

# *The Eternal Message of the Gita*

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## 6. A Dialectics of Existence

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### 1. Introduction

*The unreal has no existence;  
the Real never ceases to exist.  
This truth is known from those  
who perceive the essence of things. (Gita: 2.16)*

Shankara who attaches great importance to this verse of the *Gita*, devotes a commentary to it, the translation of which we shall give later on. In this introduction we propose to study the notion of *titiksha* (physical and mental endurance) within the context of the dialectics of Vedanta, and we shall see how this presents us with a new perspective—that of Existence.

Shankara provides a metaphysical basis for *titiksha*, the

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  - 2 This is the 6<sup>th</sup> of a series of independent commentaries by the Swami on various themes of the Gita-teachings published in French from Gretz in their *Bulletin des Activités Culturelles* No.7, March 1956). English translation and edit by André van den Brink.

meaning of which is given in two verses earlier (2.14): 'O son of Kunti, contact with matter which produces heat and cold, pleasure and pain, is impermanent. Endure them bravely, O Bharata!' If *titiksha* consisted simply in remaining indifferent to pleasure or pain, heat or cold, etc., it would only be a heroic attitude, the expression of mental control enabling one to keep one's calm, whether the external events be favourable or unfavourable. *Titiksha*, however, is more profound than such stoicism. It is a mental attitude that is the result of our *understanding* of life. In this perspective, man is no longer considered independent of what surrounds him: There is only *ONE* whole, one unique manifestation. Here the awakening of the understanding is seen to play a fundamental role, for man ceases to think of himself as separated from the rest of the world. He is no longer concerned to dominate nature, but wants to understand it and, at the same time, to understand himself as being but a minute part of it.

The conquest of nature, whether accomplished by ethics or by scientific techniques, implies a human being separated from nature. Man is convinced that he is superior to nature. Although subject to its laws, he thinks he is capable of modifying and controlling them. In this combat, in this opposition between man and the external world, between the 'I' and the 'non-I'—with all the prejudices it involves in favour of the 'I'—lies the primordial error which will be eliminated only through an awakening of the intelligence (*buddhi*). *Intelligence* is showing man that he is *part* of the universe.

This 'non-duality' of Vedanta is not a notion opposed to that of 'duality': We don't have to level down a 'duality' in order to have it transformed into 'non-duality'. In Vedanta 'non-duality' (*advaita*) corresponds to 'Existence' without which nothing would ever *be*.

In this context we should also note that, from an intellectual point of view, the very achievable fact of realization remains but a probability. Hubert Benoit is right when he speaks of the 'probable' *satori* (realization) of the Buddha, of the 'probable' *satori* of Ramana Maharshi. We *believe* in the realization of the 'man of *satori*' because of the *emotional* projections that we apply to him. When we declare that 'he is a sage', we are expressing our emotion, our personal faith, and not a truth of a universal order. Surely, our intellectual intuition may give us the certitude of the Real, but to speak of the realization of the Buddha or the Maharshi is to express an emotional value that is particular to us.

A contradiction may be observed between the incertitude in which we find ourselves, of recognizing the realization of such a man reputed to be 'a sage', and the certitude which the *Gita* gives us, i.e. the sage *can* be recognized by his conduct. As a matter of fact, from the metaphysical point of view there can be no 'conduct of wisdom', for *wisdom* is *not a state* (cf *Mandukya Karika*, 2.32). The *Gita*, however, puts itself in the *human* point of view where, in our eyes, the reflection of a superior understanding appears under the characteristics described in its second chapter.

*Titiksha* is the conduct which an intuitive understanding of Existence yields. The man of perfect equilibrium acts naturally and his morality is a natural morality. When the *Gita* describes the sage (2.55-72) it is not proposing an imitation, but is showing us that the spontaneous character of the sage's actions proceeds from his knowledge of the nature of things. Sri Krishna declares: 'I have told you what supreme wisdom is. Meditate deeply on this teaching, then act as it pleases you' (18.63). For, our ideal of a perfect man should be based on intelligence.

