

The Eternal Message of the Gita

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Contradiction & Certitude –

1. Illusory relations

In My non-manifested aspect I pervade the entire universe. All creatures have their being in Me, but I am not in them.

And, in reality, they do not even have their being in Me. Behold My sovereign Yoga! My Self, though bringing forth and sustaining the creatures, is not in them. – (Gita, IX.4-5)

After having said in the first verse, 'All creatures have their being in Me, but I am not in them,' Sri Krishna in the second verse declares contrary to this: 'In reality they do not even have their being in Me. Behold My sovereign Yoga!' What, then, is this sovereign Yoga which is only expressed in paradoxes?

Both by their ring and by their contents these verses recall the *Mandukya Upanishad* where we find the same *Asparsha Yoga*, the Yoga of 'non-contact'. Sri Krishna points out the highest Reality by first proposing a standpoint which is sub-

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2 This the 7th 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.12, August 1956. English translation and edit by André van den Brink, of Netherlands.

sequently contradicted by Him. Due to the fact that we have developed mental habits as well as an inborn need to follow close reasoning, such an attitude is confusing to us. It is logical that the contradictions proposed by the Gita do not seem valid to us.

They do, however, lead to a refutation of the theistic position according to which all creatures would be living in God, a position which is also mentioned in the same chapter: 'I am the same towards all beings. I do not hate anyone; I do not cherish anyone. Those who adore Me with fervour are in Me and I am in them' (9.29). But relations of this kind cease to exist, when the supreme Reality is known, as Sri Krishna expresses in the verses 9.4 and 9.5, and in verse 11.53: 'Not by the *Vedas*, nor by austerities, alms or offerings can one see Me as I have revealed Myself to you.'

Shankara's commentary on verse 9.4 is as follows: 'This whole universe is pervaded by My supreme essence, the form of which cannot be perceived by the senses. It is in My non-manifested form that all creatures, from Brahmâ to a blade of grass, have their being.' This form which the senses cannot grasp, is the proper nature of all objects. The pure Consciousness by which all things seem to be pervaded, is without beginning. [We observe that, 'The pot IS', that, 'The cloth IS', *without* there being any gap between these two cognitions, just as there is no gap between the reality of the dream and the reality of the waking state.] Consciousness which is ever present, never becomes unconsciousness. And, although this Consciousness cannot be perceived by the senses, it is *all* we perceive. Although remaining invisible, it is through That that we have our vision, it is within That that our senses operate. The whole universe, 'from Brahmâ to a

blade of grass', cannot be separated from it: It is the supreme Non-manifested who never becomes an object of perception.

Shankara's commentary continues with a remark of capital importance: 'An object that would be *outside* of the Self would not be able to give rise to any experience.' We simply *cannot* conceive of the absence of the Self. Even if we commit the error of thinking that the Self could be an object of experience, even if we deny the existence of the Self, all we ever do is to implicitly postulate its existence. At the same time it cannot be experienced under any condition: *It is to be realised.*

If such is the nature of the Self, then, in religious terms, all creatures may be said to be living in the Lord: 'It is in Me and through Me that they have their proper nature.' We have seen with reference to verse 2.16 that, even in a negation, when we say for instance, 'The pot IS not', 'The cloth IS not', the consciousness of Existence is still present there. In his commentary Shankara makes the Lord say: 'Since I am the Self of all creatures, it may seem to those who live in error and delusion, that I dwell in them.' The expression, 'It may *seem* that...', is very significant, for it points to the relation which we establish between the Substance and the form. If one relies on the appearance only, then the form *seems* to dwell in the Substance, and vice versa. But, as we have seen while giving the example of the clay, the reality of the clay and the reality of the form are *not* different. 'To those who live in error and delusion' the clay may seem to dwell *in* the form. In fact, the relation that may be conceived between Existence and the object existing is only apparent, for we are not dealing here with *two* real entities. Our mind which usu-

ally proceeds through relations of that order, should nevertheless be awake to the fact that names and forms (*nâma-rûpa*) are but different modifications (*vikâra*) without any proper reality.

Thus no contact is possible between Sri Krishna—the Reality—and the creature. A contact may be established between objects, for example, a book that is lying on a table. Although the relation is accidental (*samyoga sambandha*), there is nevertheless question of a relation. But to speak of 'an intrinsic relation between the Reality and the objects' is to let oneself fall into the trap of speech: The expression makes no sense, because here it is not a question of *two individual things*. It is necessary, it seems to us, to stress this point throughout. In his commentary on verse 2.16 the interlocutor who is made to join in by Shankara, objects: 'If the pot disappears, the consciousness of the Self also disappears', thus expressing the common error which consists in considering the Self to be an *object* of perception. We are in a cul-de-sac as long as we desire to have the *experience* of the Self. As soon as the metaphysical intuition is awakened, we shall lose the taste and the desire to have experiences, and realisation will become possible.

In his commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* Shankara observes that, when a particular form presents itself to our eyes, it excludes all other forms. The form of the pot does not allow the form of the jar to exist at the same time. However, it is not by replacing one form by another that we shall be able to discover the clay *in itself*. We often believe that it is sufficient to eliminate all the forms, one after another, in order to realise the non-mundane, as with the onion which is peeled off in the hope to find something in its

centre. After the last peeling is removed, nothing is left. This non-mundane we imagine to be some mysterious entity that will make its appearance, once all the forms that are known to us will have gone. In fact, such is the mystical way which consists in 'knowing the Lord'. According to Vedanta the Lord cannot be *known*: He is to be *realised*.

