

ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S NON-MONISTIC ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE

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## Abstract

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### ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S NON-MONISTIC ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE

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The French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktānanda) sought to establish an Indian Christian monasticism, emphasizing Hindu *advaitic* experience. He understood *advaita* as both nondual and non-monistic. Using phenomenology and comparative philosophy, this thesis explores his understanding and experience of *advaita*, comparing it to both traditional Hinduism and neo-Vedānta, as well as to Christianity and Zen Buddhism. Abhishiktānanda's description of his experience is examined in relation to perception, thinking, action, ontology and theology. Special attention is given to comparing the views of the Hindu sages Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gṇānānanda, both of whom influenced Abhishiktānanda.

Abhishiktānanda believed that *advaita* must be directly experienced; this experience is beyond all words and concepts. He compares Christian apophatic mysticism and Hindu *sannyāsa*. This thesis examines his distinction between experience and thought in relation to recent philosophical discussions.

Abhishiktānanda radically reinterprets Christianity. His affirmation of both nonduality and non-monism was influenced by Christian Trinitarianism, interpreted as an emanation of the Many from the One. Jesus' experience of Sonship with the Father is an *advaitic* experience that is equally available to everyone. Abhishiktānanda believes that the early Upanishads report a similar experience. A monistic interpretation of *advaita* only developed later with the "dialectics" of Shankara's disciples. In non-monistic *advaita*, the world is not an illusion. Using ideas derived from *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism*, Abhishiktānanda interprets *māyā* as the *śakti* or power of Shiva. He compares *śakti* to the Holy Spirit.

Abhishiktānanda distinguishes between a pure consciousness experience (*nirvikalpa* or *kevala samādhi*) and a return to the world of diversity in *sahaja samādhi*. Ramaṇa and Gṇānānanda make a similar distinction. *Sahaja samādhi* is the state of the *jīvanmukti*, the one who is liberated while still in the body; it is an experience that is referred to in *tantra* and in Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda never experienced *nirvikalpa samādhi*, but he did experience *sahaja samādhi*.

The appendix provides one possible synthesis of Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* using the ideas of C.G. Jung.

**Key words:** Abhishiktānanda, Le Saux, Ramaṇa, Gṇānānanda, *advaita*, nondualism, non-monistic, mysticism, Hindu-Christian, Jung.

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My wife Sabine Moritz accompanied me on my visit to India. She has encouraged me not only in writing of this thesis but in pursuing the spirituality that is its subject. Sabine has herself researched spirituality from the perspective of its application in alternative medicine.

Our teenage children Skye and Luke watched with interest as my research progressed, asking interesting questions about the religious traditions involved. Just at the time that I was completing this thesis, we adopted little Zoë Huong from Viet Nam. The Buddhist tradition of her country is a reminder to us of the increasing religious pluralism of our world. I hope that our children will find the religious meeting point that is evident in Abhishiktānanda's experience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### VOLUME I

<b>I. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ABHISHIKTĀNANDA.....	1
B. THE ISSUE: THE NATURE OF ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE.....	7
C. PREVIOUS RESEARCH .....	12
D. NOTES ON THE TEXT.....	14
<b>II. COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND DIALOGUE .....</b>	<b>16</b>
A. COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY .....	16
B. EXPERIENCE AND CONCEPT: FOUR MODELS .....	22
1. <i>The Model of Immediate Experience</i> .....	22
2. <i>Constructivism</i> .....	33
3. <i>Hermeneutics</i> .....	37
4. <i>The Yogic Model</i> .....	44
C. PHENOMENOLOGY .....	50
D. SOURCES INVESTIGATED .....	54
<b>III. MAJOR INFLUENCES ON ABHISHIKTĀNANDA.....</b>	<b>57</b>
A. BOOKS.....	57
B. JULES MONCHANIN.....	59
C. RAMAṆA MAHARSHI .....	62
1. <i>Who was Ramaṇa Maharshi?</i> .....	62
2. <i>Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi</i> .....	66
3. <i>Abhishiktānanda's Previous Information about Ramaṇa Maharshi</i> .....	77
4. <i>Time Spent with Ramaṇa Maharshi</i> .....	84
5. <i>Disciples of Ramaṇa Maharshi who had a major influence</i> .....	91
6. <i>The influence of Ramaṇa Maharshi on Abhishiktānanda</i> .....	96
D. GNĀNĀNANDA .....	98
1. <i>Who was Gnānānanda?</i> .....	98
2. <i>Teachings of Gnānānanda</i> .....	101
3. <i>Time spent with Gnānānanda</i> .....	109
4. <i>The influence of Gnānānanda on Abhishiktānanda</i> .....	109
E. BUDDHIST INFLUENCES .....	111

F.	ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S DISCIPLE MARC .....	117
1.	<i>Guru/Disciple relationship</i> .....	117
2.	<i>The dīkshā of Marc Chaduc</i> .....	119
G.	OTHER IMPORTANT INFLUENCES .....	120
1.	<i>Raimon Panikkar</i> .....	120
2.	<i>Chidananda</i> .....	123
<b>IV. ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S DESCRIPTION OF HIS ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE.....</b>		<b>126</b>
A.	DOUBTS AND AUTHENTICITY OF THE EXPERIENCE.....	126
B.	CRITERIA OF AUTHENTICITY .....	129
1.	<i>Immediate Luminousness of the Experience</i> .....	129
2.	<i>Philosophical Reasonableness</i> .....	129
3.	<i>Moral effect</i> .....	130
C.	LEVELS OF ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE.....	130
D.	PRE-1972 "TASTES" OF THE ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE.....	133
1.	<i>Ramaṇa Maharshi</i> .....	133
2.	<i>Caves of Arunāchala</i> .....	135
3.	<i>Gnānānanda</i> .....	150
4.	<i>Himalayas</i> .....	152
E.	THE ADVAITIC EXPERIENCES IN 1972-1973 .....	153
1.	<i>Experiences with his disciple Marc Chaduc</i> .....	153
2.	<i>Rishikesh</i> .....	171
F.	INTERPRETIVE EXPRESSIONS .....	190
<b>V. NONDUAL PERCEPTION .....</b>		<b>192</b>
A.	NONDIFFERENCE OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT .....	192
1.	<i>Some issues in nondual perception</i> .....	192
2.	<i>Nondual perception in Buddhism</i> .....	193
3.	<i>Nondual perception in Vedānta Advaita</i> .....	203
B.	ABHISHIKTĀNANDA AND NONDUAL PERCEPTION.....	220
1.	<i>The four states of consciousness</i> .....	220
2.	<i>Yoga and nirvikalpa samādhi</i> .....	222
3.	<i>Sahaja samādhi as a return to the world</i> .....	227
4.	<i>Seeing Brahman in all things</i> .....	236
5.	<i>Anātman and Self</i> .....	239
6.	<i>Affirmation of the world of "objects" and distinctions</i> .....	243