Because our intelligence has not been awakened we project our sense of immortality, our innate predilection for stability on the external world and when a change takes place in this world, we are greatly shocked by it. If, on the other hand, man is able to understand the nature of his suffering and anguish, his spirit will cease to attach itself to the ephemeral realities and he will turn himself towards the Reality that has neither beginning nor end.

This understanding enables him to interpret a present suffering correctly by withdrawing all imagination. Based on an intuition of the *intemporal* Reality, it is reflected in the mental structure, expressing itself as *discipline: the discipline of living the present moment*. Such is true *acceptance—titiksha*.

'The Reality cannot be described, neither as existing (*sat*) nor as non-existing (*asat*),' Shankara writes in his commentary on verse 13.12. Reality is Reality, and the fact that It cannot be described is called *anirvachaniya* (inexplicability). As the knowledge of the Real is not of the order of dialectics, there is no need to teach such knowledge directly: 'What is needed is the simple elimination of the *unreal* ('name' and 'form') associated with the Real. It would be superfluous to demonstrate what the consciousness of the Real consists of, because in each object of perception it is *invariably present*. We simply have to discard what, through error, we attribute to Brahman. No effort is necessary to *acquire* the knowledge of Brahman: It is *self-evident*' (Commentary on verse 18.50).

To this text may be compared the reply of Ramana Maharshi to a question which was put to him one day: 'Why does Revelation not tell us what the Self *is*?' 'In order to find the Self all that is needed is the elimination of everything that is *not* the Self. A man began to doubt that he was a man. He

puts the question to his friend. The latter tells him: “You are neither a tree, nor a cow, and so on,” thus making it clear that he is nothing but a man. If he is not satisfied with this answer, and objects: “But you are not telling me what I *am*,” his friend replies him: “Nobody told you that you *weren't* a man.” If, even then, he does not become conscious of his status of man, it is useless to repeat it to him. Similarly we are taught what we are *not*, and through elimination we shall find what is left: the Self.'

One sees the impossibility of a dialectics of the Absolute. Professor Masson-Oursel told us one day: 'In the West we have got a dialectics of the Absolute, whereas in the East you only have a dialectics of Maya.' The Absolute of the Vedanta is only expressed through silence. Wherever philosophers seek a dialectic approach of the Absolute, contradictory systems are being multiplied. Ancient Buddhist texts teach us what the views of the different schools of thought were at the time of the Buddha: Some answered with a 'yes' to the problem to which others replied with 'no', and through this endless opposition reason proved to be devalued. On this subject Professor Murti writes that the Buddha solved the conflict from a higher point of view, *beyond thought*, a viewpoint that can only be suggested through silence. True dialectics was born.

This dialectics is not proposing to define the Reality with the help of demonstrations and arguments. The Reality is Silence, inaccessible to the various thought processes. The object of dialectics should therefore be to make clear the invalidity of concepts. 'While establishing the true nature of *Brahman*, it should not be described by the men of wisdom in terms of 'totality' or 'parts', of 'unity' or 'fractions', of 'cause' or 'effect', for *the true import of the Upanishads is to eliminate all limited conception with respect to Brahman* (Shankara's commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 2.1.20).

Such should be our dialectics.

In his *Karikas* 2.20-29, Gaudapada quotes a series of false identifications of the Real which the mind considers to be true. In this long enumeration we even detect a humorous note. Gaudapada thus wants to show that, whenever an assertion is pronounced, the Real is made to enter the category of objects *perceived*. Now all that is perceived by the senses or by thought is unreal, and the affirmations enumerated by Gaudapada contain dogmas, credos, that is to say, unverifiable hypotheses. From the point of view of human perception indeed *everything* may present a contradictory aspect, thus being a cause for doubt. But, because man has a great need for security, he takes shelter behind these dogmas which he has invented for that purpose.

The philosophy of Vedanta utilizes dialectics only in order to demonstrate the total incompetence of the intellect to define the Real. By refusing any particular position, Vedanta liberates itself from doubt and goes beyond the formal domain of theory and dogma.

