

The Golden String

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THE ETHICS OF YOGA AND THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

Comparing the incomparable

The title of this lecture is not properly academic. One might see it on a poster at a street corner or in the side column of a newspaper's third page, and its wording serves only to attract attention. The key word is 'Yoga': a term in nearly everyone's passive vocabulary, a noun one has heard or seen in a book or article, but whose meaning is vague. The term's connection with the Latin *jugum* and the English 'yoke' is well known. But from the start I need to note that the meaning of 'Yoga' is vague even for one like myself who has dedicated a considerable portion of his life to the study of the area of religious culture identified by this noun.

It is also true that a majority of educated persons throughout the world would not be able to identify 'Saint Benedict' as an historical personage, nor would they know that he had written a 'Rule'. But were one to travel East from here, beyond the Mediterranean Basin, more and more people would immediately recognize the term 'Yoga' (whether or not they would be able to give a definition of it), and by the time one reached India, one would likely find a person at a city bus stand who would ask, "The Ethics of Yoga? Do you perhaps mean the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali?"

There you have it: the proper academic wording of my title ought to be: "A Comparison of the Ethical and Ascetical Precepts in the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Yoga Sutras of Patañjali" — a properly academic title, but not very

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THE LENGTH OF THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN DOUBLED TO ACCOMMODATE LONGER ARTICLES WITHOUT DIVIDING THEM.

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Spirit, Soul and Body III TANTRA

Cyprian Consiglio

Those who would govern the world should trust what is natural.

The world cannot be controlled consciously.

It is too big a thing.

The world can only be governed by the spirit,
not by human strength or knowledge.

Te-Ch'ing

All creatures have existed eternally in the divine essence as in their exemplar. So far as they conform to the divine idea, all beings were, before their creation, one thing with the essence of God. *Henry Suso*

3. TANTRA

If there is a problem with the systems we have already discussed—Samkhya, Classical Yoga, Advaita-Vedanta and early Buddhism—(and that, as they say, is a big "if"), it is that they tend to stop short. They are faithful children of First Axial consciousness, (I had almost said "sons," since the First Axial awakening had very much a masculine thrust) in which there is a tendency to leave behind the world, the body, and creation due to an at least implicit dualism, i.e. soul (or Spirit/spirit, or pure consciousness) is good, body (matter, creation, earth) is at best illusory, at worst out and out evil, the "ancient and perennial dualism" that Sam Keene warns us about, "(equally manifest in Platonism, Gnosticism and schizophrenia) which considers the flesh of less dignity than the spirit and the senses inferior to the mind."

Even Yoga can and often does fall into this dualism. We in the West often associate Yoga with the asanas of Hatha Yoga, but the accent on the physical, the "psycho-somatic," is actually a later development.¹ In its earliest incarnation Classical Yoga may not have been so much a psycho-somatic method (involving body and soul) as it was a psycho-technology: notice the second of Patanjali's aphorisms is, "Yoga is a stilling of the thought waves of the mind." Very few asanas are even mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The body has often been regarded by spiritual seekers rather as an obstacle, Aurobindo writes; in the past the body has been regarded "as something to be overcome and discarded" rather "than as an instrument of spiritual per-

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Yoga and the Rule *(Continued from page 1)*

interesting. This academic wording would also expose me to the immediate objection: “Can these two very different texts be compared at all?” Perhaps they could no more be compared than any two fruits of human creativity: say, for example, a film of Federico Fellini and a symphony of Beethoven. In fact, the two texts we consider here may chronologically be separated by about the same time span as that between Beethoven and Fellini; so the Yoga Sutras can be dated a couple of centuries before the Rule of Benedict, some time between the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era.

Obviously, I hope to show that Rule and Sutras can in some way be compared, for the fact that the *Sitz im Leben* of both is a kind of community dedicated to a rigorous discipline different from that of the human family or other, ordinary, social institutions. I might even be so bold as to say that the communities that gave rise to both texts could be called ‘schools of the Lord’s service’ in some analogous sense. Of course, I would immediately correct my own boldness, before the objection could be raised by a hearer, that the ‘Lord’ in the Rule of Benedict is the *Dominus Deus Israel* and especially the *Dominus Jesus*, while Patañjali’s *Īshvara* (which does mean ‘Lord’), although identified as the supreme Spirit, *Paramātman* or *Purusha*, cannot simply be declared the same (under a Sanskrit rather than a Latin name) as the one whom the Bible identifies as Lord and God. Let me state this objection in other terms: those formed in the school of Patañjali do not relate to their *Īshvara* in exactly the same way as those who have been formed in the school of the Gospels and Saint Benedict relate to the Lord Jesus.

I said, “not exactly as,” but I can always say that a Benedictine’s relationship to Jesus, to God, is in some way analogous to a yogi’s relationship to the Lord named *Īshvara* in the Yoga Sutras. The analogy is strengthened, as we move forward in time, into and beyond the Western Middle Ages, and we see witnesses of devotional Hinduism, yogis belonging to what are called the *bhakti* schools. But time does not permit us to cover so much ground, and so we limit our topic and our primary sources to the Rule of Benedict and the Yoga Sutras. However, keep in mind the difference of literary genre: the genre of a monastic rule, which mixes descriptive and instructive teaching; and the genre of *sūtrāni*, a neuter plural noun that shares the Proto-Indo-European root with the English verb ‘to sew’. The Sanskrit noun, *sūtra*, can be translated ‘stitches’. Italian has a similar metaphor: stitches are *punti*, and this word is also used in speaking of points in a discourse.

Aphorisms of Yoga

In many translations, the title ‘Yoga Sutras’ is given as ‘Aphorisms of Yoga’, and this is also an appropriate name for the genre. Here we have pithy, sometimes arcane phrases, often no more than two or three words. These phrases, aphorisms, points, or stitches are in practice used as reminders — *aides-mémoires* — of a more ample discourse.

In fact, underlying the phrases of Patañjali, there is a long history of teaching, an oral tradition like that of so many schools in India and even of the Vedic literature itself; the most sacred texts of Hinduism, like the *sūtrāni*, are handed down orally, ‘from mouth to ear’, with a mnemonic precision unmatched by scribes and copyists.

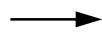
Just as the aphorisms presuppose an antecedent discourse, rich in content, which they condense into the fewest possible words, they also have given rise to an abundant literature of commentary, whereby the individual sutras are shown to be practically inexhaustible sources of doctrine and precept. Hence a text like the Yoga Sutras stands as a pivotal point in the midst of many texts, anterior and posterior to it.

In addition to the metaphor of ‘points’ or ‘stitches’ in the title, the tradition also refers to the teachings of Patañjali as *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. *Aṣṭa* is etymologically related to Latin *octo*, that is, ‘eight’; *āṅga* is related to ‘ankle’, and the Italian *anca* (‘hip-bone’), and means ‘limb’. So the *sūtras* of Patañjali are the ‘eight-limbed yoga’, and this calls to mind the ‘Noble Eight-fold Path’ of Buddhism, the eight righteous actions that lead to the cessation of the cause of our alienation or ontological suffering; most significant is the use of the identical term *samādhi* in both Buddhist and yogic texts, for the eighth of these actions or ‘limbs’.

In the system of Patañjali, *samādhi* is both a goal and a practice. As the end of yoga, the term *samādhi* is used to define yoga itself. The first chapter, verse two of Patañjali’s aphorisms gives another, general definition of yoga as: *cittavritti nirodha*, “stopping the agitations of the heart”. By means of the eight ‘limbs’, the yogi, having practiced *samādhi*, attains a perfect ‘concentration’ of the mind upon its own essential being (‘concentration’ being a literal translation of *samādhi*), and mind and heart are still. As a practice, *samādhi* is understood as a fixed, contemplative gaze and an uninterrupted meditation, and even when the meditator contemplates an external object (a flame, an icon, a name of God, etc.), the practice is ultimately aimed at the mind itself. Hence, in *samādhi*, as the fruit of meditation, the mind is totally assimilated to its object; the object then paradoxically disappears, and the mind as ‘seer’ (the ‘seeing one’) shines of its own light.

If this were all that yoga is about, we would find it to be a polar opposite of a Christian monastic’s ultimate end. Although Christian monks and nuns do practice meditation and do seek to quiet the heart’s agitation, the goal is not to contemplate one’s own mind but rather to turn mind, heart, and will toward the Trinitarian God, the God of subsistent relations, whose essence is love and whose primary external manifestation to human beings is God’s image in the neighbor, whom we are called to love, even were the neighbor an ‘enemy’. If we sum up yoga in a definition that so starkly contrasts it with a Christian’s ultimate end, we should face the same dilemma that assailed Jules Mon-

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Tantra (Continued from page 1)

fection and a field of the spiritual change.” And, since our body is our bridge to and model of the world, how we are in our body so will we be in the world. Thus, creation too could come to be seen as something to be overcome (or dominated and beaten into submission), of less dignity than spirit and inferior to the mind, rather than as an instrument of spiritual perfection and a field of spiritual change.

One antidote to all of this, one that Fr. Bede was particularly fascinated with, is the Tantric movement both in Hinduism and Buddhism.

pre-Aryan India

Although the birth of the Tantric movement is generally thought to have been in the first centuries of the Common Era, Tantra’s roots are deep in the history of ancient India. The religious tradition that we know now as Hinduism, indeed Indian civilization itself, is a synthesis of at least two different spiritual traditions and cultures coming together. The semi-nomadic Indo-European Aryans migrated to the subcontinent of India around 2000 BCE, perhaps by way of the Khyber Pass. These Aryans brought with them a language (an ancient form of Sanskrit), their military ways, their economic systems and their castes. They also brought with them their gods and their religious practices based on ritual sacrifice, for all of which the priesthood—*brahminism*—was very important. The scriptures that record this ancient religion are of course the *Vedas*: the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda* (though this latter comes from a later period). This is also the tradition that will eventually lead to the Upanishads and Classical Yoga.

We could hazard to say that this Aryan tradition was very *yang*, very masculine. Indeed throughout the world the pre-historical matriarchal societies were beginning to die out, to be pretty much eclipsed halfway through the last millennium before the Common Era, the time known as the 1st Axial Period, the era of the Upanishads, the Buddha, Taoism, the Jewish prophets, the rise of Greek philosophy. Proponents of the Perennial Philosophy and this Axial Period theory will suggest that from here on out in human thought the feminine in general will be more and more repressed and rejected.

However, it is important to note that when the Aryans descended into the subcontinent of India, they fused with the indigenous peoples of that region, especially the Harappan culture of the Indus Valley (modern day Pakistan) who already had a thousand-year-old civilization that was thriving in technology and trade. Even though the Harappan culture was no match for the warlike Aryan invaders, some elements of the pre-Aryan culture and spiritual tradition remained.² There is some conjecture that the Yogic tradition in general may have derived from this Harappan culture. Many sources, for instance, point to a pre-Aryan “proto-Shiva” statue of a man in lotus position. There is a little more certainty yet that the specifically Tantric approach to

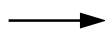
Yoga is a remnant of this ancient tradition that was able to survive and then re-emerge, especially in border areas that were able to resist complete Aryanization.