## VOLUME II

<b>VI. NONDUAL THINKING .....</b>	<b>248</b>
A. WHAT IS DUALISTIC THINKING? .....	248
B. CONCEPT AND EXPERIENCE IN ABHISHIKTĀNANDA .....	250
1. <i>Experience is both prior to and beyond concepts</i> .....	250
2. <i>Intuition</i> .....	252
3. <i>Superimposition and Nāmarūpa</i> .....	254
C. MYTH AND SYMBOL .....	255
1. <i>The nature of myth</i> .....	255
2. <i>The relativity of myth</i> .....	257
3. <i>The necessity of myth</i> .....	259
D. CONCEPT .....	260
1. <i>Development of concept from myth</i> .....	260
2. <i>The grasping nature of concepts</i> .....	261
3. <i>Inadequacy of Concepts</i> .....	262
E. NONDUAL THINKING .....	281
1. <i>The continuance of thinking</i> .....	281
2. <i>Poetry and Aesthetics</i> .....	283
3. <i>Paradox</i> .....	285
<b>VII. NONDUAL ACTION .....</b>	<b>287</b>
A. THE FRUITS OF OUR ACTIONS .....	287
B. NONDUAL ACTION AND PURE CONSCIOUSNESS .....	291
1. <i>Monasticism/Sannyasa</i> .....	291
2. <i>Acosmism</i> .....	294
3. <i>Non involvement</i> .....	299
4. <i>Criticism of acosmism</i> .....	303
C. NONDUAL ACTION AND SAHAJA .....	309
1. <i>The jīvanmukta</i> .....	309
2. <i>Beyond ego</i> .....	312
3. <i>Beyond good and evil</i> .....	314
4. <i>Presence of the Self in Others</i> .....	320
5. <i>Actionless Action</i> .....	325
6. <i>Nature</i> .....	328

<b>VIII. PHENOMENA AND THE ABSOLUTE.....</b>	<b>330</b>
A. TWO LEVELS OF REALITY?.....	331
1. <i>Vedānta's monistic idea of Self</i> .....	332
2. <i>Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of māyā</i> .....	346
3. <i>Transcendence in Immanence</i> .....	352
B. TRINITARIANISM.....	358
1. <i>Monchanin's trinitarianism</i> .....	358
2. <i>Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism</i> .....	361
3. <i>God's Freedom of Creation</i> .....	373
4. <i>The Importance of Time</i> .....	374
5. <i>Fullness and Emptiness</i> .....	380
C. TELEOLOGY.....	385
1. <i>Abhishiktānanda's teleology</i> .....	385
2. <i>Aurobindo</i> .....	387
3. <i>Teilhard de Chardin</i> .....	390
4. <i>Can there be a teleology without dualism?</i> .....	391
<b>IX. THE MYSTICAL UNION OF GOD AND HUMANITY .....</b>	<b>397</b>
A. THE EXPERIENCE OF "I AM" .....	397
B. ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S CRITICISM OF THEISM .....	403
1. <i>Theism as Projection</i> .....	403
2. <i>Transcendental Atheism</i> .....	407
3. <i>Union and Communion</i> .....	408
C. SCRIPTURE .....	411
D. SPECIFIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	414
1. <i>Trinity</i> .....	415
2. <i>Christology</i> .....	421
3. <i>Sin and Salvation</i> .....	427
4. <i>Prayer</i> .....	430
5. <i>Eucharist</i> .....	431
6. <i>Institutions</i> .....	432
7. <i>Resurrection and Afterlife</i> .....	434
<b>X. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS.....</b>	<b>439</b>
A. SEEKING A COHERENCE.....	439
B. CHRISTIAN TRINITARIANISM.....	441
C. EQUIVALENTS TO NON-MONISTIC ADVAITA WITHIN HINDUISM.....	444

1.	<i>The Upanishads</i> .....	444
2.	<i>Aneka</i> .....	446
D.	THE INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN KEVALA AND SAHAJA.....	449
1.	<i>Pure Consciousness versus the awareness of interrelation</i> .....	449
2.	<i>Inconsistency within Hinduism itself</i> .....	450
3.	<i>Inconsistencies in Ramaṇa's Story</i> .....	452
4.	<i>The return</i> .....	453
5.	<i>Abhishiktānanda's own experience</i> .....	456
E.	BEING AND THE ISSUE OF LEVELS OF REALITY.....	457
F.	THINKING AND THE ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE.....	460
1.	<i>Apophaticism</i> .....	460
2.	<i>The dualistic nature of concepts</i> .....	462
3.	<i>A positive valuation of concepts</i> .....	463
4.	<i>Rejection of logicism</i> .....	465
G.	ACOSMISM AND ETHICS.....	470
H.	THE RELATIVIZING OF RELIGION.....	474
1.	<i>Religions are different views</i> .....	474
2.	<i>The Challenge for Christianity</i> .....	477
3.	<i>The Challenge for Hinduism</i> .....	479
4.	<i>The Challenge to Buddhism</i> .....	481
5.	<i>Not a meta-religion</i> .....	483
I.	SUMMARY.....	485
<b>APPENDIX: THE INFLUENCE OF C.G. JUNG ON ABHISHIKTĀNANDA.....</b>		<b>489</b>
A.	ABHISHIKTĀNANDA'S DISCOVERY OF JUNG.....	489
B.	JUNG AND HINDUISM.....	493
1.	<i>The Idea of the Self</i> .....	493
2.	<i>Jung and Ramaṇa</i> .....	496
3.	<i>Possible influence of Ramaṇa on Jung</i> .....	497
4.	<i>Jung's evaluation of Ramaṇa's religious experience</i> .....	499
C.	JUNG'S UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPTS.....	500
D.	JUNG AND SYMBOLS.....	502
E.	ARCHETYPES.....	505
1.	<i>Jung's explanation of archetypes</i> .....	505
2.	<i>Abhishiktānanda's reliance on the idea of archetypes</i> .....	506
3.	<i>Going beyond the archetype</i> .....	507
4.	<i>Necessity but relativity of Archetypes</i> .....	509
5.	<i>The relativity and necessity of concepts</i> .....	513

F.	SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTIFICATION WITH BRAHMAN.....	516
1.	<i>Jung and Kundalini yoga</i> .....	516
2.	<i>Superconsciousness and nirvikalpa samādhi</i> .....	517
G.	TELEOLOGY .....	520
1.	<i>Jung's idea of teleology</i> .....	520
H.	TRANSCENDENCE .....	523
I.	TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS .....	525
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>		<b>526</b>
<b>INDEX.....</b>		<b>544</b>

## I. Introduction

### A. A Brief Biography of Abhishiktānanda

The twentieth century saw levels of interaction between religious traditions unparalleled in the history of religions. Two such traditions that had long been separated by geography and ideology were Catholic Christianity and Hinduism. In few instances can the dynamic interaction between these two be seen more clearly than in the life of Abhishiktānanda.

Abhishiktānanda means “Bliss of the Anointed One, the Lord.” It is the name that was used in India by the French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux.<sup>1</sup> There is an ambiguity in this name, an ambiguity that perhaps reflects the tension felt by Abhishiktānanda in reconciling his Hindu *advaitic* experience with his Christian religious experience. Panikkar says that the name means, “He whose joy is the Lord’s anointed, Christ.”<sup>2</sup> That would suggest the joy of devotion to Christ. Or the name may mean “He who *is* the bliss of the Lord’s Anointed”, thus going beyond devotion to Christ to an actual sharing of Christ’s experience. This second meaning is more in keeping with Abhishiktānanda’s emphasis on the importance of this experience for himself.<sup>3</sup> Christ’s ‘anointing’ was his experience of Sonship with the Father. Abhishiktānanda equated this experience of Sonship with the Hindu *advaitic* experience. In his view, this experience is the most important goal of human life; it is an experience that is open to anyone who will only realize it.

