

THE FURTHER SHORE
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THE FURTHER SHORE

स्वस्ति वः पाराय तमसः परस्तात्।

Blessings on your journey to the further shore beyond darkness!
(Mund. Up 2.2.6.)

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THE FURTHER SHORE

Three Essays by
ABHISHIKTANANDA

“SANNYASA”

“THE UPANISHADS—AN INTRODUCTION”

“THE UPANISHADS AND THE ADVAITIC
EXPERIENCE”

I S P C K

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NOTE

THE TRANSLITERATION OF SANSKRIT WORDS

This follows in general the established usage among scholars, though not in all respects; thus, for instance, the vowel *r* is printed with an 'i' (e.g., (Brihad)). A certain number of common words and names are given in their accepted English form: e.g., rishi, sannyasi, Sanskrit, Upanishad. To reduce the amount of italic type, Sanskrit terms which appear frequently in the text are normally printed in roman type.

PRONUNCIATION

For those who are not familiar with Indian pronunciation, a few general principles may be helpful:

Vowels, long or short, are pure, like Italian vowels; but the short 'a' is an indefinite sound, like the 'u' in the English word 'but'.

'c' corresponds to the English 'ch': 'ch' is the same aspirated. The sibilants 'ś' and 'ṣ' are similar to the English 'sh'.

The dentals 't', 'd' and 'n' are pronounced with the tongue touching the front teeth, a softer sound than in English.

The so-called cerebrals 'ṭ', 'ḍ' and 'ṇ' are more like the English dentals, but the tongue is turned further back towards the roof of the mouth.

Wherever a consonant is followed by an 'h', the sound is distinctly aspirated.

'h' (visarga) is pronounced as a hard 'h' followed by a short echo of the preceding vowel.

REFERENCE TO MINOR UPANISHADS

With the exception of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad, references are given according to the edition of 108 *Upanishads* published in Bombay in 1932. (Note : the edition of 108 *Upanishads*, published by the Sanskrit Sansthan of Bareilly, numbers the sections differently.)

In the case of the Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad, references are according to the Anandashram edition of the Taittirīyāranyaka (10th Prapāṭhaka, given in the Appendix on p. 783), which is also followed in the edition of the Upanishad published by the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras.

FOREWORD

SANNYĀSA (or, The Call of the Desert) was Swāmī Abhishikṭananda's last writing, and was completed in July 1973, a few months before his death.* IN this penetrating essay he expounds the significance of the Indian tradition of renunciation (*sannyāsa*), and thereby causes a compelling echo to resound in the heart of contemporary man. He underlines the profound link between the call to *sannyāsa* and the call to the desert which was heard by the first Christian monks. More broadly he shows how the Christian conscience in general is challenged at depth by the advaitic experience to which *sannyāsa* is the standing witness. The text has an unquestionable authenticity, so completely had Swāmī identified himself with what he here presents. Indeed, it is written 'in letters of fire,' and reveals the inner fervour which consumed him to his very depths and summoned him irresistibly to an ever more acosmic life, totally absorbed in the inward vision.

The second essay, the *Upanishads—an introduction*, was written in French during 1972, but the author never gave it a final revision. Many of the notes written in the margin of his typescript were only brief reminders of what he intended to write, and at some points in the

*The first chapter, "The Ideal of Sannyasa", was written in 1969-70, being apparently intended as a contribution to *Asia Focus*. It was first published in English in the *Annual Bulletin* (1973) of the Rajpur Retreat and Study Centre. A French version appeared in the *Revue Internationale* of the Centre Monchanin in Montreal, Canada (cahier 43, p. 2). The complete text in English, prepared in some haste by Swāmī himself, was first published in seven issues of *The Divine Life*, starting in September 1973. He hoped that it might also be revised and printed in book form. The text presented here is slightly fuller than the original, as (a) it includes some passages derived from the version which he wrote in French and (b) it incorporates in chapter 5 the thoughts which came to him after the actual experience of the 'ecumenical diksa' in July 1973. In a letter of 30 September he wrote: "The last pages anyhow have to be revised, and I was feeling very much the need of adding a few pages about Sannyasa as a 'Mystery'. When the diksa took place, I realized so much that it was so much more than a simple sign. We might say, a 'symbol' in the language of Jung, in religious terms a 'mystery'. That should be a response to the chapter on 'contestation' (i.e., chapter 4). But for that the brain must work in a brighter way than it does for the moment..."

text his style is far from clear. However these closely packed pages are full of inspiration, and contain a profoundly original presentation of the Upanishads. Set in their actual context, their central intuition and their controlling themes stand out clearly. This provides an invaluable key for those who desire to penetrate to the heart of these wonderful texts, which reflect the experience of the first rishis as they awoke to the inner mystery. No one who reads these pages can fail to sense something of this mystery in himself.

The *Introduction to the Upanishads* deals particularly with the great primitive Upanishads and their master-themes, while *Sannyāsa* is based on the mediaeval tradition of the Sannyāsa-Upanishads. These latter texts are unfortunately still for the most part not available in English, but Swamiji here presents their substance, enabling one to savour both their strength and their beauty.

It is no accident that these two writings have been printed side by side in a single volume. Indian tradition itself insists that the life of renunciation (*sannyāsa*) and the knowledge of the mystery of Brahman (*brahmavidyā*, the Upanishadic experience) are inseparable, and that one cannot exist without the other.

On the one hand, the Upanishadic experience, that is, the discovery of the mystery of non-duality at the very heart of human consciousness, is regarded as an essential condition of genuine *sannyāsa*. If *sannyāsa* does not spring out of inner illumination and out of an awakening to the *aham asmi* (I am) in all its purity, then *sannyāsa* is no more than one among many possible ways of living; it has lost its transcendent quality and its true significance disappears. In fact, only that man, 'the knots of whose heart' have been loosed, 'departs' in truth—for this departure first takes place in the depths of his own self-awareness; it becomes an imperative necessity from the very moment that his inner vision is realized and he discovers himself to be inwardly free from all attachment, possessed by the Spirit alone:

the very day on which he finds himself to be free from all inner attachment, that is the day on which he should go forth and roam abroad (Nārada-parivrajaka Up., 3, 77).

On the other hand, the true knowledge of the secret of the Upanishads—*brahmavidyā*—is impossible without a life of absolute renunciation and total dispossession; as the Mūṇḍaka Upanishad (3.2.6) curtly says: "No Vedānta without *sannyāsa-yoga* (renunciation)"; and the Mahānārāyaṇa Up. (12.14):

that mystery of glory and immortality,
hidden in the depth of the heart and in highest heaven,
which only those can find
who have renounced all.

Apart from this complete dispossession, knowledge of the Upanishads is no more than a bookish knowledge and is totally ineffective, even if it be garnished with beautiful meditations and lofty thoughts. The inner nudity experienced by him who is ablaze with the light that comes from beyond all worlds, is a total desert. It is attained only by him in whose depths nothing but the supreme and absolute 'I am' is shining in all its purity; and such an illumination is unbearable apart from the total abandonment of the *sannyāsī*, freed from all desire, all thought, all action and all possession—in fact, in the condition of the *avadhūta* who has nothing.

It is interesting to note that everything that the primitive Upanishads attribute to the Ātman or to Brahman—above all, his uniqueness and aloneness (*kaivalyam*)—is attributed by the Sannyāsa Upanishads to the *sannyāsī* himself. The *neti-neti* becomes incarnate in the *avadhūta* by his total refusal of all. His nudity is only the symbol of fullness, a fullness realized in the mystery of non-duality, from which henceforth he can no longer experience himself as distinct.

In the life of Swāmī Abhishiktānanda the Upanishads had a central place. His spiritual path essentially consisted in the complete appropriation of the advaitic experience of the Upanishadic rishis, without however losing hold of his own rootedness in the Christian tradition. He had made the Upanishads his own, and whenever he happened to comment on them, it was always with a reverent enthusiasm and in order to bring out the radiance of their marvellous intuition.

He never ceased to contemplate the Mystery—at once the Mystery which has a Face, even as the Gospel presents it to us in the person of Jesus; and at the same time, the Mystery that has no face, as it was revealed in the heart of India's rishis. For him there was but one single and unique act of contemplation, centred unfailingly on the non-dual experience of the absolute and unique *aham asmi*, pregnant with the resonance of the 'I AM' of Yahweh which Jesus pronounced in his own name. That *aham* is the mystery realized by Swamiji, the essence of his illumination.

In these two essays we are led directly to the texts and to the heart

of the experience of *sannyāsa*, without having to follow the detours introduced by later comparisons or interpretations. Swamiji had a single burning enthusiasm, which was to communicate to anyone who was ready for it the *anubhava* (experience) as it is at its very source, with all the vigour of its original strength and completely unencumbered by all that was later superimposed upon it. Though the Upanishads were his inspiration, he learnt in practice how to be free even from them, so that he might be nothing but a pure transparency to the mystery that is beyond all signs, even beyond all Scriptures. He was aware that the experience of *advaita* transcends all conceptualization and that it is a 'secret'—and this secret set him apart from everything, in the *ekaivādvitīyam* (One-only-without-a-second), the aloneness of the Self—the aloneness which perhaps is the highest form of true catholicity...

Sannyāsa, written as it was few months before his heart-attack, may be considered as Swamiji's spiritual testament—and that for more than one reason. It was thought out in the course of a dialogue with Swamī Chidānandajī concerning the significance and forms of the 'ecumenical *dīkṣā*' which is the subject of chapter 5 of his essay, and which he was soon to have the joy of imparting. But its importance far exceeds the particular occasion of its writing.

Far from describing a visionary ideal, the essay on the contrary conveys the very substance of *sannyāsa* as Swamiji himself existentially lived it; and the correspondences between several of its paragraphs and the last weeks of his life are profoundly moving to those who are acquainted with the details. While he was working on it in his hermitage at Gyansu, he wrote to tell his friends how the re-reading of the *Sannyāsa Upanishads* had once more stirred him to the depths, as he felt in himself again their irresistible call to the *acosmic* life.

In his inspiring vision of *Sannyāsa* Swamiji emphasizes above all the absolute transcendence of *sannyāsa* over against every state of life, whether secular or religious, and over against every *dharma* (it is *beyond—dharmātīta, turīyātīta*). He thus stressed its derivation from the great *advaitic* tradition, of which the primitive Upanishads (above all the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Up.*) were in his view the incomparable expression.

At the same time he brought out the correspondence between *sannyāsa* and the call to the desert which sounded in the hearts of the first Christian monks of the 3rd and 4th centuries. All the false securities and 'concessions' which at times have found their way into later religious and monastic life are shattered by a genuine confrontation with the total renunciation of *sannyāsa*. All who in our day are concerned for the revival of the eremitic life and of an eschatological

witness at the heart of the Church and of our time, will find great inspiration in these pages, filled as they are with a prophetic fire. For example, the Vedic figure of the *keśī*, the 'hairy one', the perfect *acosmic* (ch. 2), at once recalls the prophetic figure of Elijah, the spiritual father of Carmel, the typical *sannyāsī* of the Old Testament, whose *acosmic* life is also entirely rooted in the vision of God.

Sannyāsa is thus a mighty challenge to the Christian conscience. If Christians are to be true to the eschatological mystery of the Kingdom of God, they cannot refuse to be questioned in their depths by this call to total renunciation, which is beyond all names, all forms, even all *dharma*.

The vision which Swamiji here sets out is drawn at one and the same time inseparably from the Upanishadic experience and from the Trinitarian experience in their mutual non-duality. The Trinitarian experience itself, as far as we can see, appeared first of all in the consciousness of Jesus, very likely on the occasion of that Awakening which took place at his Baptism (see p. 56). Only at this deep spiritual level can we hold together in a single non-dual intuition, on the one hand, the Christian experience of the desert and of the divine Kingdom, and on the other, the Upanishadic experience which culminates in the *aham asmī*—as Swamiji did, and this precisely was his *charisma*.

Now more than ever the Church has need of *jñānis*, awakened ones, who have realized in themselves the unique awareness of Being, hid for ever in their own depth, beyond themselves, having 'passed over' entirely into the non-dual Mystery of 'Brahman'—the self-same Mystery to which Jesus awakened when he cried 'Abba, Father.'

*

The weeks before and after the ecumenical *dīkṣā* marked a decisive turning-point in the life and spiritual fulfilment of Swamiji. He had profound contacts with *avadhūtas*, living in caves on the banks of the Ganges. He himself lived in a cave, then for a while roamed, begging his food. The myth of the *keśī*, the perfect *acosmic*, more and more filled the field of his consciousness. In the act of giving the *dīkṣā*, he himself realized with overwhelming force, the quasi-sacramental value of *sannyāsa-dīkṣā*: that is what is referred to in the term 'means of grace' on p. 46 and 'grace' (p. 49). It became perfectly clear to him then that *sannyāsa* is not only a sign of the Mystery, but is itself a mystery; and that *dīkṣā* and the wearing of *kavi* have a 'sacramental' value. But only those to whom this mystery is revealed and who have been penetrated by it, can know its secret power.

Thus Swamiji entered into the final mystery of the avadhūta, living it in the fullness of his sannyāsa, during his time in the jungle in July 1973 to which he was led by the Spirit. There he knew a fullness of grace which no words can express. From then on, as *turyātIta*, in the ultimate awakening to the sole *Aham*, he glowed with a transfiguring light which was soon to swallow up all that was left of his *śarīram*. The 'adventure' (his own word) of the heart-attack, followed by his entry on *mahāsamādhi*, was in truth only the physical expression of his being swallowed up in the great Light, in his self.

Henceforward, as one who was *kṛitakṛityaḥ* (Nārada-parivrajaka Up. 3.86), that is to say, one who had completed all that he had to do and had reached his own fullness, to remain in the body or to leave it ceased to have any importance for him—as is the case with the avadhūta or the man who has found realization (the *jīvanmukta*). In fact he was soon to leave his body (only five months later)—and this is the last detail of which the Sannyāsa Upanishads speak in connection with the avadhūta: 'one day the body is laid aside in some mountain-cave'. It is surely significant that the text of the Nārada-parivrajaka Up. (4. 38; cp. the *TuryātIta* Up.) passes, without the interruption of a single phrase, from the *dīkṣā* of the *vidvat-sannyāsi* to the abandonment of his body; thus indicating that, for him who has entered into the mystery of sannyāsa, all time and all activity is done away. The avadhūta, the *kṛitakṛityaḥ*, lives at a different level from that of the body or of external awareness. HE IS.

So it was with Swamiji.

Truly nothing that Swamiji wrote had not been lived by him, realized in himself. This is the beauty of his written work, which was the fruit of his silence.

Sannyāsa was his last word before being carried off in his final awakening to the Great Light beyond all worlds.

AJĀTĀNANDA

1

SANNYĀSA

The Call of the Desert

I. THE IDEAL

IT was India's privilege and her glory that she pursued her spiritual and philosophical quest for Being to its ultimate depths. In so doing she made man aware of his own deepest centre, beyond what in other cultures is termed 'mind', 'soul', or even 'spirit'. At this transcendent point her sages discovered God, or rather, the divine mystery, beyond all its actual or even possible manifestations, beyond every sign which claimed to represent it, beyond all formulations, names, concepts or myths. At the same time they discovered their own true *self* to be likewise beyond everything that signifies it, whether it be body or mind, sense-perception or thought, or that which is normally called consciousness.

It was this awareness that gave rise in India, for the first time in the history of the world, to the phenomenon of *sannyāsa*.^{*} Men heard the call to total renunciation and the acosmic life; they abandoned the world and human society in order to live in mountains and deserts, or to wander ceaselessly from place to place, in silence and solitude, stripped of everything. Long before the first Christian monks began to go away and hide themselves in the deserts of Egypt and Syria, the followers of the Buddha had spread this way of life throughout the Far East of Asia.

*

Sannyāsa is a fundamental characteristic of the traditional Indian approach to the divine realities, and without reference to it the religious mind of India can never be properly understood.

In the modern world, no doubt, the value of *sannyāsa* has become a matter of debate. To some extent this is due to the unworthiness of many of those who wear *kavi* (the saffron garb of a monk); but far more it is a symptom of the general questioning which affects all the religions of the world and challenges the rigidity which has come over so many institutions. The result will probably be that the external signs of *sannyāsa* will become less obtrusive, but its essential nature will

^{*}For Sanskrit terms, please see the glossary

surely not be lost. Sannyasis may well be fewer in the years to come, but there is every reason to expect that a steady flow of Hindu devotees will never cease to hear the call to the life of renunciation and entire dedication to God alone.

Sannyāsa—as was the case with monasticism when it first began to appeal to Christians—is the direct response to what Hindu spirituality calls *mumukṣutva*, the longing for salvation. This longing is so intense that it leaves no place for any other desire, and is best compared with the action of a man whose clothes have caught fire, and who immediately, without a moment's thought, hurls himself into the nearest pool of water.

Men are naturally concerned with the things outside them, since the Creator pierced the openings of the senses towards the outside; and therefore man naturally looks outward and not within. Only the wise man, eager for immortality, turns his gaze within and there discovers the Self (cp. *Kaṭha Up.*, 4.1). He knows that what is permanent cannot be attained through anything impermanent (*Kaṭha Up.*, 2.10), nor can the Uncreated (*akṛita*) be reached by anything created or by any action (*Muṇḍaka Up.* 1.2.12). Yama (Death) tried to tempt the young Naciketas by offering him every conceivable earthly pleasure; but he wisely replied that when old age comes he will lose the capacity of enjoying them, and finally death itself will snatch them all away (*Kaṭha Up.*, 1.26ff). Even the rewards of the other world have little to recommend them, for they too will come to an end when the merits which earned them are exhausted. A reward must be of the same order as the action which merited it, and is necessarily conditioned by it, hence the merely relative value of prayers and offerings to the *devas*, including every kind of *yajña*, *homa* and *pūjā*; these at best can only ensure a comfortable life on earth, followed by a pleasant interlude in a localized heaven (*svarga*). The *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* therefore concludes (1.2 11-13): Leave everything and go to the forest, practise austerity and keep your soul in peace; approach a competent *guru* and learn from him the truth, the real *Brahma*-knowledge, which not even the *Vedas* can teach you.

Jesus also instilled into the hearts of his disciples an ultimate concern which was equally unsettling to human complacency: "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world.....?" "I came to cast fire upon the earth...." (*Mark* 8:36; *Luke* 12:49; cp. *Prov.* 30:16). Nothing but the kingdom of heaven has in itself an absolute value to which all else should be sacrificed. The Gospel is incompatible with

half-measures, and only when it loses its savour can Christianity be turned into a comfortable religion. For the Hindu *jñāni* also, the kingdom of which something can still be said is not *the* kingdom; just as the Tao which can be spoken of is not the Tao (*Tao Tei king* 1). Of the Ultimate nothing can be said, except 'asti', it is (*Kaṭha Up.*, 6.12).

According to the Law of Manu and subsequent tradition, *sannyāsa* should only be taken late in life, when a man has fulfilled his duty to the *devas* by prayers and ritual offerings and to the ancestors by begetting children, and when he has a grown-up son who is himself a parent and capable of taking his place in fulfilling the duties of man's estate. However, it may happen that the light of self-realization begins to shine so brightly in a man's heart that it can no longer be resisted; then, no matter what his age, his calling or his responsibilities in society may be, he has no alternative but to leave his home and become a solitary wanderer, far from the cities of men (*Jābāla Up.*, 4.1). As Shankara explains in his commentary on *Bṛihadāraṇyaka Up.*, 1.4, that knowledge puts an end to all activity; no *karma* is compatible with it.

The call to *sannyāsa* is primarily inspired by *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between the transitory and the permanent, which is the first requisite in anyone who aspires to *brahma-vidyā*. There is nothing abstract or conceptual about this discrimination, which underlies all spiritual judgement and becomes the fundamental principle of action.

What is the source of this *viveka*? One is reminded of Pascal's insight: "Thou wouldst not seek me, if thou hadst not already found me" ('The Mystery of Jesus' in *Thoughts*, frag. 552, Everyman edition). For many people, no doubt, the words *viveka*, *mokṣa* (salvation), *advaita* (non-duality)—and their conceptual or emotional equivalents in other religious contexts—convey enchanting ideas which may inspire profound meditation or learned discussion among the initiated. But there are others whose lives have been branded by the experience of their truth; willy-nilly they are snatched away from all that hitherto they had held most dear. Yet their first awareness of the call may well have been almost imperceptible, like the trickle of water that the prophet Ezekiel saw issuing from beneath the threshold of the Temple (47:1), which soon became a torrent, then a mighty river too deep to cross, sweeping all before it and bringing life to the whole land.

Originally, as was also the case with the first Christian monks, to take sannyāsa simply meant leaving one's home and village and departing to the forest or taking to the roads (*parivrajya*). At most it meant receiving the characteristic dress from another monk or *sādhu*, as St Benedict did—always supposing that one felt the need for a special dress, or even for any dress at all. So also Jesus said to one who sought to enter the Kingdom of God: "Go, sell all your possessions, distribute the proceeds to the poor and follow me" (Mark 10:21). It was only later on that the life of a sannyāsī was organized and regulated by specific rules, as also happened in the case of Christian monks.

A formal initiation was soon evolved. It is interesting to note that it includes a sacrifice (*yajña*), in which the aspirant formally abandons all his possessions and his position in society, and addresses to his son the words of 'handing over' (*sampratti*) which are normally pronounced at the moment of dying: "You are the sacred knowledge, you are the sacrifice, you are the world"¹ (Br Up., 1.5.17; Sannyāsa Up.1). This ceremony is, however, strictly only obligatory for those who have received the series of *samskāras* which make up the brahminical initiation, and who—at any rate in theory—cannot be released from their obligations to religion, family and society incurred thereby, except by a new rite. On the other hand, not a few dispense entirely with all rites. Rāmdās, for example, simply began to wear saffron after a symbolic plunge in the Kaveri River at Srīrangam. This is the case especially with *avadhūtas*, who claim neither the name nor the status of sannyāsī, but accept the uncompromising ideal more rigorously than any others. Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi simply left his home once for all and went straight to Aruṇāchala. Before him Sadāśīva Brahmendra first, on the very day of his marriage, abandoned his home, then left the ashram of his guru, and thereafter roamed, for ever naked and silent, up and down the banks of the Kaveri.

The *kavi* (saffron) dress is not intended to mark off sannyāsī as a special class within society, as is often unfortunately supposed. Sannyāsa should not be regarded as a fourth *āśrama*, or state of life, which follows after the three stages of being a student (*brahmacāri*), a householder (*grihastha*) and living in retirement in the forest (*vanaprastha*); rather it is *atyāśrama*, beyond (*ati-*) every state of life. It belongs to no category whatever, and cannot be undertaken along with anything else. It is truly transcendent, as God himself transcends

1. त्वं ब्रह्म त्वं यज्ञस्त्वं लोक इति । (Br. Up., 1.5.17)

all, being apart from all, beyond all, and yet immanent in all without any duality.

From this follows the impropriety, carefully avoided by wellbred Hindus, of asking a sannyāsī such questions as, What is your name? From where do you come? and the like. Whoever he may be—and God alone knows the secrets of a man's heart—the *sādhu* is set among men to be simply the sign of the divine Presence, a witness to the mystery which is beyond all signs, a reminder to every man of the inner mystery of his own true self. All that one should ask of the *sādhu*, as of God, is the grace of his *darsana*, of looking at him with faith, and also, where possible some words of help and encouragement in the way that leads 'from the unreal to the Real' (Br. Up., 1.3.28).

The essential rule of the sannyāsī is to be totally free from desire. Or rather, he has but one desire—the desire for God alone. This of course has nothing whatever to do with desiring the favour of some *deva* (celestial being), who can be propitiated or enjoyed, for that would amount only to self-seeking (*svārtha*). His desire for God is the desire for One who is beyond all forms, for communion with the One-without-a-second, for a joy which is beyond all distinction between 'enjoyer' and 'enjoyed'. With this unique and transcendent desire the sannyāsī may equally be called *a-kāma*, free from desire, and *āpta-kāma*, one whose desire is satisfied (cp. Br. Up., 4.4.6); for his desire is for the Self alone, and the Self is ever-present in all fullness: "the heart filled with the unique experience of the Self" (Nārada-parivrajaka Up., 4.38).²

In his spiritual endeavour, however, the sannyāsī will not strive to eliminate one after another the throng of desires which every moment spring up in the human heart. His non-desire for passing things comes rather from his sure possession of that which does not pass away. His heart knows so well the true bliss—even, or especially, when this knowledge leaves no mental impression—that ordinary pleasures no longer attract him. This does not mean that he despises the things of this world, such as marriage, family, human society. All these have their value, and the sannyāsī appreciates it perhaps to a greater extent than others, simply because he penetrates to the ultimate depth of things and of the mystery of which they are signs. He has discovered 'the further shore', the Reality of which everything 'on this

2. स्यानुभवेकपूर्णहृदयः । (Na. Pa.Up., 4.38)

side' is simply a sign, like footprints which lead one 'to find this all' (Br. Up., 1.4.7). He can no longer 'act his part' in this world; that is the business of others whose calling it is to act out the Lord's *Iti* in the universe. He is also well aware of the dangers which lie in wait for those who live at the level of signs. Signs may well serve as supports on the upward path, just as footprints may be necessary to show the right road; but these signs and indications are in themselves so wonderful that too often men stop at them and forget the goal to which they point—the further shore!

The sādhu therefore seeks none of the pleasures which the things of this world offer. But even so he has some basic requirements. So long as he is in this body he must have food to support life and clothing to cover him and protect him from cold and heat. However, in deciding what is suitable and necessary, he will be guided not so much by the rules laid down in the *śāstras* (Scriptures) as by his own inward sense of discrimination, *viveka*, which continually whispers: Use as little as possible, only that which cannot be done without.....

As regards food, the general rule of the sannyāsī is that he takes it in the same way as one takes medicine, not for its taste, but as something essential for keeping the body alive.³ He must of course eat strictly vegetarian food. Further, as is said in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad, he should live only on food that he has begged; and this, even more than his dress, is an essential characteristic of the life of renunciation in India. For indeed, he no longer has a house with a fire at which his food could be cooked, and besides, he should avoid the distraction of preparing foodstuffs. More important still, to depend entirely on others for the quality, quantity, and even the availability, of his food is the best possible exercise in surrender to divine Providence. Complete insecurity and the lack of all foothold in this world belongs to the very essence of sannyāsa. And lastly, the sannyāsī no longer has any act, any *karma*, left to perform. He has been set free from all duties in this world, even towards his own body. He can no longer work to earn his living, for his whole activity is directed towards the inner vision.

His poverty and his complete freedom are again apparent in the sannyāsī's clothing. The body is clothed, just as it has to be fed, because it is impossible in practice to do otherwise. In the Upanishads it is assumed that his clothing will become more and more scanty as

3. प्राणधारणपरायणः । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

he enters more deeply into the inner experience. Finally the sādhu should be content with any sort of rag picked up by the roadside, enough merely for a loincloth (*kaupīnam*)—or better still, with nothing at all. He does not mind what people may say; if he wears anything, it is not to draw attention to himself; and equally, if he is naked, his external nudity must correspond to an inward stripping away of all desires—or else it too may become a show.

Free from all anxiety and all desire, the sādhu passes on his way through the world like one who does not belong to it at all. Nothing affects him one way or the other (cp. 1 Corinth. 7:29-32). He is like one who is blind, deaf and dumb, as the old texts say. For him praise and blame are the same, since he has passed out of the sphere of the *dvandvas*, the pairs of contraries, like heat and cold, pain and joy, and favour and disfavour. He no longer notices *dvandvas* anywhere. He does not judge anyone or compare himself with anyone, nor does he consider himself as 'above' or 'below' anyone at all. In his vision of the *ātman*, the Self, he has left behind all sense of difference; from whom can he still feel himself to be 'other'?

He no longer has his own dwelling-place, he is *a-nīketanaḥ*. He may stay, as the spirit moves him, at the foot of a tree, in a cave, on the bank of a river, or in some abandoned building, but never in a proper house. Hence people do not ask him, Where do you live? but Where do you sit? Where is your *āsana* (seat)? He goes from place to place, and eats or sleeps wherever his wanderings have brought him by midday or sunset. The only places that are forbidden for him are those in which he lived before taking sannyāsa, or where he knows his relatives or old friends to be. Apart from that, his freedom is complete; he has no responsibility towards anyone else, and no one else is responsible for him. There is nothing on this earth that he can call his own, for he cannot even any more say 'I' in the name of this conglomeration of flesh and thoughts which is his *śarīram*, being *nirmamo nirahamkārah* (free from I and Mine; Bhagavadgītā 12:13). The Śāstras however allow him to give up his wandering during the four months of the rainy season; but even so his cave or hut (*kutīra*) must only contain the bare minimum for his essential needs.

In view of the conditions of present-day society and the change in people's outlook, many sannyāsīs have chosen to give up mendicancy and the life of perpetual wandering. The ideal, however, remains and must remain, despite all the adaptations that may be required by time and circumstances; and any sannyāsī should certainly

have had the experience of *parivrajya* (the wandering life) for a reasonable length of time. In any case, alongside the official and 'sensible' sannyasis there still exist in India—in caves, rock-shelters or on the roads—an indefinite number of ascetics without any status, who to the indifferent or hostile eye of the casual passer-by appear to be common beggars. And yet it is through people like this that the ideal of the ancient *yati* (world-renouncer) is most surely preserved and handed on. They are not concerned about changing times, they come and go as they please, free from all care, clad in a piece of old sacking, or perhaps wearing nothing at all. They sleep anywhere, they eat any food that is available, wild fruits or roots from the jungle, or grain soaked in water, and are perfectly content if they have to go for days on end with nothing but water.

In any case even those who feel bound to adapt their way of life to modern conditions, living in *mathas* (monasteries) or ashrams and depending on the *seva* (gifts and offerings) of their disciples, are no less bound to preserve a spirit of poverty and an equal detachment in all that concerns their food, clothing and shelter. To accept more than is strictly necessary would be a denial of the ideal which they profess. In his *Letters to the Ashram* Gandhiji says that such a failure is simple theft.

The sannyāsī has renounced the society of men to live in silence and solitude. Even when he moves among men, he will not indulge in idle conversation, or be anxious to hear the latest news. What interest in fact could the world's news hold for him, or how could it help him on his inward pilgrimage? Yet the sādhu's lack of interest in the personalities and events of the world does not at all mean that he is a self-centred egotist. Quite the reverse—the sādhu's self is supposed to have expanded to the limits of the universe, to share the very infinity of the Self. In fact, his own personal affairs concern him equally as little as the affairs of others—and this precisely is the real proof of the genuineness of his unconcern about the world and other men. He has been summoned in quite another direction. Some people feel themselves bound to be busy with the world's affairs, others to intercede in detail for the needs of men and society. The sādhu lives at the very Source, and it is not his duty to look after the water-works and canals further downstream. His work, if one may put it so, is to make sure that the water flows plentifully and unceasingly from the Source itself.

If the sannyāsī opens his mouth, it will normally be to speak about the inner Mystery, and how to discover it, hidden as it is in the depths of the heart. He will steadfastly avoid all purely intellectual discussions; not for him are the conferences and seminars of the learned, or even the gatherings of sages. But he will never refuse to help the humble and genuine seeker, one who is truly eager for *brahmavidya*, and will show him the way to the cave of the heart. Even so, in communicating with his disciples, he will not rely too much on verbal transmission 'from mouth to ear'; behind his words at a deeper level there will be the direct contact of heart with heart in the Spirit; and often silence will convey his meaning far more powerfully than any word.

To what extent should a sannyāsī make use of books? Should he use them to keep contact with sages of past and present? Most of the best sādhus keep with them few, if any, books. Even a small library ill accords with the wandering life which remains the over-riding ideal of the Hindu monk. Apart from this—to quote an old sādhu of Arunāchala—"What is the use of being able to read and write? We have the living book of the heart which is ever open; is that not enough for us?" Many sannyasis are frankly scandalized if they find even a small library in the *kutira* of a would-be sādhu. "With all that, how can you ever hope to come to the inner vision?" asked one of them.

At all events it must be said that a sādhu should never read out of mere curiosity. All his reading should contribute at least indirectly to reaching his goal—the realization of the Self. It is even said in the Śruti (Amṛitanāda Upanishad) that the Scriptures (*śruti*) themselves have to be put aside, once the light of truth has shone within, as a taper is thrown away once the lamp is lit; for after all, their sole function is to be a guide to that light. The philosopher-saint Shankara is on record as saying (in his commentary on Br. Up., 1.4.10) that scriptural teaching becomes useless when once the truth is known—and how much more that applies to other literature!

Even so a sādhu may sometimes read with a view to helping others. Ramaṇa Maharshi is a case in point; after years of silence and seclusion he did this in order to help a neighbouring sādhu who was struggling vainly to understand some elementary Vedantic catechism. Thus a sādhu may be expected to give help to others in understanding the deep meaning of the Scriptures, which indeed is one of the reasons why four months of the year are appointed for him to remain in one

place. In any case the explanation that he gives will not be a learned exegesis, but rather the overflow of his own silent contemplation of the sacred text. This should be even more true of anything that he may write. It is not for him to be either a teacher or an author; his call is of a different order—however difficult it may sometimes be to understand and accept this, whether for the man himself, or for those who would draw him from his solitude when they want his help. The true function of the sannyāsī is, in the name of mankind, to stand fast in the secret place of the heart, hidden and unknown; unless the Lord himself in his own way makes him known to others, as happened when Antony was led to discover Paul the Hermit. Then, when the time comes for him to share with others, his gift will be nothing but the pure water that springs directly from the Source, without admixture of any kind—or better still, he will help his brothers themselves to quench their spiritual thirst from the very Source, that which gushes forth in the cave (*guhā*) itself.

How will the sannyāsī pray? In terms of the ideal, the sannyāsī has passed beyond all possibility of formal prayer. His last *yajña* was offered when he brought to an end his life as a member of human society. On the same night he uttered for the last time the sacred *Gayatrī*. He is dead to the world; in the first place, to this world below where men live, but also to that other world, believed by men to be the heaven of the devas. Society no longer has any claim on him; and equally the devas can no longer demand his prayers or sacrifices (cp. Br. Up., 1.4.10). Indeed what does he have that he could offer? He has stripped himself of all his possessions, and there is nothing left that he can call 'mine'. If in fact there is no longer an 'I' to be the subject of rights and duties, 'who' is left to offer the prayer, and to 'whom' can it be addressed? As Sadāśiva Brahmendra so well puts it; "Where am I to turn to address God? In which corner of the heart can I stand to adore him and pray to him? Whatever vantage point I take, he is there already. In any 'I' that I attempt to utter, his own I is already resplendent, and in its brilliance my 'I' has been swallowed up." The devas are only the sign of Brahman, his manifestation at the level of man's senses and intellect. When a man has realized the mystery of Brahman—and this self-realization is precisely what the sannyāsī is supposed to bear witness to in the world—then in what can his prayer still consist, except for pure silence in his experience of fullness, and the OM which only emerges out of this inner silence in order to draw the mind back into it again?

