

# *The Eternal Message of the Gita*

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## **Contradiction & Certitude — 3. Devotion & Metaphysics**

*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)*

Having considered the contradictions presented by the verses 9.4 and 9.5, we shall again reflect on their particular character: the close juxtaposition of an extra-religious, impersonal teaching (*the comprehension of non-causality*) and a religious attitude (*belief in a causal [or personal] relation between two different entities*). The impersonal teaching even borrows the language of feeling and emotion—'Behold My sovereign Yoga!'—thus addressing itself to the person to whom the religious path is the most familiar, without hurting his sensitivity. At the same time it does not essentially differ from the teaching found in the most metaphysical of the *Upanishads*, the *Mandukya*.

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- 2 This the 9<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.14, October 1956. English translation and edit by André van den Brink of the Netherlands.

Most Indian teachings respect the causal [or 'personal'] relation which is the usual framework of our thinking. In the mean time nothing is imposed: Imperatives do not have a place in Indian spirituality. Thus one should not be surprised to find Shankara often accepting duality and causality as a basis for the enquiry. In certain commentaries he speaks at length about the relation between man and Godhead, but he also shows what will happen to the seeker who questions the reality of such relations: all of a sudden, he finds himself facing the ultimate Reality, beyond all relation. Then nothing remains any more of the rapports between God and His creature.

Thus, in commenting upon verse 9.5, Shankara adopts the religious point of view: '... My Self,' says the Lord, 'is the support of all things—but It does not dwell in them.' How is it possible for the Lord to say, 'My Self? We reply: Separating the physical body and the other formal elements from the real Self, and considering this body to be the 'I', the Lord speaks of the Self, saying, 'My Self', thus merely following the current notion. That does not mean, however, that He shares the error of those who believe the Atman, the Self, to be different from Himself. One sees that the non-causal position is always implicitly assumed, present like the watermark in paper. 'It is in My Self that all creatures have their being and development.'

The latter idea is described in detail by verse 9.6: 'Just as the mighty wind who is continuously moving, always remains in *âkâsha*, so also all beings remain in Me.' The illustration thus suggests, how the creatures may remain in the Lord without there being any contact between them and Him. How, then, does manifestation take place? *Prakriti* or Nature, we are told by the following verses, is the primordial cause

of the whole universe: 'I remain the witness, while *prakriti* makes the beings move or keeps them immobile. It is *prakriti's* power which causes movement' (9.10). Because *to us* the universe appears as multiplicity, *prakriti* is the source of ignorance for us. According to Shankara *prakriti* is thus identical with *avidyâ* or ignorance: 'With the help of *prakriti*, i.e., ignorance, which is dependent on Me, I manifest all the creatures that we see. Through the force of ignorance and other evils inherent in *prakriti*, Nature, all have been made powerless.'

Wisdom is thus conceived as being enveloped by *non-wisdom*. Because *avidyâ* or ignorance is dependent on the Lord, there is no fundamental opposition between wisdom and ignorance. Here we resume the classic illustration of the clay: If we interpret it from a causal point of view, then we shall see in the clay the cause, and in the pot the effect—a form that is 'dependent' on the clay. But when this causal explanation no longer satisfies us, we shall understand that *the clay is not different from the form*, and we shall have the intuition that *all is but clay*. The man of realisation sees that he himself is the all—nothing exists but the Lord: His *prakriti* is not different from Him, and the contradiction between the propositions of the verses 9.4 and 9.5 is only apparent: 'All creatures have their being in Me... And, in reality, they do not even have their being in Me.' Thus one passes easily from the non-causal to the causal position. Having understood that the Lord is all, one may admit of a conception which sees in Him the Cause of *prakriti* (Nature) or of *mâyâ* (the apparent reality).

When realisation, which is not an experience [or an object to be sensed], has come and seized a person disposed towards devotion, nothing is going to stand in the way of this

person to then continue to follow the path familiar to him, a path on which he will have religious experiences. There is no need for him to go and change his way of life. Sri Ramakrishna's realisation did not keep him from singing hymns to the Lord and from tasting the joys of devotion, while all the time being fully aware of the non-dual Reality. He also held in high esteem the *Ashtavakra Samhita*, a text which expounds the teaching of non-duality, and which looks upon meditation as an act of ignorance ('Your greatest error is to meditate'). At the same time no master has emphasised the importance of meditation (*dhyâna*) and the repetition of the Lord's name (*japa*) more than Sri Ramakrishna, and he had a great respect for the popular forms of religion. In the eyes of an external observer there seemed to be two attitudes in him, which coexisted without the least conflict.