This thesis will examine Abhishiktānanda’s understanding of his *advaitic* experience. How does he describe it? What does he mean when he says that *advaita* is non-monistic? How

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<sup>1</sup> The original name was Abhishikteshvarānanda (The Sanskrit *abhishikta* means ‘anointed’, i.e. Christ; *īśvara* means ‘Lord’; *ānanda* means ‘bliss’). This was shortened to Abhishiktānanda. See James Stuart (ed.): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters*, (Delhi: ISPC, 1989, 2nd edition 1995), p. 40. (This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Letters*.) *Sannyāsīs* (Hindu monks) frequently have names ending with ‘ānanda’.

<sup>2</sup> Raimon Panikkar (ed.): *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: the Spiritual Diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri Le Saux)*, ed. (Paris: OEIL, 1998), p. 19. This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Diary*.

<sup>3</sup> Abhishiktānanda himself explained his name as “Celui-qui-est-dans-la-Béatitude-de-l’Oint-du Seigneur.” This seems to emphasize a sharing of Christ’s experience. See Alain Chapellier in Marc de Smedt (ed.): *Christ et Vedanta: L’expérience d’Henri Le Saux en Inde* (In the series “Question de”, No. 85, Albin Michel, 1991). There may be a development here from a devotional approach to an interiorization of Christ’s experience. In any event, both meanings may be correct. Even as he interiorized the experience, Abhishiktānanda continued to be devoted to Christ, whom he called his *Sadguru* (which literally means “True/Real Teacher”).

does this compare to other descriptions of nondual experience? Who influenced him to seek the experience, and what expectations did he have of the experience? Was the experience in accordance with those expectations? How does he evaluate his *advaitic* experience?

Abhishiktānanda was born in 1910 at St.-Briac (Brittany), France. His parents encouraged him to enter the priesthood. In 1921, he was sent to the Minor Seminary at Châteaugiron to prepare for the priesthood. In 1924, his mother nearly died giving birth to another child. The following year she was again expecting a child. Abhishiktānanda made a private vow that if she survived he would go as a missionary wherever God would have him go, “even to the most distant mission.” An uncle of his had gone as a missionary to China in 1923. His mother did survive.

Abhishiktānanda entered the Major Seminary at Rennes in 1926. A close friend of his at seminary said he wanted to become a Benedictine. When that friend died, Abhishiktānanda felt that he had inherited this vocation to become a monk. Abhishiktānanda sought admission to the Abbey of Ste.-Anne de Kergonan, Brittany. In his letter to the novice master seeking admission to the Abbey, he already states his desire for immediate religious experience:

What has drawn me from the beginning, and what still leads me on, is the hope of finding there the presence of God more immediately than anywhere else. I have a very ambitious spirit—and this is permissible, is it not? when it is a matter of seeking God—and I hope I shall not be disappointed.<sup>4</sup>

In 1929, Abhishiktānanda entered the Abbey at the age of 19. He remained there until 1948. He became the librarian at Kergonan; while there, he read works by the Greek Fathers of the Church, and the Fathers of the Desert.<sup>5</sup> From them Abhishiktānanda learned the apophatic way of mysticism.

From 1946 to 1948, he was in charge of teaching novices at the Abbey. He taught Canon Law, and the history of the Church, which included the writings of the Church Fathers.

By 1934 he saw his life’s vocation as going to India. Kergonan was not satisfying his ambition in seeking God. He longed for an even deeper monasticism. “It was in my deep

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<sup>4</sup> *Letters*, p. 2 (4.12.28).

<sup>5</sup> *Letters*, p. 7.

dissatisfaction that my desire to come to India was born.”<sup>6</sup> It is not clear why he chose India; it appears that he believed that life in India would allow him a greater simplicity and a greater degree of renunciation in his monasticism. He began studying Hindu texts in preparation for going to India. Despite his desire to go to India, he was not permitted to make inquiries about going there until after the war ended in 1945.

In 1942, Abhishiktānanda wrote a manuscript for his mother, entitled *Amour et Sagesse* (Love and Wisdom). It was a meditation on the Trinity, which he considered the noblest mystery of the faith, “so little known, so little savoured, experienced, even by fervent Christians.” As we shall see, the doctrine of the Trinity continued to be important for Abhishiktānanda in his understanding of the *advaitic* experience. The manuscript *Amour et Sagesse* also takes up the theme of apophatic mysticism which would be so important in Abhishiktānanda’s thought. He refers to God as being beyond our thought. It is also interesting that *Amour et Sagesse* makes some references to Indian writings. He quotes Tagore’s *Gitanjali* with respect to God’s loving condescension in accepting the devotion of his creatures. And he ends each chapter with the sacred syllable ‘OM’.

Abhishiktānanda’s mother died in 1944. His father died in 1954. After he went to India, Abhishiktānanda stayed in touch with his brothers and sisters. But he never returned to France. One of his sisters, Sr. Marie-Thérèse, also entered the Abbey of St. Michel, a sister-Abbey to Kergonan. Some of Abhishiktānanda’s most personal correspondence is with her.

In 1947, Abhishiktānanda wrote to the Bishop of Tiruchirapalli in India about the possibility of going to India. Abhishiktānanda indicated that he sought “to lead the contemplative life, in the absolute simplicity of early Christian monasticism and at the same time in the closest possible conformity with the traditions of Indian *sannyāsa*.”<sup>7</sup> Fr. Jules Monchanin, who also shared this vision of an Indian Christianity, answered his letter on behalf of the Bishop. Abhishiktānanda had previously heard of Monchanin from articles he had read. He wrote back to Monchanin:

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<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, p. 12 (13.3.67).

<sup>7</sup> *Letters*, p. 12 (15.5.47).

You can imagine what it meant to discover someone whom the thought of the *ātman* leads to the contemplation of the divine Paraclete, and who behind the superficial pantheism discerns the extraordinary intuition of the Spirit reached by the great seers of the Upanishads<sup>8</sup>

Monchanin in turn saw Abhishiktānanda's request to come to India as an answer from God, and he encouraged Abhishiktānanda to join him. Abhishiktānanda left France for India in 1948, with the goal of starting a Christian ashram, and of developing a truly Indian Christianity. In joining Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda had to obtain an indult of exclaustation (formal permission for a monk to live outside his monastery).