Existence is not bound by the many different forms under which it presents itself to our senses. Before his passing away Ramana Maharshi told those that surrounded him: 'People think that I am going to pass away, but I am not going anywhere. Where could I go? I am *here!*' The same idea is expressed in the Old Testament (*Exodus*, III, 14), where God replies to Moses: 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what man discovers in the realization of Existence.

## **2. Shankara's commentary on Verse 2.16**

*The unreal has no existence;  
the Real never ceases to exist.*

*This truth is known from those  
who perceive the essence of things. (Gita: 2.16)*

The unreal has no existence. The unreal that is to say, the pairs of opposites such as cold and heat (and their causes)—has neither existence (*bhava*) nor being (*sat*). Heat, cold, etc., although undoubtedly being perceived by the sense organs, are nevertheless not substantially real (*vastu sat*), for they are effects, modifications (*vikâra*). Now then, all modifications are transient. A pot made of clay, for example that is to say, an objective form apprehended by the consciousness by means of the visual organ—appears to be unreal, because it cannot be perceived independent of the clay: Every effect is unreal, because it is not perceived independent of its cause; and also, as is seen in the example of the pot, because it is not perceived before its production nor after its destruction<sup>3</sup>. Finally a cause—another some such form of clay<sup>4</sup>—is equally unreal, because it is itself but an effect that cannot be separated from its own cause.<sup>5</sup>

OBJECTION: So it will come down to this, that absolutely nothing exists.<sup>6</sup>

REPLY: No, for each fact of experience implies a double consciousness: that of the Real, and that of the unreal. Real is that of which the consciousness is never absent—unreal

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3 *Mandukya Karika*, 4.31: 'That which did not have any existence in the past, which will cease to exist in the future, has no existence in the present:

4 The form of clay preceding the form of the pot is therefore considered to be the cause of the latter.

5 Anandagiri, a philosopher of the 10<sup>th</sup> century who has commented on the writings of Shankara, makes the following note here: 'The absolute Reality is not to be conditioned by causality. Inverse proposition: The series of causes and effects is illusory:

6 The one formulating this objection believes that nothing can exist which isn't either cause or effect.

that of which the consciousness is impermanent.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the distinction between 'Real' and 'unreal' depends on the consciousness. In all experience there are, with reference to one and the same substratum, two consciousnesses, so to speak, having a functional coordination (*samanadhikarana*) which is expressed in one single cognition: 'The cloth is existent', 'the pot is existent', 'the elephant is existent'. Here the predicate corresponds to Existence, and not to a particular quality, as in the phrase, 'This lotus is blue'.<sup>8</sup> Now, then, the consciousness which we have of the pot, the cloth, etc., is transient, as has already been said, but the same does not hold good for the consciousness of Existence. Whereas the object which corresponds to the consciousness that we have of the pot is unreal because of its transient character, that which corresponds to the consciousness of Existence is not unreal, for the latter never disappears.

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7 In the example of the rope which we mistake for a snake, we see the unreality of the snake, when we cease to perceive it. But that which, in the perception, corresponds to 'this' (*This is a snake*), i.e. the rope, is *real*. The consciousness which we have of the existence of the rope remains the same, irrespective of the illusory superimpositions perceived by us.

8 Note by Anandagiri: "Blue" and "lotus" indicate two distinct notions, whereas "Existence" and "the pot" refer only to one object which really exists, as in the phrase, "This is the man that we saw". Here it is not a question of two distinct realities being interlinked, as with the universal and the particular, the substance and its qualities, etc. If the pot were as real as Existence, it would be impossible for us to explain why, with reference to one and the same substratum, the object (the pot) and Existence should always *both* be present to our consciousness, to the exclusion of other associations (such as between the pot and the cloth). The double consciousness—that of Existence and that of the pot—may be explained as the result of illusion, because there is only *one* Reality—Existence—and all the rest is illusory. The illustration provided by the rope, the form of which gives rise to the mistake with a snake, gives us a demonstration of it. The consciousness of Existence appears even in the absence of the pot. When we say, 'There is no pot here', the consciousness of Existence asserts itself by establishing the absence of the pot.