In spite of the repression and rejection of the feminine that was concomitant to the rise of the more masculine traditions in general and the Aryan one in particular, one important pre-Aryan element that was able to survive in the subcontinent of India was devotion to the Divine Feminine, the strong element of worship of the Great Mother that was prevalent in pre-Aryan India, especially among the Dravidian people of South India, as it still is to this day. When the Aryan invaders and settlers came down from the north, along with the Vedic mythology and philosophy worship of male gods came into prominence—similar to the development that occurred among the Greeks and Hebrews—and the indigenous goddesses were assigned lesser importance. Nevertheless, goddess worship was not extinguished; it was assimilated into the Vedic tradition in a synthesis that ought to sound familiar to us—the Great Goddess became Prakriti, the active principle, as we saw in Samkhya philosophy. Similarly, Shiva, the god who was often represented by the image of the lingam or phallus became the Vedic Purusha, the inactive, conscious witnessing principle.³ This survival and assimilation of the feminine principle will be an important element in the rise of Tantra.

The beginning of the Tantric movement

It is almost impossible to assign much specificity to the beginning of the Tantric movement in India due to the anonymity of most of its texts, except to say it was sometime in the beginning of the Common Era. Its golden age was undoubtedly the 10th to 12th centuries, the age of Abhinavagupta, the great chronicler of the Trika school of Hindu Tantrism, and Naropa, one of the founders of the Kagyupa school of Tibetan Buddhist Tantrism, both of Kashmir. It is also an open question if the movement began first in Hinduism or Buddhism, though many sources speculate that the Buddhist texts are older. It is safe to say that there was mutual influence between the two. What is widely held is that Tantra arose at least in a large part as a reaction against both the Vedic Brahmanism of Hinduism and the ascetical monasticism of Buddhist orders, specifically “the dualistic and renunciate practices taught in the Vedas and Upanishads and further codified in the *Yoga Sutras*,” against the traditions “that would put the devoted yogi in an isolated cave and insist that normal human experiences such as desire or sexuality prevent or at least limit true happiness or enlightened being.”⁴ As June Singer wrote, Tantra was “unlike the orthodox Brahmin tradition, which asserts that our world is a meaningless illusion that we must learn to reject along with all its pleasures.” Neither does Tantra spend much time bemoaning the misery of the human condition or on any kind of attempt to escape from consciousness of or interest in worldly matters through oppressing the body and the mind.⁵

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THE ENDURING LEGACY: FATHER BEDE AND SWAMI ABHISHIKTANANDA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Michael Christian

One of the things that became clear in Shantivanam during the course of 2010—a year bookended by conferences for the centenary of Swami Abhishiktananda (9-15 Jan 2010 and 14-17 Dec 2010)—was the value and increasing relevance today of Fr. Bede's and Sw. Abhishiktananda's work. Rather than trailing off and fading away with the passage of the decades since their deaths, what we seemed to be seeing this year and in recent years is a growing attraction to the teaching these founders imparted through their combined literary corpus and by the example of their respective monastic careers. One indication of this increased interest is simply the swelling guest ministry at the Ashram over the last couple of years. The 2010-11 season, for example, was booked throughout — a happy problem that hasn't been there since Bede's time. Many who are coming are pilgrimage groups from the West. Some are Church groups, such as Patrick Woodhouse's group from Wells Cathedral, an annual pilgrimage made by a vital group composed largely of Anglican clergy from Wells Cathedral and surrounding dioceses. Other groups include students such as the Chigwell School which comes each February or the young Danish student group last January, among them a number of aspiring comparative religion students. Russell and Asha's group brings forty or more each season. Doctoral students of theology and Catholic and Anglican religious are finding their way to Shantivanam in increasing numbers by way of Bede's and Abhishiktananda's writings. 2010-11 also saw two separate French film crews (headed by Vincent Lauth), one doing a documentary on Abhishiktananda's life (not to be confused with the 2006-7 German film crew led by Gunter Franke) and a second, filming a documentary on Christian Ashrams for French national television (*France 2*). An ecumenical interfaith dialogue center of prayer in South Africa which has taken Shantivanam's namesake (calling itself *Sat Chit Anand*), regularly includes in its newsletters reflections inspired by Bede's books and Br Martin's talks.

But 2010-11 brought not only an increase in numbers at the Ashram, but seemed to engender a qualitative shift, a synergy of presence and an intensity of purpose among those gathered that was not there before. So why all this sudden interest in Shantivanam, Fr. Bede, Swami Abhishiktananda and the East-West encounter?

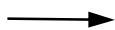
Perhaps it is several things. To be sure the conferences last year, drawing sincere dedicated scholars, writers, priests, pundits, monks and nuns from all over the world, came as a fresh breeze inspiring us India-based participants and nudging us back to the work that had brought us down this path in the first place. It was an eye-opener and pointed to a vital dimension of Shantivanam's growing ministry—one that is yet to be fully exploited: Shantivanam's role as a convener,

hub and headquarters for ongoing research in the East/West dialogue and the Christian Ashram experiment. But the trend of the 2010 conference year was already in place before the year began. Indeed Br. Martin's ministry in Europe has been growing year by year in recent years and many who have the chance to see him in Europe are drawn to visit the Ashram. Camaldolese oblates from Italy and the US are learning of Bede and Shantivanam through their contacts with the Camaldolese. Cyprian's world-wide music and teaching ministry has raised awareness about East-West dialogue and Fr Bede in remote regions of the world, and his Santa Cruz-based Bede Sangha (which recently did a benefit concert in Santa Cruz for Bless School [situated near Shantivanam]) made a pilgrimage to Shantivanam a few years ago, inspiring numerous follow-up visits by its members. The Bede Sangha in the UK and their outreach work in Tannirpalli has raised interest at home and brought their own groups to Shantivanam.

The gradual dissemination of information about the mission of Shantivanam spreads with new publications, elevating Shantivanam's profile in other countries, e.g., Shirley Du Boulay's biographies of Bede and Abhishiktananda, *Medio Media's* reprinting Bede's books with worldwide distribution, and ongoing translation of Abhishiktananda's writings into various languages. But if Fr Bede's and Swami Abhishiktananda's ideas are propagating and reaching larger audiences, still the question remains, why only now?

Arguably the social changes we are seeing globally are playing a part. The increasing interculturalism in Western societies, for example, has lent a sense of immediacy to the language of accommodation and interfaith bridge-building across religious and ethno-cultural lines. Since Bede and Abhishiktananda's time, history has made ecumenism not just a good idea but essential, even inevitable. If no man is an island, then in this age of globalization, no religion is either, and the need for mutual understanding—if not mutual interpenetration bridging denominational divides—is proving indispensable. To be sure, as Fr Bede would have been quick to point out, this work can only be effective in the context of an authentic appreciation of one's own tradition and knowing how to place oneself and one's tradition within the overall scheme of a radically and rapidly changing globalised social and theological landscape. But as the ground shifts beneath our feet and the very fabric of individual and collective spiritual psychologies and modes of articulation undergo a dramatic reordering, we as Christians seem to be pining for prophetic voices and the theoretical footing from which to gain a purchase on the slippery slopes of contemporary religious life. Could it be that the subtle forces at work in the interior lives of Fr Bede Griffiths and Dom Henri Le Saux, compelling them to take the radical steps they did more than a half a century ago, are the very forces operative in the lives of thousands, or perhaps even millions of Catholics around the world today? Could it

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The Enduring Legacy (Continued from page 4)

be that it is theirs and other similarly prophetic interventions that offer one of the keys to the current crisis in religion today? Could it be, ironically, if not providentially, that the unfamiliar epistemologies and theologies of other faiths, while, in one way of looking, present challenges to the Christian ethos, might also be the very remedy by which we as Christians (in the West, at least) could reinvigorate, inspire and recover our own spiritual vitality and deepen the Christian experience? If so, could we undertake such an endeavor without betraying the spirit of our own heritage? Speaking as a monk, Merton offers this response:

“I think we have now reached a stage of (long-overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet to learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience. I believe that some of us need to do this in order to improve the quality of our own monastic life and even to help in the task of monastic renewal which has been undertaken within the Western Church” (*Asian Journal*, p. 313).

It is fascinating to hear how similar the stories told by pilgrims of various Christian denominations from diverse parts of the world are. What we hear each year from seekers coming to Tamil Nadu is an intense longing to explore the deeper questions of life and faith, and to heed the call of the ‘inner’ monk or nun that invariably dwells within each us. As lay monasticism continues to grow—expressed in increasing oblate membership rolls in various communities around the world, not least of all, at Shantivanam—what we see in seekers today is a sense of urgency, a healthy desperation and quiet yearning to find solid and committed faith communities engaged in the genuine search for spiritual wholeness. Where, they implore, is truth beyond the sham consumer humdrum that floods and saturates the planet’s life-world on a daily basis? Where and how in an increasingly desacralized info-saturated consumer world is one to encounter silence and the Sacred?

A stream of refugees appears each year in South India, perhaps with slightly romanticized expectations as to what is to be found here and yet, with an unquestioned sincerity. What a blessing and joyful surprise it is for them to discover that not only are they not alone in their quest but that others—Fr. Bede and Sw. Abhishiktananda not least of all among them—have marked the way. Nearly twenty years after Father Bede’s passing and almost forty years after that of Swami Abhishiktananda, the social, theological, and liturgical experiments these two monks initiated more than a half a century ago offer encouragement and orientation in an increasingly complex, centrifugal postmodern world. It is perhaps only now that the insights and ideas of these towering figures are coming into their own, finding a sympathetic listening and the broader audience they so deserve, and thus are finally attaining fulfillment in the promise of serving this and future generations of seekers and believers. ■

THE RISING SUN WITHIN
Elbina Rafizadeh

...the vast movement and agitation of human life opens onto a road which leads somewhere, and that road climbs somewhere. *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

Grief arrives in many forms, at different times, and often unexpectedly. It is awakened whether I am alone, or when I am with friends. Though unwelcome, it offers the opportunity for a deeper reflection and, maybe, a doorway to find somewhere else, the mystery of God, and eventually the destination, where all roads converge. During a hike at the hermitage, my friend said to me, “There’s something in you, something that you need to confront. You need to dig deep and work through it.” He was referring to my attachment to the memories of Nader, my husband who died 26 years earlier. I didn’t believe him at first. I refused to relive that sad journey of grief work, over and over again as in the years before. Of course he was totally wrong. I had dealt with Nader’s death, experiencing the painful loneliness of missing my best friend and husband. I had already been through the grief. There was nothing left. Grief was not gaining entry into my life, again. Not now. I am never in the mood for grief.

During Lent, the subject of Nader came up many times during conversation jolting awake that gnawing pain in my chest. I had been so used to this pain that comes and goes that I thought it was normal. It came back again and again. But my friend insisted that it can go away. Annoyed, I thought, such audacity to suggest that I was still having problems with letting go of the past? This grief belonged to me, not to him.

