of nature's beauty and prompt questions about the world and its order. He reiterates ideas developed at length in *Nature*, thus laying the groundwork for what he will say about the state of religion at the current time.

Emerson Divinity School Address



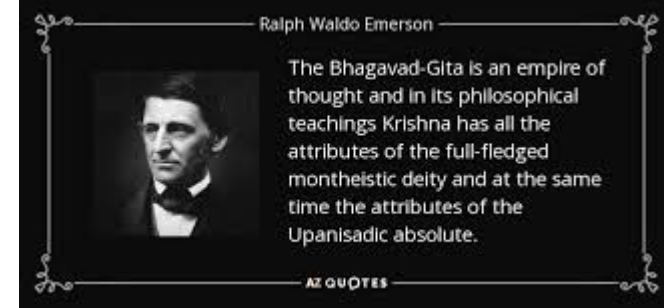
- A beauty more "secret, sweet, and overpowering" than that of nature is apparent when man opens himself to "the sentiment of virtue."
- Man then sees the divine and universal that encompass his existence, and knows that his place in the larger picture assures him a limitless capacity for goodness.
- When man strives to apprehend the absolutes of right, truth, and virtue, he is in harmony with God's creation of the universe for that very purpose, and he pleases God.
- The "sentiment of virtue" is identified as "reverence and delight in the presence of certain divine laws," which are revealed through experience of the world and through life.
- Universal laws cannot be fully envisioned or articulated, but are evident in our character and actions. The "sentiment of virtue" is at the heart of religion.

Emerson Divinity School Address



- Emerson holds up intuition as the means of perceiving the laws of the soul, which are timeless and absolute, not subject to current values and circumstances.
- Goodness and evil are instantly rewarded or punished in the enlargement or diminishment of the man who practices them — external reward and punishment are beside the point.
- Man *is* God to the degree that he is inwardly virtuous. In subordinating himself to the expression of the divine virtue that speaks through him, he knows himself and realizes his capabilities.
- As he does so, he acts in accordance with the workings of the universe, and his efforts to understand and exercise virtue are reinforced.
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Emerson Divinity School Address

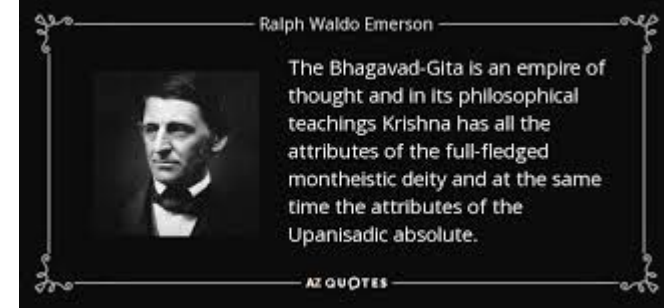


The human soul, in its ability to elevate itself, has the power to determine whether it will go to heaven or hell — that is, there is nothing predetermined about the ultimate fate of the soul. All of this is true because of the unity of man and nature in the divine mind

Because the divine is intrinsically perfect, goodness is real, while evil — the absence of goodness — is not an absolute quality in and of itself.

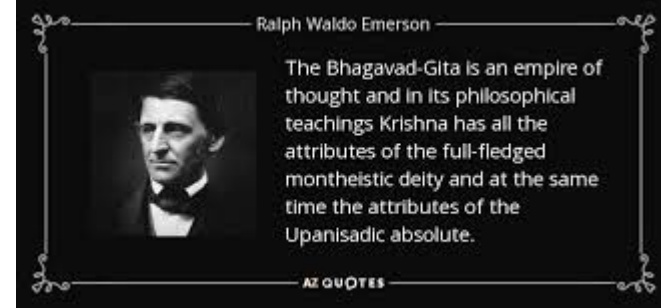
Goodness is identified with life; evil, with death. In straying from goodness, a man progressively loses his connection with the divine, is diminished, and — from a universal point of view, if not physically — ceases to exist.