OBJECTION: When the pot disappears so that we are no longer conscious of it, the consciousness of Existence disappears along with it.

REPLY: You cannot say so. For the consciousness of Existence still expresses itself with reference to other objects, such as a cloth. The consciousness of Existence corresponds to the predicate (*visheshana*).<sup>9</sup>

OBJECTION: Just as the consciousness of Existence is awakened with reference to other objects, the perception of the pot is awakened at the sight of another pot.

REPLY: There is no consciousness of a pot with reference to a cloth.

OBJECTION: When the pot has disappeared, there is no longer any consciousness of Existence.

REPLY: In the latter case the subject (*vishesha*) is absent. The consciousness of Existence corresponds to the predicate; and, as there can be no consciousness of the predicate without a subject to which it refers, how could the consciousness of the predicate then arise? Surely, not because there isn't any reality corresponding to the consciousness of Existence present there.

OBJECTION: If the subject—the pot, for example—is unreal, a double consciousness appearing with reference to one and the same substratum, cannot be explained.<sup>10</sup>

REPLY: Still, it is found that it appears with reference to one and the same substratum, even though one of the two

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9 The consciousness of Existence appears even in the absence of the pot. When we say, 'There is no pot here', the consciousness of Existence asserts itself by establishing the absence of the pot.

10 Note by Anandagiri: 'The thought of one formulating the objection is this: In all our experiences we take the subject and the predicate to be real. Therefore, the pot is as real as Existence.'

objects corresponding to this double consciousness is obviously unreal, as in the case of a mirage, for example, when our consciousness declares, 'This is water'.

Therefore, the unreal—that is to say, the body, the pairs of opposites, etc. and their causes—does not have any existence. The Real, the Self (Atman), never ceases to be, for, as we have pointed out, the consciousness of the Self is never absent.

The Real is ever existent; the unreal never exists—such is the conclusion that we have arrived at with respect to the Self and the non-Self, the Real and the unreal. This truth always remains present before the minds of those who direct their sole attention to the truth, to the real nature of Brahman, the Absolute, the Totality.

Therefore, endeavour to follow the teaching of those who know the truth, and liberate yourself from torment and delusion.

Having understood that all phenomena (*vikâra*) are but appearances—as much without existence as a mirage—quietly endure heat and cold and all the passing opposites that cause joy and suffering to alternate in you.

### **3. Consciousness of Existence**

In the first paragraph of his commentary Shankara questions the principle of causality and arrives at the conclusion that both cause and effect are unreal. To do so he proposes the classic example of the clay. The clay represents the real nature of things, the pure Consciousness, and the forms which it assumes represent the vast and changing multiplicity of objects. A particular form—the one of the jar, for example—is like the totality of the perceived world at a given mo-

ment. The form of the jar is said to be the cause of the form of the pot that succeeds it, so as to show that the present totality is caused by the preceding totality, combining within itself all the different causes, such as efficient, material, etc. Although the selected example only accounts for the material causality, by generalisation it leads to the *principle* of causality.

By 'cause' Shankara understands the previous form of the clay, the one that gave birth to the form which we are perceiving now, and which we call 'the effect'. All objects perceived are but effects. After having stated that 'every effect is unreal, because it cannot be perceived independent of its proper cause', he confirms the thesis by another argument: The effect—a pot, for example—is unreal, because it is not perceived *before* its production, nor *after* its destruction. To emphasise the unreality of the effect is to make evident the fundamental importance of the 'primal matter' which never ceases to be, irrespective of the forms under which it presents itself. Thus the various modifications such as the pot, the jar, etc. succeed each other.

If one concentrates the attention on the 'primal matter', i.e. on the clay, then the fact that it presents itself under different aspects which are continuously changing is not important. It will be clear that, properly speaking, it is not possible to 'concentrate the attention on the primal matter', because it is not a modification (*vikâra*). The point here is to become conscious of the fact that the clay is the *only* existing reality. There is no relation here between subject and object, and the attention that we are speaking of is *without object*. If, however, the clay is disregarded or one forgets to take the clay into consideration, while the attention is focused on the modifications only, then one will only perceive the unreal-'unreal' in the sense that the existence of these

modifications doesn't last any longer than their presentation. As in all Vedantic reasoning the word 'unreal' is used here with respect to the ultimate Reality. The ultimate reality of the clay is clay: No interpretation can be given of it. The presentation of the clay as a pot is a momentary reality which disappears, however, when this effect is transformed into another effect. Because of their *transient aspect* these modifications are said to be 'unreal'.