This does not mean that the sannyāsī will spend his time in meditation, in *samādhi*, as is so often mistakenly asserted. As Ramaṇa Maharshi pointed out, the highest form of *samādhi* is *sahaja samādhi* that which is completely natural (literally, 'innate'). In this there is no restraint of a man's normal bodily and mental awareness, as in ecstasy (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), which itself implies a dualism; rather the *jñānī* continues to be fully aware of himself and of all around him, but within the indivisible awareness of the ātman. Thus the prayer of the sannyāsī no less than his life, is not a matter of doing, but of being. 'Meditation', 'recollection', 'concentration', are far too activist terms to convey accurately the nature of his prayer and inner communication with the One to whom he is no longer able to give any name.

The above description of the life of sannyāsa may well appear too idealized to be possible, though it is entirely based on scriptural texts. However it is a true account of what may be observed even today, if one has the *darśana*, not indeed of famous 'Mahātmās', but of those humble men who have renounced the world, either as wandering monks or as hermits, and who generally remain quite unknown to the public.

In fact, as tradition has it, there are two forms of sannyāsa, or rather, of the call to sannyāsa—*vidvat-* and *vividiṣa-sannyāsa*. The first (*vidvat-sannyāsa*) comes upon a man of itself and, whether he likes it or not, he is seized by an inner compulsion. The light has shone so brightly within, that he has become blind to all the things of this world, as happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. In our times the best known case in India is that of Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi, though such an experience is by no means entirely unique. Whether such a man should receive the formal initiation to sannyāsa or not, matters very little. He has already become an *avadhūta*, one who has renounced everything, according to the primitive tradition which existed before any rules had even been thought of. This is that original sannyāsa without the name, which was described in Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad: "Once a man has come to know Him (the great unborn ātman), he becomes a *muni*. Desiring him alone as their *loka*, the wandering monks begin to roam. The men of old knew it well, and then they had no wish for offspring. 'What should we do with offspring, since we possess the ātman as this *loka*?' Rising above the desire for sons, the desire for riches, the desire for lokas, they wander forth and live by begging" (4.4.22).

The other kind of sannyāsa (*vividiṣa-sannyāsa*) is taken by a man

in order to get *jñāna* (wisdom) and *mokṣa* (liberation). It is a sure sign of the greatness of Indian society that its tradition encourages a man to devote the last stage of his life to the sole quest for the Self, renouncing all else as if he were dead already. Sannyāsa, when genuinely lived with all its implications, is certainly a man's most direct route for becoming a *jñānī* and finding liberation. Even then it is clear that no one would ever take sannyāsa unless he had already glimpsed the light in his own depths and heard the summons within. For no sincere devotee can have failed to sense something of the mystery when reading the Scriptures or the lives of the saints, and still more, when enjoying the *satsanga* of great souls. However, the light is still too dim to guide his life or to effect in him that complete 'overturn' of the soul (*metanoia*, *conversio*, in their etymological sense), which characterizes the first kind of sannyāsa. Accordingly, to help him in this situation he will have all the regulations laid down by tradition, of which the most important have already been indicated. But one day, when he discovers that mere religious observances will never gain for him the true knowledge of Brahman, he departs in search of the wise Guru, the one who—in theory, at least—will guide his further steps in the monastic life and will finally impart initiation. But nowadays in fact the initiating guru is rarely, alas, the *mokṣada* guru of whom the *Brahmaṣāstra Upaniṣad* speaks, the one who imparts the saving knowledge from heart to heart and is not content merely to talk about it, or to indicate from afar the road that leads to it.

The guru is indeed normally indispensable for anyone who would make effective progress on the spiritual path. Both the *Muṇḍaka* (1.2.12-13) and the *Kaṭha* Up. (2.8) assert this without qualification. The guru is a man who has not only heard or read about the path to salvation (*mokṣa*); he is one who has himself reached the goal, and is therefore able to guide others from his own experience; through him there shines without obstruction 'the smokeless light of the *Puruṣa* who dwells within the heart' (cp. *Kaṭha* Up. 4.13). To his guru the disciple must give complete *śraddhā* (faith), that total surrender which includes both faith and obedience in the fullest sense of the words. For the disciple the guru is the manifestation of God himself, and his 'devotion' to the guru is for him the final stage—beyond all external worship and every *mūrti* (icon)—in his pilgrimage towards Brahman who is utterly transcendent in his non-manifestation. To such a disciple the guru will impart the ultimate knowledge, mouth to ear and finally, for the most part silently, heart to heart. He will guide him step by step in the

control of the senses and of the mind. He will foster in him *vairāgya* (renunciation) and *viveka* (discrimination). He will sometimes be very hard on him, allowing him neither ease nor respite. But he will temper his firmness with gentleness, leading him in the path of true understanding which alone makes his *tapas* fruitful (*Muṇḍaka* Up. 3.2.4).

The guru will chiefly help him little by little to discover the secret of true prayer. He will not of course reveal to him at the very start the heights of advaitic experience. If the disciple is not yet prepared for it, this could be dangerous, as even the best medicine may be, if taken at the wrong time. So long as a man has a strong sense of his own ego (*ahamkāra*), God is necessarily 'another' for him. To him therefore advaita can only be an intellectual concept and not an actual experience, and can have the disastrous effect of enhancing his self-conceit and leading to a monstrous development of his ego. The guru will first teach his disciple to silence his mind by withdrawing it from the objects of sense and imagination (*pratyāhāra*), by fixing his attention on a single point (*dhāraṇa*, *ekāgrata*) and by constantly repeating the name of God (*nāmajapa*). When at last the disciple is sufficiently free from desire and self-concern and has come to know the bliss of inner silence, only then the guru, himself *Brahmaṇiṣṭha*, firmly established in Brahman,

will teach him the supreme knowledge of Brahman
in its very essence
whereby one may know the Truth,
the eternal *Puruṣa* (*Muṇḍaka* Up., 1.2.13);

and will lead him 'immaculate' through the doorway of the Sun, there where beyond death dwells that *Puruṣa*, the imperishable One (*Muṇḍaka* Up., 1.2.11).

The sannyāsī is essentially acosmic, just as were the original Christian monks. So long as this is not clearly understood, it is impossible to recognize either his essential commitment or the complete freedom (and non-commitment to the world) that he enjoys. As soon as he feels that he has some duty or obligation towards anyone else, whether it be self-chosen or imposed on him by others, he has fallen away from the true ideal of sannyāsa, and no longer performs the essential function for which he was set apart from society—to witness to the one unique Absolute. This can never be sufficiently stressed in these days, when there is continual pressure upon Hindu sannyasis here (just as

there is on Christian monks in the West) to *do* something or other—whereas in fact the only thing that should be required of them is to *be*, in the deepest sense of the word.

The sādhu has no obligation towards society in terms of things that can be seen or measured. He is not a priest whose duty is to pray and make offerings on behalf of mankind. He is not a teacher, not even of the Scriptures themselves, as has already been said. Still less is he a social worker, for he does not share in the political or economic life of society. He is as dead to society as the man whose corpse is being carried to the burning-ghat. It is India's great distinction that for thousands of years her society has accepted this, and has been ready to supply all the needs of the sannyāsī without asking of him anything tangible in return, except just to *be*, to be what he is. Sannyasis are their people's oblation to God, their most precious *yajña*; they are the true human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*), victims consumed in the sacred fire of *tapas*, their own inner oblation.

In our day such acosmism is not merely questioned, rather it is condemned. Society's claim on the individual tends to be even more exacting than it was in the time of primitive tribalism, when personal existence was barely distinguishable within the consciousness of the group; and this outlook is world-wide, even in the sphere of religion and the churches. The sannyāsī is the outward expression of man's ultimate freedom in his innermost being; his existence and his witness are vitally necessary for human society, whether secular or religious. In a world whose interest is increasingly restricted to what performs (or seems to perform) a function, there is an ever greater need for those who are supremely dedicated to an activity that has no ulterior purpose, that has no 'reason' (*a-nimitta*), that exists in and for itself alone and is tied neither to the past nor to the future.

However, when all is said and done, there is no doubt that Hindu sannyāsa will adapt itself to present circumstances, precisely in order that it may continue to fulfil its essential purpose. Some of its forms have become obsolete and will disappear. Its eccentrics will be less in evidence—though who is to judge what is eccentricity? The mass of those who are beggars rather than real sādhus will die out, as society will refuse any longer to support them. But the true sannyasis will continue to bear their witness, whether they pass their time in ashrams or depart on *parivrajya*, whether they remain in solitude or congregate in math, whether they wear clothes or not, whatever name or outward

appearance they may choose to adopt. And society will not fail to take care of them. The present crisis will effectively sift the chaff from the good grain, and only those will remain whose outward profession is a sign of their complete inner renunciation. This small 'remnant' will doubtless be less numerous and imposing than their predecessors, but they will survive and will continue to remind India and the world that *God alone is*. By their witness they will act as a most powerful leaven working for the transformation and spiritual progress of mankind.

One cannot however overlook the fact that an increasing number of sannyasis and sannyasin organizations are involving themselves in social work, in teaching or other forms of service (*seva*). This would certainly appear to be contrary to the scriptural tradition as given above, and in many cases is probably due to their losing the true sense of their calling, and hence to their inability to be wholly faithful to their ideal—as also happens with Christian monks in the West. Nevertheless there are many signs that this is an authentic development, in which the old spirit manifests itself along new lines. It would indeed be regrettable if the majority of Hindu sādhus were to be involved in such activities; but it would also be a denial of the Spirit not to permit such a response to the needs of contemporary society. It may well be that one important reason for these developments is the fact that nowadays, contrary to what used to be the case, many of those who feel the call to sannyāsa are young people; and the acosmic life of silence, solitude and non-action is beyond what is possible for most youngsters, or rather, may actually be detrimental to their spiritual progress. That being so, it would seem a wise course to direct their energies into the path of service towards their fellow-men in that spirit of renunciation and total detachment which is taught so powerfully in the Bhagavad-Gītā.

The jñānī, after all, is above and beyond all *dvandvas*, and it is of no importance to him whether he is seated on a royal throne or tramping the roads as a beggar. Janaka the king is quoted as a model of the spiritual life just as much as the rishis on the banks of the Ganga. A jñānī, whose call is to live among men in the world may well set them the best example of the kind of life that they should lead in order to reach *mokṣa* and the knowledge of Brahman; for *mokṣa* and *brahmaidvā* in themselves have nothing to do with any particular state of life. He will show them in his own life how to perform their ordinary human tasks with the fullest conscientiousness combined with total detachment; and at the same time how to maintain an unswerving

attention to the Presence, even in the midst of their daily occupations and concerns.

The life of a jñānī passed among men and in connection with ordinary human activities in fact calls for a deeper degree of renunciation even than the traditional life of silence and solitude. His choice of this kind of life must never be a surrender to weakness. Wherever the sannyāsi may be, if his life is only a facade, he will certainly scandalize others, and for himself he will earn one of the worst possible hells, as is said in the Nārada-parivrajaka Upanishad. Thus the early tradition was wise in requiring that no one should take upon himself to teach others, or even consent under pressure to do so, unless he has first passed at least twelve years in solitude and silence, attentive only to the inner Presence. Otherwise what could he have to give to others?

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The Spirit blows where he wills. He calls from within, he calls from without. May his chosen ones never fail to attend to his call! In the desert or the jungle, just as much as in the world, the danger is always to fix one's attention upon oneself. For the wise man, who has discovered his true Self, there is no longer either forest or town, clothes or nakedness, doing or not-doing. He has the freedom of the Spirit, and through him the Spirit works as he wills in this world, using equally his silence and his speech, his solitude and his presence in society. Having passed beyond his 'own' self, his 'own' life, his 'own' being and doing, he finds bliss and peace in the Self alone, the only real Self, the *parama-ātman*. This is the true ideal of the sannyāsi.

2. THE TRANSCENDENT CHARACTER OF SANNYĀSA (ATYĀŚRAMA)

AS has already been said, Hindu tradition speaks of Sannyāsa in two ways. It is sometimes counted as the fourth *āśrama*, or stage of life, of the twice-born (*dvija*) Hindu, following those of *brahmacarya*, *grihastha* and *vanaprastha*. Sometimes it is regarded as transcending all stages of life, and therefore as being beyond the possibility of inclusion in any classification whatever; thus it is the *atyāśrama* (*ati-*, beyond), mentioned in the Śvetāśvatara (6.21) and Kaivalya (v.5) Upanishads.

In the notion of the 'fourth' *āśrama* the historian cannot fail to recognize the attempt of Hindu society to win back and, at least to some extent, to reintegrate with itself those who had renounced everything. Such *yati* existed from the time of the Rig-Veda, men who renounced alike the advantages and the ties of social life, and passed through the world, subject only to the inspiration of the Spirit, naked and totally free, like the Wind, the king of Space:

The hairy one (*Keśi*) supports the fire (*agni*)...
The hairy one supports both the worlds;
he is called this Light (*jyoti*)...
The munis, girdled with the wind,
wear garments soiled, of yellow hue;
after the wind's course follow they,
when once the gods have entered them.
Maddened with ecstasy (*mauna*),
we have mounted the winds.
Ye, mortal men, are able now
to see our bodies and no more...
The muni flies through regions of the air,
beholding all the various forms...
Friend of the gods, friend of the Wind,
friend most sweet and most rapturous...
he drinks at the very cup of Rudra.⁴ (RV.10.136)

4. Rudra: a name of Shiva

Such also were those anchorites, mentioned in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad (1.2.11) and the *Panchāgnividyā* (Br. Up., 6.2.15 and Chāndogya Up., 5.10), who left their villages (*grāma*) and withdrew to the forest (*vana*, *araṇya*). They had given up all obligations and duties, both social and religious. For them religious rites (*yajña*, *karma*) no longer existed; they no longer worked in the fields or anywhere else for their living, but depended entirely on *bhikṣā* or food received as alms. All they sought was the inner vision, the real and ultimate knowledge of Brahman (Muṇḍaka Up., 1.2.12-13).

However, as further reflection will suggest, the idea of Sannyāsa as the fourth *āśrama* is not so totally at variance with the estimate of it as *atyāśrama* as it may appear to be at first sight. The relation of sannyāsa, regarded as the fourth *āśrama*, to the 'other' three states of life is in fact of the same order as the relation of the fourth 'state of consciousness' to the 'other' three (waking, dreaming and deep sleep or *suṣupti*) referred to in the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad.⁵ The fourth—whether we speak of the final stage of life or the ultimate state of (self-)awareness—is not one member of a group of four and cannot be numbered after the 'other' three. No doubt it is the last moment in a man's progress towards his ultimate goal, that to which the Spirit is directing and impelling everyone from within. But in the passage from *vanaprastha* to sannyāsa, as from *suṣupti* (deep sleep) to *turīya* (the fourth state of consciousness),⁶ there is a break in continuity and, strictly speaking, we should not even say that there is a 'passage'. The ultimate, *turīya*, state of consciousness or of life does not enter into *dvandva* or opposition with anything whatever. It rests on its own greatness, *mahiman*, on itself alone, that it to say, on nothing else that can be seen, touched or expressed, as the Chāndogya Upanishad says (7.24), referring to *bhūman*, fullness, infinitude. "It is everywhere....the Self is everywhere.... I am everywhere" (cp. Ch. Up., 7.25).⁷ Therefore, as the

5. See Māṇḍūkya Up., 3-12. The relation of the 'fourth' (*caturtha*, *turīya*) state of consciousness (*sthāna*) to the first three is also comparable to that of the fourth and silent part of the *praṇava* (OM) to the first three parts (A,U,M). It is significant that Mand. Up., 7 pointedly omits the word '*sthāna*' when referring to the fourth state of consciousness.
6. cp. the passage from *nirvikalpa-samādhi* to *sahaja-samādhi* (above, p. 11).
7. cp. Br. Up., 1.4.10—अहं ब्रह्मस्मि । and 4.3.20—अहमेवेदं सर्वोऽस्मि । also Praśna Up., 4.5—सर्वं पश्यति सर्वः पश्यति ।

Nārada-parivrajaka Upanishad says on the subject of distinguishing classes among sannyasis (see below), we may well say that the conception of sannyāsa as a fourth *āśrama*, as commonly understood, is only useful so long as one remains in *avidyā*, in ignorance of the ultimate truth.

Sannyāsa is beyond all *dharma*, including all ethical and religious duties whatever. Sannyāsa Upanishads never tire of celebrating the glorious freedom of the sannyāsī. They apply to him all that the ancient Scriptures have to say of the awakened or liberated man, the *jīvanmukta* of later tradition. They go even further, and claim for him even the attributes of the Ātman itself—its utter freedom, its being unborn, untouched, unseen, beyond comprehension. The sannyāsī is indeed the witness to the world of that final state in which man recovers, or rather, wakes up to, his own true nature (*svarūpa*, *svabhāva*).⁸ In that awakening he realizes himself as *a-ja*, (unborn), sprung from nowhere and going nowhere,⁹ as *a-nimitta*, purposeless,¹⁰ as *svaraṭ*, absolutely autonomous, and *kāmacāra*, free to move in every *loka*, every plane, both literal and symbolic.¹¹ His *I* can no longer be in opposition to any other *I*—"No one is different from or other than myself."¹² His awakened *I*, piercing like a laser beam, now lights up to its very depths the 'I' that is uttered by any conscious being (cp. Br. Up., 1.4.10: the awakened man has become the self of the devas). The sannyāsī is the *sthitaprajña*, the man with stabilized mind of the Bhagavad-Gīta (2.54), the *a-kāma*, the man free from all desire (Br. Up., 4.4.6), the one who is free from all ritual obligations, from all *dharma*, as is said in the Kāṭha Upanishad (2.14):

Other than *dharma* and *adharma*,
other than what is done and not-done (*kṛita* and *a-kṛita*),
other than what has been and what will be....

He has abandoned everything in this world or the other, and indeed in any conceivable world:

8. Na. Pa., 4.38; cp. also the *sahaja-sthiti* (natural state) according to Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi, and the insistence of the Zen masters on the discovery of one's own 'original nature'.
9. Kāṭha Up., 2.18.
10. cp., for example, Na.Pa.Up., 5.1.
11. cp. Ch. Up., 8.1-2.
12. मत्तः कश्चिन् नान्यो व्यतिरिक्त इति । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

OM! Earth, air, sky—all worlds are renounced by me!¹³

He no longer has any desire, whether for anything here below (physical pleasure, human fellowship, even the joy of sacred knowledge or religious ecstasy), or for any *loka* at all, not even the world of the devas, in which they might invite him to take his pleasure (cp. Muṇḍaka Up., 1.2.6), The only *loka* that interests him and is sought by him is the *ātma-loka* (cp. Br. Up., 4.4.22); and that world is beyond all worlds, since it is restricted to no world that can be seen touched or attained, but rather comprises all worlds.¹⁴ In awakening to this *ātman*, he has passed beyond all that he believed in and adored, and all his human and religious assurance of security and support has been left behind. As is forcibly said by Brahman in the Kena Upanishad (1.4ff): "It is this Brahman that you must know, and not what people here take for Brahman and adore."¹⁵ The *sannyāsī* has discovered that unique Brahman, and has discovered himself in that unique Brahman beside which there is no other (*ekam advitīyam*; cp. Br. Up. 1.4.1); he has no further desire, for he has reached the fullness, *bhūman*, *pūrṇam*, infinite bliss (Ch. Up., 7.23 ff; cp. Taittirīya Up., 2.7).

The *sannyāsī* no longer has any obligation whatever, either towards human society, or towards the *pitṛi* (the ancestors), or towards the devas, those personifications of the divine Mystery on the plane of manifestation. Whatever he might once have possessed, from which he could provide for his own needs and those of his dependents, with which he could share in the building of man's city, and with which he could offer *śrāddha* to the ancestors and *yajña* to the devas—all was given away on the eve of his taking *sannyāsa*, when he celebrated the *prajāpatya-iṣṭi* (the *yajña* in which a man strips himself of all his possessions, *sarvavedasam*, making this the sacrificial fee). On that same night he offered a last *śrāddha* for his departed ancestors, but on that occasion it was an *aṣṭaśrāddha* and included the offering of rice-balls (*piṇḍa*) for himself also, in token that he himself had departed from this world (*pretya*). For the last time too he venerated the ritual fire, and by the act of inhaling it, symbolically caused it to pass into his own breath (*prāṇa*) as a sign of the interiorization of his worship.

Having duly offered gifts to the departed spirits,

13. ओं भूर्भुवः सुवः संन्यस्तं मया । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

14. cp. Br. Up., 1.4.7—आत्मा इति एव उपासीत ।

15. तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ।

to celestial and human beings,
having performed *śrāddha* for departed ancestors and human relations.

having performed his own funeral rites,
and having taken the sacred fire within his own self,
one enters the order of *sannyāsa* (*Hārītasamhitā* 6.3).

From now on he passes through the world of the living like a ghost:

Ye, mortal men, are able now
to see our bodies, and no more (RV 10.136);

and wherever he goes, he is hidden, unknown, with no token by which he may be recognized—*avyaktaliṅga*, *avyaktācāra* (*Jābala Up.*, 6).

Desireless.....established in his inner vision
let him roam the earth...

Of this sage no work or sign exists...
let the *yati* move about in secret.¹⁶

Even the Vedas no longer concern him, for they deal with the devas and with the worship that men are bound to offer them. Certainly he may still remember and meditate upon the Upanishads, the culmination of all Vedas (*Veda-anta*), but even that is only for the time being. Soon only the *mahāvākyas* will stay with him, and finally nothing but OM will remain to irradiate his consciousness:

Let the wise one study the Scriptures, intent on wisdom;
but later let him discard them altogether,
like the husk when one wants rice (*Amṛitabindu Up.*, 18; cp. *Amṛitanāda Up.*, 1).¹⁷

For him nothing remains to be learned, said or listened to; apart from the *pranava* (OM) there is no theology and no Scripture left for him to study.¹⁸

16. अलोलुपः ध्यानयुक्तो महीं चरेत् । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.17-18)

न तस्य विद्यते कार्यं न लिङ्गं वा विपश्चितः । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.31)

गूढश्चरेद्यतिः (Na.Pa.Up., 3.32)

17. ग्रन्थमभ्यस्य मेधावी ज्ञानविज्ञानतत्परः ।

फलालमिव धान्यार्थी त्यजेद् ग्रन्थमशेषतः । (*Amṛitabindu Up.*, 18)

18. नाध्येतव्यो (न वक्तव्यो) न श्रोतव्यमन्यत्किंचित् प्रणवादन्यं न तर्कं पठेन्न शब्दमपि । (Na.Pa.Up., 5.1)

Everything that relates to the world of *māyā*, such as rules of life or the paraphernalia of classical *sannyāsa*, is simply a concession where proper knowledge and inner experience is lacking. When the guru gives monastic initiation to a *krama-sannyāsī*, that is, to one who comes to *sannyāsa* after passing through the three normal stages of the Brahmanical life (*brahmacarya*, *grihastha* and *vanaprastha*), he makes him discard his tuft of hair (*śikhā*), his sacred thread, his waistband and all his clothing in the water, and sends him away naked towards the north. Then, when the candidate has gone about 100 paces (*śatapatha*, says Nārada-parivrajaka Up., 4.38), he makes him stop, saying: "Halt, O blessed one!" (*Tiṣṭha, tiṣṭha, mahābhāga*), and calls him back to confer on him the insignia of *sannyāsa*—the *kamaṇḍalu* (begging-bowl), the *daṇḍa* (stick), the *kaupīnam* (loin-cloth) and the saffron cloth to cover him.

This last part of the *dīkṣā*, however, only takes place in the case of the *krama-* or *karma-sannyāsī*, that is, one who comes to *sannyāsa* in order to fulfil the scriptural precepts concerning the last stage of human life and finally to attain to *brahmavidyā*, without which *mokṣa* is impossible; such is the case of the *vivṛtsu-* or *vividīṣa-sannyāsī*.

The case of the *vidvat-sannyāsī* is completely different. There are indeed certain blessed souls who from childhood never give place to any worldly desire and who, as soon as they become aware of themselves, without hesitation abandon their home and human society (as did Ramaṇa Maharshi and many others)—sometimes even while still *avratin*, that is, before receiving the sacred thread in the *upanayana-saṁskāra*. These are the *vairagya-sannyāsis*. Among the *vidvat-sannyāsis* the Scriptures also speak of *jñāna-sannyāsis*, in whose heart such a blaze of light has been kindled by the reading of the Scriptures and the testimony of the guru that it becomes impossible for them to remain any longer in the midst of worldly occupations. Here there is no question of a *sannyāsa* taken as a result of a human decision after lengthy consideration, or in obedience to the Scriptures. It is not a self-imposed *sannyāsa*, but rather one that is imposed by the Self. It is an irresistible inner urge, a sheer necessity springing from the depth of the spirit. It is a spontaneous thrust towards the infinite in the heart of one who can no longer be held back by anything. It is not at all a matter of seeking to acquire light or wisdom or of practising renunciation; it is rather the strong impulse of a man's own nature, unborn and unfettered. The rule of Scripture forbids anyone to take *sannyāsa* so long as he has not yet begotten children: "A twice-born man who

seeks final liberation without having studied the Vedas, without having begotten sons and without having offered sacrifices, sinks downwards" (Laws of Manu, 6.37, tr. C. Buhler, SBE 25, p. 205). But this counts for nothing when once the Spirit summons the chosen one (cp. Kāṭha Up., 2.23—and John 3.8) and sweeps him away inexorably. "The very day that a man becomes indifferent, on that very day he should go forth and roam" (Nārada-parivrajaka Up., 3.77).¹⁹ He may still be a student or *brahmacārī*, he may be a householder with wife and children, with position and responsibilities in the world; but the inner awakening frees him from all duties, and for him the life of *sannyāsa* has become a necessity, whether or not he passes through a *dīkṣā*.

In his case, if he receives a formal *dīkṣā* in order to be officially released from his previous *saṁskāras*, then the rite has a completely different significance from what it has in the case of the *krama-sannyāsī*. This *dīkṣā* is not performed with the object of gaining some further result; it is essentially *a-nimitta*, without purpose. It is simply the public acknowledgment of the inner freedom which he has already himself realized at the very source of his being. In this rite, therefore, the initiating guru does not call back the aspirant, nor does he present him with any of the outer tokens of *sannyāsa*; he merely whispers in his ear the *praṇava* and the *mahāvākyas*, and then the disciple departs naked as when he was born, clad in space,²⁰ full of joy, knowing that no one at all is 'other' to himself,²¹ his heart overflowing with the unique experience of his own being.²² Thus, unknown to all, he wanders freely over the face of the earth until the time comes for him to lay down his mortal frame in some mountain cave (Nārada-parivrajaka Up., 4.38).

In fact for every *sannyāsī* that day should come for him to strip himself of everything, depending on when the inner light attains in him to the fullness of its splendour (*tejas*)—

when the (inner) sun in him has reached its zenith,
when it no longer moves, no longer rises and sets—

for in reality never has it either set or risen (cp. Ch. Up., 3.11.1-2).

19. यदहरेव विरजेत्तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत् । (Na.Pa.Up.3.77)

20. जातरूपधरः । दिगम्बरः । (e.g., Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

21. See Note 12.

22. सर्वदानन्दस्वानुभवैकपूर्णहृदयः । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

When that happens, no regulations concerning the condition of a *paramahansa* can bind him any longer. With the words "OM *bhūh svaha*," he tosses into the river the whole paraphernalia of *daṇḍa* and *kaupīnam*, *kamaṇḍalu* and kavi robe.²³ As the Nārada-parivrajaka Up. (5.1) says, all such things are merely provisional; they are only meaningful while awaiting the full inner awakening, until a man has '*alam buddhi*,' that is, sufficient wisdom to realize that henceforth he no longer needs anything whatever. Then

space is his garment,
the palm of his hand his begging-bowl,
the earth his couch (Sṛīmad Bhāgavatam 2.2).

All this goes to show that any distinction of degree in sannyasa, starting with the *kutīcaka* and leading up to the highest ranks of *paramahansa*, *turyātīta* and *avadhūta*, is merely a matter of names, and this, according to the Nārada-parivrajaka Up. (5.1) is due to ignorance and mental weakness.²⁴ The typical and ideal sannāyāsī is the *avadhūta*—literally, the 'drop-out,' the one who has shaken off everything (cp. Ch. Up., 8.13); he is free from all rules (*a-niyama*) and fixed in the contemplation of his own true nature,²⁵ clad in space.

The sannāyāsī no longer has to trouble himself with the anxieties of this life, and especially the worries of those who formerly were most dear to him—friends, wife, children, parents; he should not even think of them. No longer need he conform to any rules of courtesy in his meetings with others (*na namaskāraḥ*). He is completely indifferent to all things, even to physical conditions of heat and cold and the like. No more than a corpse or one who is deaf, dumb and blind, does he react to anything that comes his way, be it pleasant or unpleasant, either at the level of sense or at that of the mind (praise, insult, etc). He is beyond dharma and adharma, what is done and what is not-done, *mantra-namantra* (Na. Pa. Up., 3.86). He has no sense of otherness or opposition, for he has transcended all the pairs of opposites.

His departure towards the north—the path of the sun's ascent—when he rose naked from the waters, was for him the symbol of his inner

23. Na.Pa.Up., 4.38.

24. अज्ञानेनाशक्तिवशात् ।

25. अनियमःस्वरूपानुसन्धानपरः । (Na.Pa.Up., 5.1)

26. न पुनरावर्तते । (Ch.Up., 8 end)

departure towards the place from which 'there is no return,'²⁶ where there is no death, no birth so aging, no becoming.

In the infinite serenity of his being
he has risen up from the body,
reached the supreme light,
and been revealed in his own form.²⁷

He goes the way of Prajāpati, and after passing through all worlds, all being and all places (since he is born in all²⁸), at last, through himself, in himself, he has attained to himself.²⁹

27. Ch. Up., 8.12.3; see p. 59.

28. एषःपूर्वो हि जातः स उ गर्भे अन्तः ।

स विजायमानः स जनिष्यमाणः ॥ (Ma.Na.Up., 1.12)

29. परीत्य लोकान्परीत्य भूतानि परीत्य सर्वाः प्रदिशो दिशश्च ।

प्रजापतिः प्रथमजा ऋतस्याऽऽत्मानाऽऽत्मानमभिसंबभूव ॥ (Ma.Na.Up., 1.18)

3. SANNYĀSA AND RELIGION (DHARMĀTĪTA)

BOTH as an inner experience and as the outward expression of this experience in human life, sannyāsa transcends all the *dvandvas*, or pairs of opposites. It even transcends the fundamental *dvandva* which religious men have discovered in *dharma-adharma*:

“He who knows this—to him these two thoughts do not occur: ‘So I have done evil.’ ‘So I have done right.’ He shrugs them off. What he has done and what he has left undone do not torment him” (Br. Up., 4.4.22)

Even more the sannyāsī stands beyond the manifold distinctions and *dvandvas* which differentiate the various dharmas or religions with their sacred symbols, by whose guidance man strives to reach his goal.

There is no question here of that facile syncretism which seeks to reduce all religions to their lowest common denominator, or what is often called their ‘essence’, in the form of a few universal truths, and then, on the basis of some hasty and superficial comparisons maintains that their fundamental elements and essential beliefs are really the same. Nor is this a plea to treat all religions, from a practical, existential point of view, as equivalent. Every great dharma in fact takes its rise from the awakening to the Real of some mighty personality—or it may be, of some close-knit group, as in the case of Vedic rishis—and it develops within a social and intellectual world which is generally highly particularized. No doubt it deeply influences this world, but it is itself strongly marked by the conditioning received from this world. In the last resort no one is capable of standing outside his own conditioning, so that he can pass a dispassionate judgement on the conditioning of others—a fact that strictly limits the scope of studies of comparative religion, and even more so, of any philosophy of religion claimed to be inferred therefrom.

Every dharma is for its followers the supreme vehicle of the claims of the Absolute. However, behind and beyond the *nāmarūpa*, the external features such as creed, rite, etc., by which it is-recognized

and through which it is transmitted, it bears within itself an urgent call to men to pass beyond itself, inasmuch as its essence is to be a sign of the Absolute. In fact, whatever the excellence of any dharma, it remains inevitably at the level of signs; it remains on *this* side of the Real, not only in its structure and institutional forms, but also in all its attempts to formulate the ineffable Reality, alike in mythical or in conceptual images. The mystery to which it points overflows its limits in every direction. Like the nucleus of an atom, the innermost core of any dharma explodes when the abyss of man’s consciousness is pierced to its depth by the ray of pure awakening. Indeed its true greatness lies precisely in its potentiality of leading beyond itself.

Beyond all manifestations of the Spirit, beyond the level of *nāmarūpa*, there is the Spirit itself (cp. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, 12:4ff), which can neither be defined nor imprisoned in any system whatever. All *a priori* deductions and speculations fall short of discovering the Spirit in itself beyond the level of religion. It can only be reached existentially, that is, by piercing to the very heart of the religious experience itself. But as long we feel able to name or define this central core, we prove that we are still at the level of *dvandva* and *nāmarūpa* which inform the consciousness of each individual at the very source of his reflexive thinking. But in every religion and in every religious experience there is a *beyond*, and it is precisely this ‘beyond’ that is our goal.

Sannyāsa is the recognition of that which is beyond all signs; and paradoxically, it is itself the sign of what for ever lies beyond all possibility of being adequately expressed by rites, creeds or institutions. Hindu dharma very early recognized this truth, so clearly discerned in the intuition of the Upanishads, and even kept a place (the highest) within its own structure for the privileged witness to that which in the end neither itself nor any other dharma is able to express.

In one form or another sannyāsa has emerged in every great dharma. As a matter of history this happened first in India within the *sanātana dharma*; and to this day Hindu sannyāsa, despite all the changes and even the times of degeneration through which it has passed, remains the most radical witness to that call to the beyond which sounds, however faintly, in the heart of every man. In India too the Jain and Buddhist religions originated as monastic reformations, and it was primarily through the Sangha of its monks that Buddhism spread all over East Asia, proclaiming everywhere the call to awake and pointing out the Path thereto which was first taught by Gautama

the Buddha. In the West, from the third century of the Christian era, Christian ascetics in increasing numbers began to flee the world and flocked to the desert in search of peace and salvation; and this tradition is still alive in the churches of our own day. Even Islam has a place for those who renounce the world, and all through its history the Sufi movement (which indeed owes much to Indian influence) has borne witness to the call from the beyond.

Terms like 'Hindu sannyāsa', 'Christian' or 'Buddhist monasticism,' despite their convenience, should be used with caution, since they only have meaning on the phenomenological level (the level of appearance). No epithet or qualification, religious or other, can rightly be attributed to the core of what in India is called sannyāsa and elsewhere monasticism. The call to complete renunciation cuts across all dharmas and disregards all frontiers. No doubt the call reaches individuals through the particular forms of their own dharma: but it corresponds to a powerful instinct, so deep-rooted in the human heart, *nihitam guhāyām*, that it is anterior to every religious formulation. In the end, it is in that call arising from the depths of the human heart that all the great dharmas really meet each other and discover their innermost truth in that attraction beyond themselves which they all share. This fundamental urge towards the Infinite is altogether beyond the reach of either sense or intellect.