Emerson Divinity School Address



- The religious sentiment brings joy and makes sense of the world for us, empowers and deifies us. Through the religious sentiment, a man understands that goodness is within him, that he and every other man enjoys a direct relationship with God through intuitive Reason, and that virtue cannot be attained by emulating other men.
- All of society's forms of worship — Oriental as well as western — were founded on an original direct understanding of God by man.
- The importance of intuition to the individual in achieving the religious sentiment, stating that it cannot be received "at second hand," and stresses that the process takes place through inspiration or revelation rather than learning.

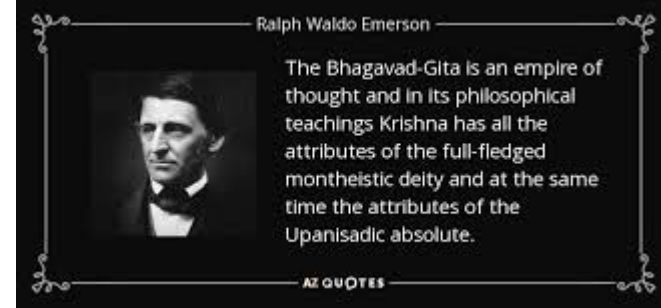
Emerson Divinity School Address



If religion is not based on this intuitive individual connection with the divine, the church is meaningless, man's importance is reduced, and the inner drive to achieve the true religious sentiment is perverted into rejection of a direct relationship with God.

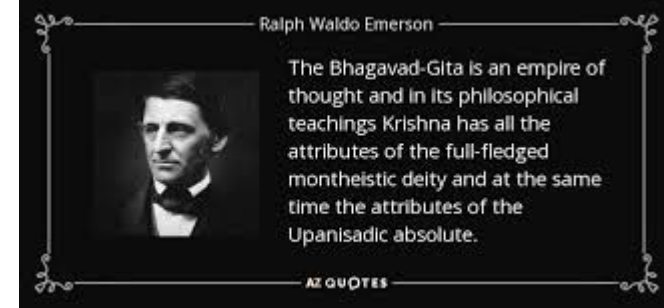
Miracles, prophecy, poetry, the ideal life, the holy life then are present through religion only historically, in its ancient intuitive origin, but not as it currently exists. **Emerson points to the established Christian church as an illustration of this decline of religion from what it was and should be.**

Emerson Divinity School Address



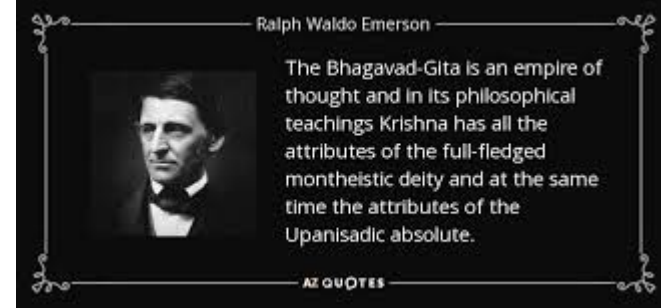
- Jesus belonged to the true race of prophets.
- He saw and lived the inherent relationship between God and man, perceived the human soul as the outlet of the universal soul, and consequently accorded man his proper greatness.
- In his life, he demonstrated the agency of God through men.
- But the example of Jesus has been misused by the church, which quickly came to deny his humanity and to focus upon "the idioms of his language, and the figures of his rhetoric" instead.
- The church has offered false miracles in place of the miracles of human life that Jesus himself recognized, and it has replaced inner perception of truth and goodness with externally imposed commandments.