On a solitary hike in the Santa Cruz Mountains, I saw other hikers, all with companions, boyfriends, girlfriends, wives, husbands, families, or children. I was alone, the only one who was the solitary hiker. I am always alone. I am even comfortably alone. After all, I felt reassured that Nader’s spirit was always with me. So I needed nothing, no one else, except my family and some friends. When I am alone, unchallenged, the pain is absent. I was detached from anything that risked the possibility of having to endure emotional pain all over again because I knew that every relationship was temporary, and separation from meaningful relationships was my issue. I knew that.

God, however, had other ideas. I found myself challenged in new friendships, the kind that drew me into emotional encounters, and the kind that agitated those unpleasant feelings hidden in my heart, tucked into the folds of a safety haven, in the dark cave where no one is allowed entry. I was at a loss and confused again. So agitated did my heart become, as I began to relive that horrible loss of a loved one through sudden death, then the subsequent losses of friends and family through death or separation. Then

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The Golden String

Rising Sun Within (Continued from page 5)

there was a close friend who committed suicide. And, several years earlier, a favorite aunt who also died unexpectedly. The reverberation awoke the feelings, and then began the attack, like an army set for battle to create another upheaval. My meditations were disrupted and abysmal. Consequently, the tears arrived in full force. One day I was calm, the next, in abysmal grief. Here we go again, I thought. Prayer, meditation, and again more prayer. I lived between meditation and prayer through Lent.

One evening, God's faithfulness arrived. I came across a quote, "Christian cemeteries are barren except for a mowed lawn because there's no one there. They're with God." There, simply stated, yet reverberated deeply. Then again, a few weeks later at the Hermitage, reiterated by Fr. Daniel in a homily. God was talking. Hadn't I known that Nader was with God? Intellectually, yes, but emotionally, perhaps I could not embrace this truth. I needed to survive. I had found comfort in the thought that Nader remained with me in spirit, because we loved each other that much. He would *never* leave me. This was the gross illusion that became clearer as I meditated on the reality of my life. My illusion had been my companion for many years, especially during those very empty moments and why I stayed so incredibly busy with work and more work. Now I had to face this massive detachment. *Nader is gone, especially in spirit.* Was it true? Have I grown so dependent on this illusion that it became a crutch? Did all those years of grief work lead to this, to a somewhat benign illusion that helped me through those abysmal moments? If so, let me then begin the journey of living in the unknown. Let me rewind and erase the tape of habitual thought from my mind and be more mindful of living in the fullness of life, in sadness and in joy.

So one morning, after prayer, I wrote Nader a final goodbye letter, asking him for forgiveness and also forgiving him for all that was left unsaid because of his unexpected departure. I also wrote of my gratitude for our friendship, love, and marriage. For full participation in the world, as God intended, I had to step out of the haven of illusion, to live in truth in the world. The risk of living in the unknown, the mystery of God in the world, was now my choice to be taken. The unknown path beckoned me and this time, I was willing to journey the unknown path despite fear and apprehension. But I have also adopted this habit of asking for God's help in times of need, and this was my time of need. Maybe I will have to work on erasing the tapes again, during some unknown time in the future. I have faith because I rest in God and if I have to go through this again, I find comfort in God's reassurance in Jesus, through the Cross and Resurrection.

I was driving over Nacimiento Road, a curvy road along the cliff face of the Los Padres mountain range towards Mission San Antonio, where I would join friends from the Santa Cruz sangha for discussion, meditation, and

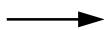
prayer. I had just left the Hermitage after praying Vigils and Lauds with the monks. After a peaceful morning meditation in the rotunda before leaving, I was looking forward to being with my sangha friends. While navigating an especially narrow hairpin turn, I finally arrive on the section of the road lined by trees, and a stream that ran alongside. I am safe. God is with us. Then for some unknown reason, Jesus on the Cross came to mind and the beauty of the Resurrection.

The Cross comes into our lives over and over again, but we can have faith that the Resurrection is waiting for our recovery. The Cross in my life has been the grief from my losses, not only of Nader, but also close family members and meaningful friendships that had found their way into my path but are no longer with me. The journey is not easy, but we can have faith that God will lead us through those dark nights.

At the Easter Sunday Vigil Mass, Fr. Bruno ended a homily with this statement that resonates: "the resurrection is like finding the rising sun within." Like the sun that warmed the chill from the morning as I drove to the mission, the rising sun is within us, waiting to be discovered.

"When Jesus surrendered his life on the cross, he brought to fulfillment this movement of the human soul; he accomplished the total surrender of man to God, of the human to the divine; he achieved the final death of the self to this world and raised it to eternal life in the resurrection....."

Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Center.* ■



INTEGRAL DYNAMIC MONO-THEISM (FULLY HUMAN, FULLY DIVINE) Part II. John Martin Sahajananda

Some Observations

The Prophetic Monotheism reduces human beings into creatures of God and thus closes the door to realize themselves as the sons and daughters of God and one with God. The theory of creation out of nothing⁸ is not a very liberating theory as it blocks the spiritual evolution of human consciousness. Shankara opened to creation and human beings the possibility to realize themselves as being one with God. He was focused nothing else but on human beings' divinity but this was done at the cost of their humanity. Human existence and relationships seem to have no significance. Ramanuja tried to correct this extreme position and give some meaning and purpose to creation and human relationships. He gave creation and human beings the dignity of divine manifestation and divine son-ship and daughterhood but it was done at the cost of their divinity. Madhva tried to bring God to the level of human beings in all their limitations but it was done at the cost of their divine son-ship and daughterhood and also their divinity.

The position of Shankara on the nature of creation is very ambiguous. If he really means that the creation is an illusion then we live in a purposeless creation. If he means that creation, in the sense of names and forms, is not eternal then there is some meaning to creation and human existence. The names and forms are not eternal but what is within the names and forms is eternal. In that sense creation is also divine in its essence just as human beings are essentially one with the divine in their essence. Shankara gives some meaning and purpose to creation in the functional separation which he calls the *vyavaharika* level. Only in the ultimate level, *paramarthika*, the creation is an illusion. In general his system is interpreted to mean that creation is an illusion or *maya*. This position does not give any positive role to creation and human beings in the world of time and space. The entire focus is on realizing our divinity and then everything comes to an end.

Ramanuja holds that Brahman is the material and instrumental cause of creation and human souls. In that sense they are essentially one with Brahman though functionally may be different like water and ice. If it is so what prevents human souls from merging with Brahman in the ultimate level? Just as what prevents ice melting into water? It seems that there is some contradiction in his proposition. Madhva holds that creation is completely different from Brahman. He also holds that creation has no beginning as if it is eternal. How can there be two eternal realities? Does it imply that there are two Gods? These three Hindu Monotheistic systems seem to have something to integrate just as prophetic Monotheistic Religions need to open themselves

to the higher divine-human relationship. There have been many great Hindu mystics, like Sri Ramakrishna and his disciple Swami Vivekananda, who have tried to integrate these three systems. So also there have been many mystics in the prophetic religions who had opened the human consciousness to the higher level of divine-human relationship even though they had to face many difficulties.

Is Jesus Christ a Prophetic Monotheist or a Hindu Monotheist?

Jesus Christ made statements which do not fit within the Prophetic Monotheism. He called God as his Father. He said that he was the Son of God. He was in the Father and the Father in him. He came from the Father and returned to the Father. He also claimed that the Father (God) and he were one. His experience of God did not fit within the belief system of Prophetic Monotheism. For Jesus, God was not his creator and he was not a creature. His origin is in eternity. Judaism and Islam reject his claims and consider them blasphemous. They think that his statements are metaphorical and not metaphysical. Christianity accepts his claims but limits them only to Jesus and not a possibility for every human being. The claims of Jesus are very close to the Qualified Non-Dualistic and Non-dualistic systems of Hinduism. His statements make perfect sense to these two systems. In that sense Jesus was more a Hindu Monotheist than a Prophetic Monotheist. In Qualified Non-dualism and Non-dualism these claims are not limited to any one particular individual but a possibility for every human being.

Is Jesus Christ a Dualist? A Qualified Non-Dualist? Or a Non-Dualist?

We are dealing with this question retrospectively. There were not these systems during the time of Jesus. But these systems give us some tools to understand Jesus's experience. Jesus has made three important statements: "my Father is greater than I"⁹, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me"¹⁰ and "the Father and I are one."¹¹ The first statement is in accordance with the Dualistic system. God is the creator and Jesus is the creature. God is greater than him. The second statement is in accordance with the Qualified Non-Dualistic system. Here the relationship is much more intimate. It is not the relationship of creator and creature. It is the relationship of Father and Son. He is in God and God is in him. It is an experience of mutual indwelling. Still there is some distance between him and the Father. He is not the Father. The third statement is in accordance with the Non-Dualistic system. The Father and he are one. There is no distance. There is no separation. If we take them all together then it appears Jesus is contradicting himself. If God is greater than him then he cannot say 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me'. If there is a distance between God and Jesus then he cannot say that God and he are one.

We can say that Jesus began his journey with the experience of being a creature (dualist) and experienced God as greater than him according to his spiritual tradition. At the moment of his baptismal experience he went beyond

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that relationship and realized that he was not a creature but the son of God (qualified non-dualist), the manifestation of God. Later he went even beyond that and realized that he was one with the Father, God (non-dualist). But he did not remain in that non-dual experience but came down to qualified-non-dualistic experience and dualistic experience as long as he lived in his physical body and in the world of time and space. We can say that Jesus was essentially a non-dualist but functionally a qualified non-dualist and a dualist. We cannot put him into any one of these systems.

Integral Dynamic Monotheism

We have seen different types of monotheisms: the simple Monotheism of Upanishads, which affirms One Reality (Brahman, Atman) without the second and human beings are ultimately one with that Reality (*tatvamasi*); the Prophetic Monotheism, which affirms that there is only One God and creation is essentially different; Non-dualistic Monotheism of Shankara which affirms that there is only One God and creation is an illusion or unreal; Qualified Non-dualistic Monotheism of Ramanujaja, which affirms that there is only One God and creation is his body; and the Dualistic Monotheism of Madhva, which affirms that there is only One God and creation also is eternal but essentially different from God. Jesus' experience does not fit into any of these monotheisms. So I like to describe him — not to define him — as an *Integral Dynamic Monotheist*.

The Integral Dynamic Monotheism of Jesus Christ

The Integral Dynamic Monotheism of Jesus can be described in this way:

God alone is. God alone is eternal (sathyam and nithyam). This God cannot be put into any human categories. It is independent, creative, timeless, peace and love. It is personal, impersonal and beyond. It is like an infinite space and our concepts of it are like houses that we build within the space. It allows the building of houses according to the needs and capacities of human mind but it always transcends them. Our human mind cannot build a house for the infinite space. *Creation is the manifestation of God.* Creation (names and forms) is not an illusion. It is unreal, finite. It has the beginning and the end. It is essentially one with God but functionally different, like water and ice, energy and matter. Water and ice are essentially one but functionally different. Energy and matter are essentially one but functionally different.