It is therefore perfectly natural that monks of every dharma should recognize each other as brothers across the frontiers of their respective dharmas. This follows from that very transcendence of all signs to which all of them bear witness. There is indeed a 'monastic order' which is universal and includes them all—not of course any kind of 'order' that might seek to 'organize' them, for this would simply destroy the essential charisma of the monastic life, which is to be an unquenchable desire for the Absolute. It is enough that they should thus recognize each other whenever they happen to meet, and in fact those who are genuine do infallibly respond to each other. Despite all differences in observance, language and cultural background, they perceive in each other's eyes that depth which the One Spirit has opened in their own hearts. They sense the bliss, the light, the ineffable peace which emanate from it; and when they embrace each other, as they so often spontaneously do, it is a sign that they have felt and recognized their innate 'non-duality', for in truth in the sphere of the *ajāta*, the unborn, there is no 'otherness'.

It has to be granted, however, that the unconditional summons to the Beyond, which is implied in all monasticism, is not always accepted with the same degree of radicalism. In India itself over the centuries various orders of sannyāsis came into being, which were devoted to the worship and service of particular deities, or rather, of particular forms (*mūrti*) of the unique and transcendent divine Mystery. Others sought to combine the cultic tradition of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas with the call to pass beyond all dharma and all karma, which is recorded in the most ancient Upanishads and is the immediate source of sannyāsa itself (cp. Br. Up., 3.5 and 4.4.22). No one has any right to pass judgment on the masters who founded such orders: but equally, no one can challenge the right of those who choose to abide strictly by the great tradition which comes down from the earliest days and was powerfully restated in the imposing series of mediaeval Sannyāsa Upanishads. Unquestionably the main point of their teaching is that the sannyāsī is beyond all rites and all worship, as he is equally beyond all rules, all karma, all dharma:

Let him not mix with the singers of *kīrtanas*,
who repeat the name of the Lord!
Let him not attend religious festivities!
Let him not offer any worship at all,
nor receive any *prasāda*!³⁰

Here also no doubt we have to abide by the commentary of the Nārada-parivrajaka Upanishad, that the ceremonies and rules of sannyāsa have indeed meaning and value, but only so long as the *paramjyotiḥ* (the supreme light) has not penetrated to the ultimate depths of the heart:

that Splendour which shines in the cave,
beyond all heavens—
only the *yatis* have access to it.³¹

In the case of Christian monks also it is true that most of them can be described as bhaktas and karmins, that is, as engaged in a life

30. न परिव्राण्णामसंकीर्तनपरः न देवताप्रसादग्रहणम् ।

न बाह्यदेवाभ्यर्चनं कुर्यात् । (Sannyāsa Up., 59)

न देवोत्सवदर्शनं कुर्यात् । नैकत्राशी न बाह्यदेवाचर्चनं कुर्यात् ।

(Na.Pa.Up., 7.1)

31. परेण नाकं निहितं गुहायां विभ्राजदेतद् यतयो विशन्ति । (Ma.Na.Up., 12.14)

of worship and activity. They belong to Orders which are highly organized and usually lay much emphasis on common worship (the rite). A central element in such monasticism is the life in community under obedience to a superior. On the other hand, the Hindu tradition of sannyāsa lays stress on solitude (exterior, if possible, but certainly interior), complete freedom of movement (non-stability), and total independence in every respect—this solitude and freedom being themselves symbolic of the absolute aloneness (*kaivalyam*) of the ātman. However the profession of a Christian monk certainly implies, at least in its roots, the full renunciation and radical transcendence which shines out so clearly in the tradition of Hindu sannyāsa. For instance, the Rule of St Benedict, in its enumeration of the various kinds of monks (ch. 1) places the hermits first; and while regarding this calling as somewhat rare, lays down that only those should aspire to it who have first been found perfect in community life. Above all the call to solitude which, beginning in the fourth century, carried off so many Christians to the deserts of Egypt and Syria, and then a thousand years later, to the great forests of Central and Northern Russia, was certainly no less radical than the call of Hindu sannyāsa, and in its extreme form implies separation from all ecclesiastical associations and even from the sacraments.

This call to solitude—

alone with the Alone,
alone with the aloneness of the One who is Alone—

is still heard by Christ's disciples. Indeed it seems to be heard with all the greater urgency in these times when most people are unable to resist the temptation to gregariousness, activism and exteriority. More than ever before Christians are being called to a life of renunciation that is very similar to the strictest ideal of Hindu sannyāsa, as found in the Upanishads:

established in the contemplation of his own nature;...
his heart filled with the unique experience of the Self.³²

In this reappearance of the tradition of the desert it is impossible not to discern the impulse of the Spirit and the outpouring of his fullness. Christian monks first began to flee the world after the ending of the fearful persecutions of the third and fourth centuries. At that time the

32. स्वरूपानुसंधानपूर्वकं स्वानुभवैकपूर्णहृदयः । (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)

Church began to identify itself with the transitory world and to acquire a social and intellectual structure like any other human institution, and thus virtually forgot its eschatological and transcendental calling. At the present juncture in the history of the world and of religions, in the East as well as in the West, the sense of the Mystery is everywhere being increasingly obscured even in those whose special vocation is to bear witness among their brothers to the *eschaton*,³³ to the presence here and now of the ultimate realities. The spirit of secular activism corrodes everything. So in the West monks and clergy seek to establish their status in society and ask for a social recognition which is purely secular in character. In the flood of secularism which is sweeping away all the adventitious sacredness with which their calling was overlaid (cp. *adhyāsa*) in previous ages they lose the sense of their real identity. Thus they forget that their primary function is to be the witnesses in the midst of society to what is truly sacred—that which is beyond all forms and definitions. They merely replace the forms of a false sacredness with secular forms which are no less alienating, instead of plunging directly into the Infinite—though this is what is imperatively demanded at this turning-point of history. Meanwhile society itself is becoming all-engrossing. It permits no one to escape from its hellish cycle of production and consumption. It does not allow that anyone has the right to stand aside and live on religious alms; still less does it recognize its own duty of providing for the needs of those who have been summoned to pass beyond its structures, whereas in fact such people are the guardians of its purity and its need for transcendence. It is therefore more than ever important that many "*kesīs*" should go forth both from the churches and from the world, and first of all in India, which from the beginning has been the faithful herald of the mystery of transcendence. Following the great tradition of the desert in the West and of *parivrajya* in India, they are needed to remind everyone that there is a Beyond, an *eschaton* (a transcendent finality), already present, something permanent in the midst of all that passes away, deeper than words, deeper than acts, deeper than all exterior relationships among men. Their motto might well be that spoken by the angel to the great Arsenius, the high officer of the emperor Theodosius, who in the midst of his career left the world and

33. *eschaton*—a Greek word meaning 'the end', 'the end of the world', and so referring to the transcendent realities, seen symbolically as revealed at the end of time.

the court to hide himself among the hermits of Scete in Egypt: "Flee away; keep silence; be at peace!" India, the world, and the religions need such prophets as never before, for they alone can safeguard the right of every man to be himself.

Here the question inevitably arises, what is to be the relation of those who follow the way of renunciation to their original dharma? In India Hindu society has made numerous attempts to reintegrate them with itself. According to some scholars, the Mahānāryāṇa Upanishad is a kind of prayer-book for ascetics, who are invited to recite the mantras, even if they do this only mentally (*manasā*). However, that may be, some have laid stress on heartfelt piety (*bhakti*), the need for which is so deeply rooted in man's heart; others insisted on concern for the spiritual needs of people living in the world; and finally, on the pretext of dharma, the monk's freedom was restricted by a whole network of regulations. However, the great tradition to which we have been referring throughout this essay cannot allow that the *paramahansa* is bound by any rules whatever, whether of family, society, religion or cult (in Christian terms, not even of the sacraments).

He goes wherever he will, the immortal,
the golden Puruṣa, the unique Haṁsa...
There are some who see his pleasure-grove;
but him, no one sees at all (Br. Up, 4.3.12,14).³⁴

He is the man who has passed beyond the realm of signs, whose function in this world is to remind each and every one that 'all is over' (*tetelestai*; John 19:30), that the time for parables has gone (John 16:25), that shadows have vanished before the reality (Heb. 10.1)—not that a new rite has taken the place of the old, but rather that all signs and rites have been transcended by the passage 'through the veil' (Heb. 10:20). Christ's unique and final oblation has put an end to all rites, since nothing further is left to be done or obtained (Heb. 10:14). By his whole being the monk testifies that the *eschaton*, the 'last time', is already present (John 4:23; 5:25; cp. 1 Cor. 10:11).

The 'sign' of this is not so much the monk who lives in a community, but the hermit, whose communion with his brothers is no longer at the level of the sign, in outward human fellowship, but at the level of the advaita of the Spirit, in which he sees no one as 'other'

34. स ईयतेऽमृतो यत्र कामं हिरण्यमयः पुरुष एकहंसः ।
आराममस्य पश्यन्ति न तं पश्यति कश्चनेति ॥ (Br.Up., 4.3.12,14)

to himself.³⁵ That is why no society, not even a religious society, can legislate for its hermits. The most it can do is to recognize—not to bestow—their right to be 'themselves', and to endorse publicly their 'departure' from this world. It cannot impose anything whatever upon them; it can only hand them over to the Spirit, as Indra delivered the well-deserving departed souls to Vāyu, the Wind-Spirit (*Vāyu* is *pneuma*) according to Br. Up., 3.3. And yet no hermit can presume upon the ritual *dīkṣā* which he may have received in order to claim any right for himself, even the right to be free. It is not the *dīkṣā* that confers freedom on him. Indeed, as soon as anyone boasts of possessing freedom, he had already lost it; the would-be possessor of freedom has fallen back to the level of the *dvandvas*, and is therefore subject to the obligations of the law. This freedom is the fruit of his inner awakening, and that cannot be 'given' by anyone. That which is essentially *akṛita*, not made or produced, cannot be produced by any action, any rite or any teaching. It is discovered spontaneously in the innermost recesses of the heart, in the *guhā* (cave) where the Spirit dwells alone.

It is also undoubtedly true that the Christian contemplative has passed together with Jesus beyond the veil of the flesh, which is the body of Jesus. Through death he has conquered death and has discovered himself alive with Christ in a life which simply IS, which cannot be defined and transcends all categories and cannot be said to have either beginning or ending (cp. Kaṭha Up., 2.18). The Christ who rose from the dead was independent of any particular sign; he used whatever manifestation he wished, in making his presence known to his disciples. So Hindu tradition holds that the guru is only truly and finally recognized as guru, when the disciple no longer distinguishes him from his own inner mystery, when "there is no guru and no disciple."³⁶ In the same way, Jesus the Sadguru (the True Guru), is only known for what he really is, when the form that he has assumed disappears, as happened when he revealed himself to the two disciples at Emmaus on Easter night. It was somewhat the same when the prophet Elijah was taken away from his disciple Elisha in the chariot of fire—then only the Spirit was given. The Spirit who is Wind cannot be imprisoned anywhere; his *loka* is the *ākāśa*, the infinitude of space, whether in the heart or in the universe. The Spirit who is Fire burns all that comes in contact with him. The true 'baptism of the Spirit' is

35. cp. Note 12.

36. न गुरुश्च न शिष्यश्च ।

a plunging into fire, a passage beyond all words, all forms, all names. There only the Spirit is recognized. In the recognition of the Spirit, Jesus is recognized; in recognizing Jesus, one at last discovers his own true self. There remains only the *guhā*, the cave of the heart, and the Silence of the Father. *ekam eva advityam*, the One without a second.

4. RENUNCIATION ITSELF RENOUNCED (*TURIYĀTĪTA*)

IT is precisely the all-transcending character of *sannyāsa* that makes some people vehemently deny the possibility of its existing as an institution within the framework of any social or religious order. In their view, to speak of *sannyāsa* as 'a sign of what is beyond signs' is a mere playing with words; it shows that once more one is caught in the snare of *māyā*. *Sannyāsa* is an inner experience—just that. The *sannyāsī* is the man whom the Spirit has made 'alone', *ekakī*.³⁷ Any attempt to group *sannyāsīs* together, so that they may be counted or included in a special class, is a denial of what *sannyāsa* really is. The *sannyāsī* is unique, each individual *sannyāsī* is unique, unique as the *ātman* is unique, beyond any kind of otherness; he is *ekarṣī*,³⁸ since "no one is different from or other than myself."³⁹ The *sannyāsī* has no place, no *loka*. His only *loka* is the *āmaloka*, but this is both *a-loka* (without *loka*) and *sarva-loka* (in all *lokas*). He cannot enter into *dvandva* (duality) with anything whatever—so, if there is a class of *sannyāsīs*, it is all up with *sannyāsa*!

They have renounced the world—splendid! So from then on they belong to the *loka*, the 'world', of those who have renounced the world! They constitute themselves a new kind of society, an 'in-group' of their own, a spiritual élite apart from the common man, and charged with instructing him, very like those 'scribes and pharisees' whose attitude made even Jesus, the compassionate one, lose his temper. Then a whole new code of correct behaviour develops, worse than that of the world, with its courtesy titles, respectful greetings, orders of precedence and the rest. The wearing of saffron becomes the sign, not so much of renunciation, as of belonging to the 'order of swamis'. Rare indeed are those who do not at least expect, even if they do not actually demand, to be treated with special respect on account of their

37. cp. the Greek *monachos*, monk, from *monos*, alone.

38. *ekarṣī*—the unique rishi; references to this mysterious figure are in *Mund. Up.*, 3.2.10; *Pr.Up.*, 2.11; *Īśa Up.*, 16; *cp.Br.Up.*, 2.6.3; 4.6.3.

39. cp. Note 12.

dress. Along with their dīkṣā it is assumed that they were admitted to the rank of 'spiritual men' and became entitled to receive food and all kinds of sevā (service) from others.

At the beginning of his dīkṣā the one who is taking sannyāsa repeats this mantra: "OM bhūr bhuvah svaḥ saṁnyastam mayā"— "All the worlds are renounced by me." But so long as there remains a 'by me' (mayā) in the one who is renouncing the world, he has not yet renounced anything at all! The mayā (I, me) is annihilated, blown to pieces, when the renunciation is genuine; and the only genuine renunciation is a total one, that is, when the renouncer is himself included in the renunciation. Then 'mayā' is wiped out, renunciation is wiped out, and so is the renouncer. Then the heavens are torn open, as happened at the baptism of Jesus, and the truth of advaita shines out, needing no words, names or expressions, being beyond all expression. Words are quite incapable of expressing the mystery of that truth which pierces through to the unfathomable abyss of the inner experience, beyond the I/Thou, Father/Son, of Jesus' baptismal initiation, beyond the tattvamasi/ahambrahmāsmi (That art thou/I am Brahman) of the Upanishadic initiation, beyond all sannyāsa, beyond all light that can be seen or spoken of, beyond any 'desert' that is still known as such.

Sannyāsa no doubt carries within itself its own abrogation, in the same way that the Upanishads contain verses which shatter all their formulations. For this reason sannyāsa-dīkṣā cannot be compared with any other dīkṣā, because it points towards and can lead to that 'beyond' of which it is the sign. And yet there cannot actually be any act of renouncing, for who in fact is there to pronounce the ritual formula; "OM bhūh...saṁnyastam mayā", "I have renounced..."? The only one entitled to pronounce it without telling a lie is no longer capable of uttering it. What indeed can he renounce? Everything has disappeared; and the 'mayā', the 'I' that renounces, what meaning does it have? Of course, the impalpable ego still subsists; it escapes every attempt to suppress it and every moment it is born again from its ashes; but the bonds which have to be broken will never be broken by any kind of rite. That can only be done when the tejōbindu, the 'pearl of glory', the self-luminous one of which the Upanishads speak, flashes forth, the ray of light that illuminates the depth of the soul.⁴⁰

There is no rite for passing beyond rites, no rite for reaching ati-

40. स्वयंज्योतिः—self-luminous: cp. Br. Up., 4.3.6-9.

dharma (beyond dharma). There is no passage to the ātman, the Self... I am, I wake up to myself.

Whether one likes it or not, the fact is plain that in the end the formal sannyāsa, with its rite of investiture, its distinctive dress and its strict code of rules, is one of the Hindu āśramas or stages of life, and is quite literally the caturtha, or fourth. The man in whose heart the flame has been kindled may quite understandably have nothing to do with this rite and its accompanying rules: "The very day that a man becomes indifferent, on that day he should go forth and roam."⁴¹ Such was Ramaṇa; he just went to Aruṇāchala, abandoned his clothes, and sat on the steps of the temple, taking no thought for guru or mantra, but simply gazing at Aruṇāchala, the holy Mount, the guru who had summoned him.

The real turīya is aty-āśrama, and no dīkṣā can convey this turīya in its fullness. It is only because he is moved from within and overpowered by the glory of the light that blazes in his heart, that the paramahansa throws aside his paraphernalia and passes without more ado beyond that 'turīya' which still belongs to the series of āśramas. The real turīya is turīyātīta, beyond the turīya. The man who has transcended and forgotten his place in any series whatever, becomes avadhūta. He is no longer conscious of his śarīram (which includes both body and thinking faculty), and so no longer identifies himself with any of the states of consciousness of his śarīram, neither the waking, nor the dreaming, nor the state of deep sleep, and, least of all, the turīya.

Too often people try to persuade themselves that "This is it!", and this temptation especially lies in wait for those who live in a 'spiritual' environment. We read a few scriptural texts, hear others speak of them, and ponder them ourselves with the help of our little mind (manas); this is enough to convince us that there is some wonderful experience of which the whole Vedantic literature proclaims the greatness, that which is commonly spoken of as 'self-realization'. The only real sign of this experience is that all awareness of the śarīram has disappeared, but this is as yet far from being true of us. Nevertheless we strive to discern at least some of the antecedent signs in ourselves, and any little psychic experience is taken for a great step forward. Next, Vedantic commentaries and manuals come in to preserve and build up that experience with elaborate considerations from

41. cp. Note 19.

various points of view—philosophical, cosmological, psychological, mythical, mystical and the rest. This slowly but surely produces in the individual's life the kind of conditioning which is inevitable in any closed group—just as, in another context, it is produced by catechisms and theological manuals. We encourage ourselves with the word of the masters that the distinction between the *jñānī* and the *ajñānī* only exists from the point of view of the latter. We recall their dictum that the last obstacle to realization is the thought that we are not yet realized—overlooking the fact that an equally great obstacle is the *thought* that we are realized! Finally we talk as if it had really happened, and try to convince ourselves that this is true.

However, as long as the light has not shone fully within, and the *tejobindu*—that pearl of glory in the depth of our being—has not yet totally transformed the *buddhi* (discriminating faculty) to its ultimate recesses, one has no right to pronounce the mahāvākya: *aham Brahma asmi* (I am Brahman). The 'aham' of which he is aware in his outer consciousness is still essentially the ego of the one who utters the formula, and only very indirectly does it point to the deep *aham* to which the Scriptures refer.

Of course, faith in the Scriptures can be called in to bridge the gulf. Christians too are expected to have such a faith. But on what is this faith based, what is its *pratiṣṭhā*? In a Christian context it is related to the divinity of Christ—but this too is a matter of faith, and its formulation is deeply indebted to the intellectual and cultural environment in which it arose. On the other hand, in a Hindu context it would normally be said that faith, *śraddhā*, simply exists and has no need of further proof. It is a part of that dharma which has been handed down from generation to generation since the time of the rishis. In the words of the Chāndogya Upanishad (7.24) already quoted, the Scriptures rest on their own greatness, *māhiman*, or on nothing. Any attempt to solve the problem inevitably faces a dilemma: either the light which shines in the depth of the heart reveals that the Scriptures are true, in which case the sphere of Scripture is transcended (cp. Amṛitanāda Upanishad—'once the lamp has been lit, we forget the taper'); or else the Scriptures are repudiated in the name of reason which refuses to be bluffed any longer.

The ātman, the Self, rests on itself alone. To try to provide it with a would-be 'support'⁴² outside itself amounts to letting the sand slip

42. आलम्बनम्—Kaṭha Up., 2.17.

through one's fingers. The same can be said of sannyāsa, the supreme renunciation. As long as we try to find a support (*pratiṣṭhā*) for it in anything else—say, a mantra, a dīkṣā, a tradition, a *varṇśā*—we simply miss the point. Anyone who relies on such things in order to gain recognition and acceptance in society—or, in an extreme case, to be pardoned for having chosen to be a drop-out, an *avadhūta*—has not yet understood...

His true support is not here. It is nothing that can be shown, dated, described, proved by witnesses (such as the guru or the abbot who gave him dīkṣā)—for all such things themselves depend on other things, outside themselves (cp. Ch. Up., 7.24). No revelation, no ecstasy, no Scripture, no man, no event, no dīkṣā, nothing whatever can be his support. He does not have a support; he is founded on himself. The inner awakening sets him free from every bondage, and enables him to see with direct vision⁴³ what the eye could never see. For that there can be no 'sign', just as there cannot be for the second coming of Christ or for the final advent of the Kingdom: "They will tell you, 'He is here', or 'He is there;' do not believe it" (Matt. 24:23; Mark 13:21).

Long ago the Christ-sign, despite his being so perfectly transparent ("He who has seen me, has seen the Father"⁴⁴), was misread and misinterpreted because men are either unable or actually refuse to free themselves from signs so that they may pass yonder—or rather, simply lose and find themselves where signs are no more. In the same way, the pellucid sign which the Upanishads are in themselves has been obscured by making endless commentaries on them; whereas the text of the Upanishads is utterly pure, utterly transparent for the man who is open within.

The flame-coloured robe of the sannyāsī signifies the blazing fire in which the *śarīram* is supposed to have been consumed. Yet it is too often only play-acting. The ego should have vanished; and yet on the very evening of his initiation the new sannyāsī can be heard to say: "I have received sannyāsa!"

In the heart of every man there is something—a drive?—which is already there when he is born and will haunt him unremittingly until his last breath. It is a mystery which encompasses him on every side, but one which none of his faculties can ever attain to, or still less lay

43. अक्षरदृष्टि ।

44. St. John 14:9.

hold of. It cannot be located in anything that can be seen, heard, touched or known in this world. There is no sign for it—not even the would-be transcendent sign of sannyāsa.

It is a bursting asunder at the very heart of being, something utterly unbearable. But nevertheless this is the price of finding the treasure that is without name or form or sign—*arūpa*, *anāma*, *alinga*, *avyakta*. It is the unique splendour of the Self—but no one is left in its presence to exclaim, “How beautiful it is!”

It is an invisible ray issuing from the Pearl of Light, the *tejobindu*, in the deepest abyss of the Self; it is also a death-ray, ruthlessly destroying all that comes in its way. Blessed death! It pierces irresistibly through and through, and all desires are consumed, even the supreme and ultimate desire, the desire for non-desire, the desire for renunciation itself. As long as any desire remains, there is no real sannyāsa and the desire for sannyāsa is itself the negation of sannyāsa. The only true sannyāsī is the one who has renounced both renunciation and non-renunciation.⁴⁵ Farewell then to any recognition by others that I am a sannyāsī!

The *keśī* does not regard himself as a sannyāsī. There is no world, no loka, in which he belongs. Free and riding the winds, he traverses the worlds at his pleasure. Wherever he goes, he goes maddened with his own rapture, intoxicated with the unique Self. Friend of all and fearing none, he bears the Fire, he bears the Light. Some take him for a common beggar, some for a madman, a few for a sage. To him it is all one. He is himself, he is accountable to no one. His support is in himself, that is to say, in the Spirit from whom he is not ‘other’.

Any *dīkṣā*, any official recognition by society, would amount to bringing him back to the world of signs, the world of *kṛita*, that which is made, fabricated, even the world of *sukṛita*, that which is well done, praiseworthy (cp. Muṇḍaka Up., 1.2.6); but

without sign, without name, the *yati* goes his way...

No doubt, in the heart of many people there are the beginnings of inner illumination, but often that light is perceived only through the lens of the intellect. That reflection is itself so beautiful that normally men do not think of looking directly at its source—or maybe they have an instinctive fear of being blinded by the full splendour.

In a Vedantic environment it is natural to interpret this in terms

45. यः संन्यासं चासंन्यासं च संन्यस्यत्येषः संन्यासी ।

of non-duality. In the Semitic world, in which Jesus lived and which has left such a deep mark on the spiritual experience of the West, the ‘seer’ quite simply finds himself in the presence of God, One whom he adores and loves, whose almighty power complements the weakness of man, while his holiness cleanses him from his sin:

Father, blessed be thy name!

Let thy Spirit come!

Give us the food we need

and forgive us our sins (cp. Luke 11:12-4).

The non-dualistic formulations of Vedānta and the apparently dualistic formulations which arose from the deep sources of the Semitic mind are both alike the result of conditioning. Only faith makes possible the leap beyond—and faith rests on itself alone.

It is necessary to detach ourselves even from the experience of *advaita*, or rather, from what we think it to be, from every concept that has been formed of it. In that precisely lies the criterion of its truth.

It is necessary likewise to detach ourselves from sannyāsa, or rather, from all that men think or say about it, from all definitions that are given of it, from every form in which it has been expressed. That precisely is the criterion of its truth. But then what is left, what remains?

When the embodied one is about to leave the body,
when he frees himself from it, what is left here?

That, just That!

That is the Pure, that is Brahman, that is called the Immortal.
In him all the worlds are established, and none can go beyond.

*That, just That!*⁴⁶ (Kāṭha Up., 5.4 and 8)

Yes indeed—“That, just That!”. But who remains to say ‘That’, to think of it, to feel it? For the one about whom we continue to speak—he has disappeared blissfully in the mystery of the Source.

From the call of the Spirit there is no release. Nothing can con-

46. अस्य विस्त्रं समानस्य शरीरस्थस्य देहिनः ।

देहाद्विमुच्यमानस्य किमत्र परिशिष्यत एतद्वै तत् ॥

तदेव शुक्रं तद्ब्रह्म तदेवामृतमुच्यते ।

तस्मिल्लोकाः श्रिताः सर्वे तदु नात्येति कश्चन एतद्वै तत् ॥

(Kāṭha Up., 5.4,8)

tinue to have meaning or value for the man on whom the Spirit has descended. He no longer has either a past or a future. All plans made by him or for him, even the loftiest religious projects, are swept away like leaves before the wind. It is the same as when death takes off some young person, full of promise, from whom the world expected much. He has passed into the silence, a silence which no one else can ever penetrate; for this tomb is sealed from within.

Awakening must not be confused with any particular human or religious situation, with any specific state of life, or loka, or with any condition (or conditioning) which sets one 'apart'. Even Gautama the Buddha seems to have tied the possibility of awakening too closely to the monastic life, and too often Hindu dharma has thought on the same lines. But the *jīvan-mukta* is not distinguished by any particular sign, just as Jesus gave no description of one who has risen from the dead.

Self-realization' is the great myth⁴⁷ of the Vedānta. When Sri Ramaṇa says that the final obstacle to realization is the very idea that one ought to strive after it, he is in fact setting forth the definitive purification of the Spirit, that which sets man free and cuts the last 'knot of the heart', *hṛdayagranthi*.⁴⁸ It is the equivalent of the 'dark night of the soul' according to John of the Cross, who teaches that the ultimate act of union and perfect love is an act so spiritual that nothing in our created nature is able to feel it or lay hold of it, to understand or express it. It happens without our mind being aware of it or being able to apprehend it. Yet something in us knows that 'It is,' 'asti'. Both of these great seers refuse to allow that the final perfection, the awakening, has anything to do with space or time, or even thought. It is utterly mistaken to try to attain to some ultimate experience, as a result of which one might hold oneself to be a 'realized man'. To seek for such an experience or such a condition of being 'realized' within the world of space and time, or even in the mental sphere, is merely a sign of lacking the most elementary purification required for the decisive awakening. As soon as self-realization is spoken of, and still more when it is applied to any particular person, it is simply caricatured and reduced to the level of *manas*, being made an object of thought (however 'spiritual'), and therefore something quite incapable

47. myth—here understood to mean a complex of signs and meanings which symbolize a reality so rich that it cannot be expressed directly in logical terms.

48. हृदयग्रन्थी (cp. Kāṭha Up., 6.15)

of leading to *mokṣa*. No one is realized, no one is awakened, there is no awakening; and this is not playing with words. The *evamīd*—he who knows *thus*—smiles and says nothing, or maybe he dances like a madman, or perhaps he remains motionless and indifferent.

We therefore have to accept the fact that nothing in us is capable of appropriating or containing this famous self-realization, the central myth of Vedānta. Once the deva of that myth is discovered and exposed, all the other devas make themselves scarce without more ado. They vanish; only Brahman, the Ātman, the Self, shines with his own light, and all else lights up in him:

that supreme dwelling of Brahma, founded on which all the
universe shines brilliantly (Muṇḍaka Up., 3.2.1);
in his shining everything shines;
all that is reflects his radiance (Muṇḍaka Up., 2.2.10).⁴⁹

Once that central myth has been unveiled, all myths are lit up from within and yield their secrets. This is the potent draught which the *keśī* carries with him, drinking it from the very cup of Shiva-Rudra (RV 10.136).

Is such a total purity possible? Even to raise the question destroys the life of which it is asked. The only man who could answer it is he who has met on the way a *keśī*, a true guru. From him he received a marvellous *dīkṣā* in which all things were revealed to him; but such a *dīkṣā* was supported on nothing whatever. That guru had no *varṇā* authorizing him to initiate others, nor did he recite any mantra hallowed by tradition. He did not even realize that he was giving *dīkṣā*, because he had no idea that he was a guru. If he made any gestures, they were spontaneous, unrehearsed. If he spoke any words, they arose naturally from the inner Source, direct and unmediated. This was the *mauna-dīkṣā*, the silent initiation, an infinitely pure communication within the mystery of the non-dual Spirit, a glance which pierces to the very depths, an embrace which abolishes all distinctions...

But the *keśī* in the Spirit can beget only *keśis*...

The horse has shaken out his mane,
The wave has shed its foam,
The water is pure,

49. एतत्परमं ब्रह्म घाम यत्र विश्वं निहितं भाति शुभ्रम् । (Mund. Up., 3.2.1)
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति । (Mund. Up., 2.2.10)

The runner is free...
 Freely, riding the winds
 the keśī traverses the worlds
 intoxicated with the unique Self...
 Solitude and silence,
 total nakedness,
 without sign or memory...

5. SANNYĀSA-DIKṢĀ

SANNYĀSA confronts us as a sign of that which is essentially beyond all signs—indeed, in its sheer transparency, it proclaims its own death as a sign. This is how it has been handed down from generation to generation by the dominant tradition of renunciation in India. This also is how it appears above all to those whose heart and mind is overwhelmed by the call to sannyāsa, and to whom the Spirit has given a glimpse of that infinite Space that is within the heart.

However the sannyāsī lives in the world of signs, of the divine manifestation, and this world of manifestation needs him, 'the one beyond signs', so that it may realize the impossible possibility of a bridge between the two worlds; the keśī bears up the two worlds,⁵⁰ keeping them apart, and yet being the way through which man has access to the brahma-world (cp. Ch. Up., 8.4.1; Br. Up., 4.4.22).

These ascetics who flee the world and care nothing for its recognition are precisely the ones who uphold the world. They are like the Vedic *skambha* which maintains the stability of the universe (cp. Atharvaveda 10.7 and 8). It is their renunciation which is symbolized by all the yajñas and homas offered by the priests. In them the primordial sacrifice of the Puruṣa⁵¹ is accomplished in the full reality of the Spirit. From their inward fire, the *agni* manifested in their austerity (*tapas*), all sacrificial fires are lit.

As far as they are concerned, being known or unknown is of no importance. They go their way in secret.⁵² There is no sign to identify them, they are *alinga*, *avyaktācāra*. But society needs to know them. It needs to know that they are there, so that it may preserve a reminder of transcendence in the midst of the transient world.

For this reason, despite the risk of sclerosis in anything human that becomes an institution, it is none the less good for society to allow a place for monks and publicly to acknowledge their condition as

50. केशी विभर्ति रोदसी । (R.V. 10. 136)

51. In R.V. 10.90 the world originates from the sacrifice of the archetypal man. The Puruṣa is also total Man in the fullness of his being.

52. cp. Note 16.

'apart'. Further, it is normally through the institution of monasticism that the Spirit reveals himself in making his call heard by those whom he chooses—even if, later on, this very same call thrusts them remorselessly beyond all signs. Sannyāsa-dīkṣā can never be made obligatory, but no more can it be denied to those who sincerely ask for it, not to gain prestige from its special status, but that they may be free to devote themselves more entirely to the quest for Brahman, "dedicated to Brahman, established in Brahman, in search of the supreme Brahman" (Praśna Up. 1.1)⁵³—in fact, "seeking God" (*quaerere Deum*), as St Benedict says.

It would certainly be wrong to regard sannyāsa-dīkṣā as an empty sign with no real content. Its rich significance entitles it to be termed a *symbol* rather than a sign (to adopt the widely accepted distinction in contemporary thought, with which is related the recent treatment of the Christian sacraments as symbols⁵⁴). Sannyāsa-dīkṣā in fact carries all the concreteness of a symbol whose roots penetrate to the very source of being itself—so deeply that in some sense it bears within itself the very reality which it signifies. The sign of sannyāsa—and equally that of dīkṣā—stands then on the very frontier, the unattainable frontier, between two worlds, the world of manifestation and the world of the unmanifest Absolute. It is the mystery of the sacred, lived with the greatest possible interiority. It is a powerful means of grace—that grace which is nothing else than the Presence of the Absolute, the Eternal, the Unborn, existing at the heart of the realm of becoming, of time, of death and life; and a grace which is at the same time the irresistible drawing of the entire universe and its fullness towards the ultimate fullness of the Awakening to the Absolute, to the Ātman. This sign, this grace is supremely the *tarāṇa*, the raft by which man passes over to the 'other shore', 'the ultimate shore of the Beyond'⁵⁵. Finally, it is even the *tāraka*, the actual one who himself carries men across to the other shore, the one and only 'ferryman', manifested in manifold ways in the form of all those rishis, mahātmas, gurus and buddhas, who throughout history have themselves been awoken and in turn awake their brother-men.

53. ब्रह्मपरा ब्रह्मनिष्ठाः परं ब्रह्मन्वेपमाणाः । (Pr.Up., 1.1)

54. e.g., the writings of P.Ricoeur.