Emerson Divinity School Address: Two errors in Christianity Administration



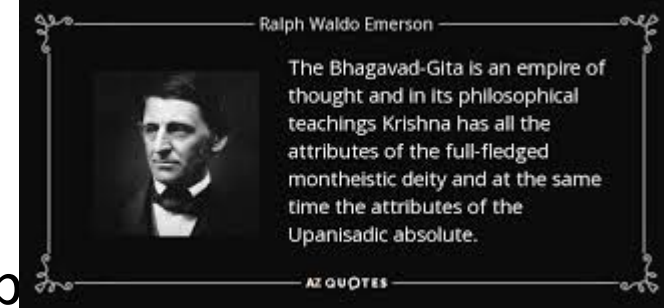
- Rather than promoting the doctrine of the soul as it applies to all, Christianity raises Jesus up above other men. The soul "knows no persons," but indiscriminately invites each man "to expand to the full circle of the universe." Jesus has been made into a kind of eastern monarch, his name associated with official, formal titles that obscure his original position as "friend of man."
- If we accept this view of Jesus and subordinate our own importance to his, we do not recognize our ability also to enter into the divine. The approach that takes God out of man weakens man; that which reveals God within strengthens man. If God is not within, then there is no reason for man's existence, and he will "decease forever." Jesus and the prophets — the "divine bards" — only serve to remind us that our intuitions of the divine do not emanate from us, but from God
- Ordinary men tend to exaggerate the importance of a "great and rich soul" like Jesus, and not to see that they themselves can elevate by "coming again to themselves, or to God in themselves." The current "vulgar tone of preaching" denigrates Jesus as much as it does the rest of mankind. It isolates Jesus and discounts the warmth and vigor that characterized his life and words.

Emerson Divinity School Address



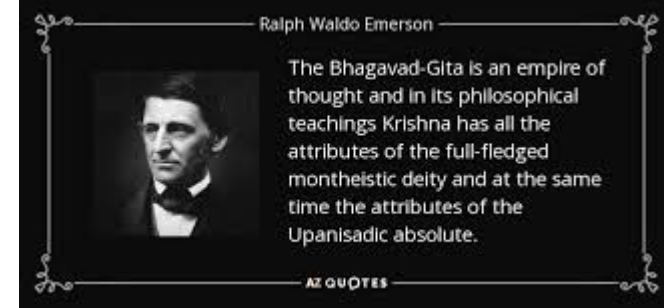
- Secondly, the failure of traditional Christianity to acknowledge as its source "Moral Nature, that Law of laws, whose revelations introduce greatness, — yea, God himself, into the open soul."
- Consequently, men think that revelation happened long ago, once and for all, "as if God were dead," instead of being always possible for every individual. This belief makes it difficult for the minister to preach with meaning and to offer inspiration.
- Because he is obliged to preach a religion that has been formalized and codified, he cannot preach the primacy of the soul. Because "the seer is a sayer," the minister's words do not satisfy his own inner (although sometimes unrecognized) need to impart vision of the "beauty of the soul" to others; nor do they satisfy the innate craving of the members of his congregation to realize their own personal connection to God.

Emerson Divinity School Address



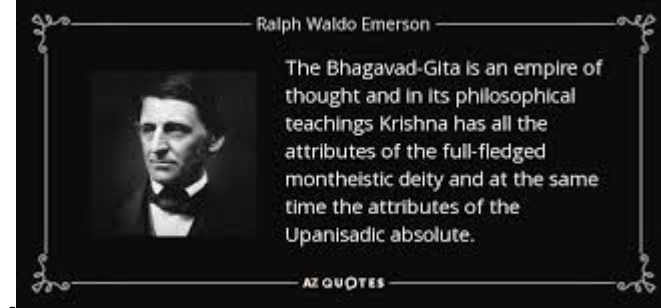
- The death of faith and the lifelessness of the church is deplorable
- The audience of new preachers embarking upon pastoral careers to restore truth, the soul, and intuitive revelation to the church.
- The barrenness of inherited religion must be acknowledged, and ministers must accept their true and exalted function. The preacher's particular office is to express the applicability of the moral sentiment to the duties of life, to help his parishioners relate the ideal to experience
- How infrequently the preacher helps man to see "that he is an infinite Soul; that the earth and heavens are passing into his mind; that he is drinking forever the soul of God," and points out that we ourselves, sitting in church on Sunday, come to a better understanding of God than the preacher offers.
- Religious formalism leaves us empty. The preacher who does not convey his own humanity and the truth that he has gleaned from life says nothing that we need to hear.