Next Shankara speaks about the production and the destruction of the effect, and this notion is equally important. Although the effect is a reality within its duration, its non-existence before its appearance and after its destruction shows us that its reality is limited. Its momentary presentation is therefore 'unreal' in the sense which we have given above to this term.

Shankara finally says that the cause itself is unreal, 'because it is not perceived independent of its proper cause'. This is a point to be dwelt upon in more detail: The cause which precedes a given effect is *also an effect*. If a serious criticism of the principle of causality is made, it will appear that the two terms of 'cause' and 'effect' do not *really* enter into a relation with each other, for what we are perceiving now is *only an effect*, whatever the modification that we may be examining. *The 'cause' only exists in the mind*: As soon as we search for it, we only find an effect before us! Even if the previous form is seen as the cause of the present form, it is clear that such a 'cause' is just as unreal. For example, before assuming the form of a pot, the clay appeared to have assumed the form of a jar. Can you say that the jar is the *cause* of the pot? The jar itself was but an *effect!* By retracing the interminable series of modifications, we will be in error so long as we are looking for a cause which we want to define and establish. To search for a cause in this way is to

try to catch a shadow.

However, an objection is being raised: 'If such is the case, then nothing exists.' Shankara then develops his idea of *ultimate* Reality by following the method of *adhyaropa-apavada* which consists in detecting the superimpositions, and in trying to remove them. Still, even when Shankara is speaking about superimposition, the non-causal position remains the implicit basis of his whole exposition. It is important to understand clearly that the idea of non-causality is not *opposed* to the idea of causality. 'Causality' is Maya, the apparent reality. The cause such as we normally understand it, is an event preceding another event. In the succession of events the one is called 'the effect', the other 'the cause'. *The relation between the two is a mental operation*, implying an attachment to form, a desire to isolate the forms in order to have them organised, which is a sign of ignorance (*avidya*). The principle of *non-causality* indicates an *absence* of such a relation within Reality in the same way as the events of the dream, being unreal, are not *produced* by one another in a causal way. This mental processing which, being subject to Maya, establishes a 'causal' link in the world of form, is therefore not contradicted by *non-causality*. When ignorance disappears, when realisation comes, causality is recognised as one of the infinite possibilities in which Maya has to express itself, and no longer as a *particular* and *exclusive* causal series.

3b VK2005-02

In order to reply to the objection, 'Nothing exists', Shankara sets forth the thesis of 'functional coordination' (*saman-adhikarana*). 'Each fact of experience,' he writes, 'implies a *double* consciousness, that of the Real (*sat*) and that of the unreal (*asat*).' This explanation may be surprising, for at first

sight there can only be *one* consciousness and not a double. This contradiction cannot be solved, but, as Shankara writes, here we are dealing with a 'fact of experience', and all experience carries within itself the many different contradictions of life. Swami Vivekananda said that Maya is not a theory, but a simple 'statement of the facts.' Our mind, being a product of Maya, is *itself* immersed in the world of contradictions. None of the explanations it proposes will be able to break away from the plane of Maya, no dialectics will be able to penetrate the mystery of Reality.

This 'mystery' of the Reality only exists, in so far as the mind is hoping to discover something 'hidden'. The Upanishads declare that the goal is *beyond* the reach of the mind. This is what Shankara means to say, when he states that acts of cognition such as, 'The cloth IS', 'The pot IS', are no logical assertions. As the intuition of the Real appears in a mental presentation, the statement assumes a grammatical form, involving a subject and a predicate. Basing itself on this grammatical form, the mind tries to establish the soundness of its interpretation. No doubt the thesis of Shankara has got a dialectic aspect to it, but on analysis one soon discovers that it is impossible to look upon Existence (*sat*), the Reality, as an *objective* reality, similar to that of the pot or the cloth. *Every act of knowledge IS the integral Reality*: Our mind can never enter into and make contact with That; it can only try to remove the superimpositions. To the mind the goal of the search remains very much of a mystery, offering to the imagination an inexhaustible theme which myths and legends have developed in a poetic way.