Both the causal conception—more accessible and more current—and the teaching of non-causality are explained in the Gita, so that the seeker may adopt either of these two positions. The teaching never becomes fixed into a dogmatic form. If we are able to grasp the non-causal position, we will find it majestically explained in the verses 9.4 and 5. And, conversely, it may be noticed that the most impersonal exposition contains 'emergency exits' for those who, due to their exclusively religious disposition, would not bear the all too vivifying atmosphere of non-causality.

In order to point out the ultimate Reality the Gita does not limit itself to a particular point of view, leaving to each the possibility of seeking according to his own nature: What he asks will be given to him. The only guiding principle, the only continuity to be noted in the teaching of the Gita concerns the conduct of the liberated man. On a social level such conduct will be an example and, looking at it from this

angle, the Gita is a *dharma shastra*, an ethics. Sri Krishna emphasises moral conduct, a just behaviour without which we will not be able to obtain the vision that we are seeking.

In any case, very rare is the person who is capable of attaining the 'right comprehension'. 'Among those who try to reach perfection, there may perhaps be one who succeeds in knowing Me as I am' (Gita, 7.3). Usually the Lord is thought of as the Cause of all creatures, a conception implying duality, and Sri Krishna expresses himself in the language of this duality, when He says: 'I am the Self of all beings.' But in saying so He wants to make it clear to us that His Self is *not* different from that of the creature, and that the manifestation is *identical* with the Absolute. At that point there is no longer any question of establishing a relation between the two. We have seen that, according to Vedanta, the Absolute is not of the order of the mind nor of the objective world: It is the Reality of which we have a *direct* intuition. Here, however, we are at the mercy of words, because it is *the characteristic of speech*, it is its *function in the empirical world, to establish relations*. The Absolute may only be indicated through silence or through contradiction.

Nothing more illusory, then, than a 'rapport' between the Self and the material elements. If the Lord would be *inside* the manifestation, He would exhaust himself while producing it. The fact that the manifestation is continuously renewing itself, shows that nothing is being retrenched from Him. Moreover, if the Lord would be dwelling in the creature, He would have to modify himself simultaneously with the creature, and He would no longer be the Eternal.

Even admitting that the Reality could enter into a system of relations, how to explain that the mighty and infinite Lord would be able to dwell in the creature? Who could claim to

contain within himself the Lord who is so vast? If I would really believe the Reality to be dwelling *inside* me, then this 'me' would be flooded and destroyed! On the other hand, nothing limits the Reality of the Lord, which can never become unreal, whereas the creature, being under the influence of continuous movement, is subject to birth, decrepitude and death. It would be a grave mistake, therefore, to identify the Real with that which is transient. The Real is no more change than its opposite: It is neither static nor dynamic.

When the Lord says: 'I manifest the creatures and support them', it concerns *every* presentation of the Consciousness (see chapter 5 with our commentary on verse 13.2). And, although the presentations *appear* to be different, each one is the Totality, in no way different from the other. The Reality does not enter into any relation, and there is not some *other* entity in which It could dwell. One need not fear that the person with a great thirst for life (*abhinivesha*) will come near the explosive charge which the non-causal teaching contains. Who will dare to undertake his own destruction? Realisation is nothing but the disappearing of the 'I', yet we are not able to decide on having it disappear. What to do?

No teaching gives us a more remarkable reply than the Gita. While showing us the ultimate position, a position which we are not able to accept right at the beginning, it proposes to get there by means that are in conformity with our nature. In order to make the created being understand that his Consciousness is not different from Himself, the Lord is asking an attitude of devotion towards Him—a causal position, because He will be looked upon as the Creator and Master of all things: 'In truth, it is difficult to overcome My divine *mâyâ*... Those who are wholly devoted to Me may be liber-

ated from illusion' (7.14).

The ultimate counsel given by the Gita, 'Come and take refuge in Me alone' (18.66), is the abandonment of all *dharma*, and by *dharma* (righteous deeds) one should of course understand the different disciplines by means of which one is trying to attain the truth. This giving up of all *dharma* requires a great maturity of spirit. In fact, it means the abandonment of all enquiry regarding an ultimate cause of the various beings: *Realisation is the perfect understanding of non-causality*. It is paradoxical that we should arrive there, starting from a causal position.

The Gita also never mentions that an individual could gain the 'right comprehension' by efforts independent of Revelation. As a matter of fact, it is the Lord himself who, through His *mâyâ*, establishes the values and determines the series of causes and effects. The search is in vain, if it is not in agreement with the directions of the revealed Scriptures. A causal approach, in conformity with the recommendations of the Scriptures, will lead us to the non-causal position, to the same *Asparsha Yoga* which is also taught by the *Mandukya Upanishad*.



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