Emerson Divinity School Address



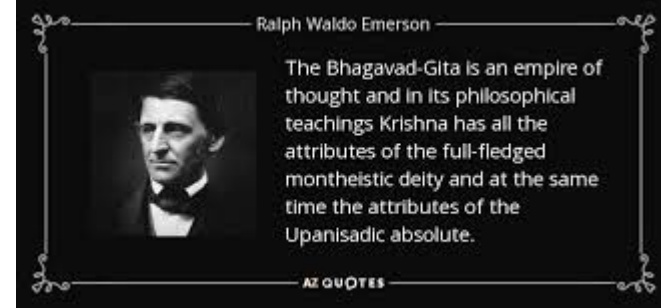
- People so want to enlarge their sense of the moral sentiment that they still go to church. The "good hearer" takes what he can from bad sermons by finding in them echoes of more inspiring words he has heard and thoughts he has had at other times.
- People put up with preaching that does not acknowledge the soul, because the stale doctrines preached were all once intuitively inspired and preserve some of the vigor imparted by their origins.
- The minister is on some level aware of the lack of truth and life in what he preaches, and he suspects that he falls short of fulfilling his duty. He cannot even invite men to the Lord's Supper in good conscience, because he is unable to bring warmth to this rite, the "hollow, dry, creaking formality" of which is "too plain."

Emerson Divinity School Address



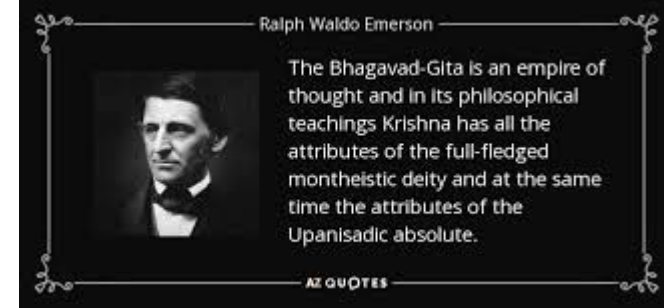
- There are ministers who bring life to public worship. The exceptions, he says, are found not so much in the examples of a few extraordinary preachers as in the rare sincere moments of all.
- By and large, preaching is hindered by tradition, by lack of a sense of the essentials of true religion — the soul, and the absolutes toward which the soul strives.
- By ignoring man's moral nature, historical Christianity destroys the power of preaching, takes the joy out of religion, and invalidates the very reason for the ministry's existence.
- The results are devastating — "the soul of the community is sick and faithless," man despises himself, and fails to achieve the goodness of which he is capable. People are leaving the church in droves. The loss of worship is the worst of all possible calamities

Emerson Divinity School Address



- What can be done to redeem the church: the fledgling ministers in his audience need to recognize and preach the importance of the soul, thereby restoring man to his place of importance, and to combat the notion that religion is static and must be accepted as received
- Do not fear the presentation of Jesus as a man, and show what God is, not what God was to other men. True Christianity — a faith like Christ's in the boundless capabilities of man — has been lost through our tendency to trust in established schemes of religion rather than in the power of the individual soul.
- Only the soul can restore to man a sense of the divine within himself: "to go alone; to refuse the good models, . . . and dare to love God without mediator or veil," and in so doing to inspire their congregations to break from conformity. provided are key, **the Sabbath and the institution of preaching**. Both will become meaningful again if life and conscience are restored to religion.