As we have said in our introduction, this commentary of Shankara establishes that dialectics is an *ineffective* means for attaining the truth. Only by going *beyond* the dualism of thesis-antithesis will it be possible to get there, by thus ob-

taining a larger vision that lies *beyond* the workings of the mind. With Mr. Maurice Papon we can say that the Hegelian synthesis does not have the least justification in contemporary science. The disappearance of ignorance is not a synthetic knowledge, but a new vision, often called by us (after the felicitous expression of Hubert Benoit) the 'stereoscopic vision', thus indicating that it reveals a depth which thesis and antithesis, taken separately, are lacking, and which, when taken together, they may cause to appear. 'I perceive my conscious world,' writes Hubert Benoit, 'under some aspect or other—never in its totality, in its reality. It is as if I was seeing the external world from the right eye or from the left eye, never from both at the same time, never in a stereoscopic vision.' Such vision is effected through the opening of 'the third eye'. It concerns a new dimension and not the resolution of the opposition at the very level at which it manifests itself.

In this context we have often quoted Shankara's commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1.4.10) where he distinguishes two sorts of vision: that of the mind and that of the Self. The vision of the mind only considers modifications and, because it has a beginning and an end, it is unreal. The vision of the Self, however, is without beginning and without end. In this commentary Shankara tries to awaken us to a metaphysical intuition of the Self which is Existence (*sat*).<sup>11</sup>

The notion of 'clay', of the Reality expressing itself under so many different aspects, is not an abstract notion. Because our mind doesn't have the faculty to grasp the Reality *as It is*, it can only grasp its particular presentations. At the same time we *do* have the intuition of the 'clay' *in itself*. Just as the mind interprets all of our experiences, it will not fail to

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11 In the terminology of Hubert Benoit 'to live' corresponds to temporal reality, and 'to exist' to intemporal Reality.

interpret this intuition as well, assuming the appearance of an *intellectual* intuition, a mental processing, whereas it is always of a *metaphysical* nature.

But on what authority can the latter statement be based? Is it possible to give any proof of it? No, we are not able to do so in any way, and any attempt in that direction is doomed to fail. The metaphysical intuition is a *vision*, a total reaction, it is the Totality itself which only silence can express. Indeed, here is an enigma before which our need for explanation and demonstration remains unsatisfied. The metaphysical intuition is the retreat of all mental activity, revealing to us the real nature of the universe by which we are surrounded.

The reality of Brahman is not dependent on the *idea* that we form of it: It is *vastu*, Shankara notes in his preface to the *Brahma Sutras*, that is to say, *independent of any mental association*. The term *vastu tantra* is normally used by Shankara to indicate non-personal knowledge—the term *purusha tantra* for expressing our personal reactions. It would therefore be a mistake to identify the Vedantic position with subjective idealism (solipsism), repeating what we have often said on this subject, namely that the Vedantic idea has nothing to do with such an erroneous notion. In fact, the real nature of every object is *identical* with the Reality: It is *vastu tantra* and not *purusha tantra*. It is the mind which is perceiving relations, whereas the Reality remains free from any relation. All our experiences, all our cognitions are *vastu*, are non-duality (*advaita*) itself, despite the fact that, in appearance, there is the object perceived, the subject who perceives, and the act of perceiving. Our experience of the world is 'a continuous perception of Brahman', according to Shankara.

In his commentary on verse 2.18 Shankara observes that one wouldn't seek to know the objects, if the Self weren't known *already*. And, although the Scriptures are considered to be an incontestable authority, helping us to eliminate all the superimpositions and attributes that are foreign to the Self, they do not reveal any knowledge which, until then, we would *not* have had already. They thus give us the following description of the Self: 'Brahman, of whom we have *an immediate and close knowledge*, is the Self who dwells in all things.'