Human souls are essentially one with God but functionally different. Names and forms are like mirrors in which God reflects. When the reflection identifies with the names and the forms it feels it is finite. When it looks into its source then it realizes being identical with God. Human souls have the possibility to evolve into different levels and experience God according to their level.

It is Integral. This monotheism integrates all the systems mentioned above and also other possible systems but always transcends every system. God or Truth cannot be put into any system. It is essentially non-dualistic but functionally

qualified non-dualistic and dualistic. This monotheism does not exclude any spiritual path but embraces all spiritual paths that help human beings to grow in relationship with God and with neighbours. The spiritual paths of wisdom (*jnana*), devotion (*bhakti*) and action (*karma*) are not seen as exclusive but mutually complementing.

It is Dynamic. The relationship between God and human souls is not static but dynamic. It is a process ascending and descending. Human souls grow in their relationship with God, from dualistic relationship to qualified non-dualistic relationship and from there into non-dualistic relationship. Then they descend from non-dualistic state to qualified non-dualistic state and from there to dualistic state. When the soul is ascending these levels look like different stages. But when the soul is descending these stages are transformed into levels of consciousness. One can live all the levels at the same time without any contradiction. It is an essential unity or non-duality and functional duality. A useful symbol could be a tree. The tree is essentially one but functionally different.

It is Growing into Love of God and Love of Neighbor. In this monotheism the focus is on growing into the love of God and love of neighbor. "The Father and I are one"¹² and "whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me"¹³ are the two pillars of this monotheism. One has to begin with the dualistic love of God and love of neighbour, and grow into the qualified non-dualistic love of God and love of neighbour and finally arrive at the non-dualistic love of God and love of neighbour. In the dualistic love of God a person says: God is my creator, I am a creature and my neighbour is another creature of God. In the qualified non-dualistic love a person says: God is my Father, I am a manifestation of God and my neighbour is another manifestation of God. In the Non-dualistic love of God a person says: Only God is. My Real self is God (*aham brahma asmi*) and the Real self of my neighbour is also God (*tatvamasi*). It is God loving God. In the first level, our knowledge (*jnana*) of God is dualistic, our relationship (*bhakti*) with God and neighbour is dualistic and our actions (*karma*) towards our neighbours are dualistic. In the second level our knowledge of God is qualified non-dualistic and our relationship with God and neighbour is qualified non-dualistic and actions towards our neighbours are qualified non-dualistic. In the third level our knowledge of God is non-dualistic and our relationship with God is non-dualistic and our actions towards our neighbours are non-dualistic. The purpose of our human existence is to manifest divine attributes in our relationships.

Fully Human and Fully Divine

Prophetic Monotheism and the Dvaita system of Hinduism emphasize the humanness of human beings. Qualified Non-Dualistic monotheism emphasizes the divine sonship or daughterhood of human beings. Non-Dualistic Monotheism emphasizes the divinity of human beings. The

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NEW AUTONOMOUS WOMEN'S COMMUNITY: ARANYA KUTIR, NORTH INDIA

This small, autonomous community of contemplative women spans across all spiritual traditions. Aranya in Sanskrit means forest, desert, wilderness, and reflects the symbolism of going into solitude and silence in quest of the Absolute. Inspired by the lives and writings of the Hermits of Saccidananda: Jules Monchanin and Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri le Saux), it is located in Tapovan by the Ganges. Aranya Kutir Trust is a registered Trust in India whose aim is particularly to support the spiritual needs of women. It is designed primarily for Indian women who seek a place for long term sadhana. Visitors to India are most welcome to apply as retreatants.

The Kutir Facilities

The Kutir consists of six *sadhana* rooms, each for single occupancy. Each room has its own private bathroom and balcony to prevent disturbance. There is also a meditation / prayer room, a small library of spiritual books and a community room (called 'Shantivanam') including a kitchen. The rooftop terrace provides a scenic space for relaxation, yoga and recreation. The Kutir sits at the base of the Himalayan foothills with the sacred river Ganga only a few minutes walking distance away.

Wandering, seeking, waiting . . . Adoration of the only one, dazzled amazement before God's transcendence . . . Desert patience of the one who is called, already sharing the solitude of God, called to a vision which will make (her) forget all things previously seen . . . God is sufficient

(Jules Monchanin, 1945)

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first two belong to our humanity and the third one belongs to our divinity. Christianity says that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine. Jesus integrated these three experiences within himself. He is a human being, he is the son of God and he is one with God. He opened this possibility to every human being. Integral Dynamic Monotheism holds that every human being is fully human and fully divine. Divinity is the foundation and humanity is its manifestation or its vehicle. The purpose of our human existence is to realize this truth and live accordingly.

Notes:

8. Whatever may be the expressions given to it.

9. Jn 14:28

10. Jn 14:10

11. Jn 10:30

12. Jn 10:30

13. Mt 25:40 ■

Wisdom Christianity **THE WISDOM OF THE WEST II** **Bruno Barnhart**

In seeking what I have called a 'wisdom of the West,' we are also seeking a new Christian wisdom, a new Christian sapiential theology and spirituality. Further, the seeking for understanding is at the same time a seeking to imagine, to participate in the coming-to-be of this new vision.

If we begin with an understanding of Christian – and Western – wisdom as an experiential knowledge of the Event of Christ, we can probably not get closer to the event itself than by starting with the experience of Paul, as reflected in his letters. And I propose that Paul offers us not only the first written expressions of a Christian sapiential theology but also the first expressions of a wisdom of the West, or the roots of such a western wisdom.

Paul's experience of Christ, of the Event of Christ, is the experience of a *revolution* – both in his vision of reality and his own life. Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and now glorified, has become the absolute center of reality for Paul. In some way – incomprehensible but most real – this Christ comprehends within himself the whole of reality for Paul, and this as the direct consequence of the paschal Event.

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11)

Such is the magnitude, the scope and profundity of this event that it must be called a *new creation* (See 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15.). In these three dynamic expressions – event, revolution, new creation – we can already begin to feel the continuity between the experience of Paul and what will unfold as the history of the West.

Henri de Lubac, in his tracing of the Christian tradition of spiritual exegesis of the Bible, has identified the original core of Christian sapiential theology in the 'spiritual understanding' which consists of the experiential discovery of 'Christ' in the Old Testament scriptures – a spiritual-intellectual enlightenment which may be understood as a manifestation of the indwelling Holy Spirit, received in baptismal initiation.

Paul, at the beginning of our Christian sapiential tradition, repeatedly brings to expression this 'spiritual under

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standing,' and identifies it with conversion to faith in Christ. Perhaps his most powerful statement of this is in the third and fourth chapters of his Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 3:4-18; 4: 2-6). The whole of these texts should be read. Paul writes of the veil with which Moses covered his face after speaking with God, so as not to alarm the Israelites (Exodus 34:29-35)

... Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. . . . (2 Cor 3:12-18)

... For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

In these passages Paul reads both the beginning of the first creation narrative in the Book of Genesis (Gen ch.1): and an episode from the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt in the Book of Exods (Ex ch. 34) in the light of the event of Christ. Literally 'in the *light*' of the event of Christ which is both 'New Exodus' and 'New Creation' – both Jesus' resurrection and the illumination, *photismos* of baptismal initiation. These are truly foundational texts of the Christian wisdom tradition in which the light of 'spiritual understanding' – as the light of the 'first day' of new creation – flashes forth.

At the center of the New Creation is a new marriage of Divinity and Humanity. The New Creation is distinguished from the first, or original creation by the fact that it is not only *from* God but *in* God: it at once creation and the *generation* of the incarnate Child of God, the Whole Christ.

I would like to carry further Henri de Lubac's conception of 'spiritual understanding' as an experience of the emergence of Christ both as the fullness of the Old Testament revelation and as the beginning of a new age and a new order. In the context of our quest for a *new* Christian wisdom, let us suppose that the core of one major new Christian wisdom – a wisdom characteristic of the West – is *an experience of the Event of Christ as the movement from old to new* – and this first of all in our reading of the Bible. We may then discover the Event of Christ unfolding in our 'reading' of the reality and movement within which we live. This notion – so simple as to sound banal – has



deep and far-reaching implications.

A new western mutation of Christian wisdom will focus both on the *event* quality of the mystery of Christ and the *event* quality of this experience of spiritual understanding. The event or experience of spiritual understanding will be seen as the first step in a contemporary actualization of the event of Christ: as a beginning of an *active participation in the New Creation*.

Much of the modern development of our western culture strains toward this actualization of New Creation even while it remains within the confinement of a secular consciousness. A new 'secular transcendence' is evident in the consciousness and energies of the modern West as these find expression in art, in science and in the transformation of society. A Christian wisdom of the West will break through the wall which separates the world of Christian faith from the modern western secular world, seeing the two worlds as one in their ultimate historical origin in the Event of Christ – and as convergent in the further unfolding of this event. In this liberating theological or spiritual vision, the West may regain its depth and its incarnational root and Christianity may emerge into the second hemisphere – or third age – of its development

This new phase of the evolution of Christianity, – a further stage in the history of the awakening, the liberation and empowerment of the human person – can be called creativity, or generativity. It is an entering into a conscious activity of co-creation with God the Creator. The Event of Christ was the beginning of the New Creation; in the bodily resurrection of Jesus the divinizing transformation of the material universe has begun. The New Creation is distinguished from the first Creation because it involves the active participation of human beings – starting with Jesus himself. The event of Christ enters into the human person with the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptismal initiation. Received at first passively, the gift is to develop in the course of time and growth into a conscious and active participation in the New Creation. Christians have been actualizing the New Creation in the world for two thousand years in living the Spirit-given 'fontality' of faith, hope and love and in living in communion, *koinonia*. It is in recent centuries that the new external and 'secular' manifestations of creativity have begun to transform the world in which we live.

The historical Event of Christ is the Center of History, and marks a revolutionary change of orientation of the human person from the Beginning, the first Creation, toward the End, which will be the consummation, the fullness, of the Second Creation. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, while writing in terms of evolutionary progression, has proven to be the prophet of this revolution in our contemporary time of transition.

Orientation toward the past, the *beginning*, has characterized the great Asian spiritual traditions. In Hindu Vedanta and varieties of Buddhism as well as Taoism the be-

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ginning has been conceived as an undifferentiated Absolute, which may be participated by the human being. From this view derived Aldous Huxley's version of the "perennial philosophy."

Orientation to the past, the beginning the prelapsarian Alpha, has often been imagined in Christian tradition as a return to Paradise, and has often been accompanied in western Christianity by an obsessive preoccupation with "original sin." Orientation toward the future, the end, the Omega, revolutionizes Christian spirituality by turning it away from a dominant preoccupation with reparation and renunciation, with flight from the world and extinction of the ego or self, to positive efforts in service of humanity and ultimately in service to the New Creation, and thus to the initiation of the kingdom of God on earth.