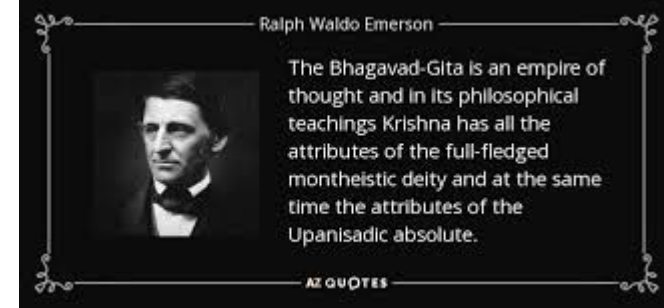
Emerson Divinity School Address



If ministers "acquaint men at first hand with Deity," their flocks will respond with love and gratitude. Society does not encourage development of the "absolute ability and worth" of every person, but after we form a direct connection with God, "the all-knowing Spirit," we will not care about society's values, which preoccupy us only as much as we allow them to.

We must be independent of the opinions of others and draw upon the resources within ourselves, regardless of consequences. Do not establish new rites and forms, but rather breath life back into those already in existence. If we are fully alive with soul, the forms of worship that we employ will become "plastic and new." Two traditions that Christianity has

Emerson Divinity School Address

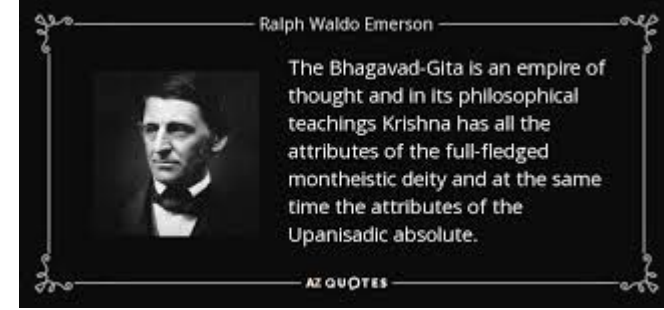


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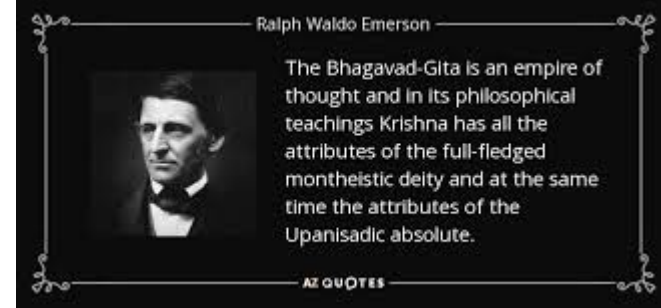
Emerson Divinity School Address

Conclusion



- looking to the time when the spirit that inspired the prophets of old will move men in the present, and
- bringing forth "the new Teacher" who can see the universe and its laws in totality, the world as "mirror of the soul,"
- showing the correspondence of natural laws with spiritual laws and the ultimate oneness of all absolutes.

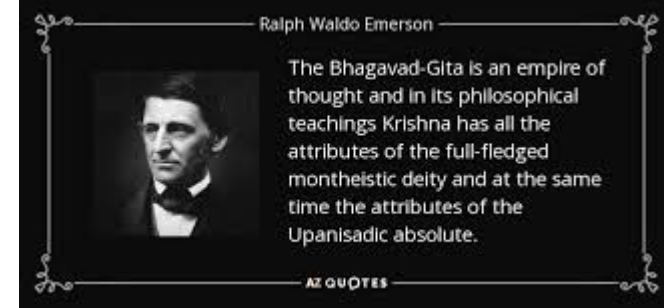
Emerson Divinity School Address



Man as Outlet to the Divine

- Emerson bases all that he says upon the intimate relationship between man and God earlier put forth in *Nature*.
- At the beginning of the address, he introduces the unity of God, man, and nature that he elsewhere terms the Oversoul, and he refers to this unity throughout. He stresses that a true sense of religion, indeed the very soundness of the individual and of society, are impossible to achieve unless a man realizes his direct access to God and recognizes that religion and virtue are within, not imposed or understood from without.