55. पारं (Kātha Up., 3.2) परमे परार्धे। (Kātha Up., 3.1)

While it is true that monastic life is transcendent in relation to any dharma, it is perfectly natural for the 'profession' or initiation which marks the official entry on monastic life to be performed within the particular religious tradition into which each individual is born and in which he has grown up in the Spirit. As long as we remain at the level of signs, the best signs for us are normally those among which we first awoke as men, and as men devoted to God, even if later on those signs have to be purified and freed from their limitations and particularity. However, there is in Hindu sannyāsa something so strong, such a burning savour of the Absolute, that it is irresistibly attractive to those who have discovered within themselves that ineffable mystery to which the Upanishads give their insistent testimony. Then, no matter which dharma happens to be theirs—and even more when they feel themselves unrelated to any dharma—they have a strong desire to be coopted into the great Indian tradition of sannyāsa. Through the sign of the *vaṁśa*, linking them with the ancient rishis, their hope is to discover more surely the unique Seer, *ekarṣi*, who reposes in the depth of their heart.⁵⁶

Let us take first the case of Christian monks, who are already bound—and freed—by their religious profession. When they come into contact with their Hindu brother-monks and meet with the uncompromising ideal of sannyāsa, they discover in their own dedication a compelling summons, even more interior than exterior, which no longer allows them any respite. They feel a natural urge to take the garb of the Indian sannyāsī and to observe at least the most essential of their customs in matters of poverty, abstinence, *abhayam*, etc.⁵⁷ Even more fundamentally, they surrender themselves to that freedom breathed in their hearts by the Spirit. In such case to receive a new dīkṣā would be without meaning, since in the total surrender of their original profession, expressed in the prayer "*Suscipe...*," the essential oblation was already made. Their case is comparable with that of the paramahansa

56. cp. Svet. Up., 3.11—the Puruṣa 'hidden in the heart of every creature,' सर्वभूतगुहाशयः ।

57. On the other hand it is impossible to deplore too strongly those persons, whether Christian monks or spiritual wanderers from the west, who adopt the *kavi* dress, but care nothing for the binding requirements implied by the garb of a sannyāsī—for instance, abstinence from eating flesh. In the same way, too many institutions take the name of 'ashram' without concern for the presence of a real guru or for the following of the Indian life-style both outwardly and inwardly.

who, when the full light shines within him, passes over, quite naturally and without further thought, to the condition of a *turiyatīta* or of an *avadhūta*.

There are, however, others who come to India with no previous monastic or even religious affiliations and, when here, 'awake', sometimes as a result of hearing the Scriptures, or more particularly through contact with a true guru, in whom they encounter a burning fire which consumes all their desires and previous aspirations. Then, whether or not they intend, or are allowed, to remain in India, or perhaps have to return to the country of their birth, they often dream of pronouncing their vow of renunciation in the Indian manner, and seek permission to do so, in order that they may be officially set apart from society and may thereafter spend their life in undivided attention to the mystery within.⁵⁸ This raises a problem; for, although it is true that *sannyāsa-dīkṣā* means an end of all rites and a final passing beyond the world of signs, the fact remains that such a *dīkṣā* is so intimately connected with Hindu ritual and tradition that it can have no meaning for those who do not belong to the Hindu dharma.

For a Hindu the initiation to *sannyāsa* belongs to the series of rites which mark the stages in the life of a the *dvija* (twice-born) from his conception to his being carried to the funeral-pyre. Indeed it actually anticipates the performance of that final *agnihotra* (cp. Ch. Up., 5.4-9). *Sannyāsa-dīkṣā* is therefore regularly accompanied by rites which signify the end of all rites; thus the candidate repeats the *gāyatrī* one thousand times at each of the two *sandhyā* which precede his initiation.

Further—at least in the case of a *krama-sannyāsī*⁵⁹—the ceremony concludes with the guru handing over to the disciple the paraphernalia of *sannyāsa*, namely, the *daṇḍa* and *kamaṇḍalu*, the *kaupīnam* and the *kavi* covering. These insignia are barely intelligible outside the particular social and cultural context of India, and their handing over by the guru has little meaning in the case of a non-Indian *sannyāsī* who will have to live outside India, despite the rich significance inherent in this ceremony.

One might dream of investing *sannyāsa* with signs of universal significance, both as regards the rite and in the external appearance of the *sannyāsī*. But by definition all signs are particular, belonging as

58. See Note 25.

59. See above, p. 22

they must to some given culture and milieu. Once again we are face to face with the paradox (or rather, the contradiction) at the heart of *sannyāsa*, that it is at the same time not at home in any world (*aloka*) and also present to all worlds (*sarvaloka*), the sign of what is beyond signs. Inevitably we are led back to the original *sannyāsa* described in the ancient texts as 'without sign' (*aliṅga*), without rules' (*anīyama*).

The ambivalence of *sannyāsa* is such that, in the last resort, when stripped of all rules and outward signs, it can no longer be differentiated from the spontaneous inner renunciation of any awakened man. Nothing external can serve as the sign of the *sannyāsī*, just as there is nothing that could be the sign of a *jīvan-mukta*. He may roam through the worlds like the *keśī* of the Rīg-Veda, he may hide himself in caves and jungles, and equally he may live in the midst of the multitude and even share in the world's work without losing his solitude. The unperceptive will never notice him; only the *evamīd* (the one who knows *thus*) will recognize him, since he too abides in the depth of the Self. However, anyone who is already in the slightest degree awakened cannot fail to experience something of his radiance—a taste, a touch, a gleam of light—which only the interior sense can perceive, and which leaves behind it a truly wonderful impression.

If then, there cannot possibly be any universally meaningful sign of *sannyāsa*, and if social pressures compel the *sannyāsī* ultimately to divest himself of all signs, is there any remaining justification for the retention of an outward form of initiation, since in any case its value is debatable from the point of view of what *sannyāsa* essentially is?

The reasons given above for its retention still hold good. There is, first, the grace with which such an institution is unquestionably surrounded and endued. No doubt those whose approach is purely intellectual will question this; but those who have given or received the *dīkṣā* testify to the grace which has flooded their being to its depths. All that they can say of it—and still more, all that they cannot possibly express in words—was made known to them from within through a profound and unforgettable experience.

Then there is the need of society itself for *sannyāsis*, who are known to be genuine, to live in its midst as witnesses to a transcendent presence, even if the signs of this presence cannot well be determined in advance and perhaps have to be thought out afresh every day, as circumstances continually change. We have to trust in the Spirit and to recognize that the monk—being a privileged witness to the Spirit—has ways of action and communication over and above those which pass

through the senses. This is his real strength, which no obstacle can resist.

Moreover a public engagement in the presence of authorized witnesses will guard the sannyāsī most effectively from the temptation to look back. When once the enthusiasm generated by his first spiritual experience has faded, and when he is no longer living in a situation which holds him to his spiritual quest, there is a real danger of his being carried away by his desires, which often appear under a plausible disguise. At the mental level, where a host of desires present themselves as they seek to force the gate of his heart, the memory of his commitment and of the transcendence of which it is the sign, will surely aid him powerfully in remaining steadfast, unshaken.⁶⁰ When temptation assails him, and the solicitations of mind and sense are strong, the sannyāsī can fall back on the remembrance of his vows; so, even if he cannot live on *bhikṣā*, his food should always be as simple as possible, the bare minimum required to maintain his body, and never taken to gratify his palate; even if he can no longer wander from village to village and can find no forest hut for his shelter, his house must only be what is absolutely essential for his needs; even if he cannot wear *kavi* dress, even if he cannot make do with rags picked up on the roadside or live altogether without any clothing, his garment must be no more than what is needed to cover his body according to the simplest standards of his neighbours. Always he will remember that his essential obligation is to silence, solitude, meditation (*dhyāna*),⁶¹ and this he can never abandon. The very fact that he is no longer marked by any particular outward sign will make him all the more careful to express his dedication through the way he lives. In the end the truest sign of what he is will be his essential freedom and his refusal to be dependent on anything or to seek security in anything whatever outside himself.

His commitment as a sannyāsī will also safeguard him against the persuasion of others, his friends and relatives for instance, who with the best intentions will try to draw him back into the world, either permanently, or at least for the time being. Some will encourage him to marry; others will invite him into their homes. Some will tell him that he should write or give lectures; others will offer to build an

60. स्थिरबुद्धिः स्थितप्रज्ञः—Bhagavad Gītā, 2.54ff.

61. cp. Na.Pa.Up., 4.17,18—“Let him remain in a single place.....established in his meditation”; एकत्र संवसेत् ध्यानयुक्तः ।

ashram for him, where he would be able to teach conveniently. The time may perhaps come for him, when he will have a right to share with others what he has seen within; but first he needs to have passed long years—twelve, according to the tradition—in silence and solitude, forgotten by all and buried out of sight. This alone will eventually make him capable of speaking from experience of the Self; for all speech about the Self which does not spring spontaneously out of the depths is delusion and a lie; the knowledge of the Self can only be learnt through interior recollection within the depth of the Self. Until the Spirit gives unmistakable signs that the hour has come—and one of the signs is the coming to him of seekers already ‘established in Brahman’ (*Brahmaniṣṭhaḥ*)—his answer to all these invitations will be the same: “My vow does not permit me to do this.”

There is another fact that is worth taking into consideration, even though it is limited to one particular religious tradition. Western monasticism, like all religious institutions, is at present facing a crisis, as it gropingly seeks to find a path forward; avoiding on one side a sterile medievalism, and on the other, a modernism which loses all sense of mystery. As has happened in the past, a genuine monastic revival will follow in the wake of a renewed eremitical life, of which many hopeful signs can be discerned. It is possible to imagine that in the West there might be a kind of blend between the tradition of the Desert (harking back to John the Baptist and the great Elijah, the typical monk-prophet of the Old Testament) and the tradition of sannyāsa, deriving from the primeval rishis of India. In such a context those monks who have tasted here of the Upanishadic ideal would feel less out of place when they return to their own countries, for they can no longer adjust themselves to an exclusive spiritual tradition, and still less to any monastery, whether traditional or modernized. Further, in the West there is in fact no recognized initiation into the hermit-life, understood in terms of living ‘beyond signs’. There may therefore be something to be said for communicating the grace of sannyāsa-dīkṣā to the eremitical life of the West, so that it may infuse into it something of the ‘great departure’ (*mahāprasthāna*) which is characteristic of our Indian sannyāsa. That could only be done by those Christian westerners who have come to India and sat at the feet of a true guru. Discovering in the advaitic experience the fullness of Christ’s mystery and universal presence, they will have finally abandoned everything in their symbolic plunge into the Ganga, and will have received from the

guru, together with the fire-coloured robe, the pressing command to depart to the 'place' (loka) which is beyond all place, to the very source. This would not mean the foundation of a new Order, for sannyāsa is in no sense an 'order' and the Spirit does not 'found' anything, being rather the foundation of everything; all that is needed is a recognition of the signs of the Spirit's call and a method whereby those who are called may be enabled to answer their call. Evidently a sannyāsa of this kind would in no way be limited by any forms, and would be open to whoever is called to it, whatever his cultural or religious background may be.

In this connection it is possible to dream of a kind of ecumenical dīkṣā, a monastic profession to which both a Hindu sannyāsī and a Christian monk would be witnesses. The first would transmit to the candidate the initiation which he himself received, and would coopt him into that mystery of sannyāsa which has been manifested throughout the centuries by innumerable mahātmas and sādhus, descending from the original rishis who first heard the inner call to the experience of the Self. The other would receive him into the company, no less numerous, of those who have heard the call of Christ to leave all for the sake of the Kingdom, beginning with those giants of the Desert, men like Antony, Hilarion or Arsenius. Then, beyond that double *varṇāśa*, both together, in advaita, will lead him to the one who has called him, to the Spirit, the Inner Light which shines in the heart of all those who are called.

In such a situation the ritual handing on of sannyāsa from guru to disciple, despite all, continues to have value at the level of signs—and nothing whatever is exempted from belonging to the world of signs—even though it is absolutely impossible to predict the manner in which that sannyāsa would actually be lived. But it would be necessary that this handing on, while certainly inducting the candidate into the great tradition of the rishis, should as far as possible be freed from anything that linked it too closely with Vedic myth and ritual. Just as one cannot determine in advance the outward conditions of sannyāsa in a milieu that is different from the traditional Indian one, so equally one cannot lay down *a priori* what form such a dīkṣā should take.

In any case it should contain a minimum of ceremonies, and should be modelled on the initiation of the *vidvat-sannyāsī* (cp. p. 22), since the type of candidate that is here in view would be (to follow the classification of the Sannyāsa Upanishads) a *jñāna*-, not a *krama*-, *sannyāsī*. Indeed it is clear that a sannyāsa so curtailed of forms could

only be given to an aspirant on whom the awakening had already taken hold, and not to one who required the help of an 'institution' in order to attain to this awakening. But in whatever form this dīkṣā might be given, it should undoubtedly be based above all on the primitive Upanishadic tradition. For the ancient Upanishads, more clearly than any other texts, mark the passage from rites and myths to the experience of the Self and of Brahman who is the All (*sarvam*), and in so doing give freedom from all that adventitious man-made sacredness which the previous age of Vedas and Brāhmaṇas had superimposed on the real Man, the Puruṣa, who is henceforth known in all his glory.

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Sannyāsa can only be given (and this applies all the more to the cases under consideration) when the guru feels confident that the disciple has really *seen*, is *evamīdvān*, and possesses the physical, mental and spiritual strength to remain faithful under any circumstances to the fundamental demands of the ascetic life. Normally he should have given proof of his quality, not only in his life in the guru's company (*antevāsin*) but also in solitude and wandering (*parivrajya*); and even more, in the case of a westerner, in the persevering practice of the acosmic life in the midst of a world which rejects such acosmism. It is also understood that his dīkṣā will involve for him the actual departure for a period of wandering and *bhīkṣācarya* (living on alms), which should last as long as possible. The candidate should also renounce the possession of all that could be called his: and if actual and legal dispossession is not possible, he must realize that he no longer holds any right of ownership in anything at all, and must be ready to set out with anything or nothing whatever, when circumstances call for this. Only then can the guru agree to be the witness before earth and heaven to the final commitment of the candidate.

The days which precede the dīkṣā are passed in retreat, that is, in silence, meditation and appropriate reading, either alone or in the company of the guru. Immediately before the initiation the Scriptures prescribe a day of fasting and a night of prayer. That night will be spent in silent meditation, and possibly in reading over again those Upanishadic texts which have most strongly formed the spiritual experience of the aspirant.⁶²

62. For instance, the texts of the Sannyāsa Upanishads, of which the most important have already been quoted; the texts on renunciation in Br. Up.,

The *homas* and *śrāddhas* which take place during that night in the ritual of a *dvija* are unnecessary when the candidate does not belong to the Hindu fold and has not been invested with the sacred thread. Nor need he repeat the *gāyatrī*, the supreme mantra which until now has been an essential element in the life of a *Brāhmaṇa*.

In the case of a Christian aspirant with which we are here specially concerned, the place of all this will naturally be taken by the celebration of the Eucharist at the dawn of the day of his *dīkṣā*, when the circumstances will invest its celebration with an uncommon degree of truth and authenticity. In addition, this Eucharist will have been preceded by a reading, in conjunction with the above-mentioned Upanishadic texts, of those passages of the gospel in which Jesus summons his disciples to total renunciation and to the way of the Cross. There are indeed many texts in the Gospels which are as uncompromisingly radical as those in the Upanishads:

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head...
Go, sell what you have...and come, follow me...
Leave the dead to bury the dead...
No man who puts his hands to the plough and looks back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.
If anyone...does not 'hate' his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.
Take nothing for your journey—no staff, bag, bread, money, no change of clothes...
(see Luke 9:58; Mark 10:21; Luke 9:62; 14:26; 9:3 etc)

The aspirant will also remember the summons to a wandering life that came to Abraham (Gen. 12:1): Leave your country, your family, your home, and come to the place that I will show you. So also the call to Elijah, the great seer of the Old Covenant, to depart into the desert to Horeb, the mountain of God (1 Kings, ch. 19).

3.5; 4.4.22; and Mund. Up., 1.2; those on non-desire in Br. Up., 4.4.6, and on the departure of Yājñavalkya in Br. Up., 4.5; those which contain the mahāvākyas; also Ch. Up., 7 with its climax in *Bhūman*; 8.1 on the discovery of the place of the heart; the hymns of jubilation of the awakened man in Ch. Up., 8.13-14, Taitt Up., 1.1.4 and 10; the first three chapters of the Kaṭha Up.—for the aspirant is none other than the young Naciketas who compelled Death to reveal his secret, and discovered himself in himself beyond death and rebirth.

This Eucharist will also be the sign of the 'great departure' beyond all signs. Indeed, in Christian understanding the Eucharist is that unique sacrifice (*yajña*) which Christ, the *Satpuruṣa*, the True Man, the *Barnasha* or Son of Man, once for all (*ephapax*) in the fullness of time offered to God as the summing up of all the sacrifices and offerings made by men throughout all ages under countless different signs and symbols. In his perfect offering of himself as the *Ādi-Puruṣa* (the primordial, perfect Man) he passed, on his own account and on behalf of all those who put their faith in him, beyond the veil which is his body (cp. Heb. 10:19,20), and attained to the bosom of the Father, the *guhā* which is at once the deep centre of all and also beyond all (cp. Col. 3:1ff)—

that mystery of glory and immortality
hidden in the depth of the heart, beyond the firmament,
which cannot be won either by ritual acts,
or by begetting offspring,
or by giving one's wealth:
but which only they can enter
who have renounced all (Mahānārāyaṇa Up. 12.14).⁶³

The perfect sacrifice of Christ the *Satpuruṣa* is the total surrender of himself beyond all signs, as he hands over to God and to men the total oblation⁶⁴ of his *śarīram*. Is this not the mystery of the perfect *yati*? Thus for a Christian the Eucharist contains the whole meaning of the *prajāpatya*, the *yajña* through which a man abandons all that he possesses; of the *agneyi*, through which the future *sannyāsi* bids farewell to the ritual Fire and causes the outer fire to pass into his inner *prāṇa*; of the *aśtaśrāddha* when for the last time he presents the *piṇḍas* to his departed ancestors, and even makes the offering to himself; and finally, of the *virajā-homa*, by which he is supposed to pass beyond even the three *guṇas* which constitute his body, so that, freed from all hindrances and attachments, he may pronounce in strict truth his vow of *sannyāsa*. For the Christian aspirant his participation in the Eucharist and his sacramental communion will be his own personal commitment by which he binds himself to pass to the 'beyond', or

63. न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन त्यागेनैके अमृतत्वमानशुः ।
परेण नाकं निहितं गुहायां विभ्राजदेतद् यतयो विशन्ति ॥

(Ma.Na.Up., 12.14)

64. सर्वहुतः । (RV. 10.90.8)

rather, they will be his actual passage in truth to the *eschaton* (the end of time, transcendent reality; see Note 33) in his total abandonment of himself, so that he even forgets that he has made the gift,

Jesus' sacrificial offering means the gift of himself for the sake of all, and is signified in the Eucharist by the gift of his body in the form of food and of his blood in the symbol of a beverage—a mystery which is prefigured in the Upanishads, where every being is expected to be *annam* and *madhu*, food and sweet drink, for every other being (e.g. Br. Up., 2.5). Is this not the meaning of the vow of *abhayam*, that essential characteristic of the *sannyāsī*?

When celebrated in such circumstances, the Eucharist has an especially strong eschatological meaning. It is the ultimate sign which announces the awakening beyond all signs.

The immersion of a *sannyāsī* in the Ganga during the *dīkṣā* cannot but recall Jesus' immersion in the Jordan, that is, his baptism by John (*baptisma*, a Greek word for immersion). The mystery which was revealed on that occasion may also be seen as the reality which is symbolized in the present *dīkṣā*. For, when he came up out of the waters, Jesus saw the heavens 'rent asunder', and thus the separation between heaven and earth, between man and God, was abolished, while the Spirit 'descended', thus filling the whole of space (*ākāśa-brahma*). Then a voice was heard from within the heavenly *guhā*: "Thou art my Son." This simple word, with which in the past the prophets had so often heard God addressing the people of Israel (e.g., Ex. 4:22; Ps. 2:7), now pierced the heart of Jesus at a depth which no Jew, however holy, could possibly have imagined. And Jesus answers, "Abba (Father)," using a word which in Aramaic (the language spoken by Jesus) can be said only to the one from whom one is actually born. This "Son"/"Father" is the nearest equivalent in a Semitic context to the "*tattvamasi*"/"*ahambrahmāsmi*" which at the time of the *dīkṣā* the Spirit utters through the mouth and heart of both guru and disciple beyond all duality.

The awakening (*prabodha*) of Jesus by the Jordan marked his whole life and consciousness, all his words and actions. This above all is what he means to share with his disciples in their baptism (immersion) in Spirit and in Fire. At his Transfiguration his full glory as man (*tejomaya-puruṣa*) was manifested even outwardly to the chosen disciples. Death itself could not affect this awakening. On Easter Day Jesus revealed himself in a variety of human forms to those who still needed this assurance that he was alive. At Pentecost and subsequently

he continued to make his presence felt in the various manifestations of the Spirit. There are however others whom he has chosen, not primarily to be the heralds of his word or the visible bearers of his Spirit in the world, but simply to be, as *He is* himself,⁶⁵ in the final mystery of his self-awareness. These he bears off with himself in his Ascension, his great departure,⁶⁶ *mahāprasthānam*, beyond all lokas and all signs, to the *guhā* of the Father which was revealed by the voice at Jordan and on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the depths of the heart and in highest heaven,⁶⁷ in the *advaita*, non-duality, of the Spirit, in which God is all in all for ever (1 Cor. 15:28):

Going beyond all worlds, all beings,
beyond space and the limits of heaven,
Lord of all that is, the first-born of truth,
by himself he attained to himself⁶⁸ (Mahānārāyaṇa Up., 1.18).

Now all the preparations are finished, completed. Only the rite of the *dīkṣā* itself has to be enacted in the bare simplicity of its symbolism. All signs are about to be fulfilled (cp. *tetelestai*⁶⁹) in that ultimate sign which bears the elect one beyond all, to the final discovery of himself. All graces are to be summed up in that definitive gift of grace, beyond which there is only the unique and non-dual mystery of grace in itself. The rite will be the supreme symbol of the interior departure beyond oneself to the Self, who alone permits "*ahambrahmāsmi*" to be uttered in truth. Now the whole life of the aspirant comes to its final point, and his spirit, freed from all bonds, takes flight into the infinity of the Self, as is expressed in the mantra from the Chāndogya Upanishad which he will soon recite. As Jesus said on the eve of his great departure: The hour has come...I go to the Father.

Guru and disciple come to the river bank—if possible, to the Ganga which in the course of many centuries at countless points along its banks or at its *prayāgas* has so often witnessed such initiations. Below them is the Water, the Ganga; above them in the sky is *Agni*, the Fire of the rising Sun; water and fire, the two sacred elements in which is made the oblation of everything that has to be consecrated.

65. cp. John 8:24, 58, etc, for Jesus' use of "I am" (*ego eimi*).

66. cp. Ephesians 4:8.

67. निहितं गुहायां परमे व्योमन् (Taitt. Up., 2.1)

68. See Note 29.

69. cp. Christ's word on the Cross, John 19:30 and p.32 above.

They first sing the hymn to Dakṣiṇamūrti, the supreme Guru. Here indeed it is not only one man who gives the initiation. For the disciple in whom the Inward Light has shone, this man is only the manifestation at the moment of the unique Guru who manifests himself at every place and time, whenever the heart is opened from within.

OM! Salutation to all gurus!

OM! Salutation to the unique Guru!⁷⁰

All gurus are present here, all the awakened ones, the unique Awakened One, for there is but one awakening and a single Awakened one.

The aspirant enters the water waist-deep. He takes a sip (*ācamana*) of the holy water, as if to purify the mouth which will utter the great vow.

Then, turning to the East, he repeats after the guru the formulas of the vows, which do not so much indicate a decision now taken for the future, but rather manifest that which is already true in the depths of the soul and transcends all past and future;

ॐ भूर्भुवः सुवः संन्यस्तं मया। (Na. Pa. Up., 4.38)

I have renounced all worlds—this world of earth, the so-called world of heaven, all possible worlds in between, all *lokas*, all places where I might rest and find security (*pratiṣṭhā*), whether in the material or the mental sphere, in that of human fellowship, or even in the so-called spiritual sphere. My adoration, my total dedication (*upāsana*) is to the unique Self, the Brahman that I AM.

पुत्रैषणायाश्च वित्तैषणायाश्च लोकैषणायाश्च व्युत्थितोऽहम्।

I have risen beyond all desires, desire for progeny, desire for riches, desire for any loka whatever.⁷¹

अभयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो मत्तः सर्वं प्रवर्तते।

Let no creature have fear of me, since everything comes from me.⁷²

The new sannyāsī plunges into the water. Then the guru raises him like the Puruṣa of the Aitareya Upanishad:

उत्तिष्ठ पुरुष

70. ॐ समस्तगुरुभ्यो नमः। ॐमेकगुरुवे नमः।

71. cp. Br. Up., 3.5 and Na.Pa.Up., 4.38.

72. Na.Pa.Up., 4.38.

उत्तिष्ठ जाग्र प्राप्य वरान्निबोध ।

Arise, O Man! Arise, wake up, you who have received the boons; keep awake! (cp. Kāṭha Up., 3.14)

Both of them then face the rising sun and sing the song to the Puruṣa from the Uttara-Nārāyaṇa:

वेदाहमेतं पुरुषं महान्तं आदित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ।

तमेव विदित्वाति मृत्युमेति नान्य पन्थाः विद्यतेऽयनाय ।

I know him, that supreme Puruṣa, sun-coloured, beyond all darkness; only in knowing him one overcomes death; no other way exists (V. Saṃhitā 31.18)

Then they recite the sacred mantra of the Chāndogya Upanishad, which so powerfully sums up the mystery which is taking place:

एष संप्रसादोऽस्माच्छरीरात्समुत्थाय परं ज्योतिरुपसंपद्य स्वैन रूपेणाभिनिष्पद्यते
स उत्तमः पुरुषः स आत्मा तद् ब्रह्म तत्सर्वं तत्सत्यं तदभयं तदमृतं स एवाजातः।
सोऽहमस्मि ।

In total serenity he rises up from this body, reaches the highest light, and is revealed in his own proper form; he is the supreme Puruṣa, he is Ātman, he is Brahman, he is the All, he is the Truth, he is beyond fear, beyond death, he is unborn. And I myself am He.⁷³

The new sannyāsī then unties all the clothes he may be wearing and lets them float away in the stream. Then the guru calls him back to the bank and receives him in his arms, dripping with water and naked as he was when he came forth from his mother's womb. He then covers him with the fire-coloured cloth of the sannyāsī, the flame-colour of the Puruṣa; of the golden Haṃsa (Br. Up., 4.3.11), All has been burnt up; he is a new man—or rather, he is the unique Man, the unique Puruṣa, the unique Spirit, whom no garment can ever again clothe, other than the garment of fire, which consumes all other garments superimposed on the essential nudity of the original Puruṣa, the non-dual Spirit.

Now the guru makes him sit before him and gives him his last brief instructions. He reminds him of the uniqueness of the Ātman, and so

73. For the first two lines, cp. Ch.Up., 8.3.4, 8.12.3; the remainder is a catena.

of his total freedom towards all beings, of his lack of obligation to anyone apart from the unique Spirit, and of his sole duty which is to remain fixed in the vision of his self, the inner mystery which is the non-dual Brahman, while his mind remains totally absorbed in repeating endlessly the sacred OM with every breath he takes and every beat of his heart.

The guru stands beside him. With all the power that springs from the inner awakening he imparts from mouth to ear, and still more from heart to heart, the OM and the mahāvākyas. He says:

ॐ प्रज्ञानं ब्रह्म

OM! Brahman is consciousness (Aitareya Up., 5.3).

and the disciple repeats it after him.

ॐ अयमात्मा ब्रह्म

OM! This self is Brahman (Māṇḍūkya Up., 2)

and again the disciple repeats it after him.

But when he comes to what is, properly speaking, the mantra of initiation, the upadesa-mantra of the Chāndogya Upanishad (6.8.7ff):

ॐ तत्त्वमसि

OM! Thou art That!—

the disciple answers with the fundamental mantra of the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad, (1.4.10) which now issues with full spontaneity from his deepest self :

ॐ अहं ब्रह्मास्मि

OM! I am Brahman.

ॐ अहमस्मि

ॐ अहम्

ॐ

Now the last sign itself is over; the time has come for the great departure from which there is no possible return. Henceforward the guru has no right to recall his disciple.

Go, my son, in the freedom of the Spirit,

across the infinite space of the heart:
go to the Source, go to the Father,
go to the Unborn, yourself unborn (*ajātaḥ*),
to the Brahma-loka
which you yourself have found
and from which there is no returning.⁷⁴

Immediately the new sannyāsī sets out on his path, the path of the Self, the 'ancient narrow path' (Br. Up. 4.4.8)

in this world, out of this world,
seer of what is beyond sight.
He goes secretly and hidden, unknown,
mad with the madness of those who know,
free with the freedom of the Spirit.
filled with essential bliss,
established in the mystery of the non-dual,
free from all sense of otherness,
his heart filled with the unique experience of the Self,
fully and for ever awake.....

OM

ॐ

74. For the last three lines, cp. Br. Up., 4.4.23 and Ch.Up., 8 end:

सः एष ब्रह्मलोकः

प्रापितोऽसि त्वम् ।

अतो न पुनरावर्तते न पुनरावर्तते ॥

1. APPROACH TO THE UPANISHADS

THE Upanishads form part of the religious and spiritual heritage of mankind. They are a sacred book. One cannot approach them in the same way as one does a profane text, or even a work of high philosophy. The Upanishads belong with the other great Scriptures of the world, for example, the Bible, the Quran or the Avesta. Even a sceptic cannot question the profound impact of these Scriptures on the life of men. No doubt, the great stream of religions carries along in its course ingredients of every kind; but every religion, in its own way and in the varying contexts of different cultures and civilizations, has assisted man to bring to expression the mystery which he bears within himself. This is the same mystery which modern psychology is beginning to glimpse beyond man's observable nature, even as it increasingly recognizes at once its fundamental importance for the unfolding of man's being, and also its inherent inaccessibility. Thus, if anyone approaches these Scriptures in a purely profane and would-be scientific manner, he will remain for ever totally incapable of discovering their secret or of learning their true meaning.

No doubt all philosophy is based on certain profound intuitions. However, these intuitions, these flashes of light, which at their source defy expression, are transformed at the level at which they are grasped by mental reflection, into abstractions and ideas. In philosophy concepts and logic reign supreme; intuition can only take form if it submits to the conditions established by the technical instruments of knowing. In the Scriptures also, of course, intuition is necessarily mediated through mental forms; but in this case intuition remains the governing factor from beginning to end. Ideas, concepts, abstractions, reflections are never anything more than means of returning once more to the original intuition. That is the hidden norm to which they must be continually referred, rather than to any reasoning which intuition infinitely transcends.

All religion is based on faith and aims at deepening that faith, at enabling its light to shine at full strength, until it illuminates every human faculty. Contrary to what is too often supposed, faith does not primarily consist in the mind's acceptance of certain propositions,

termed 'data of revelation'. Faith is essentially that interior sense by which the mind penetrates obscurely into those depths of one's own being which it realizes are beyond its power to explore solely by means of thought and sense-perception. The various 'revelations' enshrined in the different religions are simply the reports transmitted to their fellows by men whose inward gaze has pierced as far as those depths—namely, the sages and prophets of history.

The adherent of any given religion is naturally tempted continually to attribute an absolute value to the conceptual formulas of his own religion, as he does to its structures. However, these forms, whatever they may be, are never more than the expression—or rather, continually changing attempts at the expression—of a reality which is essentially beyond all expression. These expressions are also essentially limited—whatever may be their value in other respects—by the particular conditions of the period, language and culture of the milieu in which they come to birth. As we shall see later on in concrete terms in the case of the Upanishads, it will be the relations and correlations between the formulas and propositions, at least as much as the apparently direct statements, which will point the way towards the reality that is to be expressed.

These considerations must never be lost sight of by the believer who seeks to read and understand the sacred books of a religion other than that within which he grew up and developed spiritually. However deeply he himself may be convinced of the truth of his own Scriptures and of the uniqueness of his own *dharma*, he must at least accept the possibility that an authentic faith lies at the base of the Scriptures of other dharmas. That alone will give him the necessary capacity for the suspension of judgement and for an attitude of sincere respect, without which it is absolutely impossible to draw near to the secret which they hold. However, there is no doubt that any believer with a minimum of spiritual intelligence can do this.

At this point the rationalist and the humanist are bound to protest. For them everything ought to be subordinated to science and reason; and in itself their rejection of all that adventitious sacredness with which religions are too often concerned, is perfectly healthy. However, this rejection itself is constantly in danger of eliminating the mystery which is inherent in man's nature, whether individual, social or universal. Again, from another angle, the spiritual man can recognize precisely in the humanist's objection, the protest (which can at times be violent) of the 'inner mystery' itself against attempts to

'dignify' it by the superimposition of a man-made sanctity, and—at its limit—the explosive assertion of Truth as it frees itself from all *nāmarūpa*,* even though this may well involve no little havoc in its train. It remains true, however, that a purely rational and so-called scientific approach to any sacred Scripture will never succeed in penetrating its secret.

We conclude that whoever it is that opens the Upanishads, whether atheist, Christian, Muslim or Hindu, these texts will remain completely incomprehensible to him, so long as he does not approach them with at least a minimum of faith, that is, of sensitivity to what is interior and spiritual. Hindu tradition takes formal note of this, in that the reading of the Vedas presupposes a sacramental initiation (*upanayana*) of the reader. But in the case of the Upanishads—that is, the Vedānta, or 'Conclusion of the Vedas' (*Veda-anta*)—the grace of initiation can only be received from a qualified guru, and only a qualified disciple may seek it from his guru; and tradition defines in detail what are the qualifications of a disciple.

This preparation for being initiated into the secret of the Upanishads has nothing to do with a rite, as it has in the case of initiation into the Vedas. It is above all an interior attitude of faith, in the fundamental sense referred to above, that is to say, of being open to the invisible, to mystery. It is a faith which will naturally put implicit trust in the teaching of the guru and the word of Scripture, but still will always press on beyond them. It is a faith whose inner flame will be kindled by a deep experience, by the discovery—still obscure and inarticulate—of the secret it reveals. In the medieval Hindu texts this faith is defined by a group of four fundamental attitudes:

a sense of discrimination between that which is transitory and that which is permanent, both in oneself and in the world; consequently

a total indifference towards all fruits of action, whether moral or religious, which carry so-called rewards either in this world or in the next, including even immortality;

the quietening of the faculties;⁷⁵ and finally,

*See glossary for Sanskrit terms.