Together with Monchanin, who had chosen the name Swami Parama Arūbi Ānanda<sup>9</sup>, Abhishiktānanda founded an ashram on the bank of the Kavery River at Tannirpalli. Monchanin had never before led a monastic life; in contrast to him, Abhishiktānanda had had practically no contact with life outside a monastery. The ashram was officially called 'Saccidānanda Āshram'<sup>10</sup> or 'Eremus Sanctissimae Trinitatis' (Hermitage of the Most Holy Trinity). But it was more commonly known by the name they gave to the mango grove there, 'Shāntivanam' (Grove of Peace). The ashram was to be governed by Benedictine rules, but many Hindu customs were followed as well. They dressed and acted as Hindu *sannyāsīs* (Hindu monks who have renounced everything). Abhishiktānanda bought his first *kavi* or saffron robe in February 1949. The emblem of Shantivanam was the cross of St. Benedict with the symbol OM at the centre, and round the edge the words, in Sanskrit, "Peace, Glory to Saccidānanda". The chapel was modeled on the *mulasthanam* (the holy of holies) of the ancient Chola temple of Magadipettu in Pondicherry. They used Hindu prostrations, the *anjali*, light and incense in the Mass that they said in the chapel. Later, Abhishiktānanda adopted the practice of reciting portions of the Gospels and the 'Our Father' in Sanskrit. The two priests wore a rosary around their necks that exactly resembled that worn by Śaivite ascetics. Their quest for a truly Indian Christianity led Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin to embrace poverty and simplicity. Abhishiktānanda slept on the floor and tried not to sit in chairs. He walked in bare feet. He followed a vegetarian diet,

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<sup>8</sup> *Letters*, p. 16 (18.8.47).

<sup>9</sup> "Swami Parama Arūbi Ānanda" means, "He whose joy is the Supreme Formless One, the Holy Spirit." *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1979), p. 1. Unlike Abhishiktānanda, who was known by his Indian name, Monchanin's Indian name did not stick.

<sup>10</sup> *Saccidānanda* from *sat* (being), *cit* (awareness) and *ānanda* (bliss).

which Monchanin considered was essential for a *sannyāsī*. A visiting Hindu monk expressed surprise at their simple way of living, and found their food to be too *sattvic* (pure) even for him.

In 1951, Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin published a book describing their ashram: *An Indian Benedictine Ashram*.<sup>11</sup> The Bishop of Tiruchirapalli, J. Mendonça, wrote the Preface to the book. He supported the ashram in its missionary purposes—to convert Hindus to Christianity, but a Christianity that was one with the Hindu cultural tradition. This was in fact the ideal of the early Jesuit missionary to India, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656). Mendonça expressed the view that the approach taken by Monchanin and Abhishiktānanda would in the long run help in the assimilation of the ancient Indian culture and its Christianisation. Their goal was to allow the Indian Church to be as Indian as it could legitimately be, just as in previous eras the Church was able to be Greek and Roman. More than ten years later, this approach was affirmed by Vatican II (1962-65).

This use of Hindu cultural forms to express Christianity is sometimes referred to as ‘inculturation.’ This approach has angered some Hindus, who find it a deceptive misuse of their own traditions.<sup>12</sup> In their view, to say that Hinduism receives its fulfillment in Christ devalues their own tradition. What these critics have not acknowledged is that although Abhishiktānanda may have come to India with the intent to convert, in the end he was himself profoundly influenced by Indian traditions. Panikkar says that he was converted by those whom he had sought to convert.<sup>13</sup> Abhishiktānanda himself moved away from a theology of fulfillment to an appreciation of Hinduism in its own right.

Abhishiktānanda became convinced that the Hindu *advaitic* experience of the Self was central to any dialogue with Hinduism. He sought to attain the *advaitic* experience by meeting

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<sup>11</sup> *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* (Tiruchirapalli, 1951). This was later translated and revised as *Ermites du Saccidānanda* (Paris: Casterman, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> See the attack on inculturation by Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994). What is especially interesting is that Goel was at one time the treasurer of the Abhishiktānanda Society in New Delhi. He includes an extensive correspondence between Fr. Bede Griffiths and Devananda with respect to Shantivanam Ashram. Goel refers disparagingly to the “Trinity from Tannirpalli” (Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda and Griffiths). It is also interesting that Goel met Abhishiktānanda in 1958, and had no idea that he was a missionary. What impressed him at that time was that Abhishiktānanda knew Hindu philosophy better than he did. Goel’s book appears to be representative of what Hacker calls “surviving traditional Hinduism” which he contrasts with “neo-Hinduism”.

<sup>13</sup> *Diary*, Introduction by R. Panikkar, p. xvi.

with the Hindu sages Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gnānānanda, by spending prolonged periods of meditation in the caves of Arunāchala (a mountain that South Indian Śaivites consider sacred), as well as by prolonged retreats at his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas which he established in 1961. Before he moved into this hermitage, he hallowed it with a sacred Vedic fire.<sup>14</sup>

Abhishiktānanda found it difficult to reconcile his *advaitic* experience with his experience as a Christian, although he continued to attempt to do so. He believed that until the Church could welcome those with the *advaitic* experience, there would be no possibility of the Church's progress in India.<sup>15</sup> As he continued his experimental investigation of *advaita*, he came to prefer Hindu terminology to express his religious experience, and his beliefs as a Christian changed.<sup>16</sup> During this time, he was tormented by doubt. At times he was afraid that he was exchanging his Christian beliefs, and risking his eternal salvation for an illusory experience, a "mirage".<sup>17</sup> But in his final years, Abhishiktānanda became convinced of the authenticity and truth of his *advaitic* experience.

The ashram Shantivanam was a disappointment to Abhishiktānanda in that he and Monchanin had difficulty attracting Hindus to join the ashram. Abhishiktānanda gradually gave up his dream of a community of Hindu-Christian monks; instead he devoted himself to personally being a *sannyāsī* who was at the same time both Christian and Hindu. In 1971, looking back on the ashram, Abhishiktānanda wrote:

Expansion in human terms, success, numbers are of no importance. All that belongs to the realm of *māyā*, appearance, and the monk is only concerned with *nitya*, the real.<sup>18</sup>

In 1957, Monchanin died. Abhishiktānanda became more and more a *sannyāsī*, spending long periods of time alone in his hermitage at Uttarkashi in the Himalayas. In 1968, Fr. Bede

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<sup>14</sup> *Letters*, p. 145 (24.5.62).

<sup>15</sup> *Diary*, p. 259 (26.8.63): "The Church will only have the right to call Hindus to herself when she is capable of receiving people like Ramaṇa."

<sup>16</sup> See my article, "Abhishiktānanda: Hindu Advaitic Experience and Christian Beliefs", *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin*, 1998, Vol. 11, 31-38.

<sup>17</sup> *Diary*, p. 180, (27.11.56).

<sup>18</sup> *Letters*, p. 108.

Griffiths took over the ashram Shantivanam; Abhishiktānanda never returned to it. Bede Griffiths continued the practice of using Hindu cultural forms in the Christian worship at the ashram.

Abhishiktānanda remained a Roman Catholic priest until his death in 1973. But he also participated in Hindu (*Sāivite*) worship. His goal of being a *sannyāsī* who was both Christian and Hindu was fulfilled when he became *guru* to his own disciple, Marc Chaduc, and when this disciple was given a joint Hindu-Christian initiation (*dīkshā*) by both Abhishiktānanda and by Chidānanda, a Hindu monk at the Sivānanda ashram in Rishikesh. It was during his time with his disciple that Abhishiktānanda achieved what he believed was the definitive *advaitic* experience. The intensity of this experience removed all doubts for him. But it also resulted in a heart attack in 1973. During this attack, which Abhishiktānanda refers to as an “adventure”, he had further experiences that for him confirmed the validity of the experience.