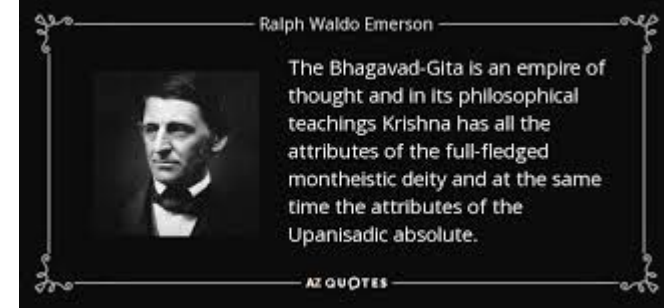
Emerson Divinity School Address



Man has no need for "mediator or veil" between himself and God. This immediate connection gives man his innate and unlimited capacity for development toward God's perfection. Man expresses his oneness with God through virtue in character and action.

Emerson is very clear about man's inherent potential for good, and about how the state into which the church has fallen has obscured our perception of human perfectibility: "[Man] learns that his being is without bound; that, to the good, to the perfect, he is born, low as he now lies in evil and weakness. That which he venerates is still his own, though he has not realized it yet." Emerson is responding to what he sees as a widespread crisis of faith caused by man's disconnection from the source of his powers.

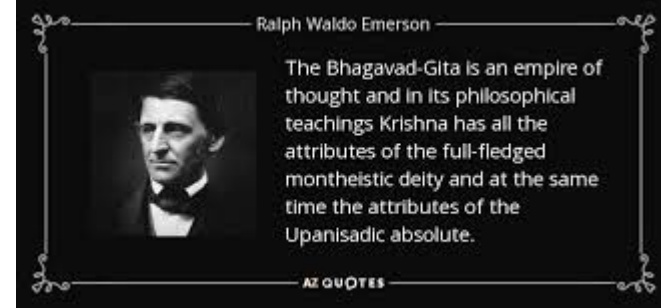
Emerson Divinity School Address



The view of evil expressed by Emerson

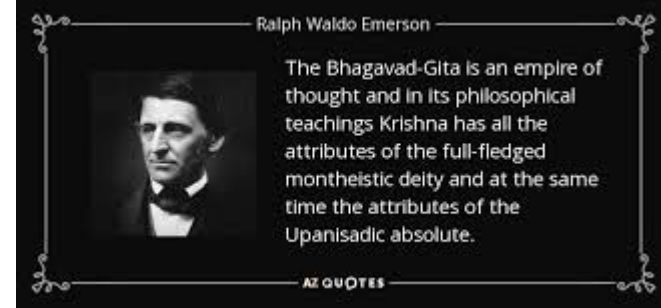
- God is perfection, and that, through his connection to God, man is perfectible. Goodness, and the reward of goodness, are within man, who therefore does not require external structures to ensure his virtue.
- All of the world exudes a kind of sympathetic support of man's goodness, because it is in harmony with the laws of the universe.
- Likewise, when a man deviates from the virtue to which God and the universal laws predispose him, he is instantly aware of disharmony within himself and with the universe, and evil is consequently its own punishment.
- Emerson states that, unlike good, which is a positive, absolute quality, evil does not have independent existence. It is "merely privative, not absolute" — nothing more than the absence of goodness. This sense of the relationship between good and evil departs radically from that offered by traditional religion. It presents a consummately affirmative outlook on human nature and possibility.

Emerson Divinity School Address



- A direct connection with God is available to and exemplified in each and every person. This belief guides his discussion of the nature and importance of Jesus, whom he regards as a man, and as the highest demonstration of the expression of the divine spirit through the life and actions of a man.
- Jesus serves as a model and a source of inspiration for other men, but he did not achieve anything beyond the capabilities of humankind in general. The church has held Jesus up as different from and superior to other men, and has focused excessively on "the person of Jesus" — that is, on the particular qualities that distinguish Jesus from other men — rather than on his inherent similarity to the rest of mankind.
- Emerson insists upon the complete equality of every man in regard to the knowledge of God: "The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those of spontaneous love."
- Emerson sees the deification of Jesus as a disservice to man in general and to Jesus as well. Men cannot forge an understanding of the God within by emulating others, even such a powerful exemplar as Jesus. And Jesus loses humanity, warmth, and his true excellence when approached as "a demigod, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo." Jesus himself — "the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of a man" — understood better than any one the divine nature of mankind.