While 'manifesting' the forms, the Reality is in no way being retrenched. We are on the wrong track, if we discard that which is now presenting itself to us, hoping that the next form presentation is going to reveal the Reality. It is enough, we think, to tear off one more peeling so as to complete the search. Such an attitude won't help us to obtain the least metaphysical intuition! When we are told not to attach ourselves to the presentation of the moment, to be ready to accept all the forms that are going to succeed it, it is only to awaken us to the truth that the Reality is never going to be fixed *into one particular form* where it would be possible to finally grasp it: *It is the infinite possibility of form.*

The enquiry is a *mental* operation which takes place on the *formal* plane. At this level it is found that all the movements of our mind are as many forms through which Existence is asserting itself in a subjective world, just as it is asserting itself in the objective world of 'clay' forms. Then our agitation which was urging us to eagerly look for the next form, and which made us all the while turn towards the future, will calm down. This state of calming down, this folding back of the mind upon itself, is a very auspicious sign which must necessarily precede the final realisation of the eternal Present, a realisation in which, according to the terminology of Yoga, all *samskaras* (innate tendencies) are consumed.

The example of the clay and that of the onion correspond

to two different methods of enquiry. In the case of the onion the attention is focussed both on the present form (the peeling) which one is trying to remove in order to reach the formless, and on the formless, this intangible 'nothing' which is attained, when all peelings are removed, that is to say, when, in the course of the search, all forms have been discarded. This 'nothing', however, which has a 'before' and an 'after', finds itself inserted in the same temporal series as the forms which preceded it. Besides, being opposed to the latter, it is of the same nature as these. What, then, does the understanding, obtained at the end of this search, involve? The realisation of the futility of concentrating one's attention *on any form in particular*. The attention of the one following this method of '*neti, neti*' ('the Reality is not this, not this') will become *without object*: '... Let him no longer think of anything', recommends the Gita (6.25).

As to the method of enquiry corresponding to the example of the clay, it will result in the vision in which the changing forms, on the one hand, and the clay (the clay which the senses cannot perceive for the forms, but which constitutes the very object of perception, there being nothing *but* clay) on the other hand, are revealed as one and the same Reality.

If the example of the onion corresponds to the notion of *progressive realisation*, the illustration of the clay gives the idea of *immediate realisation (sadyo mukti)* of which Shankara shows himself to be an advocate in his commentary on verse 18.49. To him *sannyasa* or renunciation is equal to 'right knowledge'. To renounce is to renounce all action. The action of the ego, expressing itself on the formal plane through the desire for experience, has ceased completely in the case of the liberated man. 'Because he knows the Oneness of Brah-

man, of the Self free from all action, to him the question of acting no longer poses itself. Such a state is called “absolute freedom with respect to action”. This is supreme perfection, as distinct from that obtained through Karma-yoga. This is the state of immediate liberation (*sadyo mukti*).’

‘The Lord,’ Shankara goes on to say in his commentary on verse 9.4, ‘is the innermost Essence of all things, even of *âkâsha* (space).’ It is important to note that we are not dealing here with material space (*mahâkâsha*), nor with the psychological space in which the creatures that we see in our dreams are moving, or that we are thinking of (*chittâkâsha*). The supreme *âkâsha* (*chidâkâsha*) is identical with pure Consciousness which knows no ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’.

We say, for example, that a wall separates a room from the adjacent room. But what is the wall made of? Of bricks. Now any material object is the concretisation of ‘empty space’, according to the expression of professor Karman. How could space be separated by space? Nothing really separates one object from another: The objects and the space in which they seem to be situated are Consciousness itself. When we look upon them as *objects* of Consciousness, as *distinct* from It, then we are dealing with *subjective* consciousness and we remain on the plane of form. But here we are talking about *pure* Consciousness which is Existence (*sat*), the Absolute, and this Absolute can never be identified with any mental process, with a ‘becoming conscious of’, nor with the unconsciousness in the sense of deep sleep or any other experience. As we have indicated above, this Absolute has neither beginning nor end: It doesn’t enter into any system of relations.

In concluding his commentary, Shankara writes: ‘That

which does not enter into contact with any object cannot, as in the case of a vessel, be contained by anything whatsoever.' As the supreme Reality does not admit of any duality, it would be wrong to distinguish *two* entities in It, one of which would be supported or contained by the other.

In our ignorance we attribute a basic value to the workings of the mind and to the knowledge that results from it. Whether we adopt the materialistic position according to which the body produces and supports the mind, or the idealistic position which declares the opposite, we commit the error of situating the *metaphysical* Reality in the body or in the mind, whereas, in fact, this Reality cannot be separated from either: *We are establishing relations*, and this, then, is the most obvious mark of our ignorance (*ajñāna*) which can only disappear by a sudden break of our habits.

When Sri Krishna is expressing the contradictions of verses 9.4 and 9.5, He wants us to escape from the hold of our mental activities. This 'letting go' corresponds simultaneously with the awakening of the independent, impersonal intelligence. Intellectual considerations and the inevitable 'relations' proceeding from it plunge us more and more into ignorance. In order to shatter this intellectualism nothing less than *irreducible contradictions* are needed. Then, bewildered, we won't know any more what direction to go—and this 'we', for that matter, stands for nothing more than our reflections, our agitations, our need for explanations—that is to say, a whole mental edifice which Sri Krishna's words are trying to make disappear.

We clearly see that all seeking leads us to an impasse and, at the same time, we cannot just abandon our search. In our

exposition of verse 4.18³ we have shown how this conflict may be solved through the understanding of action and inaction. Our seeking is an action, but the refusal to seek is still an action, even if we call it 'inaction'. How to escape this dilemma? 'Thirty strokes of the stick!' is the Zen masters' ruling. As to the response proposed by the Gita, it is found in the 11th chapter.



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3 See article '1. Action and Inaction' in this series.