This revolution from past to future orientation is a further unfolding of the Event of Christ in continuity with the movement from the old orders of servitude to 'the flesh' and to the Jewish law, to the new order of spirit and freedom which St. Paul recognized. It is a pivotal further step in the awakening, the maturing, the liberation and empowerment of the human person which has been the inner history of the West. In this further awakening which becomes evident in our own time, the human person arises to respond to her essential creative function and vocation in this world. Creation, twenty centuries after the historical divine Incarnation, visibly becomes *co-creation*. The biblical revelation of the human person as image of God is opened further to reveal the person as image of God the *Creator*.

Official recognition of this emergence by the Roman Catholic Church begins – however implicitly and cautiously – with the Second Vatican Council, and is expressed in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. (e.g., ch. 3, nos 33, 38, 39) The Church happily awakens to the Event of Christ at the center of a world history which moves in a *positive* direction – through all its hesitations, resistances and regressions – toward the kingdom of God.

We can hope that a new Christian wisdom will offer to the Church and to the World a vision that breathes with an ultimate optimism: a confident and active faith in God's New Creation in Christ. A conscious grounding in the *whole* historical event of Christ – both cross and resurrection – will remain, however, vital to the health and fruitfulness of the new Christian wisdom. New Creation will only be complete on the other side of death.

In the 'second wisdom' that will accompany and inform the ongoing Second Creation, we can hope that Christian wisdom will discover its creative potential and that the creativity of the West will become conscious of its divine origin and its root in the divine Incarnation and in the Event of Christ. The emergence of a new western art in and since the Renaissance, and even the obsessive concern

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chanin, co-founder of the Benedictine ashram of Shantivanam in South India: on the one hand, yoga as practice and goal seems to exclude the Christian life, which is predicated upon divine grace, and on the other, Christianity will never be incorporated into India, its society, and its culture, unless and until Christians incorporate some form of yoga into their spiritual life.

Solution to the false dilemma

Of course, the dilemma is false, to the extent that we have isolated a few terms from Patañjali's whole text, and his text from the broader, historical context, which reveals to us yoga's vast plurality of meanings and forms. Similar practices continue to emerge from these forms, so that the various yogas in India and in the Buddhist world can be compared with each other only by way of analogy. At this point, one can indeed sustain an incorporation of some form or forms of yoga into a Christian life, invoking the analogies of experience that bridge the differences among the yogis of Hinduism and Buddhism.

However, we need to remain focused in this brief lecture; so we must stay with Patañjali's aphorisms, making, now and then, only a passing reference to other traditions and texts. Let us move on to the second chapter, verse one of the YS: "Kriyā yoga consists of tapas, svādhyāya, and Īshvara-pranidhāna." Here I have provided an English verb and cast the sentence in accordance with English syntax, but the key terms are left in transliterated Sanskrit. These three

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for creative originality during recent centuries mark the emergence of *homo creator*, the awakening of the human co-creator in the universe, the beginning of a new creation *from within* the world itself. This is a central consequence of Incarnation, Resurrection and Pentecost, of the divine Spirit that Jesus breathed into humanity. This Spirit is the immanent source of that exponential *newness* which has made the western world, with all its ambiguities, a unique and prophetic phenomenon in human history – and one which challenges Christians to evolve a new sapiential vision.

The powerful figure of an awakening Adam at the center of Michelangelo's celebrated painting in the Sistine chapel — whatever its 'patriarchal' overtones — is emblematic of the awakening of humanity to its own creative potential, which has burst forth so mightily upon the world from the time of the western Renaissance to our own time. ■

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terms imply a tripartite anthropology of body, mind, and spirit. The term *kriyā* generally means ‘action’ and here could be understood as ‘practice’; so we are hearing, “Yoga as practice consists of these three kinds of action.” But *kriyā* is also found in the context of ritual: hence it can bear the meaning of ‘sacred action’ or even ‘sacrifice’. Indeed, in subsequent tradition, especially in those texts called *tantras*, yoga was often understood as a substitute for the rites described in the ancient texts called *Vedas* and *Brahmanas*.

Let us look at the three Sanskrit terms, to see if they also bear some reference to sacrificial rites. The first term, *tapas*, is etymologically linked to the English ‘tepid’, but it bears the stronger meaning of ‘heat’ and, in a metaphorical sense, ‘fervor’. As a technical term, *tapas* refers to the systematic practice of asceticism: fasting, physical immobility, exposure to extremes of heat and cold, sensory deprivation, etc. Mythological references to practitioners of extreme austerities suggest that their fervor wins divine favor and endows the practitioner with extraordinary powers. Indeed, the powers acquired by the great practitioners of *tapas* sometimes thwart the purposes of the gods. However, the aphorisms we are considering do not depend on a mythological world-view. They are more likely influenced by Buddha’s ‘middle way’; Patañjali and his school insist, as do Buddhists and the post-Buddhist text called the *Bhagavad Gita*, that “Yoga is not for one who eats too much or eats too little, nor for one who sleeps too little or sleeps too much” (chapter 6, verse 16 of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which dates probably from the second century BCE). As our own Rule teaches, a monastic’s most rigorous ascetical practice is the quest for the delicate balance between too much and too little.

The second term, *svādhyāya*, has more than one meaning. The word itself signifies the act and habit of dedicating attention to what is ‘one’s own’, which in commentaries is understood as the doctrine of sacred writings and of one’s own guru or master. In other words, yoga requires a practice quite similar to our *lectio divina*. The analogy is reinforced when the commentaries reduce to a single word the ‘text’ to which one directs one’s undivided attention. That single word is *om*, which in the Sanskrit lexicon is given the meaning of ‘yes’ and is identified with the divine essence itself. The absolute ‘yes’ of *om* is both the affirmation of God’s own self and God’s affirmation of the existing universe. From the single word that contains all the sacred writings and all that exists, the yogi proceeds to meditate on the inner word, the ‘sound of silence’ in the heart. Likewise in *lectio divina* we are directed from many words to few, and ultimately to one, when the word becomes prayer and is absorbed into contemplation.

The third term that defines *kriyā yoga* or yoga as practice is *Īshvara-pranidhāna*. We have already met the term *Īshvara*, which means ‘the Lord’. In passing, let me

note that the generic Sanskrit terms for God, such as *Īshvara*, *Deva* (‘God’), or *Paramātmāna* (‘Supreme Spirit’) have been adopted into Christian prayer and Bible translations, at least from the seventeenth century onward. The word *pranidhāna* describes an act of adoration, a full-out prostration in front of whatever symbolizes the divine. The usual translation is ‘abandonment to the Lord’. There is a certain dissonance between this term and the ancient, dualistic philosophy called *sāṅkhya*, whose basic terms and concepts are as it were the scaffolding upon which the *Yoga Sūtras* are constructed. The philosophy in question makes no reference to God or a supreme *puruṣa*, while virtually all yoga traditions do make such a reference, and indeed, the yogis are most often engaged in a devotional or even erotic relationship with the divinity. You could say that the popular, ‘health-club’ brand of yoga promoted in the West often reverts to the agnostic stance of *sāṅkhya* philosophy, but other modern schools (for example, the *Federazione italiana yoga*) emphasize the spiritual dimension of yoga practice, and even offer ‘Christian yoga retreats’ at *Camaldoli* and elsewhere.

The literary inclusion in Yoga Sūtras II

The second book of the *Yoga Sūtras* (*Yoga as Practice* or *kriyā yoga*) thus begins with three essential practices, and we find them again in verse 32; this double citation forms a literary inclusion that makes of the three terms a hermeneutical key for what comes between verses 1 and 32. There is also a third reference to the terms in verses 43-45. *Kriyā yoga*, we are told in verse 2, leads to *saṁādhi* and to the progressive attenuation of suffering; the terminology is different with respect to Buddhist teaching, but the progressive dynamic is that of the Buddha’s Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path. The causes of suffering are further parsed in the following verses, centered on the three fundamental ‘inclinations’: ignorance, concupiscence, and aversion (analogous to the noetic, the concupiscible, and the irascible appetites of Western philosophical anthropology), and on the three universal qualities of nature (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, or ‘harmony’, ‘energy’, and ‘inertia’).

At verse 11, we find an anticipation of a basic term for meditation (*dhyāna*) that reappears in the list of yoga’s eight ‘members’ in verse 29: *yama* (five ‘prohibitions’) and *niyama* (five ‘precepts’); the time-frame of this lecture allows for a more detailed reading only of these first two of the eight members, which are the ethical-ascetical pillars of the entire yoga system. The other members are: *āsana* (sitting), *prāṇāyāma* (breath exercises), *pratyāhāra* (withdrawal of sensory attention), *dhāraṇā* (simple apprehension), *dhyāna* (continuous meditation), and *saṁādhi* (concentration or total assimilation).

Verse 30 enumerates the five *yama*: *ahiṁsā* (‘do no harm’), *satya* (‘speak the truth’), *asteya* (‘take nothing that is not given’), *brahmacharya* (‘keep to the path of the Absolute’), *aparigraha* (‘do not covet another’s good’). The first of the ten words governs all of them: *ahiṁsā*, ‘harmlessness’.

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Yoga and the Rule

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Like the first precept of the Hippocratic oath (*Primum non nocere*), it means that yoga practice must do no harm either to the yogi or to others. Pushing through pain in performing postures, extending meditation periods beyond an hour, holding the breath more than three or four seconds: all of these excesses introduce a tone of violence into yoga and are contrary to the authentic sacrificial intention, which is one of yielding, offering-up, abandonment, surrender.

Gentleness and harmlessness govern the yogi's use of speech. *Satyam*, truthfulness, does not mean saying out loud in every circumstance what you regard as true. It means a silent demeanor that renders the yogi's right conscience evident and gently corrects wrongdoing by the contagion of example. Truth means never judging. The only negative precept of Jesus was: "Judge not." Truth in our minds also entails our recognition of how little we know and our sincere willingness to listen and learn.

Asteya, 'not to steal', means never to take what was not given freely. Many yogis, like Buddhist monks, are mendicants, but they are not active beggars. If they have needs, they leave a bowl at their side while they meditate, trusting that some devout soul will fill it. Yogis with family and social responsibilities practice scrupulous honesty in all their affairs and would rather not acquire goods than to harm someone by acquiring them; the rule is always 'to do no harm', *ahimsā*. All yogis practice gratefulness, and they know that what is enjoyed without giving thanks is as if it were stolen.

The fourth word in Patañjali's decalogue, *brahmacharya* (literally, 'journeying in the Absolute'), is a positive term, although it is understood as a prohibition regarding sex, expressed in euphemistic terms. It affirms primarily the yogi's commitment to integrating the body's energies into the spiritual quest; secondarily, the word is often translated 'chastity'. Properly speaking, chastity is a virtue of lovers; it is practiced in the intimate sexual relationship between two persons dedicated to each other in a conjugal union. Even yogis who live in solitude practice this virtue as if they loved someone dearly enough to do absolutely nothing to harm the relationship; the governing principle is always *ahimsā*, harmlessness and non-violence. Thus governed and purified, neither the individual's personal sexuality nor physical intimacy in a faithful relationship are impediments to the practice of yoga and the search for God. I have found, in my own experience of the body's wholesome appetites and through many years of counseling others, that emotional and psycho-sexual maturity are attained as one's sex life is purified of violence, obsessive-compulsive behavior, and false guilt. Psychological counseling may be in order, but deep yoga meditation certainly facilitates this process.