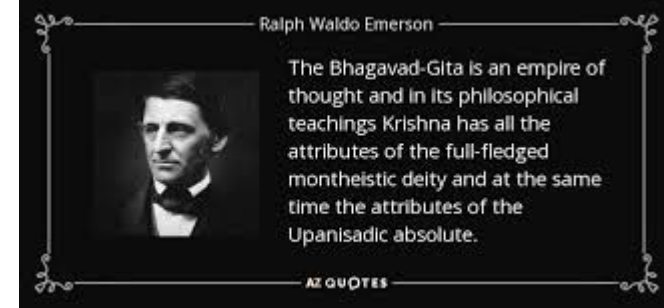
Emerson Divinity School Address



Inherited versus Intuited Religion

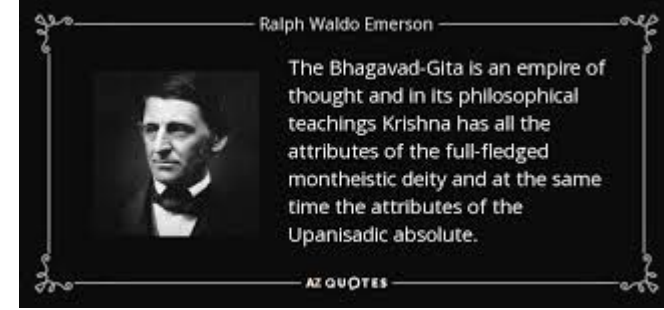
- Emerson contrasts inherited religion — the religion handed down to man by the past — with the connection that each man may form with God directly.
- Inherited or "second hand" religion is presented as lifeless, empty of vitality and meaning, and stifling to the highest capabilities of man.
- Personal religion — man's intuitive grasp of his relationship with God — is full of warmth, vitality, and significance, and is experienced in the here and now. The individual's religious understanding — his "insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul" — constitutes a grasp of universal absolutes that transcend time, space, and temporal circumstance. Intuitive insight into divine laws is also timeless, possible at any given moment, independent of specific cultural values and conditions.

Emerson Divinity School Address



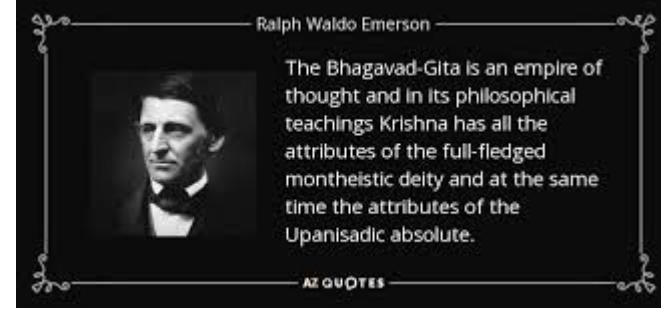
- Emerson associates the church and its inherited traditions with "stationariness," with "the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed."
- In its institutionalization, the church has developed a fixed body of beliefs, dogmas, scriptures, and rites, which it offers as religion. This "petrification" has made us forget that these traditions originated in the distant past through intuition working on the religious and creative faculties of man.
- Whatever power and meaning they retain are vestiges of their archaic inspiration through intuitive Reason. At the end of the address, Emerson looks forward to the time when "that supreme Beauty, which ravished the souls of those Eastern men, and chiefly of those Hebrews, and through their lips spoke oracles to all time, shall speak in the West also."
- Spirit is eternal, but its revelation to man occurs over and over again, in each new generation and within each man. The religious sentiment about which Emerson writes flows continuously into man from God, is fluid and dynamic, and cannot be contained or transmitted in fixed form any more than the goodness of man can be compressed into particular examples of humanity.