75. 'quietening of the faculties'—In the Vedāntasāra, where these four fundamental attitudes (*sādhana*) are listed, the third appears in the form of a list of 'six things' which have to be practised. The first two of these are 'quietening (*śama*) and 'self-restraint' (*dama*).

a desire for salvation or liberation such that all other desires vanish even in thought.⁷⁶

The Upanishads in fact do not consist primarily of revealed truths which can be transmitted through the medium of concepts and words, even if one has to admit that all passing on of experience has to be done, at least in the early stages, in this way. The Upanishadic seer is much less the man who 'knows this or that', than the man who 'knows *thus (evam)*', as the Upanishads constantly reiterate, calling him *evamīvid*. It is like a new way of knowing, a new way of looking at things, at the world, a new illumination which makes one perceive everything quite differently. It is essentially a matter of passing on an experience of oneself, which does not convey any new information, so to speak, but which is much more an awakening to an unsuspected depth in oneself, an awakening to oneself, to things, to the mystery which, when projected, is called God. It is an experience, a discovery which according to Indian tradition goes back to the awakening and enlightenment of the early rishis who lived in the forests on the banks of the Indus and at the foot of the Himalayas. He alone can pass on this experience who has known it himself, who has been awakened within, the *evamīvid*, he who knows *thus*. Words can be passed on by anyone who has a good enough memory to repeat what he has read or heard. Ideas also can be conceived and communicated by anyone with a sufficiently clear mind. But an experience quite literally cannot be transmitted. Rather, it simply propagates itself.

There is a very suggestive story in the Mahābhārata (Sāntiparvan 12) by which this may be illustrated. When Bhīṣma lay mortally wounded on his bed of arrows, awaiting the propitious moment to pass from this world to *svarga*, he asked for a drink. Duryodhana offered him a perfumed draught in a golden vessel, which Bhīṣma refused. Then Arjuna drew his bow and shot an arrow into the ground just beside Bhīṣma's head. At the point where the arrow struck, a jet of purest water spurted up and fell into Bhīṣma's mouth. The Upanishads also frequently employ the illustration of an arrow which pierces to the very heart of being (Muṇḍaka Up., 2.2.2-4). The guru is he who knows how to shoot this arrow and so enable the liberating illumination to spring up in the heart of others. In fact the guru *gives* nothing. Truth cannot be given because it does not belong to anyone. One may

76. cp.Br.Up., 4.3.21 and 4.4.6. He who desires the Self (*ātma-kāma*) is consequently the one who is free from all (other) desires (*a-kāma*).

possess what one has made or what one has received; but truth is not the object of possession—rather, one can only be possessed by the truth, and the fact of being possessed is simply not communicable. The guru is one who is so totally free from his own self that he is capable of being at home in the very heart of his disciple, and so of opening the disciple to his own self, of awakening him to himself within the guru's own self-awakening. But this presupposes in the disciple the quality of *śraddhā*, of total faith. If he lacks this complete faith in his master, the total openness of his being to the other's, he will never make progress. How can even the midday sun shine in a room if its shutters remain closed? Certainly to put faith in a guru means taking risks, and one should only do so with one's eyes open, but there is no other path that is sure and speedy.

The Upanishad can therefore only be truly communicated through this communion between guru and disciple at the deepest centre of the self. The only possible alternative to the guru's instruction is an openness of oneself to the inner mystery so complete that it allows the true sense of the Scriptures to be discerned beyond the words, the parables and the paradoxes—and even, quite independently of the Scriptures, in the solitude of mountains or jungles or caves like those of Aruṇāchala. There can also be the direct impact of the Self, which struck Ramaṇa Maharshi, as so many others, like a thunderbolt.

The words of Scripture in fact are in themselves never more than signs. That which is not created can never be reached by anything created, as the Upanishad continually asserts (Muṇḍaka Up., 1.2.12). It cannot be seen by the eye, uttered by the voice, or conceived by the mind (Kaṭha Up., 6.12). The words of the Upanishads can be thought of as a kind of coagulation—somewhat as a gas is liquefied so that it can be handled more easily—, as the reduction to words and concepts, all of them relative to a particular culture and linguistic system, of an experience that defies all formulation. A late Upanishad even contains this apparently blasphemous text: "Read, study and ceaselessly ponder the Scriptures; but once the light has shined within you, throw them away as you discard a brand which you have used to light your fire" (Amṛitanāda Up.1).

One can never lay too much emphasis on the fact that this experience springs from the deepest level of being. The call of the Upanishad is one which comes from beyond space and time. Its word issues from the silence, seeking to awaken man and to lead him to himself. As is the guru, so are the Scriptures the mirror in which man progressively

discovers himself, comes to know himself in his innermost truth. The moment comes when the spark flashes between the two poles. After that there is nothing but a pure light, in which all has disappeared—master, disciple, and Scripture too....

Preceding this there will certainly have been attentive listening to the master's teaching, equally attentive reading of the sacred text, continual repetition of the text, sustained meditation on its meaning—rather like the uninterrupted thought of *ko'an* in the Zen tradition. But as Shankara emphasizes so strongly and rightly, the illumination which comes with the knowledge of Brahman, the discovery of and awakening to Brahman, is not obtained by the hearing or recitation of Scripture, or by meditation, nor is it obtained by ritual practices or virtuous acts, or even by asceticism (*tapas*), or by the psycho-physical disciplines covered by the term *yoga*. All this indeed is of value in preparing the spirit for this awakening, but the lightning flash⁷⁷ which spans the inner heaven of the consciousness never has any other cause but itself; it is a grace which erupts in the depths of the soul, as say certain texts (cp. *Kaṭha Up.* 2.20).

It is precisely at this point that there is a fundamental difference between the great Upanishads and the later tradition in their approach to the *ātman-brahman*.

As will be explained below, the Upanishads belong to a climax in the religious and spiritual evolution of mankind. A remarkable equilibrium was reached during the period which intervened between the time of the *Brāhmaṇas* and the time of intense philosophical and religious ferment preceding the appearance of Buddhism and Jainism. As time went on, the intuition of the rishis was less and less accepted in its crystalline purity. Little by little people set themselves to classify, to discuss, to study techniques: they forgot that it was a matter of a lightning-flash, an awakening.

A later tradition distinguished between the paths of *jñāna*, *bhakti*, and *karma*. *Karma* is work, activity, whether ritual or virtuous. *Bhakti* is devotion or piety. *Jñāna*, wisdom, was too often identified with meditation which together with its associated disciplines was regarded as the high road to spiritual progress. A further stage was to identify without remainder the path of *jñāna* with the teaching of the Upanishads. The fact is that these words, *jñāna*, *vidyā* and their analogues, often

77. *Kena Up.*, 4.4; *Ch.*, *Up.* 4.13.1; cp. *स्वयंज्योतिः Br. Up.*, 4.3.9.

carry an ambivalent meaning in the Scriptures. They may signify the awakening beyond all thought, and also the increasingly pure forms of knowledge which follow each other in the mind as it searches for this definitive experience; they can even mean the fruit of this experience itself in its impact upon the mind.

In modern times Ramaṇa Maharshi has spoken with justifiable irony about the excessive importance accorded by many to meditation. There is no question that meditation, at least when it is practised with a view to interior silence, can be a peculiarly effective means of quietening the mind. However in itself it can only bear fruit at the level at which it is practised, namely, the psychological. If, as the Upanishad says, the level (*loka*) of the *ātman* is not one peculiar to itself, but rather underlies all the levels of being, then it can be found at whatever level one may start from. But when one attempts to tie it down to one particular level—even to that of the non-mental and the supersensory—then one has simply mistaken a substitute, or one of its images, for the *ātman* itself.

According to Upanishadic tradition, the word of the guru is of itself grace bearing. If guru and disciple are each of them 'competent', the guru's word is like an arrow that goes straight to the disciple's heart and at once causes the spring to flow. This will have been prepared for by *śraddhā* (faith) and *tapas*. *Śraddhā* has been explained above (p. 69). *Tapas* means the setting on one side of all desires, of all pleasures of sense, and the exclusive concentration on pure being. Without question meditation helps towards this, but the freedom from thinking which it seeks to procure and the silence of the mind at which it aims, have value only as contributing to the attainment of the simplicity of being. All too often, however, the man who meditates congratulates himself on his experiences and on his suspension of thought. But when one has reached silence, how is it possible still to know this? for to know it means to say so, and anything said breaks the silence.

The spark only flashes forth in a complete vacuum. As Ramaṇa Maharshi never tired of saying, the state of illumination, of awakening, is man's natural state (*sahaja*, innate). What impedes the flash is that the spirit is clogged with all kinds of desires and mental conceptions—a truth which the Buddha pressed upon mankind with unequalled force.

The *tapas* which, together with *śraddhā* is according to the Upanishads the fundamental precondition of *brahmavidyā*, consists of that inner

fervour which burns up everything—all desires, and equally all the conceptions that one has formed of oneself, the world, the gods, the ātman, brahman. Then when all that should be burnt up has been consumed, the smoke itself vanishes.⁷⁸ All has become pure flame, a fire that burns without fuel, as says the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad (6.19).

2. THE CONTEXT OF THE UPANISHADS

LIKE every other Scripture the Upanishads have to be studied with faith and devout respect, as otherwise their true sense will never be discovered. This attitude of respect itself demands that the study should be carried on with all due intellectual honesty. Although our approach is naturally quite different from that of the philologist or the historian of religious phenomena, nevertheless in our interpretation we are always bound to take account of their findings, especially in order to avoid reading our own presuppositions into the text.

Naturally everyone reads what he reads, or hears what he hears, through the "spectacles" of his own mental make-up. This includes his previous knowledge, his prejudices, above all his own culture and his identification with that culture (or, more precisely, his quest for personal identity by means of that culture) and also that personal substratum, largely unconscious, which he projects without thinking in his relationships with everything and everyone he meets. There is also the conditioning received from the ideas generally accepted in his society, from which few men have the strength of mind to free themselves.

The reading of the Upanishads in fact is too often approached, both in India and elsewhere, from the standpoint of the Vedantic philosophy, and unfortunately, of a simplified and objectivized Vedānta in the form made popular by its modern exponents. The result is that the Upanishads are held in a strait-jacket and are forced, at whatever cost, into agreement with particular formulations. These derive from mere interpreters of the great masters, who in place of the actual experience of ātman-brahman often disastrously substitute for it some particular expression of that experience.

It is certainly true that the great Vedantins like Shankara and Rāmānuja did not hesitate to read the Upanishadic texts through their own particular 'spectacles'. Their exegesis of the sacred texts is thus of the same order as the mediaeval commentaries on the Bible. This is characteristic of the period and culture to which they belonged; but one can be sure that, in the case of masters like Shankara or Thomas Aquinas,

78. Kātha Up., 4.13, 'like a smokeless light'—ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः ।

their commentaries bring out the true sense of their respective Scriptures; for there is no doubt that in each case their theology is consonant with Revelation. However, in their exegesis of the texts it seems that each of them in his own way strives to find in them the general lines of his theological system rather than to discover the 'Sitz im Leben' (original situation) of a given text. For them there is no question of establishing the actual meaning of the text, no matter how difficult it may be to fit it into the system. But even if this was acceptable in a past age, who would now be satisfied with an exegesis which finds the theology of Trent in every verse of the New Testament?

Shankara's interpretation is for sure remarkably powerful. He grasped the fundamentals of Upanishadic thought with a precision rarely attained. But the demands of his controversies with Buddhism, Sāṅkhya and other schools forced him to use categories which, however illuminating they may once have been, are unnecessary in other contexts for the understanding of the sacred text. Modern men will certainly be more responsive to the fresh and direct appeal of the texts themselves than to the unwieldy concepts of technical philosophy employed by the learned commentators. Examples that come to mind are those of *māyā*—in any case a very dangerous tool to handle—, of the 'double brahman,' of the 'double mukti'... In these we have the ossification of Upanishadic intuitions, but it is the intuitions themselves that we want to find at their original source.

This will involve in the first place giving all necessary attention to the religious and cultural context in which the Upanishads were thought and communicated. And in the second place it will involve giving priority to a leisurely study which will be prepared to follow, verse by verse, the twists and turns of the thought of the rishis. No doubt, he who has experienced in himself the truth of the Upanishads will be able to the end of his long study to extract as it were the pith of their essential themes; but it is vastly more effective for the disciple to follow for himself the meandering course of the rishi's thought. One may liken this to making a pilgrimage to the sources of the Ganga which day after day winds along the gorges cut out by the river, as contrasted with flying over the sacred places in a helicopter.

The Upanishads are like a language which has to be learnt. A few hours may be enough to grasp the basic elements of a language; but one can only master a language after long contact with it in its spoken and written forms. Then only will this language become part of one's

life, part of oneself, so that one can grasp and instinctively savour its articulation, its overtones, and its ever more subtle nuances.

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The Upanishads belong historically, as was said above, to a great period in the mental and spiritual development of mankind. They bear witness to one of the great awakenings of the human spirit which mark the turning-points of history. To anticipate what will have to be spoken of later, we must now observe the analogy between this awakening and the awakening of modern thought in the religious domain. Both represent the re-assertion of the spiritual against the facade of external sacredness which religions so often display and even enforce, once they become rooted in history and human society. At the source of every religion there is always a divine enthusiasm. Christianity itself was born in a mighty outpouring of the Spirit. At such a moment, myths, rites and formulas, which serve to elicit the experience and to express it in the common life of the believers, are still fresh with their original inspiration. People most certainly then make use of rites and myths, but they are no more than vehicles, channels through which the experience, the inspiration, passes irresistibly. The myths and rites themselves are not separately perceived or distinguished from that experience. Only later on, when the driving force of the Spirit has weakened, do believers begin to put their trust in the rites, myths and formulas, tending more and more to give them an absolute value. They then impose on their fellow-believers a sacredness which is adventitious and man-made, no longer the sacredness of the inherent mystery which underlies every human act, but a sanctity of special things, times and acts, abstracted from the total life of men and invested with the conventional attribute of being 'sacred'.

At the time of the Upanishads the ritualism of the brahmanic world had indeed reached saturation-point. The best parallel is with post-exilic Judaism, when the prophets had disappeared and political conditions compelled Jewish religion to turn in upon itself.

The reaction of which the earliest Upanishads are evidence, was again manifested by the Buddha in face of the formalism into which Indian theological thinking had begun to sink and of the artificiality of the contemporary methods of ascetic practice and of the quest for ecstasy. The same reaction is seen in the prophets of Israel, when they sought to protect their people from a soulless ritualism, and finally in

Jesus himself, who liberated mankind from every law apart from the law of love.

Thus, in order to understand the Upanishads aright, it is absolutely necessary to keep always in mind the world of Vedic myth and Brahmanic ritualism out of which they sprang. This was the mental sub-structure on which arose the practice of meditation which culminated in the great liberating intuitions.

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Moreover the Upanishads do not offer an organized body of doctrines. As was said above, they contain intuitive 'awakenings' which passed down in succession from guru to initiate. But it is certainly true that a fundamental line of thought can be discerned in the vision of the Upanishads, one which Shankara has set out more faithfully than anyone else. However, one cannot deny that this vast tree has put forth all kinds of branches. One is sometimes tempted, as is the commentator on Ecclesiastes, to see in this or that passage the emendation of a reader who sought to bring the teaching there given into line with his own view of the truth. There are also here and there stereotyped phrases, repeated automatically, which it is useless to take literally. Again, the question sometimes arises whether such and such a verse represents the formal teaching of the master, or the view-point of the disciple. Besides, the Upanishads have been handed down by different Vedic schools, and these links are often very illuminating; for instance, in the case of the Chândogya, the Upanishad of the singer in the Sâma-Veda. Here it is not surprising that the meditation which leads to unity begins with the correlations between the *Udgîtha* and the OM.⁷⁹

Further, the Upanishads which are called Vedic are spread out over several centuries, roughly from the ninth to the sixth centuries B.C. The later ones are perhaps contemporary with the Buddha (died 483 or 475; traditionally 543), or at least can only be understood against the back-cloth of the theological speculation and spiritual inquiry amid which is to be placed the awakening of Śākyamuni.

The Upanishads cover several centuries which were particularly rich in inquiries, at once speculative and mystical, into the mystery of man, the mystery which inevitably includes the category of the 'divine' as well as the mystery of the existing universe, the total mystery

79. In the margin the author commented: "Correlations fatigantes pour nous!"

of being. They contain inquiries which are lively and sustained, with moments of awakening like lightning-flashes; but there are also second thoughts, attempts at explanation, even sometimes retreats in face of the radical nature of this experience.

The two earliest Upanishads, the Brihadâranyaka and the Chândogya, are the ones which most faithfully express Upanishadic thought in its radical purity. They belong in time immediately after those penetrating questions in the sphere of the transcendent which the sages began to raise towards the end of the Vedic period, as is shown by certain hymns in Book 10 of the Rîg-Veda, a good number of those in the Atharva-Veda, and also by many passages (more particularly in Book 10) of the Śatapatha Brâhmaṇa. However various 'hangovers' from the mythological and ritual thought of the Vedas still remained, which were only imperfectly integrated into the deep insights of the Brihad. In fact only an intuition penetrating to the very source of being could enable men to feel at ease amid the stripping off of everything 'religious' which is implied by the teaching of the Brihad or the Chândogya. And so men fell back on discursive thought, they sought to rescue at least something, if not at the level of myth and ritual, then at that of reason and spiritual effort, something which, in face of this all-devouring Absolute, would to some extent preserve the personality of the one who is thinking and striving. They wanted to recover some recognizable form, a 'face', for that mystery (at once interior and universal) denoted by the equation *âtman-brahman*. The Puruṣa of the Vedic hymn reappeared, and the effort was made by this means to give back a face to the divine; they sought to project before themselves, to objectivize, this 'God' who is in fact the deepest mystery of immanence in the human consciousness—an undertaking to which later on Râmânuja turned his hand at the philosophical level, and to which certain Shaivite schools also applied themselves.

It seems that intuition was no longer powerful enough to pierce with a single beam of light—like a laser-beam—through all the levels of being at once, extending from the superficial levels reached by the senses to the deepest and most hidden level, which transcends equally what is thought and what is unthought. Men set themselves to discuss the reality of what is manifested, they distinguished different kinds of *âtman*, first by simply pointing them out, as in the Kaṭha Upanishad, and later with logical classification, as in the Maitri. They took to enumerating the various elements (*tattva*) in men and in the universe (*Sâṅkya*), and then to discriminating them—which accounts for the

very different tone of the Śvetāśvatara in its philosophical sections and of the Maitri as a whole.

The Śvetāśvatara is an excellent example of what tends to happen when logic is brought in—though it nonetheless manifests a trace of irony in its reference to the *brahmāvādīn*, the ‘philosopher of brahman’, who has to seek the solution of his problems from the *brahmavid*, the man who knows brahman directly by intuition. At the same time this Upanishad, like the Mahānārāyaṇa, returns to the inspiration of the Vedic hymns in order to sing the praises of the Puruṣa, who is at once totally transcendent and totally immanent.

With the Maitri Upanishad the great age of Upanishads comes to an end. Only the coming of the Buddha was sufficient to reinstate the value of experience as supreme, even while he developed his intuition with the help of conceptual tools which were totally different from those employed by the Upanishads. For instance, in place of the concept of *sarvam, pūrṇam*, the All, Fullness, Totality—which had not been able to prevent that experience from being analysed to death—he offered instead that of *sūnya*, the void, vacancy. He himself maintained and required others to maintain silence on all questions termed transcendental; but one knows well how the silence of the Buddha came to be expounded by countless commentaries, both spoken and written, and how the theme of the void has provoked even more discussion than the *pūrṇam* of the Upanishads ever did!

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Reference was made above to the various Upanishadic schools. One important Upanishadic movement certainly existed in the midst of the priestly caste itself. The foremost teacher in the Upanishads, Yājñavalkya, was a Brahman, and his very name indicated his connection with the cult and with sacrifice. The great mantra ‘*tat tvam asi*’ was taught to Śvetaketu by his father, another priestly sage, Uddālaka Āruṇi. Uddālaka Āruṇi was one of the opponents of Yājñavalkya in the great contest organized by king Janaka (Br. Up., 3.7). But it seems likely that Uddālaka’s wisdom did not come to him only through the priestly tradition. With his son Śvetaketu he was several times forced to admit defeat at the hands of princes like Pravāhaṇa Jaibali (Ch. Up., 5.3-10) and Citra Gaṅgyayani (Kau. Up., 1.1); even so, in his desire to learn he was ready to ask for instruction from these kings as their disciple. Further, the Bṛihad (2.1) tells the story of the haughty Bālāki, who was worsted by Ajātaśatru, the king of Kāśī. As Jaibali said to the father

of Svetaketu, the Brahmans knew a very great deal, but the secrets of wisdom they had not yet discovered.

Thus the Upanishads themselves testify to a tradition of mystical thought which developed outside priestly circles, especially in the courts of kings, among the kṣatriya caste of rulers and warriors.

But apart from these circles of priests and princes, there were also much freer groups—spontaneous groups, they would be called today—as was specially the case of the forest-dwelling ascetics. For example, the Muṇḍaka Upanishad draws a contrast with biting humour between the sacrificers living in their towns and villages who put all their trust in the cult and look to it to win for them a heaven (*svarga*) of temporary felicity (because naturally they will have to return eventually to earth), and those others who have withdrawn into the forests and live there a life of faith (*śraddhā*) and renunciation (*tapas*). These shaven (*muṇḍaka*) ascetics who took the ‘Muṇḍaka vow’ seem probably to have belonged to a special sect among the general class of ascetics, who according to Buddhist sources had greatly multiplied about the time when the Buddha appeared.

The Chāndogya Upanishad also contrasts the men of the city (or rather, of the village, *grāma*) with those of the jungle, and this comes out clearly in the *Panchagnividyā* (5.10.1-2), which Uddālaka received from king Jaibali. The former put their trust in sacrifices, alms and good works, and after their death their works win for them the world of the fathers, that of the moon, where transformed into *soma* they become the food of the gods, while they await their return at the appointed time to this lower world, to be reborn under the conditions which (as the Bṛihad, the Kauṣītaki and the Kaṭha Upanishads all say) will have been determined by their works (*karma*) and their knowledge (*vidyā*) or their knowledge of the Scriptures (*śrūta*).⁸⁰ But as for the forest-ascetics who live by their faith and their *tapas*, when they die, they pass to the world of the sun, and from there to the *brahmaloka*, from which there is no return.

The Bṛihad also speaks in two contexts (3.5 and 4.4.22) about brahmans who attained to the transforming intuition. Thenceforward all desire has left them, they neither wish for nor pursue after wealth, or sons, or human knowledge, because in the ātman they possess all, absolutely all. This world has become too narrow for them, and they no longer feel that they belong here. For them the real world is the ātman; that is where they live and find their happiness, there they

80. Br.Up. 4.4.2; Kau. Up., 1.2; Kaṭha Up., 5.7 (*karma* and *śrūta*).

drink from the very source of all actual and even possible joys and delights.⁸¹ Then they too leave their villages and their business, and depend only on what comes their way for food and clothing. Yājñavalkya himself, after defeating all rival theologians and scholars, and after having instructed king Janaka, and finally his own wife Maitreyī, then 'went on his way' (4.5.15).

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Of those who thus withdraw from the society of their fellow-men in order to live wholly in search of Brahman (or who, finding themselves incapable of living any longer in the world of manifestation, retire to the last frontier of human society while awaiting the dissolution of their bodies), there are two clearly distinguished categories.

First, there are those who have perceived in the blazing intuition of *ātman-brahman* that no rite, no theological formulation, no dharma, is binding on them any more, or rather, that none of this has either meaning or usefulness in connection with their final liberation, and therefore with the true knowledge. For them the realization of the *ātman-brahman* has meant the breaking of all the 'knots of the heart',⁸² and consequently of all social and religious bonds. These compose the *aty-āśrama*, of which the Śvetāsvatara Up. speaks in its final verses, those who will accept no classification in the social or religious world. This is the direction in which, long after the period of which we are speaking, the Upanishads called Sannyāsa Upanishads were later developed.

Secondly, there are those who either dare not, or are unwilling to, free themselves from the cult and from *dharma*. The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa constantly sing the praises of those forest hermitages, where the sacrificial fires (*homa*, *yajña*) rose night and morning, accompanied by ceaseless chanting of Vedic hymns. This however could correspond to a different ideal, that which later took shape in the tradition of *vanaprastha*. But it seems probable that the 'establishment' did all that it could to retain within its society those who sought to

81. cp. Ch. Up., 7.25: "He who has pleasure in the *ātman*, who has delight in the *ātman*, who has intercourse with the *ātman*, who finds bliss in the *ātman*, he is lord of himself, he has unlimited freedom in all worlds."

82. 'knots of the heart'—हृदयग्रन्थी—that is, the sense of identification of the unlimited self with what is limited, the superimposition on the self of the *nāmarūpas* which bind man, who is by nature free, to a particular *loka*.

make their escape. Thus sannyāsa was reintegrated into brahmanical society as the fourth *āśrama* (stage of life), and consequently ceased to be *aty-āśrama* (*ati-*, beyond). Some centuries later the Law of Manu began to lay down rules, not merely for entering on sannyāsa, but also for the sannyāsī himself. Hindu monasticism continued to evolve between these two poles: that of total freedom, exemplified by the *avadhūta*, those for whom the inner light, the *tejas*, is too strong to allow them to accept any social or religious obligation whatever (like Śrī Ramaṇa, for example); and that of institutional sannyāsa, which evolved on parallel lines in Hinduism and Buddhism.

For these ascetics, however, whether beggars, hermits or wanderers, there could be no question of celebrating the impressive and costly rites of brahmanical society. But the necessity for some kind of ritual among them, combined with the objection felt by many of them against the encroachment of ritualism, gradually led to the recognition of the sacrificial and sacramental value of human life as a whole.

In the Vedic Brahmanic tradition sacrifice was the supreme act of men. The famous Hymn of the Puruṣa in the Rig-Veda (10.90) had conceived the origin of the worlds and of beings in the form of an immense primordial sacrifice. The Jaibali who instructed Aruṇi explained precisely to him how the very appearance of a man in his mother's womb is the last state of a *yajña* which actually takes place at the cosmic level (Ch. Up., 5.3-10). In another text of the Chāndogya (3.16), the different stages in a man's life image the different stages of the Soma sacrifice. The first two Books of the same Upanishad show how all that happens in the universe is identical with the *Udgītha* chant, the essential chant of the Sāma-Veda which has to accompany a solemn sacrifice. The Kauṣītaki Upanishad (2.5) shows how man constantly sacrifices his speech to his breath, and *vice versa*. The last chapters of Book 5 of the Chāndogya reflect upon food as a sacrifice offered up in the interior fire, the *antar-agnihotra*. Thus food taken in a spirit of faith and sacrifice appeases the gods and the whole universe, just as surely as does any ritual sacrifice.

According to a very interesting theory of J. Varenne, the Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad would be precisely 'a kind of breviary', as he calls it, for the use of ascetics, providing them with texts to recite, even when they perform the rite purely in the mind (*manas*).

3. UPANISHADIC KEY-WORDS

FOR all serious study of the Upanishads a certain knowledge of Sanskrit is well-nigh indispensable.

In the case of the Bible the first translation of the New Testament was from Greek to Latin. These two sister-languages were used side by side by all educated people in the Roman Empire. Thus it was possible to have a translation of the New Testament that was practically literal—at least, in theory. As for the Old Testament, its translation into Greek had been like a new edition, a re-handling which many held to be inspired in the same way as the original Hebrew. The genius of the modern languages of the West is certainly very different from that of Greek or Latin; but they are partly derived from them, and their development took place in constant association with the Latin language, Greek thought, and ceaseless preaching and meditation on the Bible. All this, added to the scientific approach of modern exegesis, makes it possible for translations of the Bible into European languages to be extremely close to the original, thus enabling even those who have no direct access to the Hebrew or Greek text to be sure that they are really in touch with the thought of the author.

The translation of Sanskrit into western languages, on the other hand, raises problems that are as great as those involved in translating the Bible into non-European languages. It is a very risky undertaking. There is, first, the difference between the cultures; then the mental 'language' which underlies every spoken or written language is different; and most of all, the intuitive approach to the Mystery, to the 'divine', which governs everything else, is different. Besides, every word is a cluster of 'semantemes' (significations), and even those words which seem at first sight to correspond etymologically, in fact very often have quite different centres about which their semantemes have crystallized.

In the case of the Upanishads there are a certain number of key-words, which have to be understood as accurately as possible, if one is to avoid at least the most serious misunderstandings in the exegesis of these books. This is all the more important, and is also made far more difficult, because these key-words have evolved in the context

of a culture and religion that was continually developing, and at the same time were used to express the unique and all embracing intuition of the Upanishadic rishis. The results is that these words are used in senses which often change and fluctuate, and that the translations or interpretations which are given in one particular context will not necessarily be appropriate in another. Nevertheless all the apparently different senses form part of a whole, and their very diversity should itself point to the fundamental intuition of the rishi.

These key-words in the first place include the fundamental Upanishadic terms, like *ātman*, *brahman*, *puruṣa*, *upaniṣad*, *prāṇa*, *prajña*, *vidyā*, *amṛita*, *mṛityu*, *sat*, *asat*. There are also accessory terms and frequently occurring verbal roots, which require specially careful translation in accordance with the context, e.g., *upāsita*, *dhū*, *vidhū*, *pratiṣṭhā*...⁸³

The first term that must be explained is of course UPANISHAD itself. The traditional etymology is *upa-ni-ṣad*, to be seated at the feet of the master and to receive his instruction. However, the instruction received at the master's feet is not just any kind of instruction. When 'upaniṣad' is mentioned in the sacred texts, it always refers to teaching that is secret, hidden,—indeed, esoteric. Careful study has led the French Indologist, L. Renou, to recognize that the secret teaching of upaniṣads is the disclosure of certain 'correspondences' which are not perceptible at the mental level (the realm of *manas*), but which a particularly acute *buddhi* (intelligence or intuition) can discern.

According to Vedic and especially Brahmanic⁸⁴ thought, the whole

83. Here the author drew up a preliminary list of the most important of these terms, but noted that it was incomplete:

brahman, *ātman*, *puruṣa* (*prajāpati*)

indra (the ancient mythical basis in the Vedas)

yajña (the ancient mythical basis in the Brahmanas) with *agni*,
soma, *annam*

deva

mṛityu, *amṛita*, *janma*

sad-asat

agre

karma

themes of entry and departure (*dhū*-, *vi*-)

samprasāda, *ānanda*, *sampanna*

prāṇa, *vāyu*

upaniṣad

84. 'Brahmanic' here refers very precisely to the period of the Brahmanas.

universe is made up of correspondences, not only in general between the cosmos and man, but also between the physical and mental elements and functions of man and the elements and functions of the cosmos.⁸⁵ Even more, this world in which man lives has an extraordinarily profound correspondence with the other world—the world which man cannot reach either by his senses or by his thought, which is at the same time the super-terrestrial world of light, of the Sky, and also that other world which is inaccessible to our waking consciousness, but manifests itself mysteriously in dreams, and more mysteriously still in the state of deep sleep, *susupti*.

The westerner may smile at this continual play with correspondences which in the last resort verge on identification, but in fact, is it not an instinctive way—far more effective than abstract thinking—of living existentially and realistically within the fabric of correspondences which compose the cosmos and within which man himself inevitably moves? Besides, it would seem to be, if one understands it aright, the equivalent in quite another language of that insight of the deepest Christian theology, which regards everything as 'being-with', *sun-einai*. Here theology finds the fundamental relationship of being—not merely a relationship which would be established only after the realization of being, but one which is the constitutive law of being itself. Here too it finds the mystery of God himself, and in the light of the theology of the Trinity, the mystery also of Christ (who is made perfect only in his *pleroma*, fullness, which is his mystical body). Though lesser minds may have converted this marvellous intuition of the Trinity into an abstraction and banished it to a distant 'heaven' this does not prevent the Trinitarian mystery from asserting itself on every plane of being, as it does at every level of the Christian faith. Rightly understood, the experience of the Trinity is the experience of my relation with each of my fellow-men and with every creature. Christ himself is a mystery of pure relation: pure relation in his eternal being—with the Father and the Spirit; and at the same time pure relation in his being as man—relation to the Father, and relation to men. He has given himself to us, so that in symbiosis with every man he may live his being-as-relation at once in time and in eternity. We could say that he reveals himself indeed as the eternal archetype of 'being-with', both in his existence in the depth of every man, and also

85. e.g. eye-sun; mind (*manas*)-moon; mouth-fire; breath-wind; hearing-cardinal points of space; semen-water; etc.

in the incarnation through which he appeared in the midst of history. Even if this mystery finds in the Incarnation its definitive manifestation, bringing to a climax all history, the whole cosmos and every possible manifestation of being, it was already present and active in all those relations on which the universe is based, which come to their perfection in the communion of consciousnesses (the 'noosphere' of which Teilhard spoke); and indeed at an even deeper level beyond *nous*, the mind, in the ultimate centre of man towards which Indian thought from the very beginning has been led

These sets of correlations and identifications developed naturally on the basis of the Vedic myths and the Brahmanic cult. The myths had given a face to the elements, the powers and the functions of the cosmos. The *yajña*, or Vedic sacrifices (comprising both actions and formulas), relied for their effect upon this correlation between the various levels of being. Otherwise of course sacrifices performed and mantras pronounced on earth at one particular time could not possibly bear fruit in another world and at another time. Thus the philosophical problem of causality received an existential answer. Linked as it is to the fundamental problem of man's being, this answer is consciously grasped in the present, but it cannot but be projected beyond the present upon another time and another space, indeed, upon that other world whose existence is surmised from the state of sleep, and whose threshold at the archetypal level is guarded by *Mṛityu*, Death. (Finally, however, when it is realized that the *ātman* itself, one's deepest self, is the 'gate' which serves at once as an entrance and as a barrier (Ch. Up. 8.6.5), and the 'bridge' which both separates and unites (Ch. Up. 8.4.1), then the mystery of death, and consequently also of sleep, is illuminated and simultaneously annihilated.)

The sense of correspondence had effectually revealed to the ancient rishis the presence of Man throughout the universe. This brings us to the term PURUṢA. No translation can express its infinitely complex meaning, because western thought, so it seems, is incapable of grasping or at least of expressing through any one word belonging to its tradition and culture, the nucleus around which have crystallized the various meanings which this term evokes in Indian tradition. *Puruṣa* is fundamentally 'the man'; then, more precisely, 'the male', because undoubtedly in all traditions man is first male. *Puruṣa* is at the same time simply 'man', the Adam of the Bible, and also the 'Ben-Adam' ('Son of Man'). *Puruṣa* is further the cosmic, archetypal man, and also

that awareness of being which is to be perfectly manifested in man (the final term of creation—*sukṛita*, the 'well-made',⁸⁶ according to the Upanishad); and which from the beginning is in search of itself, and marks everything and every event in creation with the presence of the man who is to come.

