

# *The Eternal Message of the Gita*

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## **Contradiction & Certitude – 4. Transcendental Reality**

We have seen that Vedanta, in its attempt to express the Inexpressible, points to the nature of the ultimate Reality by means of contradictions. Now the question is asked, 'How can such an approach take us to the truth, the basic criterion of which is *non-contradiction*?' In other words, can the method of the contradiction give us an intuitive understanding of the Reality which lies beyond the pairs of opposites, of the Reality which shines with its own light, and which can never be contradicted by anything?

The truth of Vedanta is not limited to a particular statement. We are not claiming that only the method of the contradiction will permit one to attain this truth, or that a verification would be possible that would give us certainty. This need to verify things is firmly implanted in us. We are determined to discover the truth by removing the error, and we are convinced that, somehow or other, we possess the means to ascertain the truth of what we know. But how can we be certain that what we know is true? Contradiction, on the other hand, provokes a series of shocks in us, and we lose

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2 This 10<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.15, November 1956. English translation and edit by André van den Brink of the Netherlands.

our point of support: We no longer have any base to hold on to, and the floor under our feet is continuously giving way. How shall we thus ever be able to reach the firm ground of the truth?

While remaining on the plane of form, where, quite often unknowingly, we are holding on to a thousand attachments, we should not imagine that we will be able to establish ourselves in the non-mundane. The workings of the imagination, leading us to the continuous production of what Samkhya philosophy calls the 'mental projections', are congenital, inseparable from human nature. In order to understand that, in the world of forms, nothing remains unchanged for one single instant, life's circumstances will *have* to disconcert us and push us about, so that we will *need* to set ourselves to observe and reflect without the least partiality. Hardly have we focussed a telescope on a star than it has already moved, and what takes place in the physical world is happening in all the other areas as well. On every occasion we form opinions which we hold to be final. Soon, however, the shadow of doubt spreads over them, and what we believed to be true appears uncertain.

If that be the case, if there is no objective truth, the intelligence will give up turning itself towards the objects, or rather, it will make *itself* the object of its study. We then call it 'pure intelligence', 'independent intelligence'. And this intelligence which, until then, we considered a mental faculty, the intellectual intuition of which was the highest expression, will go and remain in itself as *pure Consciousness*, as *attention-without-object*. This intelligence seemed to be inseparable from the practices of our intellect, but here, then, it appears autonomous, without any relation to the psychic or physical activities. And the light of this intelligence which we

call '*the metaphysical intuition*', comes from nowhere.

We distinguish the metaphysical intuition from the instinctive and intellectual intuition, but, whatever the nature of the intuition may be, it will be noted that it is impossible to establish its origin. Let us take the example of the instinctive intuition: I have the feeling that a certain person is going to come tomorrow at five o'clock, despite the fact that the visit of this person is actually the last thing I should expect. Will he come or not? In order to know it I will have to be patient until tomorrow. If my intuition proves to be right, parapsychology may well be able to explain it in some way, calling it 'precognition', etc., but nobody will be able to tell *why*, at a certain moment, I had this instinctive intuition.

The same is applicable to the intellectual intuition: Thirty years ago, in Mysore, I heard the famous scholar Sir J.C. Bose explain how he had discovered the sensitivity of plants and minerals. For quite some time, despite all his research, he had not been able to find the instruments permitting him to verify and demonstrate the theories advanced by him. One day a sudden light broke in upon him and he saw how he could realise the necessary instruments. These cases frequently occur with scholars, philosophers and artists. During long years of study and reflection a great thinking power accumulates in them and one day, all of a sudden, a flash of intuition provides the seeker with the exact answer to the problem that occupied his mind.

In order to understand clearly what distinguishes the metaphysical intuition from other intuitions, we have to refer to the Vedantic method of *avasthâtraya*, the study of the states of waking, dream and deep sleep. It is clear that the intellectual intuition will not be able to help us to understand the *whole* of the three states, because this intuition

only applies to the objects of the waking state. Indeed, when we are dreaming, the whole series of perceptions that constitute the waking state, is completely replaced by another world of perceptions.

In connection with verse 13.2, I mentioned as an example a dream in which I was a sailor walking along the beach while looking at the Mont St. Michel. The whole intellectual disposition of my waking state had been effaced, while only the sailor was present there, that is to say, the mental structure particular to the sailor. The waking state is thus being annulled, contradicted by the dream and, vice-versa, the dream is annulled as soon as I wake up. Shankara observes that not only is it impossible for us to trust one opinion more than another ('Don't cherish opinions', Zen also recommends us), but also—and this is even more disturbing to us—we cannot even rely on the state in which, at present, we find ourselves. Whether it be waking or dreaming, we cannot take seriously a state which is nullified by another state. This ambiguity Shankara calls *parasparavirodha*, incompatibility or mutual contradiction.