The last word in YS2:30 is *aparigrahā*, which means something like non-grasping; it corresponds more or less with the tenth commandment of Moses, "Do not covet." It

could also indicate a willingness not to cling to persons or things, because doing so would be a form of violence and so run counter to *ahimsā*. In all cases, we need to see through the grammatical negative in ethical teaching and observe the positive virtues: the true non-violence is a life-giving and healing act; the authentic form of speech is a comforting and enlightening word; the perfection of never taking from another is a generous gift; true 'chastity' is expressed by a tender and loving embrace, and non-coveting point to a general lightness of touch that respects the integrity of persons and things. These are qualities for which yogis strive.

Verse 31 affirms: "When the yama are universal, not conditioned by caste, place, time, or circumstances, they constitute the Great Vow." Verse 32 then enumerates the five *niyama*. *Ahimsā* overflows into the *niyama*, which are grammatically positive. *Shaucha* means 'cleanliness' and is practiced by yogis as frequent bathing and regular bowel habits, etc. Contemporary society has totally secularized this part of life, and that is good. All yogis keep themselves clean, but many of them reject the rules of what traditionally is considered 'ritual purity'.

'Contentment', *santosha*, is another positive expression of the precept of *ahimsā*, which governs a yogi's whole existence. The concrete meaning of *santosha* can be updated in terms of contemporary 'green' concerns; the 'slow' movement (slow food, slow fashion, etc.) and the theme of 'elected simplicity' also show today's need for the recovery of this yogic virtue.

The final three words have already been given in the first verse of YS 2, with the name of *kriyā yoga*. The literary inclusion suggests that these three words are a governing principle for all ten of the *yama-niyama*, like *ahimsā*. *Tapas*, the first of the three terms under *kriyā yoga*, can be understood to include the three 'outer members' of Patañjali's system, that is, *āsana*, 'posture'; *prānāyāma*, 'breath exercises'; and *pratyāhāra*, 'sense withdrawal'. Of course, *ahimsā* rules here as well, especially with regard to the postures: with regard to *āsana*, Patañjali says only that the body should be steady and comfortable. In other words, the yogi assumes a meditation posture that allows the mind to remain focused and awake.

Prānāyāma is not about 'control' of the breath so much as about breathing according to the non-violent and self-surrendering intention of 'harmlessness' and 'abandonment to the Lord'. For this reason, the true breath-sacrifice does not require forced holding-in; occasional suspension of breathing or "ecstatic apnea" will happen spontaneously after regular and protracted practice. Finally, sense-withdrawal follows the same criteria of harmlessness and abandonment and consists mainly in the detached observation of one's sensory experience without forming judgments in the mind.

Parallels in the Rule of Saint Benedict

A Western objection to the philosophical anthropol-

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Yoga and the Rule (Continued from page 13)

ogy implied in the Yoga Sutras is that it is 'Pelagian', that is, it begins and ends with human effort and human self-control, without any reference to the necessity of divine grace. There are two suppositions underlying this objection, to both of which I must say, "Nego suppositum, I deny the presupposition." In the first place, Pelagianism is intelligible solely within the history of Christianity and within the context of the faith-works tension that we see in the New Testament. Thus it is totally out of place to ascribe a Christian heresy to a Hindu or pan-Indian tradition like yoga, which neither affirms nor negates any doctrine proper to Christianity. The second presupposition is that the entire tradition of yoga has never known a doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, not even in the somewhat latent way that the doctrine is present in the Hebrew Scriptures. On the contrary, a careful reading of the last chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, together with numberless texts of the bhakti or devotional yoga traditions down through the centuries of the Common Era, lead us to recognize the presence, even patent, of the doctrine of supernatural grace and the supernatural ultimate end in these traditions. Whether or not this doctrine has been absorbed into some schools of Hinduism from Judeo-Christian influence is another question, about which we cannot interest ourselves in the limited time that remains.

One other superficial judgment about the Yoga Sutras, is that they present a series of chronologically successive steps, which must be sequentially ascended in order to attain the end of yoga, while on the other hand, the Holy Rule, grounded as it is in the gospel doctrine of grace, follows no such scheme of vertical steps. On the contrary, neither the Noble Eight-fold Path of Buddhism nor the eight 'limbs' of Patañjali are presented to us as successive steps upward toward the goal. Albeit that the last term of both, samādhi, is presented as an action of the highest value, none of the others is said to be abandoned, even when one attains the perfection of samādhi. In fact, 'abandonment to the Lord' is what perfects samādhi (cf. YS2:45). This is especially true of the Yoga Sutras, whose ethical-ascetical grounding (yama-niyama) sustains and governs the practice of all the other actions, including samādhi.

The Rule of Saint Benedict is of course an extension and a concrete application of the gospel, and the teaching on grace that came down to Benedict from Paul and Augustine suffuses the whole atmosphere of monastic life as given in the Rule. Still and all, breathing the air of divine grace, Benedict gives us precepts and aphoristic maxims that can be taken as a sort of Western yoga, a way of integration and interior unification analogous to that evolved by the yogis of Hinduism and Buddhism.

We keep in mind that the Benedict's Rule can also be read as a narrative text, more descriptive of spiritual practice than preceptive. The Rule is also linked with the

'life of Benedict' narrated in the second book of Dialogues attributed to Pope Saint Gregory the Great. Setting aside all the questions of authorship (Did Gregory really write the Dialogues? Is his 'Benedict' really the author of the Rule?), a long monastic tradition holds the two texts together, as does the Camaldolese micro-history within the broader sweep of Benedictine history. This linking of a story to a rule can be found analogously in the centuries-old usage of the Bhagavad Gita as a yoga textbook and hence a companion of the Yoga Sutras.

Staying for now with the Rule, we see two possibilities of comparison and contrast: 1) the 'degrees of humility' (RB7), and 2) the 'tools for good works' (RB4). The latter are certainly aphoristic, and they have always summoned monastic commentators to peel back the layers of meaning in each and all of the 'tools'; but the inverse commentary is also made, whereby the many are reduced to few words or to one, like the yogis' om. If anything, our one word is the obscura, 'Listen!', with which the Rule begins. However, recent monastic commentators always take into consideration the literary history of the text and its derivation from the much longer Rule of the Master; in Benedict's abridgment, we also consider the last chapters of his Rule as hermeneutical keys to the chapters derived from the Master.

Steps up and down the ladder

Chapter seven of the Rule evokes Jacob's ladder (Genesis 28:12; cf. John 1:51), giving us the image of humility as a dynamic process, associated with another metaphor, that of natural growth. Climbing the ladder is also a way of integration, as Saint Benedict says: "The vertical ladder is our life in the here-and-now, and when we humble our hearts, the Lord raises our life to heaven. Our body and soul are the sides of this ladder, into which God, who is calling us, has fitted the various steps of humility and discipline by which we ascend." (RB7:8-9) The underlying assumption is that God's grace makes us who we are, calls us to ascend, and places beneath our feet the steps of humility. Our practice of spiritual discipline is our doing, our kriyā, but it is always done within and under grace. It is also done within and through our total humanity, both corporeal and mental; the implicit anthropology of Benedict sets aside the usual Greek hierarchical dualism of soma (the body as 'tomb') and psyche (the mind as spirit). The philosophy that loaned its terminology to Patañjali is also dualistic, although not necessarily hierarchical, but a larger view of yoga, with its insistence on bodily practices and (at least in the Bhagavad Gita) on the practical fulfillment of the duties of one's state in life, leads beyond the philosophers' dualism. Later yogic schools (called 'tantric') envision the yogi's perfection not as liberation from the physical but as liberation within the physical, that is, within the flesh, the living cosmos, and time.

Benedict plays with the paradox of ascending and descending: God calls us up, but we are to respond by climbing down; only at the bottom do we reach the top. The vari-

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ous ‘degrees’ of humility do not fit easily into a hierarchical pattern, whether we read them abstractly or in line with the metaphor of the ladder. If we compare the first and last degrees, we rather see a movement from within to without, from the core of our consciousness to the movements and gestures of our body. We may indeed start with the first degree, that continual consciousness of God that the Bible calls ‘fear’. This fear of God is often improperly understood, but when we read it in the Psalms, we find it placed in parallel with words like ‘serving’, ‘worshipping’, and more commonly ‘seeking’ God: “Your face do I seek; hide not your face” (Psalm 26[27]:8). This fear is the equivalent of the Buddhist ‘mindfulness’ (smṛiti in Sanskrit, sati in Pali); as Benedict says, “Shun forgetfulness and always be mindful of what God teaches you” (RB7:10-11). This fear also has an emotional valence: “Keep thinking of the way people who despise God set Gehenna on fire by their sins and the way those who seek God reach the eternal life that God has prepared” (ibid.).

The twelfth step (RB7:62-66) on the ladder of humility is the body’s expression of the inner mindfulness inculcated in the first. While some novices purposely (perhaps presumptuously) adopt the outward gestures described here (head bowed, eyes cast down, whether sitting, walking, or standing), the authentic practice of this step is always the consequence of the first. However, as our personal monastic experience teaches us, the inner and the outer humility walk hand in hand. Indeed, says the Rule (ibid., verse 65), it is the gospel prayer of the Publican (Luke 18:13) that is the heart of the outward gestures of humility.

Perhaps we can connect the twelfth step with what the yoga traditions say about ‘posture’ (āṣana). The connection cannot be traced on the physical plane, since ‘posture’ in the Yoga Sutras (YS2:46-48) is a preliminary condition for the other practices conducive to meditation. The instruction is simple: “Let your posture be steady and comfortable” (2:46). In practice, this means sitting on the ground, either on straw or on a cushion, so that one may maintain the position stably, without exerting conscious effort. Later texts, collectively referred to as hatha yoga, describe an uncountable variety of bodily positions, some indeed requiring vigorous exertion, but their link with the stability of meditative sitting is never totally forgotten. One may suggest that the degrees of humility and the postures of yoga meet in their groundedness and stability. Ultimately, they meet in the spirit of non-violence (ahimsā) and ‘abandonment to the Lord’. A yogi’s understanding of the word ‘Lord’ may differ from the common Christian understanding, but there is no question that Īshvara-pranidhāna is a gesture of profound humility.

A final word about RB4, “The Tools for Good Works,” whose genre as a list of aphorisms grants us license to compare it with Patañjali’s text. The chapter opens

with a listing of the commandments, citing in part the decalogue of Moses, but enclosing it within the commandment of love (RB4:1-2) and the Golden Rule (RB4:9). This is pure Scripture and not specific to monastics; it functions here rather like the principle of harmlessness (ahimsā) that governs all the eight members of yoga.