#### *B. The issue: The nature of Abhishiktānanda’s advaitic experience*

Abhishiktānanda understood his experience to be *advaitic* but not monistic. ‘*Advaita*’ means “non-dual”, or “not-two”. For example, one aspect of his *advaitic* experience is that the human Self and God (*Brahman*) are experienced as “not two” (*advaita*). But although the *advaitic* experience is that of “not two” (or non-dual) he also says that the *advaitic* experience is different from “only one” (or absolute monism). Abhishiktānanda’s emphasis on the experience being neither “not two” nor “only one” gives value to both unity and diversity. To the extent that the experience is one of unity it is “not two”. And to the extent that individuality is not swallowed up or identified with the One, the experience is not “only one”. He speaks of *advaita-aneka* [not two, not one]:

...God himself is both one and plural in his mystery—or rather, to put it more accurately, he is not-one, *an-eka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*.<sup>19</sup>

The truth of the simultaneous *advaita-aneka* [not-two, not-one], discovered in the *nun* [now] of the Present.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Saccidānanda* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

Advaita n'est pas monisme.<sup>21</sup> [Advaita is not monism.]

The individual is the mystery of God realized in a not-one [*aneka*] way in its [...] indivisibility as undivided non-duality [*akhanda-advaita*].<sup>22</sup>

The distinction between *advaita* and monism was crucial for Abhishiktānanda. It was important in his attempted reconciliation of Hindu and Christian thought. An examination of this distinction may therefore prove fruitful in the continuing dialogue between Hindus and Christians. Abhishiktānanda's use of the term *aneka* (not-one) will become of central importance in Chapter X, where I discuss how Abhishiktānanda uses this term, and compare it with traditional Hinduism and with neo-Hinduism.

*Advaita* has been frequently interpreted in a monistic fashion. This is especially the case in Western interpretations of *advaita*, which often apply Western ideas of monism to describe it. For example, Ninian Smart describes Vedantic *advaita* as monistic:

Though the non-dualism of Shankara is well known, it is useful to recapitulate briefly its main features. For Shankara the 'That art thou' is to be taken in the starkest, clearest sense. It means that the eternal self within the individual is identical with Brahman, the Absolute or Ultimate Reality. (...) This rigorous insistence on the non-dualism between the soul and the divine Reality is paralleled by an equally uncompromising monism in relation to the world.<sup>23</sup>

Abhishiktānanda was well aware of the problems of Western misinterpretations of *advaita*:

The absolute advaita of Shankara is only one of the Indian *darśanas* (and moreover does it not falsify Shankara and do we not make him much more angular than he was in reality, when we interpret him with western logic. Cp. Otto, Eckhart-Shankara...the commentary on the *Gita* by Shankara.)<sup>24</sup>

His reference is to Otto's well-known book *Mysticism East and West* where Otto makes comparisons between Shankara and Eckhart, and where Otto includes several references to

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<sup>21</sup> *Intériorité et révélation: Essais théologiques* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1982), p. 18. This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Intériorité*.

<sup>22</sup> *Diary*, p. 214 (17.5.58).

<sup>23</sup> Ninian Smart: *The Yogi and the Devotee: the Interplay between the Upanishads and Catholic Theology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp. 36-37.

<sup>24</sup> *Diary*, p. 29 (31.3.52).

Shankara's commentary on the *Gītā*. Abhishiktānanda seems to approve of Otto's comparisons. Otto says that the usual translation of *advaita* is monism, but that non-dualism is more exact.<sup>25</sup>

In emphasizing the non-monistic characteristics of his experience, Abhishiktānanda was able to leave some of these Western preconceptions behind. But monistic interpretations of *advaita* are also very common in Hindu philosophers. For example, Radhakrishnan refers to *advaita* as "monistic idealism":

If we put the subjective interest of the Indian mind along with its tendency to arrive at a synthetic vision, we shall see how monistic idealism becomes the truth of things. To it the whole growth of Vedic thought points; on it are based the Buddhistic and Brahmanical religions; it is the highest truth revealed to India. Even systems which announce themselves as dualistic or pluralistic seem to be permeated by a strong monistic character. For our purposes monistic idealism is of four types: (1) Non-dualism or Advaitism; (2) Pure Monism; (3) Modified Monism; and (4) Implicit Monism.<sup>26</sup>

Radhakrishnan says that his first category, 'Advaitic monism' relies on abstract and philosophical reflection, particularly the psychological interpretation of the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. Through all these states, there remains the self that is permanent and "ever-identical". Only the self is real. The categories of the world of experience, time, space and cause are self-contradictory and have no real existence. Their inexplicable existence is explained by the word *māyā*. The self is "the true and the eternal, and there is nought beside it." His second category, 'Pure Monism' recognizes a higher power than the abstract intellect relied on in the first category:

We have to sink ourselves in the universal consciousness and make ourselves co-extensive with all that is. We do not then so much *think* reality as *live* it, do not so much *know* it as *become* it. Such an extreme monism, with its distinctions of logic and intuition, reality and the world of existence, we meet with in some Upaniṣads, Nāgārjuna and Śaṅkara in his ultra-philosophical moods, Śrī Harṣa and the Advaita Vedāntins, and echoes of it are heard in Parmenides and Plato, Spinoza and Plotinus, Bradley and Bergson, not to speak of the mystics, in the West.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, first published 1932), p. 19. He writes to Fr. Lemarié about reading this book. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 36 (10.2.52).

<sup>26</sup> Robert A. McDermott (ed.): Radhakrishnan: *Selected Writings on Philosophy, Religion, and Culture*, "Introduction to *Indian Philosophy I*", New York: Dutton, 1970), pp. 75,76.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

Radhakrishnan considers both Non-dualism and Pure Monism to be monistic. His two other categories also are monistic, at least by implication. Modified Monism (e.g. Rāmānuja) recognizes degrees of reality, but these are measured in relation to their distance from the one integral reality. And he says that even the dualism of Madhva is fundamentally a monism so long as the reals are dependent on God who alone is independent.

Other Hindu philosophers are equally adamant that *advaita*, even in Shankara, is not monism. For example, T.M.P. Mahadevan says,

The term *advaita* is negative. It does not imply a monistic ideal, but implies a negation of dualism. And this negation applies both to two-ness as well as to the attempt to grasp the world as a whole by means of any logical system with rational distinctions. Because *Brahman* is beyond duality, it cannot be known conceptually, nor can it be substantially or qualitatively determined, for this would imply a division of the One.<sup>28</sup>

And in his book on Ramaṇa Maharshi, Mahadevan makes the same point:

*Brahman* is without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true, for the category of number is not applicable to it. That is why the negative expression 'non-dual', or 'not-two' (*advaita*), is preferred.<sup>29</sup>

There are therefore differing views, even by Hindu philosophers, as to whether or not the Hindu *advaitic* experience is monistic. If it is not monistic, then it may not be correct to speak of the individual's *identity* with *Brahman*. The ideas of *māyā* and of the unreality of the world may also be reinterpreted

These are some of the issues that I will explore in attempting to understand Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic view of *advaita*. My emphasis will be on exploring Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of this experience. But I will also examine how his understanding fits with classical Hinduism and with neo-Hinduism. Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* may also have derived from non-Hindu traditions or sources. As will become clear in this thesis, he was influenced by Buddhist thought. Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* is in some ways similar to and in some ways different from that of Buddhist non-dualism. There are also Western and specifically Christian influences in

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<sup>28</sup> T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi, 1974), 367f, cited by Michael von Brück: *The Unity of Reality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 17.

Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita*. For Abhishiktānanda, these various influences did not result from a mere religious eclecticism, but rather from a search for the religious ground that he believed to be expressed in all these different religious traditions.

I will use comparative philosophy to examine Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. Chapter II of this thesis sets out some of the ways that comparative philosophy will be used to do this. In Chapter III I examine the ideas of some of the persons who influenced Abhishiktānanda in seeking and in obtaining his *advaitic* experience. Their views are important in his self-understanding of the experience. In Chapter IV, I examine Abhishiktānanda's own reports of his experience. Later chapters then analyze his own understanding of the experience. I do this by asking which dualities Abhishiktānanda denies in his claim that *advaita* is nondual. The specific dualities that are denied can be more readily seen when we look at how Abhishiktānanda understands the following ideas: (1) perception, (2) thought, (3) action, (4) ideas about the nature of reality, and (5) ideas about the nature of our relationship with God. Each of these ideas will be explored in a separate chapter of this thesis.

Chapter V explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for perception. Perception is normally understood in terms of a perceiving subject and a perceived object. How does Abhishiktānanda see the subject/object relation? What unity is there between the subjective self and the object perceived? Does any difference remain? How does he understand the self?

Chapter VI explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's views of conceptual thought. Our conceptual thought depends on categories and distinctions. Abhishiktānanda does not believe that concepts can adequately describe the *advaitic* experience. How does he understand the relation between our concepts and our experience? A comparison with some ideas in philosophy is also made.

Non-monistic *advaita* also has implications for our actions and ethics. This is explored in Chapter VII. Monism tends to devalue the world, and leads to an 'acosmism' in actions. But if the world of diversity has reality, then there is a basis for a more dynamic interaction with reality. How did Abhishiktānanda's understanding of *advaita* influence his views of action in

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<sup>29</sup> T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramana Maharshi: The Sage of Arunācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 12.

the world? How did it relate to his monasticism and his view of the role of the *sannyāsi*?

Chapter VIII explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's understanding of reality. What is Abhishiktānanda's understanding of the relation between the Absolute and the phenomenal world? A monistic understanding of reality, that holds there is nothing but *Brahman* will see the world of diversity as *māyā*, not real, illusion. A non-monistic understanding of *advaita* may revise this view of *māyā*, granting reality to diversity as well as to unity. One way that Abhishiktānanda obtains this more positive view of *māyā* is when it is looked at in terms of the *śakti*, or energy of God. This may or may not amount to a revision of classical Hindu ideas of *māyā* and *śakti*.

Chapter IX explores the implications of non-monistic *advaita* for Abhishiktānanda's understanding of the relation between God and ourselves. How does the experience relate to Abhishiktānanda's theological beliefs? Abhishiktānanda uses non-monistic *advaita* to reinterpret classical Christian ideas such as that of Creation and of the Trinity.

Chapter X, the conclusion, will provide a summary of Abhishiktānanda's understanding of non-monistic *advaita*, and a further exploration of some of the issues raised.

The Appendix discusses the influence of C.G. Jung on Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. A Jungian interpretation gives one possible way of providing a coherent picture of what Abhishiktānanda means by non-monistic *advaita*. The Appendix also shows how Abhishiktānanda's ideas may resolve some issues that were raised by Jung himself in relation to Hindu thought. Much more work would be needed to fill in the details. This synthesis is one that I personally find persuasive, although I believe there are other ways of attempting to find a coherence in Abhishiktānanda's ideas as they changed over time.

### *C. Previous Research*

The Bibliography lists both primary and secondary sources for Abhishiktānanda. For Abhishiktānanda's own writings, I have relied primarily on the extensive Bibliography prepared by James Stuart, who edited the *Letters*. The Bibliography also lists many secondary sources, including several doctoral theses dealing with Abhishiktānanda.

A doctoral thesis by Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, later published as *Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktānanda*<sup>30</sup> deals with the issue of renunciation and Abhishiktānanda's choice to become a *sannyāsī*. It compares this choice with that of Christian monasticism. The book points out that for Abhishiktānanda, contemplation was more important than other 'activities' of religious life. While of some relevance to this thesis, the book does not look at the *advaitic* experience in contexts other than that of monastic renunciation.

A doctoral thesis by Antony Kalliath, later published as *the Word in the Cave*<sup>31</sup> deals with Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience primarily from a theological perspective, and in the context of Hindu-Christian dialogue. Kalliath's book analyzes Abhishiktānanda's understanding of Christianity in terms of *advaita*. As such, it is more concerned with doctrinal issues than with an analysis of the experience. With respect to the issue of monism, Kalliath says,

*Advaita* is often misinterpreted or mistaken as monism because every one tries to understand it exclusively through the *advaita-vāda* of Śaṅkara, which is prominently monistic in nature. Abhishiktānanda understands *advaita* directly from the Upaniṣads along with his Christian background without leaning on any Vedāntic school.<sup>32</sup>

Kalliath points out that by his non-monistic *advaita* Abhishiktānanda was able to include a dynamic conception of God. Kalliath does not examine this non-monistic *advaita* except in terms of the Western mysticism of Eckhart and Plotinus. Kalliath distinguishes this mysticism from Shankara's *advaita*, which he regards as monistic.<sup>33</sup>

A doctoral thesis by Roger Earl Spence<sup>34</sup> draws interesting parallels between Abhishiktānanda's experience and the transpersonal psychology of Ken Wilber. The comparison

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<sup>30</sup> Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore, 1981). (Originally submitted as doctoral thesis at Gregorian University, Rome).

<sup>31</sup> Antony Kalliath, C.M.I.: *The Word in the Cave: the Experiential Journey of Swami Abhishiktānanda to the Point of Hindu-Christian Meeting* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1996). Original thesis: "Self-Awakening: An Analytico-Critical Study of the Religious Experience of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri le Saux, O.S.B.) in the Context of Hindu-Christian Meeting" (Th.D. thesis, Gregorian University, Rome, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 369.

<sup>33</sup> Kalliath relies here on Rudolf Otto's analysis in *Mysticism East and West*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970; first published 1932).

<sup>34</sup> Roger Earl Spence: "Interiority in the Works of Abhishiktānanda and Ken Wilber" (Ph.D. thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1987).

is an appropriate one, and will be explored further in this thesis. A recent book by Wilber, *One Taste*, confirms the appropriateness of the comparison with Abhishiktānanda. Wilber there refers to nonduality as “not-two, not-one”; he wants to ensure that *advaita* is not turned into a conceptual monism.<sup>35</sup> Spence refers primarily to works of Abhishiktānanda that had been translated into English. Since the date of Spence’s thesis (1987), many more works of both Abhishiktānanda and of Wilber have appeared.