We thus cease to believe in the primacy of the intellect on which, until then, we had based our certainties. Doubt then no longer concerns an observation, a judgement or an idea, but *the reality of the very person who doubts* and, together with this person, everything that enters into contact with him, that is to say, the universe which surrounds him and of which he is only an element. *This refusal to accept that the whole of one state would be absolutely real, is what constitutes metaphysical doubt.* Later on we shall consider the state of dreamless sleep. For the moment it seems sufficient for us to have a clear understanding of the opposition which exists between the dream and the waking state, and how

each state is nullified by the other.

The metaphysical intuition, also called 'liberation', *satori* or 'realisation', and which does not belong to the domain of experience, is situated neither in time nor in space. It is never contradicted, never negated. Hardly has the dream experience passed, when we find ourselves in the experience of the waking state. When we awake to the metaphysical intuition, we shall understand that only the presentations of the Reality change: It makes little difference whether the presentation is expressed in the dream or in the waking state. What remains is the pure Consciousness (*chit*) which cannot be contradicted by anything. Non-contradiction as the opposite of contradiction belongs to the dialectics of a particular state, whereas pure Consciousness, not being limited by any state, cannot be contradicted. This supreme non-contradiction is the criterion of the truth. Before such awakening takes place we can only rely on the intellectual intuition, on what it suggests to us about the realisation of persons like the Buddha, Shankara or Ramana Maharshi. As a basis for our enquiry we accept the authority of the revealed texts and the words of the sages.

While commenting upon the verses 9.4 and 9.5, we have seen that the reason behind their contradictory character is to give a jolt to our intellectual habits. The doubt which then arises will purify us, making place for certainty, for the opening of the 'third eye'. Whereas in the state of ignorance the Totality appears to be fragmented (*Gita*, 13.16), in the state of purity and equilibrium the intellectual intuition shows it to be *non-fragmented*, giving us the certainty that realisation is possible: 'The knowledge which permits one to see the indestructible Being in all beings, which reveals the Indivisible in everything that appears to be divided, that knowledge is

pure' (18.20). Then, with each operation of the mind, it is found that the Absolute and the relative are not different from each other. In the terminology of Buddhism, too, all action, all thought form, is known as being 'without form', emptiness (*shunya*). Vedanta expresses this by saying that 'everything is known as Brahman'. The realisation of the truth is the comprehension that 'Vasudeva, the Lord, is everything' (7.19).

We should now caution the reader against a premature interpretation as to what we have said about the metaphysical intuition. *One likes to flatter oneself with the belief of having realised the truth, repeating words like a parrot, that do not come from one's own fund.* The comprehension that 'all is Brahman', that 'all is Vasudeva', can only come at the end of a deep enquiry, after having crossed the antechamber of the Great Doubt. While only very few persons are capable of having intellectual intuitions, there are many that give a metaphysical purport to their instinctive intuitions. One could not be farther away from the truth.

In the preceding reflections we have intended to show that the Vedantic realisation is anything but a religious, mystical experience with which it is often mixed up. The mystical experience expresses itself in *one* state only, namely the waking, the dream or the 'visionary' state in which this particular phenomenon is experienced by us. The Vedantic intuition, however, is not associated with *any* state. Even the expression *turiya avasthâ* (the 'fourth' state) should be discarded and the transcendental state be indicated by the term of *turiyâtita*, i.e. *beyond turiya*. The Vedantic masters take care not to give the impression to their disciples that we are dealing with a *state that one could enter and leave again*.

*Gita - Contr & Cert 4. Transcendental Reality -  
Swami Siddheswarananda*

Having used the word 'transcendental', we should explain ourselves with respect to this term: In terms of religious experience the word is not without suggesting the idea of something 'supernatural'. To Vedanta it simply means 'That which cannot be fixed into any particular form'. The illustration of the clay will make this idea even clearer: Although manifesting itself under so many different forms, the clay does not exhaust itself. And, whatever the forms that are expressing the clay, these are always only clay. The comprehension of this Reality is called 'transcendental' by us. Here there is nothing 'supernatural', nothing 'spiritual', because such notions would still be opposed to those of 'natural' and 'material'. In the truth of Vedanta *there is no place for a second entity* that would be opposed to it.

The method of the contradiction plunges us in the greatest of doubts in order to reveal to us a truth that is free from contradiction: the transcendental Reality.



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