

The Eternal Message of the Gita

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Contradiction & Certitude – 2. Indisputable doubt

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)

Nothing more remarkable than the contradictions of the verses that we are studying—nothing more stimulating for our spirit of enquiry! Instruction by means of contradiction is a method proper to the Orient, where we can even speak of a tradition. There are two reasons for this:

1. The fact that statements can be opposed to each other, despite the fact that each of them seems to be perfectly justified, leads us to question the validity of intellectual reasoning. All attempts to arrive at a synthesis do not leave the formal world of mental processes and are not able to bring in

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2 This is the 8th 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.13, September 1956. English translation and edit by André van den Brink of the Netherlands.

any new perspective. Our mind then gives up the illusory help of the intellect in order to look for a solution at another level.

2. It is difficult, other than through contradiction, to point out the nature of the Reality which cannot be perceived, known or comprehended.

AS SOON AS there is contradiction, there is doubt. If an object is described to us in detail as, 'It is white,' and next we are told, 'It is black', we are confused. A doubt arises, not only concerning the object, but also concerning the person who contradicts himself while describing it. Doubt, which calls in question that which one took for certain, is the very basis of philosophical enquiry.

It does seem, however, that the Gita condemns doubt: 'An ignorant person who lacks faith or who doubts, courts his ruin. Neither this world, nor the other, nor any felicity is there for him who doubts' (4.40). But in that case we are dealing with the doubts formulated by our intellect, by the many different lines of reasoning in which our enquiry may be lost. Such doubts lock us up in the realm of form. Indeed, when we try to solve the questions that we ask ourselves regarding the nature of the Reality, presenting them, as one would, in the dialectical form of a 'thesis-antithesis', the synthesis arrived at will still be a thesis.

Whatever be the difficulties encountered by our intellect, it will yet pursue its search: Logical, obstinate like a judge holding an enquiry, it demands an answer to everything. Is our spirit, then, incapable of grasping the ultimate Reality? If by 'spirit' we understand our intellectual faculties, then such pride must be broken. This obstinacy of clinging to the values

that one has established for oneself, must necessarily be futile: Contradiction is yet going to shake our confidence, and we shall rightly be questioning the validity of the mental processes that are incapable of awakening the higher intelligence.

Quite often one may hear the following objection being formulated against the commentaries of Shankara: 'What's the use of reading them? They are so intellectual!' It means that one fails to see that the Reality that Shankara is talking about is *identical* with the metaphysical intuition, and that it is the one object of his commentaries to awaken us to this intuition. These commentaries cannot just be qualified as being 'intellectual', unless one remains under the impression of some sketchy reading, or one is dominated by prejudices.

Usually the person who makes such an objection has got well-defined intellectual ideas for himself and, when he finds that philosophical explanations are in contradiction with his own ideas, i.e. his own prejudices, he will not abandon the latter for all that. As a matter of fact, in his eyes they are not prejudices, but an inner conviction to which he will cling, wrongly identifying it with the metaphysical intuition. Such erring frequently occurs in the course of the enquiry: One is satisfied with the help brought in by the intellect, and one makes an attempt to arrive at a synthesis that is to yield final certainty. But only a 'stereoscopic' vision will permit one to transcend the plane of mental deliberation.

When I say, 'I am not disturbed by any doubt,' my attitude may be compared to that of the ostrich. The '!' that is continuously desiring new experiences, is in no way being re-trenched, and this inner disposition is an obstacle to realisation. I am, in fact, doubting a thousand things among

which my attention is being scattered. But if, on the other hand, I happen to doubt *myself* ('I actually don't trust myself'), wouldn't it seem that, *then*, the metaphysical intuition is trying to express itself, enunciating a truth that we are unaware of, the profoundness of which escapes us? My trust in my 'I' prevents me from understanding the Self, an understanding which comes *after* a 'letting go' that is *not* an experience of the 'I'.

It is therefore essential to distinguish between *intellectual* doubt and *metaphysical* doubt. The first doesn't make us leave the 'I', the activity of which, on the contrary, is being nourished by it. An intuitive understanding is indispensable in order to make us aware of the *necessity* of a break, bringing the issue to be borne on the 'I' itself, on the very validity of the mental processes. As such the metaphysical doubt is the great gateway opening on to realisation, it is the *inverse* form of the metaphysical intuition, as it were, a *negative* way of expressing it. In the *Uddhava Gita*, chapter 11.24, Sri Krishna says to Uddhava: 'I am Doubt.'

We shall quote what our professor of philosophy, V. Subrahmanya Iyer, wrote in this connection: 'Most people need to lean on some external authority, and they undertake their quest for the truth according to the various beliefs that suit their temperament: faith in the existence of an invisible, superior Being; hope of a life after death; a conviction with respect to the reality of the objective world. This gives them satisfaction to which they become attached. But when the spirit becomes more vigorous, more independent, it will begin to *doubt*, asking for proof. Doubt is dangerous, as pointed out by the Bhagavad Gita (4.40), inasmuch as it causes mental digression which one should get rid of at any cost—if ne-

cessary even with the help of dogmatic belief. But to those who are possessed with the force and the capacity to pursue the enquiry seriously, doubt is a stimulus. As shown by the *Nâsadîya Sûkta* and the *Uddhava Gita*, *knowledge is the fruit of doubt*. The first result of the study of philosophy is to become liberated from the slavish assumptions of tradition, from authority, and from all our unverified convictions.³