An MA thesis by the Rev. Robert Stephens<sup>36</sup> relates Abhishiktānanda’s experience to the context of religious dialogue. Stephens has drawn attention to the fact that Abhishiktānanda avoids a monistic interpretation of his *advaitic* experience; he suggests the expression ‘non-monistic non-dualism’ to refer to Abhishiktānanda’s views. Stephens is more concerned with the theological implications of this experience than to attempt to look at it in detail. He gives prominence to religious and theological language instead of looking at the experience. In this he seems to be taking exactly the opposite approach to that taken by Abhishiktānanda. He says that Abhishiktānanda, like other mystics, makes statements using psychological language that are “theologically rash.” Without much analysis, Stephens denies that Abhishiktānanda’s religious experience was the same as an altered state of consciousness. There is no positive appreciation of any comparison to the psychology of the unconscious. On the contrary, Stephens quotes with approval an article by R.S. Rajan which laments the loss of a “critical” spirit in philosophy, and in recent developments in depth psychology which question the scope of the conscious mind, and which “erode” the sovereignty of reason. This is in direct contrast to Abhishiktānanda, whose own view is that concepts and theology are in the realm of *nāmarūpa*, names and forms, and that it is the experience itself which is primary.

#### *D. Notes on the Text*

In quoting Abhishiktānanda, an ellipsis in parentheses (...) indicates an omission from the text by the editors, who often selected only portions of writings by Abhishiktānanda for publication. An ellipsis in brackets [...] indicates an omission by myself, or in a few cases, a passage that the editors regarded as unintelligible. I have used English translations where they are available. Otherwise I have given both the original French and my own translation, which is

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<sup>35</sup> Ken Wilber, *One Taste* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), p. 135.

<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Stephens, “Religious Experience as a Meeting-Point in Dialogue: an Evaluation of the venture of Swami Abhishiktānanda” (MA thesis, Sydney University, 1984).

also given in brackets. Abbreviations are used for references to these works by Abhishiktānanda that have been cited most frequently:

- Further Shore:** *The Further Shore: "Sannyasa", "The Upanishads—An Introduction" and "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience"* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975, revised 1984).
- Guru:** *Guru and Disciple* (ISPCK, 1990). A previous edition of this book also contains "The Mountain of the Lord." *Guru and Disciple: Gñānānanda, A Sage of the East and the Mountain of the Lord* (London: SPCK, 1974).
- Initiation:** *Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1979).
- Intériorité:** *Intériorité et révélation: Essais theologique* (Sisteron: Editions Présence, 1982).
- Diary:** *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: the Spiritual Diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktānanda (Dom Henri Le Saux)*, ed. Raimon Panikkar (Paris: OEIL, 1998), a translation of *La montée au fond du cœur* (referred to as "La montée").
- Letters:** *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters*, ed. James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989, 2nd revised edition 1995).
- Meeting Point:** *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1969, 2nd edition 1976), a translation of *Rencontre de l'hindouisme et du christianisme* (1965).
- Saccidānanda** *Saccidānanda: a Christian approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974, second revised edition 1984), a translation of *Sagesse hindoue mystique chrétienne*.
- Secret:** *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1979), a translation of *Souvenirs d'Arunāchala*.

Sanskrit words are given in roman transliteration, with diacriticals. Some words or names, like 'Shankara,' are written without diacriticals because they are so well known in that form. Abhishiktānanda's published works are not consistent in using diacriticals. Different translators use different conventions or simplified transcriptions. Sometimes the same word is spelled with and without diacriticals even within the same work.

## II. Comparative Philosophy and Dialogue

### A. Comparative Philosophy

Abhishiktānanda's life was a dialogue between his Western traditions and the Eastern Hindu traditions that he sought to understand and to experience. He tried to describe his experience using Western language, as well as by using Hindu ideas that he interpreted. His description therefore raises the issue of the adequacy of these ideas in describing his experience. We must look at how he approached and interpreted his experience. Furthermore, we must be aware of the further level of our own interpretation in reading Abhishiktānanda's description. We bring previous understandings and assumptions with us even as we read Abhishiktānanda. There is no 'neutral' or 'objective' description of an experience.

This thesis uses comparative philosophy to explore Abhishiktānanda's understanding of his *advaitic* experience. One attempt to compare the philosophical implications of nondualistic experience is David Loy's book, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup> Loy distinguishes five related but different senses of nonduality: (1) the negation of dualistic thinking (2) the nonplurality of the world (3) the nondifference of subject and object (4) the nonduality of the Absolute and phenomena and (5) the mystical unity between God and ourselves. These categories are not exhaustive. And these categories must themselves be examined as to their underlying assumptions.<sup>2</sup>

The use of Loy's categories is not intended to force Abhishiktānanda's experience into a predefined way of understanding the experience. Rather, it is a way of engaging in dialogue with Abhishiktānanda, a testing of what dualities he experienced as having been overcome in his *advaitic* experience. Abhishiktānanda's understanding may not fit with Loy's way of

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<sup>1</sup> David Loy: *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988). This book will be referred to as *Nonduality*.

<sup>2</sup> One consideration is that Loy writes from his perspective as a Buddhist, but also as a Westerner familiar with Western philosophy.

understanding nondualities, but making these comparisons can help to clarify his understanding of his experience.

Another work on comparative philosophy that I frequently refer to in this thesis is J.S. Krüger's *Along Edges*.<sup>3</sup> Like Loy, Krüger uses Buddhist assumptions for the basis of his comparisons.

I also rely on J.L. Mehta's approach to comparative philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Mehta uncovers and analyzes many of the assumptions that Westerners bring to their study of Indian philosophy. He says that Westerners approach and interpret Eastern thought and experience in terms of Western categories.<sup>5</sup> Mehta asks whether it is possible to strip away this conceptual overlay in order to have a true dialogue with these other traditions. He points out that sometimes the questions that we ask are themselves questionable, and bring with them certain unacknowledged assumptions. For example, the question, "Is Vedānta a mystical philosophy?" cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the assumption of what constitutes mysticism, the question brings with it our assumption of the nature of 'philosophy'. Is Vedānta a philosophy?

The question of what constitutes philosophy is itself a philosophical question.<sup>7</sup> Many Western philosophers have denied that Indian thought is a philosophy.<sup>8</sup> In their view, Indian

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<sup>3</sup> J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges* (University of South Africa, 1995). This book will be referred to as *Along Edges*.