In this chapter four of Benedict’s Rule, the phrase, “Love chastity” (verse 64), seems to echo a preceding aphorism: “Love fasting” (verse 13). The context of each aphorism is instructive. On the one hand, “Love fasting” is associated with the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: “Relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, extend help to the troubled, and console the sorrowing” (verses 14-19). On the other hand, “Love chastity” is associated with the healing of relationships, and is followed by: “Harbor neither hatred nor jealousy of anyone, and do nothing out of envy; do not love quarreling; shun arrogance; respect the elders and love the young; pray for your enemies out of love for Christ” (verses 65-72). Hence, as fasting is a means of helping others in need, so chastity is a way of overcoming hatred, enmity, and jealousy. In neither case is the virtue presented as a means of control or repression.

Respecting the differences in literary genre, we can say that the Yoga Sutras and the Rule of Saint Benedict do overlap in some areas, and the basis of this overlapping is a partially-shared anthropological understanding. Let me say again: we are dealing with analogies of expression and experience, in texts that are both aimed at instituting a school of divine service, although they do not share a univocal concept of the divine. We can also affirm, without disparaging the traditions of yoga, that the Benedictine life is simply and integrally Christian, and it is predicated upon the New Testament teaching about salvation by grace through faith, hope, and love. This love, whose “inexpressible sweetness” Benedict promises to his beginners (RB Prologue, verse 49), is grounded and grows in community. My own observation of yoga schools in India and elsewhere, is that many of them lack this ‘cenobitic’ dimension. Nevertheless, the human heart was made to love, and when yoga fosters love, it also builds community relationships. ■

Tantra (Continued from page 3)

Still Tantra builds on—and, adherents will say, surpasses—the foundations of Samkhya, Classical Yoga, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the Bhagavad Gita as well as early Buddhism.⁶ Some are, however, more circumspect that all of those sources were positive influences. For example, Mark Stephens writes that though the kernels of the central idea of Tantra are indeed found in the most ancient Vedas and Upanishads, they were “largely lost or discarded in the Bhagavad Gita and in raja yoga as described by Patanjali.”⁷ One very important kernel from the Vedic tradition that served as a building block for Tantra was the idea of the *jivan mukti*, “the living liberated one.” While for many ancient sages there was an assumption that one could achieve true and final liberation only after leaving the body, there also existed the idea, admitted by both Samkhya and Advaita Vedanta, of being able to be in a state of self-realization and liberation even while living in the physical body. This is known as *jivan mukta*—living liberation.⁸

As June Singer states, Tantra is difficult to define because it is not presented in direct language. “Much of it has been concealed or deliberately obscured so that those who were not sufficiently mature or developed in consciousness could be protected from the dangers inherent in the powers and insights in might activate,”⁹ especially in those experiences outside the limits of conventional morality with which we shall deal below. But we shall try here to elucidate some of Tantra’s major philosophical insights.¹⁰

The reality of the world: duality in unity

Both Samkhya and Vedanta concede that the world has an empirical reality, a reality that can be observed and experienced. But the question is whether or not there is a greater reality than that to the world, and if so what kind of reality? To review: Samkhya is commonly regarded as a dualistic system. It affirms the reality of the world, and affirms that both Purusha and Prakriti are real, but that they are separate principles and, except for the purposes of creation, independent. And the *telos*—the end of the spiritual life is to end their unfortunate marriage, to separate Pure Spirit or Consciousness from Matter-Creation. Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta, on the other hand, in order to secure the complete unity (or non-duality) of Brahman, denies that the world has a greater reality than appearance. Vedanta says that there cannot be two principles that are both absolutely real. Prakriti is *Mâyâ*, an eternal unreality, not truly real from a transcendental standpoint, therefore transcendently unreal. The only really real is *nirguna Brahman*, Brahman without attributes.

Each of these systems has merits of its own, as J. G. Woodroffe writes: Samkhya by its dualism is able to preserve the specific character of *Cit*—consciousness in all its integrity, but this is won at the cost of “the unity for which our mind has a kind of metaphysical hunger.” Shankara’s Advaita-vedanta¹¹ secures this metaphysical unity, but he

does so at the cost of a denial of the reality of the world.¹²

Tantra offers an alternative to these systems, in the doctrine of “duality in unity,” a middle course in which the reality of the world is affirmed, at least in a certain sense, without compromising the truth of the unity of Brahman. The Tantras teach that the *products* of Prakriti (its *vikriti*) are not real in the Indian sense of the term “real”—they are not “that which was, is, and will be forever,” not that which never changes and never ceases to be. And so the world as a product of Prakriti is not real but a mere appearance. But Tantra is distinct from Advaita-Vedanta in that it recognizes the reality of Prakriti itself. In this way it follows Samkhya. But it differs from Samkhya in that it believes that Prakriti is not a separate principle from Brahman, but *exists in Brahman* and as a principle of the substance of Brahman. Here is what is important: even if the products of Prakriti, the world, etc., are not real, *the ground principle of that appearance—Prakriti itself* is real and furthermore it is a part of Brahman. And so there is a reality behind all the apparent transformations.¹³

A recognition of the full-complete self

First of all, we are back to our fundamental question: the relation of the Absolute to the relative. Tantra systematically emphasizes **the identity of the absolute and the phenomenal world** (the *paramârtha* with the *vyavahâra* in Sanskrit). The fundamental intention of Tantra is to pass from the gross, phenomenal world to the subtle, absolute realm, but then also to permeate the gross phenomenal realm with the value and meaning of the subtle absolute.¹⁴ Tantric teachers single out this identity of the phenomenal and absolute world as “the nucleus around which all their speculation was to revolve.” This insight is filtered through and gained by experience, by *sadhana*.

Secondly, the other philosophical doctrine common to Hindu and Buddhist Tantra is that though **reality** is one, it is **grasped through a process of polarization**, both conceptually and intuitively. The two poles are **activity** and **passivity**, and the universe “works” through the interaction of these two poles. The pole of passivity is the static principle, and is essentially cognitive—“encompassing wisdom, realization, beatitude and spiritual illumination” similar to the concept of Purusha in Samkhya. The pole of activity, on the other hand, is the dynamic principle; it is conative, that is, it is directed toward action or behavior, impulse, desire, striving, “movement, energy, activity,”¹⁵ similar to Samkhya’s concept of Prakriti. In the Hindu Tantric tradition, the passive, static principle is Masculine; it is the mind—*chit*, and it is identified with Shiva. The active, dynamic power and primordial energy is Feminine, identified as Shakti. This unusual attribution of the active principle with the Feminine (in Hindu thought) can be seen as a direct inheritance from the worship of the Divine Feminine in India, as was noted above. (Note that Buddhist Tantra reverses this: the male principle is the activity and the female one is passivity.)

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Quiescence is realized and the universe reaches a state of absolute oneness when these two poles of activity and passivity, the Masculine and the Feminine, merge. Furthermore, the Tantric practitioner seeks the reunification of these two opposite principles—Shiva and Shakti, the masculine and the feminine, the passive and the active—in his or her own person, through experience, through *sadhana*. Note well that in Samkhya the union of Purusha and Prakriti had been an “unfortunate marriage,” whereas Tantra seeks the union of the two! Conceptually, they could merge for the Tantric simply by the repeated declaration of their fundamental oneness, but more importantly they merge when they are *experienced*, by the practitioner’s experiencing this merger through *sadhana*, through spiritual disciplines.¹⁶ They merge when the body—and with it all of creation—is experienced as an instrument of spiritual perfection.

Projection and re-absorption

In Vedānta, the supreme Self is known as Brahman, and Brahman has three activities: creation, preservation and destruction. In Tantra, on the other hand, the supreme Self is known as Shiva, and within Shiva there is an inherent energy, known as Shakti. Through the energy of this Shakti, Shiva has two more activities—*nigraha* and *anugraha*, projection and re-absorption, which go with two functions—expansion and contraction (*sankoca* and *prasāra*). So in the Tantric system the whole objective world is a projection of the one eternal subject—all creation is a projection of Shiva—through the activity of expanding by the energy of Shakti. By *nigraha* with the power of Shakti, Shiva projects or brings the world of external things out from himself, and by *anugraha* he reabsorbs what he had projected out, that which had seemed to be a separate objective world.¹⁷

The Tantra also speaks of the presence of a power of reflection (*vimarsa*) that is at the very heart of pure awareness (*prakāsa*). Normally pure consciousness or awareness would be called by the Sanskrit term *chit*. But in the Tantra it is called *chitsakti*¹⁸ instead,—“consciousness-power”—to indicate that we are speaking not just of consciousness, or even divine consciousness or self-consciousness, but of the *power* of Self-consciousness, the *power* of Self-revelation by which the Supreme shines by itself, the dynamism of the Absolute that manifests the world, the divine energy that is always inherent in consciousness. “As such, it is of the essence of Reality; it is Reality-Power.”¹⁹ Again, this energy in the divine is Shakti, God as universal Mother, the feminine creative aspect of God. In its practical manifestation in the human person it is referred to as *kundalini*.

This masculine-feminine polarity does not involve any duality in God, however, because there is, in fact, no difference or distinction between Shiva and Shakti.²⁰ It is one and the same reality called by the name Shiva when

the power of Self-reflection lies absorbed or is inactive or passive, and called by the name Shakti when that same power is active, and it is chitshakti when viewed or experienced as one.

The entire outer world of objects is *within* this consciousness. When we human beings have the realization of that all-embracing consciousness, we are in the state of the supreme knower—*parapramâtâ*. But we do not have that all-embracing consciousness and our mind gets filled up with all different types of separate mental formations called *vikalpas*. Thus we experience the world as a multiplicity of specific limited things and measured objects, but not through the all-embracing consciousness. (This state is known as *mitapramâtâ*.) Therefore, according to the Tantric system, the goal should be an *expansion of consciousness* till the entire world of existence is grasped, included, and absorbed within it, until limited awareness gives way to unlimited. This is indicated by the term *pûrnâhantâ*—“the complete or full I.”

In all of this there is **not necessarily a dissolution of the ego** (*vilaya aham*) as is the aim of the Vedānta; nor is there a separation of the ego from the touch of the outer world (*viyoga idam*) to preserve its sanctity and purity as in Sāmkhya. Instead there is a *re-cognition of the ego’s fullness* by discovering what has been lost through non-cognition or delusion. That is the aim of the Tantras: a recognition of the full-complete self.²¹

This system of philosophy is therefore sometimes called the philosophy of re-cognition (*pratyabhijnâ yoga*). The world that we think of as separate from us is to be recognized as the very stuff of our being. The play of maya or delusion makes us forget that the real relation between Subject and object is one of identity, and it is specifically the awareness of that identity and unity that must be recovered. It is an act of remembrance of what we have forgotten.