In the magnificent insight of the Veda (cp. particularly RV 10.90), which had a lasting influence on the elements of cosmogony that are scattered almost everywhere throughout the Brāhmaṇas and the Upanishads, Puruṣa is the primordial Man, he who comes at the beginning, and from whom all things come into existence. Either he simply exists without any precise beginning (RV 10.90), or else he is projected at the beginning by the ātman. In the Bṛihad (1.4.1) it is in the form of Puruṣa that Ātman first 'appears'. In the Aitareya (1-3), the Ātman first emits what is still unorganized (i.e., anterior to the cosmic order⁸⁷)—the waters (above and below), rays of light, and death; then he causes the Puruṣa to rise from the waters. In some texts the Puruṣa appears perfect from the very beginning; but elsewhere, again as in the Aitareya, the senses burst or shoot out, one after the other, from his body, driven by the pressure of the *tapas*, the heat, emitted by the Ātman as it concentrated on itself with a view to sending forth this puruṣa, and with him the whole cosmos. As the Rig-Veda (10.90.3,4) very clearly shows, the Puruṣa belongs at once to the world above and to the world here below. In the language of Christian theology he would be called a 'theandric' being. One quarter of him is manifested in this world, the other three quarters are hidden away, inaccessible.⁸⁸ It is in this archetypal Man that, at the source of the thought and intuition of the rishis, the hidden mystery⁸⁹ first (*agre*)⁹⁰ manifests itself. *Beforehand* there is nothing, *a-sat*; but not indeed pure nothingness, for that is absolutely without meaning. Being, that which IS, must transcend all notions of before and after. Besides, the Indian mind could not think in an abstract way of a 'nothing' (*nihil*)

86. 'well-made'—see Ait. Up., 1.2.3; cp. Tai. Up., 2.7, of the ātman.

87. 'cosmic order' (*ṛita*) comes from what is unorganized (*anṛita*).

88. This same proportion of one to three also appears in the Rig-Veda (1.164) in connection with the Word (*vāc*) of which only one quarter is accessible to man.

89. 'the hidden mystery'—*padam* in the Vedas, *guhā* in the Upanishads (see Silburn, *Instant et Cause*, p. 16); i.e., the mysterious abode, a place symbolic of the mystery.

90. *agre*—see below, pp. 87, 100.

from which God is supposed to draw creation (*creatio ex nihilo*)—for such a 'nothing' would necessarily but impossibly be other than God, other than Being.⁹¹ However nothing is as yet perceivable, because at the level of the perceivable there is still no perceiver. It is this 'perceiver' who, in search of his perfect form (man), will discriminate, distinguish and organize the unperceivable. Until then all is still in the state of *tohubohu* (the original chaos), of which Genesis speaks. This is the primordial mystery, or rather, the area of mystery which man uncovers at the very base of his thought and consciousness, and of which he can say absolutely nothing. It is in man's own depths—*ātma-puruṣa-vidhaḥ* ('the ātman at the beginning was in the form of the puruṣa,' Br. Up. 1.4.1)—that all begins. So the real sense of *agre* is neither spatial nor temporal; it is this depth of myself which is inaccessible to sense-perception and to abstract thought. It is in the form of man, *puruṣa-vidhaḥ*—or perhaps more precisely, in movement towards the perfect and definitive form in which man will finally appear—that everything begins to be realized, to appear, to take form and shape. Man is the Idea of creation, its divine Idea, as would certainly be said by a certain school of theology.

From this Man then all proceeds. But in the Hymn of the Rig-Veda referred to above, the origin of all things from the archetypal Puruṣa takes place by means of a *yajña*, or sacrifice; for, in the context of the latter part of the Vedic period to which this hymn belongs, the *yajña* is an archetype, or mental theme, which dominates all thinking. The primordial *yajña* of the Puruṣa is the type (supreme model) of all the *yajñas* that men will ever offer in this world throughout history, and it determines their structure, their performance and their efficacy. This primordial *yajña* is offered by the devas, and yet it is by this self-same sacrifice that all the devas come to exist, since they themselves are created beings (cp. Br. Up., 1.4.6, 10). Beyond myths and words which are of course necessary as a starting-point, man can only reach the original mystery by transcending all conceptual forms of thought. This transcendence however will no longer lead back to the original *tohu-bohu* where thought is blinded by excess of light and is aware only of darkness, but will be the discovery of the unity, the correspondence, *upanishad*,⁹² of all levels in the light of an interior sun, hence-

91. Such a view would imply that God had already been distinguished by thought from Being, and placed face to face with the created world, which as yet did not exist.

92. cp. *nidhāna*, connection, in Buddhist terminology.

forth shining at full strength. This is the essential secret of Upanishadic thought, which at a later stage is called the *turya*. Thus the last stanza of RV 10.90 has to say: By sacrifice the devas offered sacrifice to the sacrifice.⁹³ Here then we are concerned with an archetypal sacrifice, a primordial and eternal sacrifice, which underlies all sacrifices and the whole cosmos itself throughout its evolution, in the same way as Man himself does. The puruṣa is at the same time the sacrificer, the victim and the sacrifice itself. It was this intuition that guided from within the questioning of the whole institution of sacrifice which was discussed above. In making their challenge to ritual sacrifice, men discovered in the coming into being of man and in his whole life a sacrificial mystery that is immeasurably deeper than all the rites. This new dimension of sacrifice first replaced the cult from which they were with difficulty managing to emancipate themselves, and in the end enabled them to pass beyond and become totally freed from all forms in the final awakening. This happened as successive 'upanishads' were discovered among the circles of initiates who little by little extricated themselves from the social and mental domination of the 'religious' leaders, the priestly guardians of 'religion'

So from the Puruṣa—again especially according to the Puruṣa-sūkta of the Rig-Veda and the Aitareya Upanishad—comes forth all that is, devas, men, even their various social groups,⁹⁴ the cosmos; however none of these are in isolation from the others, and even the devas, those celestial beings, are in close dependence on men, as according to the tradition they live upon the sacrificial offerings.⁹⁵

Thus from the cosmic Puruṣa is emitted the sun, as his eye; the wind, as his breath; the directions of space, as his hearing. Fire corresponds to his mouth, which is the organ of speech and of the reception of food; the moon is his thought. These correlations are endlessly elaborated, sometimes with such minuteness that it might seem to be a game; but in fact they are often based on affinities that only a very penetrating mind can discover.

The DEVAS are the functions of the Puruṣa both on the cosmic and on the individual level. However, at the level of the individual man,

93. यज्ञेन यज्ञमयजन्त ।

94. in R.V. 10.90.13.

95. Accordingly, at the moment of the great awakening the devas disappear in the disappearance of the cult.

these devas are impermanent, since they depend for their existence, like the individual himself, upon the association of particular physical elements in his *śarīram*. It is only beyond the individual level that they gain their immortality, their *devatā* (divinity),⁹⁶ in the sphere or loka called *devaloka*, *svargaloka* (sphere of light), even *brahmaloka* (though later reflection realized that this term really transcends every sphere of the devas)—all of which is symbolized here as elsewhere by the firmament, the visible heaven.⁹⁷

The correlation, verging on identification, between the devas of the cosmic and transcendental order and the devas, or functions, at the individual level is often expressed in the language of the Upanishads by the image of the puruṣa as immanent in each of these 'functions'. The puruṣa who is in the sun and the puruṣa who is in the eye are one and the same; so also the puruṣa who is in the hearing and the one who is in the cardinal points of space, the puruṣa who is in the immensity of exterior space and the one in the space at the centre of the cavity of the heart, which though doubtless infinitely small is nonetheless limitless, immeasurable (cp. Ch. Up., 3.14 and 8.1: *daharāḥ vidyā*) and so on. Moreover this puruṣa is always distinguished from his place, that is, from the deva and his function. Thus in Bṛihad 2.3, the sun is the brahman with form, while the puruṣa who is in the sun is the brahman without form; and similarly with the eye and the puruṣa who is in the eye.

How then are we to translate the term *puruṣa* in these contexts? Translators are always tempted to use words like 'being', 'spirit',—and from one point of view they are justified in so doing; but in the terms 'being', 'spirit', it is impossible to recognize the correlation of this 'being' with the man who is at the same time both cosmic and individual, archetypal and particular. Wherever he is, the Puruṣa is the very mystery of man—of total man. The Kauṣṭhiki Upanishad expressly notes that no deva can ever act on his own; thus it is the total

96. cp. Br. Up., 1.3.10ff, "they were brought to the place of their immortality, *devatā*."

97. N.B. These devas certainly correspond, though with some other very important shades of meaning, to the *theoi* or *dii* of the classical Mediterranean world; but this applies mainly to the stage of the Vedas, much less to that of the Upanishads. To try to conceive of them in terms of *Theos* (*Deus*), as found in the Greek philosophical tradition, and still more in Judeo-Christian theology, is of course simply meaningless.

Puruṣa, at once individual and cosmic, who manifests himself in each manifestation of the devas that proceed from him.

The ultimate *upanishad* (correlation) of the mystery of the Puruṣa is finally revealed as being no longer the correlation between the different devas, but the correlation of myself—the thinking one, the man endowed with an ‘I’, ‘I myself’, the man who, in all that he does, says or thinks,⁹⁸ is essentially asserting *aham asmi*, ‘I AM’—with each of the devas of my own make-up, and with each of the devas of the cosmic and transcendental order. The Puruṣa who is in the sun is myself—I ‘am’ he, *so’ham asmi*.⁹⁹ The long evolution of mythological thinking by way of the primordial and archetypal Man, and the apparently fantastic cosmogonies of the Brāhmaṇas, has ended with the discovery of ‘myself’ everywhere in the human world, the cosmic world and the divine world. It is I alone who am, I who alone am all that is. Nothing of all that is, or ever was, or ever will be, is apart from me. This body, this combination of molecules and cells in which I awake, does not limit me. Just as I transcend this body, limited as it is in time and space, so equally I transcend my thought, including the reflexive consciousness of myself, for I am able to project myself into all times and spaces, by my technology, by my thought, and by my transcendental consciousness. Like the devas of my body who have discovered their *devatā*, their immortality and divinity, their transcendental condition, I also discover my transcendence in my reflection on the mystery of the All—no longer merely of the All in its extension, *viśvam*, but of the All gathered up and focused, *sarvam*, the consummated All which is I, in my pure and all-prevailing consciousness. Moreover this correlation, this discovery, functions in both directions at the same time. When the individual man thus expands into the infinite, what happens to what one calls his individuality? Who or what could limit him in time or space? As will shortly be explained, he has passed beyond even the problem of death or non-death, or

98. See Kena Up., 1; Br. Up., 1.4.1; Br.Up., 3. It is he alone who thinks, speaks, etc.

99. Īśa Up., 16; cp. the Madhukāṇḍa (Br. Up., 2.5). But one should never understand this *aham asmi* in the sense of the *ahamkāra*, which identifies me with my body and limits me to it. The linguistic symbol of *aham*, used in these two senses, should not mislead one, as they are on totally different levels. The jests of the imperipient who have not entered into the depth of ‘*aham brahma asmi*’, the supreme truth, are wide of the mark.

immortality; he has realized himself at a level where no such *dvandvas* can find entry. He has recovered the totality of the primordial Man. He now knows that it is he himself to whom all that is written in the Scriptures is referring. As long as his correlation, correspondence, *upanishad*, is restricted to one or other of the levels of being, to one of the lokas, the man who has been initiated into the knowledge of that loka possesses freedom and sovereignty in that particular level of being, as is proclaimed in very many texts. But he who has discovered the level of the ātman, of brahman, of the Puruṣa, is free and sovereign over all, in all lokas and in every time.¹⁰⁰

The progress of Indian thought towards the realization of the Fullness, which we have explored by means of the archetype or theme of the Puruṣa, followed a very long road, which included many detours and often turned back on itself. Even though in the mind of great seers the supreme intuition might be immediately attained at one bound, a very long time was needed for this intuition, this mystical perception, to be assimilated and absorbed by their intellect, and still longer for the minds of their disciples to grasp it. One theme which contributed greatly to this progress towards unity was unquestionably that of *breath*—a term which comes very close to that of *pneuma* in the Mediterranean tradition—namely, PRĀṆA at the individual level, and VĀYU, at the cosmic.

The Upanishads are filled with memories of the struggle which was fought out between the various devas, often called *prāṇāḥ*, or functions of the human body and mind, in order to determine their order of importance. The meaning of *prāṇa* is extremely complex and, as with Puruṣa, it is practically impossible to express the nucleus about which its meanings have crystallized by any one western term, above all in modern language. Prāṇa in the first place means breath, *pneuma*, and this indeed is its original sense: *pra-ana* (from the root *an*, to breathe). This breath is generally regarded as being fivefold (sometimes sevenfold). Prāṇa also refers to man’s various sense-faculties, such as sight, hearing, taste, smell, speech, procreation—in short, all the particular manifestations of the inner energy known to later tradition as *śakti*. In man the level of *prāṇa* is contrasted with that of the

100. The author noted in the margin: “Here the theme of ‘entry’”, probably referring to a hand-written note on a separate sheet of paper. (See Appended Notes 1, p. 112)

elements, *bhūtāni*, which is often called the level of food, *annam*.¹⁰¹ It is also distinguished from the level of thought (*manas*, *vijñāna*)—though the distinction is never entirely hard-and-fast, because all differentiation within being is merely from the point of view of the mind. A reasonably accurate rendering of *prāṇa* would be Life, the energy of life, the surge of life which is in a being and shows itself primarily at the physiological level. In the myth of the Aitareya, this force explodes as it were from the primordial Puruṣa into the many different faculties of action and perception. Behind this multiplicity of particular forces the man who knows (*evamvid*) discovers a mysterious force which is at the same time immanent and transcendent. Certain schools, notably those of the Kauṣṭiki, recognize Brahman in this force: *Prāṇa* is Brahman, the fullness of the mystery, Kauṣṭiki used to say.

Prāṇa, which is thus at the same time immanent in and transcendent to all the *prāṇas* and *devas*, is one of the most approved supports for meditation on brahman, the absolute principle discerned at the base of everything; this is in view both of its superiority to every individual function and of its immanence in all. That which corresponds to it in the cosmic order is *Vāyu*. At the cultic level its correlative is *Agni*, which is the intermediary between the world in which man moves and the upper world symbolized by the *devas*; since it is through the medium of fire, indeed, as transformed into fire, that the oblation ascends and becomes the food of the gods, who receive their food 'through the mouth of *Agni*'. At another level, it is *Vāyu*, the Wind, the Air, which as being universally extended is the medium of communication between worlds and between beings. For example, it is through *Vāyu* that the *devas* know the thoughts and intentions of men, as the Vedas say. *Yājñavalkya* explains to *Uddālaka* (Br. Up., 3.7.2.) that it is through *Vāyu*, the Air, that this world and the other world, and all beings without exception, are united, and (as one might develop the thought) enter into mutual relationship and realize their unity in being. Thus it is the *sūtra*, the link, the thread (as also is the syllable *OM*; Ch. Up., 2.23.3). In the same session *Yājñavalkya* explained to *Bhujyu Lāhyāyana* that it is the Air, the Wind, *Vāyu*, that bears the offerers of sacrifice beyond this world. *Vāyu*, he continued, is at once individuality (*vyastih*) and totality (*samaṣṭih*) (Br. Up. 3.3).

Very closely related to *Vāyu*, though even more subtle than it, is

¹⁰¹ A marginal note '*Annam*' presumably refers to the note written on the back of 'Entry-departure'. (See Appended Notes 2, p. 112).

Space, *Ākāśa* or *Kha*, which is often inaccurately translated as 'ether'. It is the first and most subtle of the five elements in which Being essentially manifests itself, and which when combined in many different ways accounts for the distinctions between different beings (*bhūtāni*). *Ākāśa* is infinite space, which is absolutely impalpable and imperceptible. The directions or cardinal points locate us in space; from them comes the sound we hear, and into them the sound that we produce departs and vanishes—into that space which is infinite and limitless, before, behind, to the left, to the right, above, below. Just as to *Vāyu*, the Wind that circulates among the worlds, corresponds *Prāṇa*, the breath that circulates through our body and bursts out in countless living forms, so to the limitless *ākāśa* of the cosmos which holds in itself all the worlds and still extends infinitely beyond them, there corresponds the *ākāśa* or space of the heart, which is no less limitless, no less infinite, the innermost secret of each one's being.

One of the terms most frequently used to signify the discovery of Brahman, the Absolute, in the various elements which are manifested at the level of perception, whether sensory, mental or mystical, is the root *UPA-AS*, for example, in *upāsate*, *upāsita*, *upāsana*. This last term, *upāsana*, moves very freely between a very weak sense of 'consideration' and the very strong sense of 'adoring', but in practice one should never forget the full spectrum of its meanings. In later usage it often means 'worship' or 'meditation'. Like the root from which *upanīṣad* is derived, it signifies to 'sit beneath', at the feet of', *upa-as*. But in this case it is no longer a matter of receiving instruction, but of giving, offering oneself, an attitude of reverence, of offering, of faith, *śraddhā*. To render this word as 'venerate', 'adore', is very often justified, even though the extended sense of these words, especially in modern western usage, may be a little rigid here in many cases. To balance this, one is often very much tempted (*Sénart*) to give it the greatly reduced sense of 'consider', 'regard as'; for example, 'to regard *ākāśa* as brahman', etc. This rendering is certainly not wrong, but it leaves out the essentially religious aspect of the term—or rather, perhaps one should go further and say, its mystical, if not initiatory aspect. Here it is not at all a question of simple consideration in the sense of having an opinion, or of intellectual conviction; it is an insight of faith, in the very strong sense defined above, an insight which, even when it has invaded the field of awareness of phenomena is still rooted in a mystical intuition, one that has been personally

experienced, and in which one partakes through faith in his guru or in the Scriptures. It necessarily requires an attitude of religious respect, of surrender and dedication. It can often mean 'to believe in', 'to put one's faith in'. To discover the presence of Brahman in every being or in a particular being, is never a matter of mere speculation; it is something that involves one's entire being, that requires the complete attitude of an *evamīd* towards the whole cosmos. Only faith can enable me to perceive Brahman, and thus allow me to participate in the Presence, and so through my knowledge to become as it were the possessor of the power, sovereignty and freedom of Brahman, which is revealed in every single being.

Yet this faith in the presence and power of Brahman in each being is still not enough. The Upanishads are hard on anyone who contents himself with a merely particular *upāsana* of Brahman. I may have a succession of particular discoveries of Brahman here and there, in Agni, in Vayu, in the Sun, in space, in my thought, in my breath,¹⁰² etc.; but from these I have to go on to the intuition of the All, Puruṣa or Brahman, who is at once immanent in and transcending everything. All this is summarized in the very strong words of Br. Up. 1.4.7: "One should worship (thinking), This is no other than the Ātman; for here all these (devas) are one."¹⁰³

Another way of approach—now at the mental level—to the mystery which is at once the most vast and also the most secret and interior, is by means of the terms PRAJÑĀ, VIJÑĀNA. Here again the Upanishadic approach is thoroughly disconcerting to a westerner. Guided by the intuition of the Greeks which was popularized in Christian theology, the westerner automatically thinks in terms of a distinction between the body on one side and the thinking soul on the other, the latter being spiritual and immortal. But from the Indian point of view the body, *śarīram*, embraces all the man's functions, whatever they may be. No doubt the mental functions have a certain pre-eminence in comparison with those of sense-perception and external activity, but the latter, no less than the former, are simply instruments, *karana*, employed by the self, the *ātman*. To state the position in a highly simplified fashion, and so merely approximately, one could say that on one side is the *ātman*, the absolutely bare 'principle', the essence, the

102. See Br. Up., 3.9.9, at least according to Hume's translation.

103. आत्मेत्येवोपासीत । अत्र ह्येते सर्वे एकं भवन्ति ।

ground, the 'spark' of the soul (to use the expression of the medieval western mystics of the Rhineland), and on the other everything else—eating, tasting, breathing, touching, seeing, hearing, and together with these, imagining, conceiving, thinking, willing, as well. The absolute nudity of the principle, its *kevalatvam*, the nakedness of the *ātman* in Vedāntin terms, or of the *puruṣa* in terms of Sāṅkhya (which uses the word very differently from the Upanishads), was later on to set Indian philosophy its most difficult problem—namely, the relation between this *ātman*, which is *asaṅga*, detached from all possibility of relatedness, and the body (including of course the mental functions also).

This problem is posed with particular urgency in the context of survival. What is this *puruṣa*, this *ātman*, which (without being the *puruṣa-ātman* in the strict sense) transmigrates and passes from body to body, carrying with it the seeds of merits, of reward and punishment? The body dissolves into its elements, the different functions return to their *devatā*, as the Upanishad says; but surely something remains even so of that which has made the man here below? What happens to the merits obtained from his sacrifices, or acquired by his virtuous acts? What is the subject to which all this is attached, to which it is all attributed? No doubt the *vidvān* has his radical solution: "Works do not cleave to a man"¹⁰⁴ (Iśā Up., 2). But as long as the man has not attained to this discrimination, and has not thrown off all this desires, then willy-nilly he is the prey of these desires, of these *devas*, as one might say, which under the guise of desires seek to seize hold of him and feed on him, to live on him. The tradition which runs throughout all the Upanishads is that, so long as a man in his deepest awareness has not realized himself as not other than the All, he will be endlessly carried along at the mercy of the currents and eddies of the cosmos, in other words, of the elements and the *devas*. According to the viewpoint expressed in Br. Up., 4.4, the *prāṇas* attach themselves to the migrating one, and all his *karma* follows with him. According to another approach (Br. Up., 3.2), each *prāṇa* returns to its respective *devatā* (Agni, Vayu, Sūrya, etc), and what happens to the man thereafter is a mystery which it is not proper to disclose, although those who know let it be understood that this mystery is that of *karma*.

In the quest for man's inmost centre, for the true *puruṣa*, the true *ātman*, *Prāṇa* served its turn at the physiological level. A similar role at the mental level was played by PRAJÑĀ, VIJÑĀNA. However

104. न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ।

prajñā, and likewise *vijñāna*, serve only as a way of approach. Whatever they may be, they are all mere manifestations of ātman-brahman, and one must never stop short at them. Instead one should constantly dive within more deeply, until brahman itself is directly experienced.

Among the Sanskrit terms employed to denote the human mind, MANAS presents itself first of all. The term *manas* can be used from two points of view. Either it is used to represent in its entirety the interior world, psychological and mental, as opposed to the world of matter (*annam*) and of life (*prāṇa*). In this case it conveys all the superiority of the world of thought as compared with the external world of sense. However, even then it is always regarded as infinitely distant from the world of the ātman, of sat, of Brahman, of the puruṣa in itself. Or, secondly, *manas* may be differentiated from the higher functions of the mental world, in which case its significance is greatly diminished, being only the lower stage of intellectual consciousness.¹⁰⁵

At the higher level there is the function called BUDDHI, which operates through *prajñā* and *vijñāna*. According to the Taittirīya Upanishad, in the series of the *kośa*, or sheaths, which cover ātman-brahman, there is as great a distinction between *manas* and *vijñāna* as there is between *manas* and *prāṇa* and between *prāṇa* and *annam*. However, it would be hazardous to attempt to translate any of these terms of early Indian psychology into those of modern psychology. In any case their sense is fluid.¹⁰⁶

105. cp. the 'simplex apprehensio' in scholastic terms, or perhaps the 'sensus communis'.

106. At this point a general comment on the meaning of words in the Upanishads becomes necessary. As was shown above, *upanishad* means correlation; correlation, relationship, forms the infra-structure of the whole of Upanishadic thought. Even earlier, Vedic thought had already given considerable importance to the various articulations within the cosmos—those of day and night, of the seasons, of the phases of the moon, of the sun's transit through the different signs of the zodiac, of the sun's north-south movements. Rites also had to be performed precisely at these points of transition. Here too it is the articulations of things that are most important, their functions which count for far more than the things themselves. The experience which the Upanishads sought to transmit is precisely the meaning of these articulations, these relationships. The *nāmarūpa* have only secondary importance. They only exist in their mutual relationships, in their relationship to the All, to the central mystery. This also applies to the meaning of particular (contd...)

The term *buddhi* is derived from the root *budh*, to become awake. It is intended to signify the emergence of knowledge within the mind. This emergence, even when it is preceded by conceptual reflection, will always be by an intuition, a flash of light, an awakening at one and the same moment to oneself and to things. Three roots in particular are used to express the idea of knowledge: *cit*, *vid* and *jān* (*jñā*). *Vijñāna* from the etymological point of view refers to a knowledge that discriminates (*vi-*); *prajñā* to knowledge 'in advance', as it were (*pra-*, before).¹⁰⁷ In various ways the Upanishad seeks to discover the mystery of the ātman, of brahman, of the puruṣa, in the highest act of human thought and of consciousness, regarded as the supreme reflection of that mystery. The Kauṣītaki (2.1) celebrates the *upanishad*: *Prāṇa* is Brahman (*prāṇa eva brahman*) and in ch. 3 goes on to sing the *upanishad* between *prāṇa* and *prajñā-ātman*. The whole of the last chapter of the Aitareya leads up to the *mahāvākya*: *prajñānam Brahma* (Brahma is *prajñā*). In Kauṣītaki 2 Indra explains to Prataradana, 'I am *Prāṇa*, I am *Prajñā*, and this knowledge, as the same Upanishad explains further on (4.20), is precisely that which gives Indra his pre-eminence over the devas; up to that point the *asura*, that is the malignant aspect of cosmic and individual functions, has had the better of him.

Prajñā or *vijñāna* is the highest manifestation of the mystery, because it is the supreme human act, the highest activity in the world of manifestation, at the level of *nāmarūpa*. It is the noblest image through which man can attain to the Real, can conceive It and give It 'form' or adequate expression;¹⁰⁸ for it is essential to 'conceive', i.e., absorb, this intuition, if it is to penetrate in full force all the levels of being. At the summit of self-awareness there is the awakening to Being in itself. Here one should study chapters 3 and 6 of the Kāṭha Upanishad.

However, even beyond this intuition of Being at the conscious level, there is the very mystery of the self. The Muṇḍaka (3.2.7) says that even the ātman made of *vijñāna* has to disappear. The Taittirīya

words. It follows that the precise meanings, e.g., of words denoting intellectual functions, has always to be sought in the particular context; no doubt there is a fundamental sense, but the overtones are constantly changing.

107. cp. the *pro-* in Greek *pro-phemi*.

108. cp. the term *abhikṛipta* in Kāṭha Up., 6.9 (paralleled in Svet. Up., 3.13, 4.17 and Ma. Na. Up., 1.11): हृदा मनीषा मनसाभिक्लृप्तः ।

says that it disappears in the *ātman* made of *ānanda* (3.10.5) the point of contact with that from which words and thoughts turn back without ever being able to reach it—the infinite bliss of *brahman*... (2.4=2.9)

This was also the final instruction of Yajñavalkya to his wife Maitreyī at the moment of his 'departure' (Br. Up., 2.4; 4.5): After death, the final departure, there is no more *sam-jñā* 'knowing with', apparently in the very precise sense of consciousness (*con-*, with). For all consciousness presupposes duality, i.e., knowing *with*, and all *vijñāna* presupposes distinction (*vi-*). In the total light of *sat* there is no longer a place for any distinction whatever between the knower and the known.

This is the state which is symbolized by deep sleep, in which the mental is so overwhelmed by *tejas*, the splendour, the brilliance, that everything disappears and the mind is no longer capable even of dreaming¹⁰⁹ (Praśna Up., 4.6). This is what the Chāndogya seeks to make understood in two important passages in Book 8, where the description of deep sleep appears to be nothing else than a parabolic description of the state of him who at last knows, the *vidvān*, *evamvid*. Set free from this body, and so from all the *pṛāṇas* and all thoughts, this *samprasādaḥ* (serene one) arises and comes to his full brilliance, in which at last he is revealed to himself in his proper form (8.3.4.). A good commentary on this is provided by a beautiful verse of the Yajur-Veda quoted in Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad (1.18; note 29), where it is said that Prajāpati, having passed through all worlds, all beings, all directions of space, attained to himself by means of himself—*ātmanā ātmānam abhisambabhūva*; here Prajāpati is equally the Puruṣa manifested in the individual man who finds himself in his own transcendence, beyond thought, beyond all the *devas*, and even beyond his own consciousness.

By way of the elements and functions of the cosmos, of his body and of his thought, man has drawn nearer and nearer to his source, to the intuition that reveals to him the final secret of his being and of all that is. He has discovered the universal correlations; he has realized that everything is always a mystery of convergence, of equivalences, of 'mirrors' which exchange reflections endlessly. He has realised that all particular *upanishads* converge upon a single correlation, the very 'formula' of Being, as it might be called by analogy with the universal

109. cp. *sampanna*, immersed in; Ch. Up., 6.8.1—*satāsampanna*, immersed in Being; *tejasampanna*, immersed in splendour, glory.

formula sought by a genius like Einstein. The themes which more than any others serve as vehicles of this supreme intuition are those of the *ātman-brahman*. These are the all-important key-words of Vedānta. To them the warnings given at the beginning of this section especially apply, because the ideas of *ātman-brahman* passed through a considerable evolution in the course of the Upanishadic age, until finally Vedantic philosophy gave them a very precise sense, but one which only to a very limited extent would allow one to guess at the wealth and pluriformity of their meanings in the sacred texts.

The term BRAHMAN seems to have been originally used to refer to the 'supernatural' force set in motion by a ritual utterance.¹¹⁰ From this comes a usage which is still very common in the Upanishads, where *brāhman* refers to a ritual formula (to translate it as 'prayer', however, is much too hasty, and runs the risk of attributing to the Upanishadic period aspects and attitudes of the Mediterranean religions). The power of *brāhman* showed itself especially in the improvised verses in which the priest tried to bring together all the correlations which it was possible for him to perceive. It was this concentration of universal sacredness which gave to sacrifice its perfection and efficacy. The Brahman priest, as distinct from the other officiants to whom were entrusted the details of the rite and the chants, was the one who was capable of gathering up in his thought, in this context by his silence, the totality of the correlations which made the rite perfect, complete. The *brahmán*, or *Brāhmaṇaḥ*, more generally, is the man who possesses this sacred power of *brāhman*, and this term quickly came to denote the priestly caste as a whole. From the sense of 'sacred principle' the term *brāhman* from the time of the Atharva-Veda rapidly developed towards the sense of 'cosmic absolute'. Meditation on the cosmic All under its aspect of sacred power led progressively to a steadily deepened interiorization. However, in many texts *Brāhman* still corresponds to the universe, the cosmic All in the actual form in which it is manifested. In this sense *Brāhman* is the universe itself, and one has to seek beyond it for the Puruṣa, the source of this *brāhman brāhmayoni*.¹¹¹ This *Brāhman* is the golden Embryo *hiranyagarbha*, which extends itself and is born endlessly.

110. According to Monier-Williams, *brahman* means 'sacred utterance', in contrast with *vāc*, human utterance.

111. *brahmayoni*: see Mund. Up., 3.1.3. The meaning can be either 'the womb (source) of Brahman', or 'whose source is Brahman'.

It was concerning this *brāhman*, the sacred principle and the mystery lying behind all things, that the oratorical contests recorded in the Upanishads were carried on. The brahmins used to challenge each other at the learned game of finding correspondences, or else, relying on their knowledge, they used to seek presents from the kings, saying to them, "I am going to teach you *brāhman*," and this was the usual subject of their trials of strength.

Conversely, the disciple respectfully approached the teacher, saying, *Brahma adhihi*, Teach me Brahman. Little by little the mystery of brahman was unveiled by means of various kinds of approximation, by discovering each element or function in the universe as well as in man's being. Finally brahman is revealed beyond all approximation, and moreover beyond all possibility any more of being given a name.

Brahman is used equivocally to refer to the Absolute beyond all relation and also to the creative source of all that is. At the beginning (*agre*) there was only brahman, alone-and-without-a-second, *ekaivāditīyam* (as Ch.Up., 6.2.1 says of *sat*); or rather, all this, *sarvam idam*, simply was brahman. 'All this', that is, all that exists; *agre*, 'at first', is a spatio-temporal formula which needs to be rightly understood, or it may be misleading. 'At the beginning,' that is, before anything was yet manifested, 'all this' was simply brahman. (Here there is no idea of a creation *ex nihilo*; see above). This is what later on the Purāṇas tried to express in the mythical terms of 'the day' and 'the night' of *Brahmā* (a theme which later still in a more philosophical form was to have an excessive influence on medieval commentaries on the Upanishads).

Brahman as creator increasingly developed a form. He became *Brahmā* in the masculine. The Muṇḍaka Up. made him the first-born of the devas, the one who possessed the knowledge of *brahmān* and was alone able to communicate this knowledge to men. Here we again come across the theme of *brahmān*, that is, the guardian of sacred knowledge and the sacred formula.

Shankara, as a help to finding one's way through the maze of meanings covered by the term, put forward the theory of the *nirguṇa* and the *saguṇa* brahman, the absolute brahman and the brahman as manifested. This theory of a 'double' brahman (or rather, of two ways of approaching brahman) undoubtedly had some basis, for example in the Muṇḍaka Upanishad, but it went far beyond the actual letter of the Upanishads. It is certainly a useful means of approaching the problem and of gradually drawing nearer to the mystery. However the seers of

the Upanishads had no need of this distinction, which at least in its popularized form poses some very difficult problems; for linked as it is with the theory of *māyā*, it relegates the whole universe, beginning with *Īśvara* (Brahman as creator), to a sphere of illusion (or *māyā*), which is barely distinguishable from total unreality.

The Upanishadic intuition itself was sufficiently penetrating to be able to do without such classification and this whole style of argumentation, though it was already foreshadowed in the movement which led Indian thought in the direction of Sāṃkhya and appeared very distinctly in the last two Vedic Upanishads, the Śvetāśvatara and the Maitri. However the great seers of the first age did not have these problems. In their piercing intuition they took in the *vyastih* and the *samaṣṭih* (cp. Br. Up., 3.3, and p. 92 above); they beheld the absolute in the manifested, and the manifested in the absolute, for they saw through to the very depth of things and of being. The *brahmān*, is precisely he who realizes the total mystery of the *brāhman*. As the Brihadāraṇyaka Up. (3.5, end) says, one only becomes a brahman, one only possesses this knowledge of *brāhman*, by the very fact that one is it, or possesses it. There is no cause anterior to the *agre*, the beginning.

This intuition, this laser-beam which pierces through all things, is precisely that *brahmavidyā* which is the object of all the Upanishads, the only goal of mankind. There is indeed a double *brahmavidyā* (Muṇḍaka Up. 1.1.4) but there is only a single brahman, alone and without a second. There are no doubt different ways of approaching this unique brahman, but the quest for brahman arises from the very depth of the man who is summoned by his true Source, which is the only thing capable of moving him from within. Moreover this Source alone can give to man his perfect bliss, it alone can free him from death and from fear.

The lower *brahmavidyā* is the whole human search for brahman, all the discussions of the *brahmavādin*, all the Scriptures. The higher *brahmavidyā* is the immediate intuition of brahman, that "brahman which is obvious and not abstruse," according to Br. Up., 3.4, and which cannot be explained by anything whatever. Yājñavalkya could only answer the question of Chākṛāyana by the question itself, as he said likewise to Gārgī (3.6 end; "not to question too much"). For in the end there is no longer any possible duality left to enable one to speak of it.

To speak of more than one brahman is to miss seeing the non-dual

mystery of the absolute and its manifestations; it is to run the risk of imagining a *dvandva* (the most misleading of all) between the absolute and its manifestations, when in truth there is only being, unique and without a second. Reason is no doubt in a quandary, since at the rational level no solution can be found. The truth holds its peace.