If the clay, from a certain point of view, is called 'the cause', such cause is not knowable, for it never becomes an effect. And, 'by destroying the previous effect, it does not destroy itself' (Shankara's commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.2.1). The proper nature of the clay and the proper nature of whatever object of clay are not different, and this proper nature is not a mathematical abstraction. However vast a perception may be, whatever the object on which our attention may be focussed, the invariable factor is Existence (*sat*), and this Invariable has no beginning and no end. This is the *attention-without-object* of which Hubert Benoit speaks, the '*content-less Consciousness*' of which Revelation tells us that it is One without a second. We shall never be able to know it through an operation of the mind. But, since our mind operates on the plane of causality and demands an explanation for everything, it usually looks upon the Invariable as the one Cause of all the effects.

As the Cause, Existence itself is not perceived *independent of its modifications*. The intuition that we have of this Invariable which remains in the course of all the modifications of Existence, is the intuition of the clay, or the wood, or the gold, according to the various examples proposed by the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. These examples, however, have

only got a suggestive power. In fact, no example, no illustration is able to account for the fundamental Reality.

While reading the commentary written by Shankara, one might think that he is trying to *prove* the truth of *advaita* (non-duality), in the same way as Spinoza sought to prove the existence of God. In the West it is thought necessary that the truth be proved and that it can be verified. According to Vedanta the Truth of truths cannot be demonstrated. We have said, however, that such impossibility does not mean that all seeking is to be abandoned. On the contrary, the power of concentration and the subtlety of mind have to be raised to a very high degree of perfection. At the end of the enquiry the mental armature will collapse to make place for the Vedantic intuition.

To discover that Existence is the ultimate Cause of which all the things in this world are but the effects, is to see in each effect the sole presence of the Cause. When this realisation comes, the prestige of the mind and its pretension to be able to discover the Reality are completely destroyed. That is the true 'letting go' as taught by the *Gita*: 'Abandon all duties, take refuge in Me only. I will deliver you from evil.' (18.66)

3c. VK2005-03

The methods proposed by Vedanta with a view to arrive at the ultimate truth are many and well-defined. One of them is devoted to the study of subject and predicate, quoted by Shankara in the context of a grammatical note. The predicate corresponds to Existence, and the subject to its particular presentation. In the expressions, 'The cloth IS', 'The pot IS', 'pot' and 'cloth' represent the subject, and 'IS' the predicate. The relation between the two remains invariable, whatever the form assumed by the subject whose nature it is

to be perpetually changing. This relation is not accidental (*samyoga sambandha*), in contrast with the one that appears to be established, for example, between a pot and the ground on which it is put. In the latter case it is enough to lift the pot from the ground, so that there is no question any more of a relation between the two. On the other hand, the relation pot-clay is intimate; the clay cannot be separated from the name and the form (*nama-rupa*) of the pot.

The intuition of the Absolute is *identical* with the consciousness of Existence, and each particular cognition is inseparably accompanied by it. No negation can contradict or annul it. When we say, 'There is no pot here', Existence is not failing at the place where the pot is absent. And if we declare, when remembering our sleep, 'I had a good sleep, I didn't know anything', it does not mean that the consciousness of Existence had been absent there, for it is *That* which bears witness to the non-perception. In the very negation, the breath of Existence passes.

In his commentary Shankara foresees the following objection: 'The consciousness of Existence no longer arises, when the pot is destroyed.' He replies: 'In the latter case the subject is absent. The consciousness of Existence corresponds to the predicate and, as there can be no consciousness of a predicate without a subject to which it refers, how could the consciousness of a predicate, then, arise? Surely, it is not that there isn't any reality present there, corresponding to the consciousness of Existence.' Shankara thus traces an error made by one who would raise such an objection, for the latter would imply that the consciousness of Existence would be of the same nature as the objects perceived, thus proving it to be *accidentally* linked with these (*samyoga sambandha*).