So now we have a corrective to First Axial consciousness and its tendency to leave behind the world, the body and creation due to an at least implicit dualism. Instead we have these important elements of Tantra:

1. “Tantra arose in reaction to the denial of the body and the denial of the feminine... Where *the earlier schools were patriarchal* and either dualistic or atheistic, Tantra embraced **the feminine**...”²² Thomas Matus states that, “the one element in Tantrism which reveals most clearly its archaic origins is the centrality of the divine Woman.” This feminine principle “does not supplant the male aspect but rather asserts symbolically the complementarity of the two, even on a spiritual level.”²³

2. As opposed to the *hierarchical priestly and caste based brahminism*, Tantra was **egalitarian**, and “can be traced to the lowest strata of Indian religious history.”²⁴ It “offered a way for anyone to practice. Tantra ignored class structure, and as a result had many practitioners from the lower castes.”²⁵ And because it arose “from ordinary people among the lower castes of India’s highly stratified society,

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this approach opened up the fullness of spiritual practice to anyone.”²⁶

3. The idea “that *the world is an illusion* from which one must escape is itself a delusive mental construct that must be given up.”²⁷ The fundamental intention of Tantra is instead “**to pass from the gross to the subtle**,” that is from the material phenomenal world to the absolute spiritual one, “but then to permeate the gross with the value and meaning of the subtle.”²⁸

4. “The philosophy of tantra identifies the path of freedom *not through renunciation of human desire and experience*, but indeed largely through it.”²⁹ Because at the heart of Tantric teaching is the idea that there is “continuity between what seems the ordinary realm of human life and the infinite.” On the path to enlightenment and happiness, instead of transcending the material reality of **human experience**, the Tantric goes more intensely into it. The Tantric taps into “every aspect of internal and external experience as a source of conscious awakening to divine energy, the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent primordial creative force of the universe.”³⁰ “For this reason, the Tantras emphasize the value of the body and of all human experience (including some experiences outside the limits of conventional morality.)”³¹ “Instead of suppressing the sense pleasures, the joy and the suffering of the phenomenal world, these should be approached more and more directly and openly, without fear or hesitation.”³²

5. Finally, and in summary, Tantra takes the *jivanmukta* path absolutely seriously, teaching that liberation “is possible while we are **in the body**. In fact, the body is a necessary tool to reaching this liberated state” since “only incarnate beings can become enlightened and liberated.”³³ “The idea of yoga in the Tantric perspective is to be without separation, to reconcile the body, breath, mind and emotion as one, without distinction, without anything considered impure or profane.”³⁴

The sadhana and the decline

As important as sadhana is for Tantra, I will only give a brief description of the practices here, since our major interest is in the underlying philosophy. Tantric practice consists of both *puja*—worship and yoga, though many of the specific practices of each seem to blend into the other. In all the body is of central importance. More than being seen as that which binds the soul, the body is regarded as the means to perfection. As Sri Aurobindo pointed out, *sariram khalu dharmasadhanam*—“The body is the means of fulfillment of the dharma.” There is a broad range of practices that fall under the category of Tantra. *Mantra*, the recitation of sounds and syllables, or *japa* the repetition of these same, is believed to release the power that the sounds contain. *Mudras*—literally “signs or seals”—are specific hand gestures used both in Hinduism and Buddhism, believed to be semi-sacramental, in the sense that they are meant to be visible signs of inward spiritual realities.

Lesser known are also head mudras, postural mudras, lock and perineal mudras (typically known as *bandhas*). Tantrics also employ *yantras*, geometrically patterned drawings, sacred diagrams that are considered to be charged with power and are objects of meditation and concentration. The most famous is perhaps the Shri Yantra or Shri Chakra with its intersecting triangles surrounded by circles and lotus petals, representing the intersection of Shiva and Shakti.

And then there are the infamous, *pancha-makara*—the five “M”s: *madya*, *matsya*, *mamsa*, *mudra* and *maithuna*—the imbibing of wine, fish, meat and parched grain, though this latter is thought to have been code for the use of drugs, and finally sexual intercourse. The consuming of the first four may seem mild to us, but were frowned upon by conservative Brahmin society, and so they were seen by Tantric practitioners as means to go beyond dualities.³⁵ The final, *maithuna*, is the most controversial. Here the distinction between the so-called right-handed (*daksinâcara*) and left-handed (*vâmâcara*) schools of Tantra applies. The right-handed school interprets the five “M”s symbolically. The left-handed school had a highly ritualized way of performing the *maithuna*, which was a sincere if extreme attempt to go from the gross to the subtle. It involved months of retreat, transforming the woman (the *nyayika*) involved into Shakti herself and the male partner into the very embodiment of Shiva through a series of meditations and ceremonies, including a consecration of the body known as *nyasa*. The entire act is to be done without lust but with detachment, and also in its classical form without a release of semen. Both partners are meant to let the sexual energies circulate within themselves. Through this rite both partners are meant to achieve the union within themselves of the sun and the moon (*ha-tha*) of Shiva and Shakti, and are “able to transcend time as we know it and to emerge into a Cosmic Time in which are relived the periodic creations and destructions of the universes.” June Singer adds that through this rite, performed in the correct state, “the Divine Androgyne comes into being” who is both masculine and feminine.”³⁶

Because of the decadence of some of the “left-handed” schools, Tantric yoga “came to be looked upon as an aberrant and corrupt form of Hinduism and Buddhism.” Thomas Matus says that some other factors for its decline were the Muslim rule in India, its fall into disfavor under British domination, and the general influence of Western philosophy.³⁷ Also in Buddhism, in which Tantra flourished in central-eastern India for two or three hundred years beginning around the middle of the eighth century, Mizumo states that “a vulgar, often lascivious, hedonism” arose due to this “Tantrism of the left or Shaktism,” which caused the true spirit of Buddhism to disappear from Indian Buddhism.³⁸ As with many things, Tantra may be known more by its extremes and its decadent forms than by its integrity. Especially in our age it seems there is mainly a fascination with so-called Tantric sexual practices. Though some works have

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been written about the Tantric approach to celibacy (see for instance the marvelous work of Stuart Sovatsky), which seems much in keeping with its original purpose, it is perhaps usually exploited as a means of a certain licentiousness and sexual sensationalism, the very opposite of its original purpose.

Bernie Clark says it the best and clearest way possible: Society's unfortunate but understandable disgust for Tantra's teachings, given some of its extreme and aberrant forms, happily resulted in the evolution of a new school of Yoga, *Hatha* Yoga, the yoga of the sun and the moon, the masculine and feminine, and his own school of *Yin* Yoga. "Hatha kept many of the practices that Tantra developed, but... dropped the unsavory parts," just as Tantra had discarded what it didn't like of Classical Yoga. Many of the *pranâyama* practices as well as teachings about the chakras and the subtle body, as well as the chanting of mantras and some use of yantra, trace their direct lineage to Tantra. Hatha Yoga understands the body as the instrument of transformation by focusing its practices on "building a healthy body, one that would be perfect for the higher practices of meditation and samadhi,"³⁹ and serves as a "ladder to *Raja* Yoga," the royal yoga which contains the higher limbs of *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*—concentration, meditation and absorption. And what could be more in keeping with Tantra's aims to move from the gross to the subtle, and embrace the body and human experience as a means of liberation?

Now we are ready to explore the thought of Sri Aurobindo.

Notes:

1. Though we will note right away what we will point out later, that the physical asanas may derive from an Indian tradition that actually precedes the whole later philosophical mix of Samkhya and other darshanas.
2. One theory based on Aryan religious texts and human remains in Mohenjo-Daro suggests that "the Aryans may have violently entered the area, killing its inhabitants and burning the cities. However, another theory supported by more recent evidence suggests that this civilization may have begun to decline before the Aryans arrived. The inhabitants of the Indus valley dispersed before the Aryans slowly entered the area as a nomadic people. The Aryans were then able to take over this area since most of the inhabitants had previously left." Also, even though only part of their language has been deciphered today, leaving numerous questions about this civilization unanswered. Some still assume that the Harappan people "were literate and used the Dravidian language."

David Koeller, <<<http://www.thenagain.info/webchron/india/harappa.html> © 2003

3. June Singer, *Androgyny* (New York: Anchor Press,

1976), 184.

4. Mark Stephens, *Teaching Yoga* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 13.
5. Singer, 185-186.
6. No matter in which tradition Tantra began, Hinduism or Buddhism, it is easy to see Hinduism as the original matrix of the Tantric elements in Buddhism also. Kogen Mizumo, *I Concetti Fondamentali del Buddhismo* (Assisi: Citadella Editrice, 1990), 41.
7. Stephens, 15.
8. Mark Stephens points to the "nondual" Svetasvatara Upanishad for an example of this, but I have found no specific reference to *juvan mukti* there.
9. Singer, 183.
10. Some Indian philosophers, such as Ageananda Bharati, will insist that Tantric literature is not of the philosophical genre, and that Tantrism does not add any *philosophical* novelty to Hinduism (or to Buddhism, for that matter). So while it may seem that Tantra is a corrective to Vedanta and Samkhya, Bharati says that there is nothing in Tantric philosophy "which is not wholly contained in some non-Tantric school of either." He goes on to say that he does not think it even emphasizes certain aspects of Mahayana or Hindu philosophy more than the respective non-Tantric doctrines that preceded it. Rather, he says the difference is in the practical part of Tantra, the *sadhana*. Still, even he points to some distinguishing characteristics. Ageananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (New York: Anchor Books 1965), 16-17.
11. Also known as Mâyâvâda, "theory of Maya."
12. J. G. Woodroffe "Creation as Explained in the Tantra," in *Studies on the Tantras*, (Kolkata: Rama Art Press, 1989), 120, 124.
13. Woodroffe, "Creation . . .", 120, 124.
14. Thomas Matus, *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1992), 22.
15. Singer, 184.
16. Bharati, 18-19.
17. We see something similar in the thought of Meister Eckhart, who taught about God's *bullitio*, or boiling, and creation being the *ebullitio*, or boiling over of God.
18. I have seen various transliterations of this term, including *citisakti* or simply *citi*.
19. Beatrice Bruteau, *Evolution Toward Divinity* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 128.
20. Nor is there any difference between the shining pure consciousness of *prakasa* and self-reflection of *vinar sha*.
21. Govinda Gopaol Mukerjee, "The Spiritual Heritage of India: The Tantras," in *Studies*, 53.
22. Bernie Clark, *Yinsights: The Philosophy of Yoga*

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(Self-published in Canada, 2007), 173

23. Matus, 21-22.
24. Matus, 21.
25. Clark, 173.
26. Stephens, 14-15.
27. Singer, 186.
28. Matus, 22.
29. Stephens, 13.
30. Stephens, 14.
31. Matus, 22.
32. Singer, 186.
33. Clark, 175.
34. Stephens, 15.
35. There are also other even more shocking practices associated with the extremes of the left-handed path, such as consuming the flesh of corpses and scatological substances, animal, human and self sacrifice, and the consuming of human flesh.
36. Singer, 189. Though obviously this practice is outside the bounds of ordinary morality and understanding, except within the bonds of marriage, Singer's lengthy description of *maithuna* in her book *Androgyny* is the most beautiful and convincing sympathetic description I have read of this practice.
37. Matus, 25.
38. Mizumo, 40-41. He also writes that "Buddhism had the tendency to confuse itself with popular Hinduism, if not exactly allow itself to be absorbed by it because of the Tantric elements it got from Hinduism."
39. Clark, 182. ■

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