Speculation on the ĀTMAN developed parallel to that on brahman. The term *ātman* is only an attempt to indicate that which makes an individual to be himself, that is, the principle of his essential personal identity. The term is often used as a reflexive pronoun for all three persons. But man seeks to identify the principle by which he himself is constituted.

In the Brahmanic perspective of sacrifice, of karma, of action, the *ātman* was inevitably conceived as making (root *krī*) himself. At the conclusion of the *yajña* the offerer of the sacrifice obtains an *ātman* that is 'well-made', 'per-fect,' *su-kṛita*; he is *kṛitātma*, and as such he can safely set out on the great voyage which will take him beyond this world. Compare Br. Up., 4.2.1—Like a great king about to go on a journey, you have prepared your *ātman* by means of these *upanīśads* with a view to the day when you will be released from this world. (Note how in this text it is no longer the *yajña* that prepares the *ātman*, but the secret correlations of the *upanīśads* that have united him—*samāhita* (*sam-ā-dhā*), put him together, combined him; cp. *yuktātman*). This theme of the *ātman* which comes into being and is built up, reappears in several of the Upanishadic cosmogonies: *ātmanvi syām* ("Would that I had/were an *ātman*;" (Br. Up., 1.2.1).

In the Upanishads, however, the *ātman* is reached by way of successive interiorizations and no longer by external actions. The Taittirīya Upanishad gives the fullest list of these stages: *annam*, *prāṇa*, *manas*, *vijñāna*, *ānanda*. These are like sheaths (*kośa*) which conceal the *ātman*. They have to be removed one after the other and, as the Kaṭha Upanishad puts it (6.17), the *ātman* has to be drawn out like the pith from a reed.

Thus in the Upanishads the term *ātman* is used for each of the stages attained by a man in becoming aware of his true identity. In several cases the *ātman* means simply the body—the actual trunk—an image which recalls the hawk's body in the symbolism of the Vedic altar. Above all the idea of the *ātman* is very often situated at the undefined boundary between the *vijñāna-ātman* and the *parama-ātman*, that is, the transcendent *ātman* which can only be grasped by negations, *neti-neti*, the pure self, the ultimate degree of interiority.

As happened with brahman, the temptation to distinguish between several so-called 'atmans' soon appeared, and is especially noticeable in the Maitri Up., with its *mahātman* and *bhūtātman*. Such classifications are no doubt helpful in a first approximation, but once again they are very liable to mislead. Here too such classifications and analyses only become necessary when the primitive intuition, which pierced like an arrow directly to the very heart of reality, had lost its power. Most certainly, the body is *ātman*, thought is *ātman*, that centre of myself where I utter my 'I' is *ātman*. The neo-Vedantic interpretation is continually in danger of isolating an abstract idea of *ātman* cut off from its existential basis—the 'Self' as it is commonly translated, i.e., something objectified—and so in effect bringing it into *dvandva* with everything else. Familiarity with the Upanishads and their contemplative reading will certainly help one to recover the freshness and wholeness of the Upanishadic view of things. (To be sure of having rightly understood them, one should always be able to replace the abstract 'self' with 'I' or 'myself'.)

The Upanishadic thinkers found that their most valuable aid in drawing as close as possible to the mystery of the *ātman* and of their personal identity, was to meditate on the fact of sleep, the state of dreaming and also the apparently total unconsciousness of *śuśupti*. The dreaming state is in itself a kind of challenge to normal psychology. The seers of the Upanishads were especially impressed by the sovereign liberty enjoyed by the *ātman* while dreaming. Then a man needs no external light in order to see things or to project them (cp. Br. Up., 4.3.9-11); as a sovereign lord, he can project a world at will simply out of his imagination. Still more, in the state of deep sleep he is apparently no longer aware of himself, and afterwards he remembers absolutely nothing about what has happened in that state, and yet, even then he is. A man's deep 'I' is thus discovered to be free from all the limitations of the everyday world in which he is aware of existing in his waking state. Of course the state of deep sleep cannot be a man's normal—still less, his ideal—state, since he is then totally unconscious, like a log, as Indra pointed out to his teacher Prajāpati (Ch. Up., 8.11). But it is precisely this that opens the way to the realization of another 'place' of the *ātman*, a place which, properly speaking, is no longer a place, that 'fourth' (*turīya*; or *caturtha*, as it is called in the Maṇḍūkya Up. without further specification), that world which is simultaneously the other world, the *para-loka*, the *loka* of the *ātman*, and also the *brahmaloka*. In that world the *ātman* abides

perpetually unmoved, even when it seems to be moving in the various lokas in which it is manifested. According to the fine comparison drawn by Yājñavalkya in Br. Up. 4.3.11, this puruṣa of gold, formed of light and glory, is like a great bird, which soars at will between this world and the *brahmaloka*, present in all places, and always at home in himself. He is truly the frontier between the two worlds, belonging to both at once; he is the 'dyke', the bridge, the *vidhṛiti*, which separates and holds the two worlds apart, even while uniting them.

The summit of all the Upanishadic correlations was the *upanīṣad* of *ātman-brahman*, the discovery of the identify, or rather, the non-duality, of that deepest centre of myself which is the *ātman*, and the deepest centre of the universe, which is *brahman*. This final intuition has passed through every level of being, every image, every intermediary. The arrow has hit the bull's eye. Through itself the *ātman* has attained to itself. The 'I' which it caused to sound at the different levels of consciousness, the physical body, life, thought, the entity consisting of desire and will, when once it is uttered in the deepest self, proves to be one with the 'I' uttered by the cosmic absolute, *brahman*, at the very source of its self-manifestation. *Aham asmi, aham brahma asmi*, declares the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad (1.4.10). *Tat tvam asi* (Ch. Up., 6.8.7 and parallels) is the final teaching of the guru at the moment when the mighty waters have broken all the dykes, and the glory of the one light has shone from the depth of being and illuminated the world in its entirety, *sarvam idaṃ. Ayam ātma brahma* (This *ātman* is *Brahma*), declares the seer of the Māṇḍūkya Up. (v.2), when he returns—'if ever he does return'—from his experience. Does this mean then that he might look at it as if from outside? or is this the last word that he utters in the very moment of being swallowed up in this ultimate experience?

In this supreme experience man has passed beyond all *dvandvas*, including the fundamental *dvandva* of death/life, being/not-being, knowing/not-knowing. So long as anyone seeks to explain this condition to someone else with the help of concepts drawn from sensory or mental perception, he in fact denies it; for as soon as one compares it with anything else, it ceases to be itself. It can only be defined by negations, negations moreover which are bound to cancel each other out endlessly under pain of turning out to be pure abstractions. The Upanishad often defines this experience as a flash which suddenly lights up the space of the heart. The eye blinks; one cries out 'Ah!' (Kena Up. 4.4.);

'That's it, just that!' (*etad vai tat*; Kāṭha Up. 4.3). It is also, continues the Kena, that which underlies all thought, that from which all thought takes its origin and springs forth, and also that towards which thought is mysteriously and inescapably directed, that which one suddenly remembers, an awakening, as it is elsewhere called (Kena Up., 2.4).

The problem of DEATH, the root cause of man's anguish, is thus resolved by the simple negation of the terms of the problem. This was the teaching given by Yama (Death) himself to the young Naciketas who boldly asked him to his face for the secret of death and of what really happens, what really is, or the other side of the great passing-over. It is a remarkable fact that only Death is capable of teaching the secret of death, and therefore also of life. Only the confrontation with death reveals its insubstantiality. In Christian theology Jesus himself also had to confront death. The living one is at once the 'first-born of all creation' and the 'first-born from the dead'.¹¹²

The performance of rites and virtuous acts no doubt obtain for man an immortality of a kind in the world beyond, the not-dying which belongs to the *devas*, corresponding to the fact that they are not subject to the world's conditions of growth and decay. This immortality is only a simple negation of death as we know it, a not-dying which fills the interval between death and rebirth. The state of essential being, of the *ātman*, of *brahman*, of the *Puruṣa*, of the *brahman*, is a state in which the very terms of dying and not-dying have lost their sense of contradiction. For these terms only apply to a situation in which there is passage, movement, action. But at the point where simply the mystery of being reveals itself in its infinity, its *sarvatvam*, what is dying, or not dying? Neither dying nor not-dying existed when the One rose into being, as the *Nāśadāsīt* hymn says (RV. 10.129). The level at which man dies, where he is the victim of old age, sickness, grief, dissatisfaction, is only a superficial level of his being. When he has found himself in the radiance of the *ātman*, nothing can interfere with his complete and perfect bliss—or rather, even if in the superficial strata of his being he can still suffer, and suffer horribly, in the depths of his awareness there is room only for infinite, unchangeable bliss, *ānanda*, an ocean without a shore, since it is the very bliss of Being itself which thus realizes and reaches itself, *sambabhūva*. Being, *sat*, *brahman*, the *ātman*, the *puruṣa*,—of these man is incapable of saying

112. Colossians 1:15,19.

anything. Ananda is the ultimate *kośa* in which that Being manifests itself, and that at the furthest limit of man's consciousness.

In conclusion, death is not the most important event in man's life, for it can neither bind him nor set him free. Of those who have passed through death the Upanishad says that they are *pretya* (*pra-i*), those who have passed on. But the 'passing over' of which the theme of death serves as a sign, a 'parable', is totally different. The true death, the only kind of death that liberates, is that which cuts the 'knots of the heart,' those knots which make a man identify himself with the various levels at which he is manifested, even the highest of them, even those at which he experiences *ānanda*. That is the true liberation from the body of which the Chāndogya Up. speaks in Book 8, and which in 8.13 it compares to the horse shaking loose its mane and to the moon escaping from the maw of Rahu. That alone is the Great and True Death, the true and final passing over (cp. *tāraka*). This absorption into the abyss of one's own self may be gradual and barely perceptible, or it may be sudden and shocking. In the latter case no one can say whether the body will have the strength to bear it, for man is so much identified with his desires and his philosophy that, when they are snatched away from him, he may be unable to go on living. He is then pure light, an infinite ocean of glory.

When a man returns from this death, or rather continues to live physically after this death, he is himself, but even so he is other than he was. For everywhere he goes, there is the fathomless depth of the experience of the beyond, of the *ātman-brahman*, and those three-fourths of him which belong to the other world are now integrated into his concrete existence. As for academic discussions about the possibility or not of *jīvanmuktī*, they leave him quite cold. For his part he knows only that he lives and that he has passed beyond death, *paramrita*

4. THE RELEVANCE OF THE UPANISHADS

AS was said above, the age of the Upanishads is actually very close in spirit to our own times. It was a period of questioning like ours—questioning of the value of outward rites, of myth, even of theological reasoning if it is not related to intuition and experience.

The contemporary movement of protest certainly belongs to a mental climate and to a world of thought that are very different from those that prevailed along the banks of the Indus at the beginning of the first millennium before our era. However, it may well be that we could discover there at least some ingredients of answers which would help to cure the present malaise, shown in the practical impossibility of dialogue between the rising generation and the representatives of organized religion. For the latter no doubt agree in principle that their structures stand in need of reformation, but at the same time they fear that the well-nigh inevitable explosion may mean their own disappearance. The fact of the growing interest of the West in the East is at least one indication that something may be found in this direction.

Unfortunately those who are searching for spiritual experience are all too often attracted by mere substitutes, like the European versions of Zen or Yoga, the Hare Krishna movement, or the psychedelic cult. All that has very little in common with the genuine Upanishadic experience referred to in this essay. However, behind these substitutes, what the younger generation in its search for truth is seeking, without always realizing the fact, is surely that ultimate experience, properly so called.

However, as long as this experience retains its exotic character, not unmixed with esoteric aspects, it cannot be truly understood, and very often the search for it ends with misleading and dangerous substitutes. For example, only too often one finds that this experience (or rather the simplified version of it popularised by Neo-Vedantic teaching, which is much more philosophical than mystical or spiritual) is identified with a kind of super-religion, in which all the different religions of humanity are supposed to be absorbed. This is once more to repeat the mistake, referred to above, of objectifying *ātman-brahman*, making of it a 'thing,' an object, which would then take its place in

the sphere of human experience alongside other things, even if at a higher level.

The Upanishadic experience has nothing to do with any religion whatever, and still less is it a matter of mere logic or epistemology. It is of a different order altogether. It is the ultimate awakening of the human spirit, with which religions are now being confronted, as they were confronted in the past with the categories, first of mythical, and later of logical thought. The ultimate experience stands to logos as logos stands to myth, and to structure as structure stands to unorganized raw material. The problems that it poses to religions are no doubt insoluble in terms of ideas and rational arguments. However, it thereby compels the religions to interiorize and purify themselves and this will be supremely valuable. The wider dissemination of this experience is even preparing the way, it seems, for humanity to enter a new era, one towards which the world is blindly groping its way. This new era which some might call 'the age of the Spirit', will in any case be one in which men's relationships with each other and the relation of each man with 'God' will be lived out of an interior experience at once of pure Presence and of Communion.

The Upanishadic experience is neither exotic nor esoteric. It is not exotic, because it is absolutely universal. The forms in which it is interpreted, the mental, linguistic, cultural, and even the religious, context in which it occurs, may vary to an infinite extent. It is not bound to any culture or to any language. It is true that precisely during the period of the Upanishads India produced a truly remarkable expression of this experience, one which through the spread of Buddhism penetrated in various forms to the further limits of Eastern Asia; but it is no less true that the experience is not tied to its Mediterranean expression. And it may be that the outstanding fact of the decades in which we are living is the meeting—from now on inevitable—between the great spiritual and religious traditions and experiences of mankind. Whatever these may be, in so far as they consider themselves to be 'catholic,' i.e., universal, they are bound by this very fact to recognize this expression of their own deepest mystery, however novel it may be for them.

No more is the Upanishadic experience esoteric, reserved for initiates or for a caste of self-styled 'spiritual' persons, like the *pneumatikoi* of the Gnostic sects. In the beginning, no doubt, this experience seems to have been handed on within circles of initiates, but those who lived it were not only men who had run away from the world and were

living in the forest. There were also kings among them—Janaka, the disciple of Yajñavalkya, Ajātaśatru, and others who reproached those brahmans who were unable to see anything beyond the performance of the cult and academic discussions about brahman.

Furthermore, in order to share the experience of the Upanishads, it is no more necessary to know their original language, than it is to know Greek in order to share and pass on the Biblical experience of Christianity. The Christian knows by experience that it is practically impossible for him to acquire a Jewish mind and spirit; he would have to belong to the 'Chosen People' in order to respond personally to the literal meaning of those prayers for the coming of the Messiah and the liberation of Israel that are found in the Psalms and the Prophets. It would be even more difficult for him to acquire a brahmanical soul, that of a priest devoted to Vedic rites and living by Vedic mythology. The coming of Jesus was necessary to free the Biblical revelation from its particularism and to lay the foundation of 'catholicism'. But the foundations on which the Upanishads came into existence is incomparably more universal than that of the Bible, or even of the Gospel; for Jesus is a historical person, and without a relationship to his person which transcends time, no Christianity is possible. But the rishi of the Upanishads, like the Buddha, has no personality to assert, no history in which he must be situated. The Buddha's discovery is every man's discovery; the rishi's discovery is within the reach of anyone who is really willing to apply himself to the inner quest and find his freedom. The discovery of the deepest centre of being and of the self is a possibility for every human consciousness; and truly it is only in that, precisely in that, that man attains to himself, whatever his milieu may be.

The time is ripe for spreading far and wide the 'Upanishadic' experience of freedom, as it may be called (though the term should not be used to limit the experience to a specific dependence on the actual documents; it merely records the historic fact that it is first found in them. But in fact its spread as a means of liberation and joy for mankind will only be possible at the present juncture in human history, if it is interpreted by seers who are at home in two languages: the language of the Upanishads which they have learnt well enough for it to become their second nature—and the language of the seekers themselves, whatever it may be. The latter may be some modern Indian language, or that of young people in the West; it may be the language of Christians who question the traditional forms of their

religion, or it may equally well be the language of those who wish to deepen the faith they hold.

It will be useful at this point to try to indicate the paths by which modern man might be enabled to enter into his depth, the depth of being and the world, and so to rediscover that mystery which the name of God attempts to convey. It is clear that neither the rites nor the myths of the Vedas can be his starting-point. No more could it be those endless correlations between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, to which a superficial knowledge of science and technology have destroyed his sensitivity (in fact, the very feeling for mystery has been stolen from him, and this above all he needs to recover). Even the words *ātman-brahman* need not be employed, for when these terms do not come spontaneously to the mind of the one who uses them, they become mere abstract ideas, mental constructions, lacking any connection with his day-to-day experience. On the one hand, the Upanishads cannot simply be reduced to formulas in any language whatever, for they are above all a matter of experience, a shock-treatment, an interior lightning-flash, induced by a whole series of approaches which converge from every point of the mental horizon upon this central focus of overwhelming illumination. On the other hand, this experience needs to be absorbed and assimilated by a man's every faculty—one might say, through every pore—so that his being may be wholly transformed. Only long voyages of the mind, like those of which the Upanishads give frequent examples, allow the experience to pervade all the convolutions of his psyche, thus gaining the penetrating power which enables it to be communicated in any language whatever. One thinks of the long pilgrimages which trace out all the bends and loops of the river while following it to its source—only here it is a question of the consciousness itself rediscovering its own Source!

As essential point that has to be emphasized is that we are concerned, not with a logical conclusion but with an experience. Consequently words alone will always remain powerless to convey its secret. Only he who knows *thus, evamīd*, can lead another to 'know thus'. It is essentially a matter of an awakening, an awakening in one's own ultimate depth. It is the reply, springing up from the depths and not adopted at second hand, to the question, 'Who am I?' This was precisely the question that Ramaṇa Maharshi asked in order to awaken those who came to him. His teaching was expressed in an utterly unacademic way, without any particular spiritual or philosophical terminology. And the answer to this question can never be any formula

or any argument, for that would come from outside oneself. Only an existential, experienced response can make one glimpse the answer, or better, can cause it to spring up within; for the only one who knows a man is the man himself. Others can know him from outside—often indeed better than he knows himself—seeing, for example the traits of his character or his appearance; but his depth none can discover except the one who in that same depth says 'I'. In the last resort, is not this what the contemporary world's insistence on personal experience, truth, sincerity—its rejection of bla-bla—is all about?

That requires detachment from the outside world and a loosening of the terrible hold that outward things have upon a man (Br. Up., 3.2 *graha atigraha*). Here meditation and silence find their true meaning. Meditation helps towards concentration and the quietening of the mind and leads to that interior silence, without which nothing can be achieved. Yet meditation and silence should never be confused with the end itself, which is equally beyond both silence and non-silence. Here also must be mentioned the control of desire, of all desires, alike those of our uncontrolled thoughts and those which we deliberately foster.

Little by little the mind becomes quiet, *śanta*, the condition that is demanded of every aspirant in the Upanishads. Then only is he capable of receiving from the Scriptures and from the guru that message which is destined for him—the awakening in the depth of himself.

APPENDED NOTES

1. *Entry—departure*

The problem of the relation between the ātman—or the Puruṣa—and man's bodily and mental functions is tellingly illustrated in the myths about entry and departure. Once creation is complete, the creator, Prajāpati (Puruṣa, ātman, etc) seeks his place in this man who has just appeared. But all the functions are already filled, all the places are taken. "By what way can I enter?—in the end, what am I?" says the ātman in the Aitareya Up., 3.11. In 3.12 he enters through the opening in the skull (the fontanel), and as Br. Up., 1.4.7 explains, he fills the whole body to the finger-tips; for when the eye sees, it is the ātman, the unique puruṣa, that sees; when the mind thinks, it is the puruṣa, the ātman, that thinks (cp. Br. Up., 1.4.7; Br. Up., 3). The ātman is so deeply hidden in the functions that it is difficult to recognize him (*durvedam*). The whole theme of the Kena Up. is that the devas fail to recognize him and he only reveals himself to Indra in the act of disappearing; he is hidden, yet manifest (*āvih sarānihitam*, Mund Up., 2.2.1); he is *guhāhita*, *guhāśaya*, *guhācara*—he abides, rests and moves in secret. He had entered into the hidden place (*gūḍham anupraviṣṭaḥ*, Kaṭha Up., 1.29). Also cp. Kaṭha Up., 5).

To this theme of entry also corresponds that of birth. The *guhā* thus becomes the maternal womb. "Prajāpati moves about within the 'womb'" (*Prajāpatiścarati garbhe antaḥ*); he is born endlessly, he was born and will be born again, he is born and diffused (*bahudhā vijāyate*; see the *Uttaranārayaṇānuvāka*, given in Ma.Na.Up. after 1.11). He is the Unique one, the one who is eternally born and born in everything that is born. And paradoxically, he is *a-ja*, the not-born. At the level of manifestation he is born and dies; at the level of his inner mystery, he simply IS, and the discovery, the realization of this, is salvation, *mukti*.

Next, in contrast with the myth of 'entry', we meet the mystery of 'departure'. To discover oneself and realize oneself, one has to shake off this body, this *śarīram*. As the horse shakes his mane (Ch.Up., 8.13), so one has to rise above this body, to reach the supreme light (*paramjyotiḥ upasarpadya*)—and Being, the ātman, the puruṣa, is then revealed in his own proper form (*svena rūpeṇa*; Ch. Up. 8.3.4., 8.12.3).

2. *Annam*

One of the words most frequently used in the Upanishads is *annam*,

food, Everything comes from food, everything is maintained and grows through food and finally, everything also returns to food: "Worship food as Brahman" (*annam brahma upāsīta*). Food is so fundamental that the creation/production of food is often an integral part of the cosmogonies. In Br. Up., 1.2, the Creator is manifested as Hunger, which leads to the paradox that he appears as Death, *Mṛityu*, the Devourer of his creation. As Br. Up., 1.4.6. says, everything is either food or the eater of food (Agni, Soma). The act of taking food has sacrificial and cosmic significance. Thanks to the above correlations, the food which supports this body benefits the devas, who are at the same time in this body and in the universe. When the inner *prāṇa* is satisfied, the whole universe is satisfied, as the Chāndogya Up. says. Food is consumed by Agni, which is at once the Devourer and the Mouth (of the devas?). For the devas also have need of food. Man is at their service, as the animals are at the service of man (Br. Up. 1.4). The sun is another form of Agni Vaiśvānara, the Universal Fire, and shoots his rays successively in different directions, drawing to himself all the *prāṇas* of the universe (Pr. Up., 1), and it is on this nectar, like honey, that the devas feed (Ch. Up., 3.1-11). The symbol of food is thus extended very far beyond the purely physiological function in which it first took its rise. It stands for the fact that all things and all beings in the universe are all at the service of one another (see the *Madhuvidyā* of Br. Up., 2.5). An analogous idea is expressed by the term *graha-atigraha* (apprehender, over-apprehender; Br. Up., 3.2). (Compare also the *Vāyu-Pṛāṇa* the universal 'Snatcher' the first in the cosmic order, the second at the individual level.) Each thing avails itself of something else, one being is at the service of some other being. There must therefore be a universal Snatcher, the Wind, as Raikva teaches (Ch. Up., 4.3.1-2). In Br. Up., 3.7 Yājñavalkya teaches Uddālaka that the universal Thread is the Wind. Under another symbol it is the idea of the universe as a whirlpool, *saṁsāra*. One must reach the still centre of the wheel, as many texts say [Br. Up., 2.5.15?]. Above all, one must reach that centre of oneself where one is no more at the service of anyone or any thing whatever, because at that point there is no more duality. (Br. Up., 1.4.6 explains this.) He who has found himself at the same time in his deepest centre and in his most all-embracing universality finds that *Brahma aham asmi*; in becoming the All, he has realized that he is the Ātman of all. Consequently nothing any more has power over him, he no more depends even on the devas, for he is the very self of each deva (Br. Up., 1.4.10). Anyone who has not understood this projection of the symbol of *annam* will surely be baffled by the constant references to food in the Upanishads.

THE UPANISHADS AND THE ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE

I am supposed to give here some sort of introduction, or initiation, into advaitic or Upanishadic prayer. This is really a challenge, or rather, an impossible task, and this for two fundamental reasons.

First, truly speaking, there is no such thing as advaitic *prayer*. Advaita is the central teaching of the Upanishads, and no prayer remains possible for him who has realized the truth of the Upanishads. The equivalent of what is called in monotheistic religions the "experience of God" has here nothing to do with any notion of God whatsoever, for the duality which makes it possible for man to think of himself as standing in front of God has disappeared in the burning encounter with the Real, *sat*.

There is also another reason which makes anyone who is asked to speak on the Upanishads thoroughly uncomfortable. Upanishadic teaching is not a matter of formulations—*notions and propositions*—which could be transmitted, i.e. taught or received as such. Upanishadic formulations have no other function than to lead to an *experience*. This experience is not prayer, meditation or contemplation in the commonly accepted sense. It is a kind of consciousness, an awareness to which man finds himself raised beyond the reach of any of his faculties, hearing, seeing, feeling or even thinking:

There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind.
We know not, we understand not how anyone could teach it.
Other indeed it is than the known and moreover above the
unknown.

Thus we have heard from the ancients who have explained it
to us. (Kena Up., 1.3)

Imparting and receiving the Teaching

The Upanishadic teaching is a secret and no secret can be communicated just by words. Words are necessary of course, but their efficaciousness is contained less in themselves than in the "aura" which accompanies their transmission. Their function is rather one of preparation. They aim at attuning the mind of the pupil to the heart

of his teacher, at breaking the limiting categories in which his intellect is bound, at opening his heart to the inner light of which he is still unaware.

The Upanishadic teaching can be imparted only in the intimacy of the guru-disciple relationship—a relation which has already something of a non-dual, advaitic character.

For the sake of this knowledge,
let (the seeker) go, fuel in hand (i.e., as a disciple),
to a master well learned in the sacred lore (*śrotriyaḥ*)
and whose soul is established in Brahman (*brahmaniṣṭhaḥ*).
To the one who has approached him properly,
the mind at peace, the thoughts controlled,
the sage will teach in its very truth
that knowledge of Brahman,
whereby one knows the Imperishable,
the Puruṣa, the Truth. (Munḍ. Up., 1.2.12-13)

As this text points out, not everybody is qualified to impart this secret teaching. The guru is not a man who would simply be intellectually learned, though he is supposed to have a good knowledge of the sacred lore (*śrotriyaḥ*). He must above all be *brahmaniṣṭhaḥ*, he must himself have discovered in the secret of his own heart; that inner light, *ātmabuddhiprakāśam* "shining in the very centre of his being", which radiates inside and outside and makes all things resplendent with the splendour of the *ātman*, the Self.

The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars,
there lightnings shine not, much less this fire.
After him as he shines doth everything shine.
This whole world is illumined with his light.
(Munḍ. Up., 2.2.10)

No *dīkṣā* can give anybody the right to act as a guru, even less to be called a guru, for *brahmavidyā* cannot be transmitted by human means:

The *ātman* is not obtained by discourses,
nor by intellect nor by much learning (of the Scriptures).
He is obtained by him whom he himself chooses.
(Kāṭha Up., 2.23)

The exigencies of *brahmavidyā* are no less strict for the disciple

than they are for the master: as the saying goes, it is even more difficult to find a real chela than a real guru. To use modern imagery, the most powerful radio-station cannot be heard if there is not a proper radio-set exactly attuned to it. When the young Naciketas, the hero of the Kāṭha Upanishad, asks Yama, the Lord of death, what is the condition of man after death, Yama first tests his sincerity and eagerness by proposing to him all possible allurements on the worldly plane; and only when the boy shows that he really places that *vidyā* above all pleasures or even the longest life that one may imagine, does Yama agree to reveal to him the secret. In the Prasna Upanishad, it is the venerable Pippalāda who asks Bhāradwāja and others first to spend one year with him in *tapas*, *brahmacarya* and *śraddhā* (austerity, continence and faith) before putting to him any question. In the Chāndogya Upanishad, Prajāpati agrees to begin teaching Indra, though he is his own son and the king of the devas, only after thirty-two years of discipleship, and in the end Indra's noviciate extended to 101 years (Ch. Up., 8.7ff.).

All desires should have disappeared from the heart of the one who seeks *brahmavidyā* except the desire for liberation, *mumukṣutvam*, which is identical with the desire for sacred knowledge. All desires must go: desire for bookish knowledge, desires for possessions and pleasures of this world, even more, desire for so-called spiritual experiences, desire for possessing God and enjoying the sweetness of his love, here and in the hereafter. All this is transitory, even the *svarga* or paradise of the *devas*. The training imparted by the guru will aim mainly at liberating the disciple from "all the desires which lodge in one's heart" (Br. Up., 4.4.7), at "cutting the knots of the heart", *hṛdayagranthi* (Munḍ. Up., 2.2.8, etc.)

The time will then come when the disciple "wakes up". This does not mean that he will have by then understood and accepted intellectually the teachings of his master. No; he simply wakes up to what is beyond words, thoughts, names. When a man is asleep, another man may wake him up by calling him loudly or touching him. Yet it is not the noise or the touch which is the cause of the marvellous apperception of himself and the surrounding universe which is the characteristic of man's waking state. The state of wakefulness, of awareness, is a man's birth-right, it is ingrained in his own nature and nobody can give it to him. Simply, it is *that, etad vai tad* (Kāṭha Up., ch. 4, *passim*).

An Awakening

The experience to which the Upanishadic seers call man is really comparable to such an awakening, though it is something much beyond this.

It is in an awakening that this is known,
pratibodham viditam (Kena Up. 2.4).

It is like lightning which flashes forth,
which makes one blink—and say Ah... (Kena Up., 4.4)

Without any doubt the waking state is much superior to the state of dreaming (*svapna*) or to that of deep sleep (*suṣupti*). On these three states of man's consciousness the Upanishadic masters liked to make their disciples reflect (cf. e.g. Br. Up., 4.3-4; Māṇḍūkya Up.) Yet preeminent as it is, the waking state itself is far from being ideal and a unique source of pleasure, fullness and contentment for man (cp. the reflections of Indra, Ch. Up., 8.8-9). It is subject to bondage and limitations, it is subjected to *samsāra*, an intolerable condition for any aspirant to freedom and liberation in either Buddhist or Hindu traditions.

In my waking state my consciousness of being myself is bound by and limited to the actions of my mind and body, in connection with which I am aware of being, of being myself. My peace, my happiness are all conditioned by the 'events' of my life—what happens outside and is received by my senses, what happens inside as well, and on all that unconscious plane of my psyche revealed by modern psychology. On a bright day, I am happy; if I have a toothache, I suffer; if I receive good news, I am excited; bad news, I am dejected. Hence, the fear which underlies my whole life—*bhayam*, one of the key-words of the Upanishads, something like the *Angst* of existentialism—finally the fear of death and of the whole process of decaying (ageing, *jarā*) which leads to it—all culminating in the *sarvam duḥkham* of Buddhism.

In order to face and overcome this fear and the fundamental insecurity of his condition, man, in the course of his history, devised or rather discovered three principal ways.

There is first the religious way, with all its ramifications, from the crudest worship of the devas or of the spirits up to the spiritual heights of Christianity with its faith in the resurrection and eternal life.

The second is the philosophical one. The philosopher will consider as pure myth the consolations of religion and the expectation of

a hereafter where all will be compensated for and the just will be rewarded for ever. He will accept joy and suffering, all the events of life as mere 'ideas', and counteract them with other ideas. We can think of the Stoics, and of the existentialist approach. All is a matter of thought and will. Let us be the masters of our thoughts and our decisions, and we shall overcome destiny.

Finally, there is the sage, after (or beyond) the saint and the philosopher. He considers the consolations of philosophy to be as external as those of religion, not reaching to the heart of the matter. He has *realized*, and not only imagined or thought, that there is a level of being, of truth, of Self, in which he is beyond the *dvandvas* (or pairs of opposites) of *bhayam-abhayam* (security-insecurity), *mṛityu-amṛitam* (death-no death), etc... Three great traditions of the world stand by this intuition: the Upanishadic, the Buddhist and the Tao. Their formulations of the intuition may be at variance, since all formulations are conditioned by their linguistic and cultural environment, but basically they are the same.

Suffering, pain and joy, birth and death, getting old and the like, all belong to the phenomenal level. They are real of course, *satyam*, not mere imagination or illusion, but real at their own level. There is another level in man, the level of the Absolute, of the permanent, yet out of reach of mind and sense, which can be gained by no practice whatsoever, either ritualistic or ascetic, by no mental acuteness either. *That is*, simply—and this can only be realized, not reached or worked out.

Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight
can this be apprehended.

How can it be comprehended except by saying: *asti* (it is)?
(Kāṭha Up., 6.12)

This is really the fundamental nature of man, born with him (*sahaja*) as Ramaṇa Maharshi often repeated. To that truth, to that truest level of himself man can only wake up. It is like a flash of lightning as we have said already. Brahman has passed, and his passage has transformed the whole man, beginning with his innermost depths. Yet this awakening is unknown to the senses and the mind except through a taste, an undefinable taste, which pervades all, whose presence is felt indeed, but of which nothing can be said or thought.

From where words turn back together with the mind,
unable to attain to it.

He who knows that bliss of Brahman fears not anything at all.
(Taitt. Up., 2.9)

The Self itself has been discovered and then, suddenly, man has discovered himself in the world of brahman.

The Ātman is the bridge (*setu*) which keeps these worlds apart. Over that bridge there cross neither day nor night, nor old age, nor death nor sorrow, nor well-doing nor evil-doing... Upon crossing that bridge the night appears as the day, for this brahma-world is ever illuminated (Ch. Up., 8.4).

A few lines before this quotation the same Upanishad explains this liberation from the appendage of the body—which need not be identified with bodily death, though finally it will include it.

That serene one (that is oneself, once the transparency and the utter quietude of his essence has been recovered) rising up out of this body, reaches the highest light and appears with his own form. Such a one is the supreme Person. This is the Ātman, the immortal, the fearless one. This is Brahman. Verily the name of that Brahman is truth.

(Ch. Up., 8.3.4 and 8.12.3)

To most secularists, even more perhaps to not a few religious men of the Western tradition, this will appear as mere myth or imagination. Yet *that is, asti. Tad etad satyam*, as the rishi of the Muṇḍaka Upanishad affirms repeatedly (2.1.1), with the unshakeable conviction of one who knows and laughs at the scorn of those who know not and think they know, who, “abiding in the midst of ignorance, self-wise, thinking themselves learned—running hither and thither, go around deluded, like blind men led by one who himself is blind” (Kaṭha Up., 2.5); like the sailor who laughs at the scorn of the landlubber or of the shepherd of the high mountains who have decided that there is nothing like the ocean. Yet the sage cannot prove what he says, any more than the Christian can demonstrate the resurrection of Christ. Witnesses claim they have seen him: well that is a matter between them and him. As long as he has not *appeared to me*, their claims mean no more to me than the claims of the women did to the apostles. That does not mean of course that I should see him through my senses or my imagination. It is by my faith that he appears to me. Only when I say to him: “My Lord and my God”, his resurrection has become for me *satyam*, truth itself.