Emerson Divinity School Address



- Emerson carefully does not recommend that the individual apply his own intuitive apprehension of God to overthrowing the existing traditions of the church and to replacing them with new ones. He states, "I confess, all attempts to project and establish a Cultus with new rites and forms, seem to me vain. Faith makes us, and not we it, and faith makes its own forms."
- In religion as in other areas, Emerson is suspicious of external reform. He trusts in the reform of the individual as a means of reforming the institution of the church: "Rather let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing. For, if once you are alive, you shall find they shall become plastic and new."
- The remedy to their deformity is, first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul." Rite and ritual are thus incidental and secondary. When the individual allows the spark of intuition to bring his own religious sense to life, the forms through which he expresses it will be enlivened as well. The prevalent failure of faith will be remedied only through each man's understanding of his own personal connection with God.

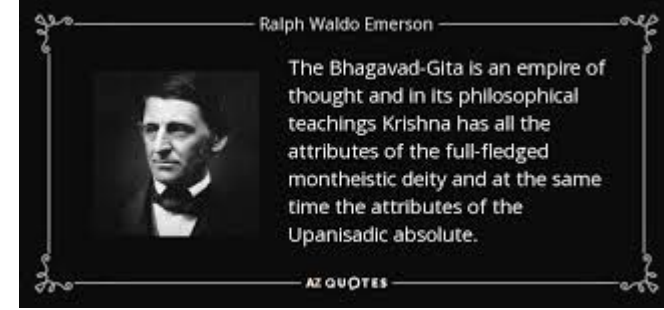
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The Function of the Preacher

- Emerson aims to inspire his audience of new preachers to meet the currently unsatisfied spiritual needs of their future congregations.
- The codification of religion into fixed forms and beliefs has made their fulfillment of this responsibility difficult. Emerson declares, "... the Moral Nature, that Law of laws whose revelations introduce greatness, — yea, God himself, into the open soul, is not explored as the fountain of the established teaching in society."
- Men and their religious leaders no longer understand that revelation is always possible and also essential to their spirituality. They regard it as an isolated phenomenon that occurred in the past. It is the preacher's function to restore soul to his parishioners by encouraging intuitive spirituality and promoting an immediate relationship with God.
- Emerson emphasizes that only the minister who has experienced intuitive perception of God can preach it: The spirit only can teach. Not any profane man, not any sensual, not any liar, not any slave can teach, but only he can give, who has; he only can create, who is. The man on whom the soul descends, through whom the soul speaks, alone can teach.

Emerson Divinity School Address



- Emerson laments the fact that the minister is frequently not such a man. In its failure to address all-encompassing soul as the first, central, necessary element of religion, the church has made worship joyless.
- If the minister likewise does not address the importance of spirit as the direct link between man and God, he not only neglects his true obligations, but is inwardly aware of his failure, and his congregation is profoundly dissatisfied.
- "Whenever the pulpit is usurped by a formalist," Emerson proclaims, "then is the worshipper defrauded and disconsolate." Conversely, when the minister is himself "a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost," he is able to reject conformity and to "acquaint men at first hand with Deity."

Emerson and Nietzsche

- Nietzsche's Surprising Love of Ralph Waldo Emerson
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr2PY4HTevQ>
- Art and philosophy are bridged by Emerson, and in constant conflict with Nietzsche
- Starting at age seventeen, Nietzsche discovered and read and reread Emerson
- Emerson was a wayward brother for Nietzsche, closer than anyone else
- Self reliance: do not seek for things besides yourself
- Ralph Waldo Emerson on Self Reliance, Cultivating Your Genius and The Curse Of Society
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOuTNgnScSc>
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