The fundamental importance of doubt is also known in the Cartesian enquiry. In his *6me Méditation* Descartes goes as far as to question the whole of the knowledge of the waking state by showing the striking resemblance between the perceptions of the dream and the waking state: 'I have never believed to be aware of anything while awake, which I also couldn't believe to be aware of while asleep. And, as I do not believe that the things which I seem to be aware of while asleep proceed from any object outside of me, I did not see why I should rather have this belief with respect to those things that I seem to be aware of when awake.' By thus comparing the dream and the waking state, Descartes sensed the importance of a study which Vedanta has pushed to its utmost limits. Indeed, in order to reach the Truth of truths, none of life's data should be omitted, and Vedanta demands that the three states (*avasthâtraya*) of waking, dreaming and deep sleep be taken into consideration—a traditional approach permitting the awakening of the metaphysical intuition.

It may be asked legitimately: If the 'I' is to disappear, *who*, then, is awakened to this intuition? The question is put on an intellectual level and one hopes for an answer at that same level. Such hope may be satisfied provisionally, but it will not

3 V. Subrahmanya Iyer, *Essentials of Vedanta*.

stand a serious enquiry. We may observe that the objective of St. John of the Cross, when he explains the discipline of *La Nuit de la Mémoire*, is essentially the same: That the 'divine Light' may shine in us. And this, he tells us, is not possible, until all our temporal hopes have been laid out in the shroud of the Night.

The only state in which no longer any doubt arises, is realisation. As long as we entrench ourselves stubbornly in our position of the waking state, we shall have to suffer innumerable contradictions which oppose the 'I' to the 'non-I': No certainty will be possible. Now the only certainty which may be able to liberate us from doubt is not a phenomenon of the waking state: It is the metaphysical intuition of Atman-Brahman in which there is no longer any duality. According to the illustration of the clay it is the certainty that the infinite multiplicity of form is *always and only clay*. It is the understanding that the Real *never becomes unreal*, and that the pure Consciousness *never becomes unconsciousness*.

CONTRADICTION is the best means for awakening the higher intelligence. When the master and his disciple are meeting within the same traditional perspective, instruction through contradiction is of very great value in order to break the world of 'convergence'⁴ in which the disciple is living. This method of teaching is often found in the Upanishads:

Brahman is known to him who does not know Him.
He who knows Him,
does not know Him.

4 We have borrowed the term 'convergence' from Hubert Benoit, which aptly sums up the whole of our tendencies, of our efforts, to gain equilibrium on the formal plane.

Brahman is unknown to those who know
He is known to those
who do not know.

—*Kena Upanishad*, II.11

Shankara judges it necessary to comment upon this verse: 'The knower of Brahman who has the firm conviction that Brahman is unknowable, knows Him perfectly. But he who *thinks* to know Him, certainly doesn't know Him.'

Contradiction introduces disharmony in our world of form. We imagine, *a priori*, that the Reality should be harmonious. The slightest false note shocks our taste, and it is difficult for us to give up the balanced and reassuring conceptions according to which our 'I' interprets the Reality. Will we ever have the courage to venture into the labyrinth, to plunge into the world of contradiction?

When it is that hot, where to flee to
in order to escape the heat?

In a cauldron with boiling water,
or in a red-hot coal fire.

But how to escape the heat in the cauldron
or in the coal fire?

No pain enters there.

—*Zen dialogue*

He who is capable of it, is a *dhîra-buddhih*, a man of sharp intelligence who has given up all hope of finding a solution in the waking state only, in a search undertaken on a limited basis. The Reality is only comprehended by taking up the position of the witness of the three states (*avasthâtraya sâkshin*).

One can see what obstacles prevent the awakening of the metaphysical intuition: our prejudices, our personal interpretations. These prejudices will disappear simultaneously with the 'I', when fear, greed and jealousy will go from us. This 'letting go' is certainly very difficult to obtain from the 'I', for it wants to keep its foothold and be the judge of all matters. *But as long as we want to preserve our own vision, we shall not be able to see the world according to the vision of God.*

'God', this ultimate Reality which our 'I' is trying to grasp, will not reveal Himself, until we have no more eye for any temporal matters, until we cease to rely on our intellect and go beyond the 'rational' path. In the vision of the Lord there is no duality, no relation. 'Indeed,' Meister Eckhart says, 'so long as we are busy contemplating, we are not yet ONE with that which we are contemplating. So long as something is yet the object of our meditation, we are not yet one in the ONE. For, where there is only ONE, only ONE is seen. That is why God may only be seen through blindness, He can only be known through non-knowing, He can only be comprehended through unreason.'

Whether we are reading Meister Eckhart or the Gita, it is through contradictory statements that the inexpressible Reality is pointed out to us. This, then, is the Yoga that we are asked to meditate upon in order to gain the understanding of all things. This understanding will not be granted to us, unless we abandon that particular point of observation adopted by us at the start of our enquiry. Even if this point of observation permits us to have a cosmic view of the universe, we shall at the most become dizzy, just as Arjuna did in the 11th chapter of the Gita, and we shall continue to question ourselves—about the nature of this dizziness, about the ultimate

Reality, etc. The sage shows the vanity of all such questions:

Don't push your enquiry too far,
lest your head should fall off.
You are questioning me
about the nature of a Divinity
that should not be reasoned about.

—*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, III, 6.11*



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