The fact that the consciousness of Existence is present in

all objects perceived, does not mean that the consciousness would be fragmented into different entities which, again, would enter into a relation with their corresponding objects. The consciousness of Existence is a metaphysical intuition which does not establish any relation with the various objects that present themselves. In fact, the subject-predicate relation is only an appearance, an illusory idea formed by our mind within the plane of Maya, the apparent reality. But those 'who see the Essence of things', according to the expression of the *Gita*, do not make such a mistake.

The false identification (*adhyasa*) which produces suffering in us is the sign of a wrong comprehension: We are attributing a *temporal* reality to the consciousness of Existence. Shankara gives the example of the mirage in order to explain the unreality of the objects perceived as against the *intemporal* Reality of the consciousness of Existence. The object perceived, the mirage, is completely illusory. At the same time the consciousness of Existence, even in the case of such an obvious illusion, did not cease to be. This example, though not corresponding with a common fact of our experience, nevertheless gives the advantage of being more imaginative and catching than the example of the pot or the cloth.

Shankara finishes his commentary with a note of a practical nature, pointing out that this teaching is addressed to those who live in ignorance and are suffering. He resumes the first proposition explained in his introduction, according to which all modifications (*vikâra*), being temporary, are without existence. He is not proposing anyone discipline in particular, permitting one thereby to obtain liberation, but a *total* discipline: an awakening to the metaphysical intuition.

The 'I' that thinks-the 'I' of the world of Maya-receives its

certainty of the Reality through an intuition of the transcendental "I":

'I in-"I"' think, 'I in-"I"' am. Whereas experiences are concerned with the *person*, the limited 'I', in correspondence with the mental modifications (*chitta vritti*), the metaphysical realization, on the other hand, is an *impersonal* intuition of the transcendental "I". The *Gita* expresses the abandoning of all such personal views as follows: 'Leave all *dharma* and take refuge in Me.' This 'Me' of Sri Krishna, the metaphysical "I", cannot be grasped or even be experienced by anyone. Apart from that, there is no longer any question of *wanting* to grasp, of *wanting* to experience, for the metaphysical intuition is the abandonment of all desire. But this total discipline, which is a total passivity, should not be regarded as a quietism. Far from opposing itself to activity, it pervades and impregnates all action with an understanding that annihilates desire.

How to conquer the imaginative agitation, the thirst for personal liberation, the continuous movement of desire? It is only possible through a Force that is beyond our forces, for the latter are still the expression of some desire. But the force we allude to lies within ourselves, unknown and hidden. 'There is a power in the soul,' says Meister Eckhart, 'which is not bound by time nor by the flesh, which emanates from the Spirit, stays in the Spirit, and is absolutely spiritual. In that power God finds Himself wholly. He blossoms and flourishes there in all the joy and all the honour that He bears within Himself. This joy is so deep, of such inconceivable magnitude, that none can fully express it in words. For in that power the eternal Father begets His eternal Son unceasingly in such a way, that this power assists in the begetting of the Son, and begets itself inasmuch as He begets this Son in the one power of the Father.'

The dialectical method, valuable though it may be within the limited field of intellectual enquiry, is thus incapable of attaining that which this force permits. Just as, according to the example of Zen, the finger which points to the moon, is not the moon, the method bears no relation to the vision of the Self. It merely indicates a way. True enquiry is not a dialectics, but a pure intuition, *immediate*, that is to say, free from any mental processes.

We shall conclude by resuming the idea of Shankara which we studied in our introduction, according to which the virtue of *titiksha* or endurance rests on a metaphysical basis. *Titiksha*, we said, is not a stoical attitude, but comes from an awakening to the evidence that all form is transient, and this awakening is accompanied with the certitude that nothing exists which isn't Brahman. Here one sees the intimate link which exists between *titiksha* (endurance) and *shraddhâ* (faith). *Shraddha*, the root of which means 'truth', is the 'right comprehension' that cannot be lost, whatever happens. We have often said that all belief is but the limited expression of faith which, in its totality, constitutes the Truth of truths: It is That which lies beyond any *partial* truth and which is summed up in the supreme knowledge: *The Real never becomes unreal.*



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