The same can be applied here. The initial call is the testimony of

the scriptures and the guru. But the day comes when the faith is direct, when faith has even reached its fullness in experience, *aparokṣa-dṛṣṭi, sakṣāt-karaṇa*. It reminds one of the words of the Samaritans to the woman who had first told them about Jesus: “We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him and we know that he is really the Saviour of the world” (Jn 4.42). The eyes of the soul are now wide open: they contemplate the great light, which has taken over the darkness.

I know him the great *Puruṣa* (that is finally myself in very truth)
of the colour of the Sun beyond darkness.
Only by knowing him does one pass over death;
there is no other path to reach the good (Svet. Up., 3.8).

The Quest for the Self

A psychological approach to that experience might well be attempted here, and this will have much in common with the practical teaching of Ramaṇa Maharshi. To any question of a seeker Śrī Ramaṇa used to retort: Who are you? “Bhagavān, I want to meditate, to practise yoga, to learn brahmavidyā, to take sannyāsa.” “Who are you, who are putting the question? Discovering this ‘who’, this *I* which puts the question, is the very answer to your question. Looking for the *I* which is at the root of your queries, is really contemplating, taking sannyāsa, practising yoga, knowing Brahman”—as he himself puts it in a beautiful Tamil sloka :

To be (to hide) in the place from whence all is surging,
this is karma, this is bhakti, this is yoga, this is jñāna.
(Upadeśa-sāram, 10)

The whole day long I am busy with myself, seeing, hearing, acting, doing, thinking... My *I* is always inevitably connected with something else, and this something else carries me constantly away from myself into the whirlpool of thoughts, feelings, actions.

The Self-existent (*svayambhū*) pierced outwards the openings
(of man: the senses).

Therefore one looks outwards not within himself.
Yet a sage longing for immortality
turned his gaze within and contemplated the Self.

(Kaṭha Up., 4.1)

This something else carries me unavoidably into the world of

becoming, of change, to the ideas of past, present, future. Yet I know well within myself that my I is not simply an epiphenomeon, a knot made of the plaits of the happenings which constantly whirl around, inside and outside me. The I which I pronounce today is identically the same as the I which I pronounced 10, 20, 60 years ago. As far as I try to go back into my memory, I find the same I, shining identical with itself, a sun always at its zenith, knowing neither setting or rising:

Henceforth after having risen in the zenith, it will no more rise nor set. It will stand alone in the middle... Verily it neither rises nor sets for him, it is evermore day for him who knows thus this upanishad of brahman. (Ch. Up., 3.11.1-3)

Of course I do not deny that this body of mine had a beginning and that the elements which compose it are bound to decay and disintegrate. But that does not concern my I, which is unbound, unlimited, which has nothing to do with the changes of the phenomenal world to which this body and therefore this mind belong.

Neither is the knower born nor does he die.
From nowhere (else) has he come, no one has he become.
Unborn, permanent, eternal, primeval,
he is not slain when the body is slain. (Kāṭha Up., 2.18)

In deep sleep I am not aware that I am, so at least it seems. However the I which shone when I woke up this morning was not different from the I which was shining in me when I went to sleep last night. I cannot but postulate the permanence of my I, and therefore, since 'I' is essentially awareness, of some awareness during my sleep. Yet that I of my sleep has not the apparent characteristics of the I of the waking state. It is an absolutely pure I. It is an I from which all things originate (nothing exists for me until I am conscious that I myself am) and grow, and into which all is resolved at the end:

He is the sovereign of all, he is the knower of all,
the immanent ruler of all. He is the source of all,
the beginning and the end of all beings. (Māṇḍ. Up., 6)

It is this I, the *svayambhūti* of man, too often apparently lost and merged in slumber, which has to be recognized and perceived with the clarity of vision of the waking state. That final stage of human consciousness is called by the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad the *caturtha* (*turiya sthāna*), the fourth state, beyond the three states of wakefulness, dreaming

and deep sleep, which all belong to the world of phenomena. That *turiya* state is free from all the limitations of those stages but it possesses in an eminent degree all their positive characteristics: that is, the simplicity and freedom from admixture characteristic of *susupti*, the sovereignty and freedom relating to time and places which is manifested in dreams, finally the full clarity of the waking state. This is the I, referred to already, pure awareness, consciousness unbound and unmixed with oneself, free from all changes and from the three divisions of time:

that imperceptible I, (lit.: that puruṣa of the measure of a thumb)
like a light without any smoke,
lord of what has been and of what will be;
he is today, he is tomorrow. (Kāṭha Up., 4.13)

Senses and mind stand puzzled, like the devas of the Kena Upanishad in the presence of Brahman, now that this awareness shines in the sky of the soul independently of them. As Yājñavalkya says to his wife Maitreyī, just before leaving his home for the great departure (Br. Up., 4.5.13ff):

"After the passing over, there is no longer consciousness"
(that is *saṃjñā*, concomitant knowledge of oneself).
—"Verily, dear Sir, you have put me to the extremes of bewilderment by speaking so," says Maitreyī.
—"Yet, Maitreyī, I say nothing bewildering at all. Imperishable truly is this Self, of indestructible quality it is. For where there is a duality, as it were, there one sees another, smells, tastes, hears, understands another. But where everything has become just one's own self, then whereby and whom would one see, taste, hear, think? Whereby would one understand him by means of whom one understands all this? That self is not this, not that, *neti neti...*"

As Sanatkumāra explains to Nārada in the Chāndogya Upanishad (7.23-25), "this self is established in its own greatness (*mahiman*) or rather in no greatness at all... It depends on nothing, it is established in nothing else than itself, because there is only He;" and, the teacher continues: "I am below, I am above, I am in front, I am behind, I am at the right, I am at the left. I am all this. Verily he who knows this is fully autonomous (*svaraṭ*), he has unlimited freedom in all the worlds."

It is this waking up to oneself which is really referred to in one

of the first chapters of the Bṛihadāraṇyaka Upanishad (1.4):

In the beginning all this was Ātman, the Self, in the form of a person (*puruṣa*). Looking around he saw nothing else than himself. He said first: I am, *aham asmi*. Thence arose the name I.

The seer sees only himself, or we may as well say, he sees himself as the whole. I am brahman—*aham brahmāsmi* (Br. Up., 1.4.10); *ayam ātmā brahma*—this self is brahman (Māṇḍ. Up., 2). That does not mean of course that the rishi identifies the individualizing elements of his body, or even his *manas* (mind), or his phenomenological consciousness, with the whole of being. But he realizes that there is in truth nothing more in the whole than this act of being, this flash of self-awareness, this mystery of absoluteness which shines in the deepest depth of himself.

Fullness there, fullness here, from fullness fullness comes,
fullness once come from fullness,
fullness for ever remains fullness.

Pūrṇam adaḥ.....

as was sung by the rishi of the Īśa Upanishad.

The unique role of the spiritual master is to awaken his pupil to "Aham asmi", I am. "Tat tvam asi", You are that. The Chāndogya Upanishad (Book 6) explains how Uddālaka Āruṇi led his son Śvetaketu step by step to the realization of the truth. He first declares to him the great teaching:

Sad eva saumya idam agra āsīd, ekam evādvītyam.

In the beginning, my child, all this verily was Sat, Being, was just Being only, one and without a second.

Then he gives him different parables to make him realize the final though imperceptible essence of all beings and concludes every parable with the words:

That which is the minutest imperceptible reality, it is that which all things have for *ātman* (innermost reality). That is the truth, that is the Self, that you yourself are (*tat tvam asi*).

Advaitic Experience and Christian Theology

Such is undoubtedly the highest experience of man, of which all

other so-called experiences are only a reflexion at the level of the mind and senses. It is towards this that the whole evolution of mankind is groping and growing. Already the whole universe is directed to man, to that apperception of "being oneself", of being conscious of being. Once this light has flashed in the cosmos, it directs the whole evolution of mankind towards an ever brighter awakening of man to this Light (cp. the powerful intuitions of Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin). After thousands of centuries man reached the point where he became aware of his own awareness, he discovered that he was thinking. This was the dawn of reflexive thought or of the philosophical era which came about at the same time in those three great areas of civilization which were to lead the cultural and religious destiny of mankind: China, India and the East Mediterranean countries. Yet even before Parmenides was fascinated by the mystery of Being, before Plato and Aristotle launched the Western world into the contemplation—and the primacy—of "essences" (*eidōs*, later on *logos*), the rishis of India were already awakened to that simple "awareness", to the consciousness of self—of the unique Self—beyond all worlds, all thoughts, even reflexive thought; the consciousness of the *Sat*, unique and without a second.

One of the most important facts of our time is certainly the encounter and confrontation between the cultural and religious world of the West, moulded by hellenistic thought and the biblical prophetic experience of God, and the Eastern world whose cultures and religions have been deeply influenced by the fundamental intuition and experience of their sages. It is also a sign of the times that so many youths, disappointed by what is offered to them in the West to appease their spiritual hunger, flock here to discover the secrets of the East.

But here a Christian audience cannot fail to ask what is the relevance of such experience to the biblical experience of the living God as received by the Prophets, and even more to the biblical history of man's salvation, culminating in Christ's death and resurrection.

I cannot embark here on theology. The question is too important and too fundamental to be treated in a few words. Really the challenge which is now offered to Christianity in the East is one which touches it at its roots and goes far beyond any challenge given to it by the Greek concept of reason, including humanism itself, since it questions the value of absolutely all its mental and social expressions, the whole sphere of the *nāmarūpa*, in the name precisely of the higher spiritual experience.

Yet if Christianity is to maintain its claim to universality it has to accept the challenge and integrate this experience (I do not say the Indian or Buddhist formulations of it), lest it be reduced to a particular religious sect which would be remembered in history as having usefully catered for twenty centuries to the religious needs of one area of the civilized world.

The confrontation, or rather the mutual discovery of their spiritual riches by the votaries respectively of the Bible and the Upanishads, should take place on the level and in the light of the highest experience itself, and not simply at the level of theological theses (including dogmas), not even at the level of Scripture, because even the Scriptures are conditioned in their formulations by the mythico-conceptual world in which the seers themselves lived. This shows by the way that the coming of an authentic Indo-Christian theology, so much spoken of just now, has much less to do with scholarly discussions and theological summits than with the humble efforts in the silence of their ashrams by groups of contemplatives, who, well versed in non-Christian and Hindu Scriptures—*śrotriya*, as the Muṇḍaka Upanishad says—will be also *brahmaniṣṭha*. This means that they will surrender to being carried away to the depths of the experience of the Self—in Christian terms, finally of the Spirit—to the secrets of the cave of the heart, *hrīdguhāyām*, wherein Christ himself realized his *advaita* with the Father.

This Upanishadic experience indeed, though it avoids the notion and the name of God, draws man nearer to the divine mystery than any experience of God which depends on names, forms, notions, images and symbols. We may remember here the teaching of John of the Cross and the drastic purification of all mental symbols which he calls the dark night of the soul. The real experience of God depends on nothing at all. It is established in its own greatness, as was said in the passage of the Chāndogya Upanishad already quoted. There is no longer any intermediary, such as an idea, or some human notion, image or abstraction. The absoluteness of the ultimate mystery is discovered in the absoluteness of the self itself, of oneself seen in its full truth. The Self is then seen in the self. In the light of pure consciousness, Being shines with its own light. Then the eternity, the aseity, the absoluteness, the sovereignty of God are no longer notions which man tries desperately to understand by way of analogy or negations. They are realized in their own truth in the discovery that oneself *is*, beyond all conditioning. Then God is no longer a HE about

whom men dare to speak among themselves, nor even only a THOU whose presence man realizes as facing him. Rather, necessarily starting from oneself, God is here discovered and experienced as I, the “*aham asmi*” of the Upanishads, the “*ehieh asher ehieh*” of the Burning Bush. It is not an I which I abstract or conclude from the Thou that I say to him, but an I of which I am aware in the very depth of my own I. There are so many places in John’s Gospel in which Jesus stresses that I AM, *ego eimi*. “If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins” (Jn 8.24). How am I to know that “I AM” of Jesus, directly, immediately, not in any reflexive manner, but in his very own experience, *sākṣāt*, except in my own experience that I am, an experience so pure, so free from any interference from outside or inside events, a light without smoke (Kaṭha Up.), that it is a pure transparency of the mystery of Being in itself, *sat, ātman, brahman*?

The Prayer of Silence

Now if something has passed in this long discourse by the way of words, yet beyond words, if you have *heard* in the words of the Upanishads some echo of what the Spirit has certainly whispered in your heart when you sat in contemplation of the mystery of the Father and the Son, then you will discover by yourselves the secret of what is called the advaitic or Upanishadic prayer. It can be summed up in one Hebrew phrase of Psalm 65, which Jerome translates: *silentium tibi laus*. For you silence is praise. Silence in prayer, silence in thanksgiving, prayer and adoration, silence in meditation, silence inside and outside as the most essential preparation for this stillness of the soul in which alone the Spirit can work at his pleasure. In the old tradition of Vedic *yajña* four priests had to sit around the *vedī* or altar. One of them, the *adhvaryu*, had the function of performing the rite and meanwhile of repeating the mantras of the Yajurveda. The *udgātṛi* was in charge of chanting the hymns of the Sāmaveda. The *hotṛi* invoked the *devas* and recited the *sūktas* of the Rīgveda. But the fourth one, the *brahmaṇa* priest par excellence, was to remain silent, whispering as it were without any interruption an almost inarticulate OM. Yet it was that silent OM which was considered as the thread uniting all the different parts of the *yajña* and giving to the whole its definitive value.

In the universal canticle which is incessantly ascending towards God from all the quarters of heaven and earth, there is a place, and surely a preeminent one, for the praise of the silent OM, and the Church cannot afford to be without her silent monks and chiefly

hermits, who beyond all rites and all words, whisper in her name and in the name of the whole of mankind and all creation that same silent OM. All petitions are comprised in this silent prayer, for such silence reaches at it were the very origin from which all things proceed from the Father in his eternal Son. All adoration, all thanksgiving, all prayers are comprised as well in this silence, for this silence is one with the silence of the Father from which sounds forth eternally the unique glory which the Son, the Word, is to the Father.

Such silence however is not a self-imposed silence, but a silence, we can say, which is imposed by the Self, the Spirit. One can never forget that the Spirit leads man freely and that no one can ever know or ask the Spirit from whence he comes and where he goes. He can equally make even the *muni* burst eventually into canticles of joy, even dance like David in front of the ark.

Anyhow, the main thrust of spiritual discipline and ascetic life should be to prepare man for the stillness of his faculties where he can be at the full disposal of the Spirit. Such a silence is certainly inconsistent with a life of agitation inward or outward. Yet this stillness is at such a transcendent level in man's spirit that it is not at all incompatible with the normal working of mind and body in the individual and social spheres. To reach such quiet, intensive practice of the meditation of silence is extremely useful for most people. This meditation however has nothing to do with the consideration of diverse aspects of the divine mystery either through imagination or through abstract reflexion. It consists in fixing the mind as it were on this point of our awareness, of our self, which is beyond the constant passing of time and the succession of surrounding happenings.

The practice of simple yoga is helpful: so is also the use of *namā-japa*... Yet all these are only aids—temporary aids. Mantras and japa slowly become simplified and even disappear by themselves. OM alone remains, *OM tat sat*, and the OM which is uttered merges finally into the OM which is pure silence.

That is all.

The Christian will say: it is the eternal awakening of the Son to the Father in the advaita of the Spirit

APPENDIX - TWO POEMS

THE FURTHER SHORE —1*

“*They found him on the further shore*” (John 6:25)

“Ascending to the Source of the river,” “Passing over to the Further Shore”—all imagery handed down from earlier generations to lead man by the path of symbols towards the most inward realities:

the return to his origins, his attaining to fulfilment.

Life is all an ascent, all a passing over, a Passover.

Only enough time to set foot to the ground. Always setting off again. Beyond.

Man lives by going beyond himself, he finds himself in losing himself.

That is why, in the Hindu myth, Shiva is the great Liberator, precisely because he is the great Destroyer, the one who dances in the cremation grounds and wears round his neck a necklace of skulls, a symbol of the Death which cuts off everything—

Shiva, ‘the gracious One’ whom the Upanishads contemplate, Shiva who is Love, *Anbe Shiva*, in the songs of Tirumular the Tamil saint.

It is he who strips away everything, who allows no one to rest anywhere in that which is not, who ceaselessly compels that which is merely in merely in process of *becoming* to pass beyond.

He is Time, who bears off man and the universe in an inexorable dance, who mows down the passing moment so that its successor may come to birth.

It is he who prevents Life from ever standing still, and man from clinging to the fleeting moment.

It is he who breaks every attachment and cuts every bond, all those bonds which hold man to this—the Nearer—Shore, where he claims to be so happy.

Shiva is he who sets man free from the passing moment by bringing him into the eternal Present.

*Composed in 1955 (?)

For the truth is that Being is always present. The origins do not belong to a past that has been left behind, but are here and now. And the Further Shore is already possessed.

That voice has already sounded which calls the dead to live (John 5:25), and the hour has indeed come for man to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Man struggles hard to discover God and himself. Too often, alas, he fails to find either God or himself.

He looks for God in some small corner of space. But God fills the whole of space and transcends all space.

He looks for God at some point of time, in a past which once was, in a future which is still to come. But God is outside all time. And eternity is present in each moment of time.

"The smallest abyss".* We must leap just the right distance, or else we shall miss our aim and find ourselves further off than ever, on a 'further shore' which is not the true one.

God is too close to us. That is why we constantly fail to find him.

We turn God into an object—and God escapes our grasp.

We turn him into an idea—but ideas pass him by.

So Mary Magdalene was too much taken up with her thoughts about Jesus to be able to recognize him in the gardener at Calvary.

And Cleopas also was too caught up in his memories of Jesus to realize that it was he who was walking beside him on the way to Emmaus, until finally Jesus made himself known.

But, as he said to Thomas, blessed are those who recognize him at first sight!

Whoever has recognized him in his own self, has recognized him in all.

Whoever has recognized him in the Church, has recognized him in all that prepares the way for the Church.

For the pure all things are pure. And all things irresistibly recall the Spirit to one who has once been gently touched by the Spirit.

He should be course be aware of the different degrees of radiance which come from the transfigured Lord.

*The title of a book by J. Sullivan, in which is described his visit to Abhishiktananda at Shantivanam in December 1962.

He knows that the perfect Light only shone upon the earth when He took flesh in whom at the beginning the Father said, *Fiat Lux*, Let there be Light!

And he also knows that the Spirit was only given to mankind in his fullness as the fruit of the Lord's resurrection.

However, seeing him everywhere in his signs, he cannot fail to recognize and adore him who is signified.

His faith makes up for the inadequacy of the signs. Or rather, it is in his faith itself that the signs acquire their truth.

Whoever gazes at the midday sun, can thereafter see nothing anywhere except the sun's blazing light. Furthermore, all the colours are but the reflection of the sun. Even blackness, the denial of light, is a sign of the sun, for without the sun and its light it could not even exist and none would be able to see it.

Everywhere the Lord extends his presence: "From east to west he takes his course". (cp. Ps. 19:6)

Everywhere He is, and only He. And yet, being in all things, he is distinct from all.

But the recognition that the Lord and his Spirit are everywhere present does not make any less urgent the task of announcing his Resurrection and of declaring everywhere the message that

"we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth!" (John 1:14)

Christ is the End of the Universe. If we are required to work together with all our intelligence and physical strength for the progress of the world and the bodily and mental development of our fellowmen, we no less have the duty to take part, again with our whole strength and all the grace that we have received, in the fulfilment in Christ of this world and in the ever more glorious advent of Christ in the heart and soul of every man.

No one has received anything except to share it with his brothers.

Even the Church does not 'possess' the Eucharist. She is at the service of the Eucharist. She only offers it so that, through the Eucharist, the world may pass from the sign that it is to the reality which it is called to be.

And the faithful only communicate as ministers to creation.

The Christian has therefore the duty to impart to his brother the Glory which he has received as a gift. In him this Glory is filled with

the promise of its manifestation. It only shines in him to the extent that it radiates around him.

But for the Christian to be able to share his message with his brother—here his Hindu brother—and to impart to him this Glory, he must seek out and meet this brother at the place where he now is, there where the Spirit has brought him and in him is waiting for the Christian

at the heart of the cave of Arunachala,
on the Further Shore of the self,
at the Source!

Only there he will be able to make known to his brother that at the very heart of Arunachala's cave is the Heart of Christ, and that the Source is the Bosom of the Father, the Further Shore, where Jesus awaits him!

* * *

Such is the bridge that leads to non-death...
Blessings on you who cross to the further shore
beyond the darkness! (Muṇḍaka Up., 2.2.5-6)
to the most distant shore of the Beyond! (Kaṭha Up., 3.1)

Thus the blessed Sanatkumāra showed him
the further shore of darkness.
People call him Skanda, the one who leaps...
(Chāndogya Up., 7.26.2)

The upholder of all, of form unthinkable,
sun-coloured,
dwelling beyond the darkness. (Bhagavad-Gīta, 8.9)

Having taken the OM as a raft
to cross the space of your heart
and reach the further shore—
the most inward space which gradually becomes radiant—,
you will enter the palace of Brahman. (Maitri Up., 6.28)

THE FURTHER SHORE—2*

Every work that man performs is done so that he may cross to the further shore,

whether he knows it, or whether instead he gives it no thought.
He comes to it in his dreams, he comes to it in the world of myths and symbols,
in the world of signs, those bearers of reality.
Thus the Hebrews passed over the Red Sea and the wilderness—which was also a sea—and the Jordan,
which latter Moses himself was unable to cross...

Man passes to the further shore of his heart in the great sacrament of the Universe and of Humanity.

Everyone that he meets and every being that he touches, acts as his Ferryman;

and all that he experiences in the events of the world, in the history of mankind and in his personal history, whether outwardly or within his own mind,

all this carries him across to the further shore of the self, to depths of the self which cannot be reached by his own awareness.

For "He is"—other than himself,
other than all that he perceives of himself,
other than all that he thinks of himself,
other than all that he can seize of himself—
and this realization torments him,
from the moment when, like a flash of lightning, it has lit up the depths of his being,
and like a thunderbolt has opened them up by shattering them.

So it is 'depth', and it is 'breadth' and it is 'height'—
what do the words matter in which the scholars try to encompass the secrets of what lies Within?

for none will understand them, unless first he has recognized himself in them,

*First drafted on 28 November 1956 during a retreat of thirty-two days at Kumbakonam.

and has one day himself experienced within himself the agony which makes him blessed...

For "He is"—other than himself; and yet, if he is, this must be so in his own greatest depth.

The descent into the abyss, where nothing is any more seen, not even himself!

Then rising up from the abyss to the Light, and once more finding 'himself'—the 'Passover'!

"Awakened", I find myself again in Thee,
resurrexi .et adhuc tecum sum.

And men amuse themselves, excite themselves,
and men make war, make love, make money,
and the learned discuss, and the scribes make rules...
I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity,
said the Preacher.

The descent into hell and the rising again on the morning of Easter—

for it is necessary to descend to the depths of the abyss in order to awaken on the Further Shore,

that other side to which in fact there is no 'other',

That 'Other' which is in my own depths and to which there is no 'other',
that is, Being, the Self.

* * *

But the Further Shore—man must come to it all alone,
naked as a stone is naked,
naked as glass is naked,
naked as the self is naked.

He began his work with the sacrament of the Universe,
continued it with the sacrament of humanity,
and completed it with the sacrament of the Church.

And in the power of this last sacrament, man plunged into the abyss.

Through his Faith.

But there he abandoned everything—

all that clothed him, all that adorned him,
all that hid him from himself,
either by enhancing or by cloaking him.

All was snatched away from him—

his body itself by death,

even the joy of feeling himself beloved of God—

Deus meus, ut quid me dereliquisti?

Father, why have you forsaken me?

Abandoned by men, and abandoned by God,

alone with himself,

alone infinitely alone....

There he discovered the aloneness of the Alone,
and the aloneness of Being,
and the joy of BEING, the peace of Being, the freedom of Being.

He awoke; there was no longer an abyss, nor a river, nor any river-bank,

Arunachala had disappeared,

"He was"

.....
And so he reached the Further Shore.

.....
In this depth of the self,
where one is,
before any foundation was dug,
or anything was built there
by human hand or brain,
and deeper than any shaft that man has dug,
prior to and deeper than the emergence of any desire,
prior to and deeper than the emergence of any symbol,
be it image or idea;
alone with the self, at the source of its being,
alone with the Absolute,
alone in the aloneness of the Alone,
in the *kevala*, the solitude that has no name,
there where the spirit issues from the hands of its Creator,
and outside Him, yet still in Him, awakes to the being
which Alone He IS.

GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT TERMS

- a-bhayam*—absence of fear
ācamana—sipping water from the hand
a-dharma—unrighteousness, irreligion
adhyāsa—superimposition
ādi-puruṣa—the primordial Man
a-dvaita—non-duality
agneyi—a ceremony of bidding farewell to the ritual fire
agni—fire
agni-hotra—sacrifice to (or by) fire
aham asmi; aham brahma asmi—I am; I am brahman
ahamkāra—the conception of oneself as an individual; self-conceit
a-ja, a-jāta—unborn
a-jñānī—one who lacks *jñāna*
a-kāma—without desire
ākāśa—space, the most subtle of the five elements
a-kṛta—not made, uncreated
a-liṅga—without sign
a-mṛita—immortal
a-nāma—without name
ānanda—bliss
a-niketana—without dwelling-place
a-nimitta—without purpose
a-niyama—without regulation, rule
annam—food (see Note 112-3)
antevāsin—living in the house (and in the heart) of the guru
anubhava—experience
āpta-kāma—all desire fulfilled
āraṇya—the forest
a-rūpa—without form
āsana—seat, posture (yogic)
a-saṅga—free from ties, attachment
a-sat—unreal

- āśrama*—(1) abode of ascetics (see Note 57); (2) stage of life (see p. 17)
aṣṭaśrāddha—the final eightfold offering to devas, rishis, ancestors, and lastly to oneself as departed (Na.Pa.Up., 4.38)
ati-—beyond; e.g. *ati-dharma*, beyond dharma
ātman—the 'self', man's innermost principle; the supreme Self (see p. 102-3)
atyāśrama—beyond every stage of life
avadhūta—one who renounces everything, including even the classical tokens of sannyāsa
a-vidyā—ignorance
a-vyakta—not manifested
bhakta; bhakti—devoted worshipper; heartfelt devotion
bhikṣa—alms
bhikṣācārya—living on alms
bhūman—fullness
bhūtāni—the elements; beings
brahmacāri—a celibate student; one in the first *āśrama*
brahmaloka—the world or heaven of Brahman
brahman—the supreme principle of all; the Absolute (see p. 89ff)
brah naniṣṭha—established in Brahman
brahmavādī—one who talks about Brahman; a theologian
brahmavidyā—the knowledge of Brahman; *brahmavid*—one who knows Brahman
buddha—awakened
buddhi—intellect in its highest form (see p. 96-7)
caturtha—the 'fourth' state of consciousness
daṇḍa—a wooden staff
darśana—sight, vision, entering the presence of God, of a saint, of an image, etc.
deva—(plur) the Vedic gods; personified divine powers at work in the cosmos and in man; manifestations of the Divine in itself (brahman), but never to be confused with it (see p. 88-9 and Note 97).
devatā—divinity
dhāraṇā—concentration of attention
dharma—norm of religious and social life, expressive of the cosmic order; duty to conform to such norms; a particular religion, as comprising rites, laws, institutions and doctrines.

- dharmātīta*—beyond all dharma
dhyāna—meditation leading to complete inner silence
digambara—‘clothed in space’, i.e. naked
dīkṣā—ceremony of initiation
dvandva—pair of opposites, like cold/heat, pleasure/pain, etc.
dvija—twice-born; a member of one of the three higher castes in Hindu society.
ekāgratā—one-pointedness
ekam eva advitīyam—One-only-without-a-second
evamvid, evamvidvān—one who knows ‘thus’
gāyatrī—a famous mantra from the Rig-Veda, whose use is obligatory for Brahmans
grihastha—a householder, married man; the second *āśrama*
guhā—cave; the secret place of the heart
guṇa—(lit.) strand; the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, goodness; *rajas*, passion; *tamas*, darkness) are the three modes or qualities of *prakṛiti* (the primary substance), whose varied combination produces the diversity of beings.
haṁsa—swan; a symbol of the *ātman* and of the liberated one, whom nothing can bind and who is free to go anywhere (cp. the *keśī*)
homa—ritual sacrifice
jīvanmukta—one who has found liberation during his lifetime
jīvanmukti—the state of a *jīvanmukta*
jñāna—wisdom, knowledge
jñānī—a sage, one who has awoken to reality, realized the Self
 jyoti—light
kaivalyam—the state of absolute aloneness, unicity of the liberated one
kāmacāra—free to go anywhere, unrestrained
kamaṇḍalu—a gourd
karaṇa—cause; instrument; agency
karma—action; work; the result of acts done in a previous life
kaupīnam—ascetic’s loin cloth
kavi—saffron colour, worn by ascetics
keśī—‘hairy one’; an ascetic, complete a cosmic
kīrtana—devotional song
kośa—‘sheath’; one of a series of ‘bodies’ held to envelop the *ātman* (see p. 96, 102)

- krama-sannyāsi*—one who takes *sannyāsa* as the final stage of life, as a means to attain *mokṣa* (see p. 22)
kṛta—something done or made
kṛitakṛitya—one who has performed all that he had to perform
kutīcaka—a type of ascetic
kutīra—a hut
līlā—sport, play; the Lord’s play in and through creation
loka—place
madhu—honey
mahāprasthāna—the great departure
mahātmā—one who is a ‘great soul’
mahāvākya—the great sentences, or mantras, which sum up the teaching of the Upanishads (see p. 60).
manas—the mental faculty (see p. 96); *manasā*—with the mind
mantra—formula of prayer
maṭha—monastery
mauna—silence
māyā—the undefinable condition of the world of manifestation, which cannot properly be described either as being (*sat*) or not-being (*asat*); hence, the power of illusion which keeps men in *saṁsāra*
mokṣa—final liberation from *saṁsāra*; salvation
mṛityu—death (see p. 105)
muni—one who keeps silence; an ascetic
mūrti—image, icon; a particular form of the unique and transcendent divine mystery
nāmajapa—repetition of the divine name
nāmarūpa—‘name and form’; this includes the world of phenomena and all the various signs used by men to express the unique mystery that is beyond all. To render by ‘individuality’ is inadequate.
namaskāra—saying ‘*namah*’, i.e., salutation, homage
neti (na-iti)—‘(saying) No;’ i.e., ‘not that’
nīhitam guhāyām—hidden in the cave (of the heart)
nirvikalpa samādhi—*samādhi* with complete suspension of all perception and thought
para—beyond
parama-ātman—the Supreme Self
paramahansa—one of the most extreme forms of *sannyāsa*

- paramjyoti*—the supreme light
parivrajya—the life of a wandering mendicant
piṇḍa—rice-balls offered to the departed
pitṛi—departed ancestors
prajāpati—the Lord of beings
prajāpatya—a sacrifice in which a man's entire property is given away before taking *sannyāsa*
prajāñā, prajāñāna—intelligence (see p. 94-7)
prāṇa—breath, breath of life (see p. 91-3)
praṇava—OM
pratiṣṭhā—support, prop
prasāda—portion of an offering given back to the worshipper; grace
pratyāhāra—withdrawal of attention from objects (phase of yoga)
prayāga—sacred place of the confluence of rivers, as at Allahabad
pretya—departed (from this world)
pūja—ritual worship given to a *mūrti* (image) accompanied by lustration, offerings and the recitation of sacred mantras
pūrṇam—fullness
puṛuṣa—the archetypal man, one of the expressions of the unique and indivisible mystery of the *ātman-brahman* (see p. 85ff)
ṛiṣi—Vedic seer (rishi)
sadguru—the true Guru
sādhana—spiritual exercises
sādhu—good, virtuous; a monk
sahaja—natural; for *sahaja samādhi* see p. 11
śakti—force, power, energy; the active power of the Divinity manifested throughout the created universe
samādhi—the final ecstasy, or rather 'enstasy,' on the spiritual path; contemplation; hence, death
samaṣṭih—totality
sampratti—ceremony of handing over the possessions at death or on taking *sannyāsa*
samsāra—the world, seen as carrying all things along in its ceaseless flux; passage through successive births and deaths
samiskāra—'sacramental' rites which mark the successive stages in the life of the *dvija* (twice-born) Hindu
sanātana dharma—the traditional name of the religion which springs from the Vedas, the 'eternal' religion or law. The modern term 'Hinduism' was coined by foreigners.

- sandhya*—the 'conjunctions' of day and night at sunset and sunrise, times which are regarded as specially appropriate for prayer
sannyāsa—life of total renunciation; *sannyāsi*—one who has renounced everything
sānti—peace
śarīram—the 'body', including all physical and mental faculties
sarva(m)—all; the All
sarvaloka—belonging to every place
śāstra—Scripture
sat—being; real; true; the Real
satsaṅga—association with, meeting with, the good
sevā—service
skambha—a tree-trunk which symbolizes the axis of the world
soma—the juice of the soma plant; nectar
śraddhā—faith (see p. 67-9)
śrāddha—ritual sacrifice, especially to the ancestors
śruti—hearing; what is heard, especially the revealed Scriptures
sukṛita—that which is well made or done
śūnya—the void
sūtra—thread; link
susupti—the state of dreamless sleep
svarga—the localized heaven of the devas
svārtha—self-interest
tapas—austerity (literally, heat)
tāraka—the 'ferryman,' symbol of a spiritual guide
tarāṇa—the 'raft' for crossing to the 'other shore'
tattva—element (e.g., in Sāṅkhya philosophy)
tat tvam asi—'That art thou', one of the mahāvākyas
tejas—brightness, glory; *tejomaya*—composed of glory
turīya—the 'fourth' state of consciousness, beyond *susupti*
turīyātīta—beyond the fourth *āśrama* (stage of life) (see p. 35)
udgītha—the chant of the Sāma-Veda
upanāyana—the *samiskāra* in which the *dvija* receives the sacred cord
upaniṣad—'sitting at the feet of a guru'; secret lore; correlation (see p. 83f)
upāsana—regarding with respect, reverence (see p. 93-4)
vairāgya—total indifference to all worldly objects; renunciation
vamśa—genealogy

- vana*—the forest
vanaprastha—dwelling in the forest; the third *āśrama*
vāyu—the wind (see p. 91f)
vedānta—‘the end of the Vedas;’ the teaching of the Upanishads; one of the darśanas which systematizes that teaching
vidhriti—barrier, boundary
vidvān—one who knows
vidvat-sannyāsi—one who takes sannyāsa as the expression of the fact that he has already realized the Self (contrast the *krama-sannyāsi*)
vidyā—knowledge
viññāna—understanding, intelligence (see p. 94f)
viśvam—the universe
viveka—discrimination (between what is real and what is unreal, etc)
vividiṣā-, *vivitsu-sannyāsi*—one who takes sannyāsa as a means to mokṣa
vyastih—individuality
yajña—ritual sacrifice (to the devas)
yama—death
yati—one who has restrained the passions; an ascetic

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