<sup>4</sup> Mehta is known in the West primarily as an interpreter of Heidegger. But Mehta is also a Hindu Brahmin, who seeks to compare his Hindu traditions to the ideas of western philosophy and self-questioning. He quotes with approval the Indologist Paul Deussen's statement to "build his life's house" where the lines of Indology and philosophy meet:

"...die Hütte meines Lebens da zu bauen, wo sich die Linien der Philosophie und Indologie schneiden" (Paul Deussen: *Mein Leben* (Leipzig, 1922), p. 165, quoted by Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, (Delhi, 1990) p. 53, referred to by Halbfass in Foreword to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1992), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> The interpretation of Hindu traditions in terms of Western ideas was something that began with the colonial modernization of India. In Heidegger's terms, this use of Western concepts is the 'Europeanization of the earth.' Mehta accepted the challenge of belonging to this "one world". He said, "...there is no other way open to us in the East, but to go along with this Europeanization and to go through it." Mehta: *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), pp. 91,92. Some traditional Hindus do not appreciate this goal of Mehta. His statement should, however, be seen not as an endorsement of Western values, but a going beyond them.

<sup>6</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, (Harvard, 1985), p. 244.

<sup>7</sup> This point is made by Raimon Panikkar in his introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. xvi, xvii.

thought is theological, emphasizing the value of the transformation of the individual through a religious experience. Indian thought does not separate philosophy from religion and does not have the Western idea of the autonomy of human reasoning. Indian thought is still caught in mythological language, whereas Western philosophy believes that it has overcome *mythos* through *logos*. And in contrast to the Western approach to the history of ideas, Indian history of thought is more doxographical, refraining from investigations into the sources of ideas and uncritically assuming a continuity of thought within various schools or *darśanas*.<sup>9</sup>

Should the word 'philosophy' be reserved to describe Western thought? Panikkar says "...there would be no tragedy if India did not have 'philosophy' in the Greek and even western sense of the word." But the danger in relegating the word 'philosophy' to Western thought is that we might then conclude that there is no other kind of thought. Western thought could then not be compared with any other; this would obscure the assumptions in Western thought.

Western philosophy assumes that it is neutral—both religiously neutral and somehow value-free. Even within the discipline of Religious Studies it has often been argued that the study of religion should be based on scientific methods that are not religious.<sup>10</sup> Against these ideas of objectivity and neutrality, Mehta says,

The concept of a rational secular sphere that is neutral, value-free and a source of self-evident verities has worked havoc in the encounter of non-Western cultures with the West, largely to the former's detriment.<sup>11</sup>

According to Mehta, all philosophical understanding must culminate in self-understanding and is therefore religious. The "effort at self-understanding ... constitutes the

<sup>8</sup> See Wilhelm Halbfass: "On the Exclusion of India from the History of Philosophy", *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 145ff. For example, Hegel says that "real philosophy" begins only in Greece. Many historians of philosophy omit Indian thought entirely from their surveys of thought. The Indologist P. Deussen was an exception in that he did not segregate religion from philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> The use of the word *darśana* to describe Indian 'philosophy' is discussed by Wilhelm Halbfass: "*Darśana, Ārvāṅśikī, Philosophy*," *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 263ff.

<sup>10</sup> But see D.R. Griffin's criticism of this view of Religious Studies in "Religious experience, naturalism, and the social scientific study of religion", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 68, Issue 1: March 2000, pp. 99-126. See also J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 81: "The alleged value-freeness of science is itself a valuational postulate."

<sup>11</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Science, Conversation and Wholeness", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi, 1990), p. 191.

basic religious process."<sup>12</sup> A modern person, without the certainties of religious faith, will try to attain a certainty about his or her own nature and about the world. Even existentialism represents "only the final stage in the attempt to reappropriate philosophically, i.e., in secularized form and without needing the warrant and the guarantee of religious faith, insights into human nature which religious faith had sustained so far."<sup>13</sup> But Mehta says that Heidegger appropriates the religious into his thought.<sup>14</sup> His idea of "pure thinking" quite obviously takes on the character of devotion, thanking, and a response to a call beyond ourselves.

Mehta believes that Heidegger was the first Western philosopher who explored the roots of the assumptions that had been taken for granted in the West. He says that Heidegger put into question the metaphysical concepts of Being, Time, Reason and World; in this way he awakened Western consciousness from its "sublime metaphysical illusion" which had existed since Socrates.<sup>15</sup> Although Mehta does not always agree with Heidegger, he uses Heidegger's writings as a kind of bridge, or Archimedean point for comparing Western with Eastern traditions. In this way, these Eastern traditions can now also see these assumptions of the West, and as a result they can go back and retrieve the forgotten foundations of their own spiritual traditions.<sup>16</sup>

Our theories depend on fundamental assumptions that are metaphysical, epistemological, psychological and ethical. Even though he criticizes metaphysical thinking, Heidegger says "the metaphysical mode of representation...is in some respect inevitable."<sup>17</sup> We make assumptions

<sup>12</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Problems of Understanding", *Bulletin, Center for the Study of World Religions*, Harvard, Vol. 15, nr. 1, 1988/89, 2ff, cited by Jackson in his *Prelude to J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Philosophical Necessity of Existentialism," *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Finding Heidegger", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 30, 31.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Will to Interpret and India's Dreaming Spirit", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 195. Mehta characterizes metaphysical thinking and scientific thinking as thinking that is dominated by the concept of system and of representational system-building. "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Finding Heidegger", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 29. This disclosure of Western assumptions also undermined the acceptance of the authority of Western civilization.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 116. Cited by Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 93. Cf. Krüger: "...religious metaphysics (a conceptual, systematic account of the most general features of the phenomenal, cognised world) cannot be 'objectively' 'true', but it remains inevitable, and could be useful as a world-orientation." *Along Edges*, p. 128.

concerning the nature of the self that is doing the theorizing, and upon the nature of the ‘object’ of our theorizing. There are epistemological assumptions—how we relate our experience to our conceptualization of that experience and whether we believe that our experience can be reduced to those concepts. We must make the assumption of whether to take a literal or a symbolic view of language. There are also ontological assumptions; our view of being is included in every method. Heidegger says, “In every understanding of the world, existence is understood with it, and *vice versa*.”<sup>18</sup> Those who assume they have no ontology merely have an unconscious or unexamined ontology.

For Mehta, comparative analysis is first of all the making of distinctions, rather than starting out with an assertion of blanket identities between Eastern and Western philosophemes (similar sounding ideas).<sup>19</sup> He says that extreme caution is needed in every kind of ‘comparative’ philosophizing and in the employment of Western metaphysical terms to express ideas rooted in another linguistic soil.<sup>20</sup> Eastern ideas must be seen in their historical context. We must acknowledge them as “other”. We cannot assume that the terminology that we use is adequate, or that it does not carry with it certain assumptions:

It is a delusion, which we are only now beginning to see through, to believe that there are certain perennial problems to which different philosophers, arising at different times, and different places, have given varying answers, that all that we have to do, as thinkers, is to decide which one of them we would like to favor.<sup>21</sup>

If we just translate Eastern thinking into the language of Western metaphysics, taken as the universally valid paradigm, we will just perpetuate Western ‘philosophy’. Because of these unacknowledged assumptions in our own thinking and in our own questions, we must be careful of making easy syntheses with Eastern thought:

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 194.

<sup>19</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Science, Conversation and Wholeness”, *Philosophy and Religio: Essays in Interpretation*, pp. 191-2. This involves taking the “other” as *other*. But Mehta differs from postmodernism in his goal of later attaining a unity. He says, “distinctions presuppose a prior unity and they demand a subsequent restoration of lost unity.” “Postmodern Problems East/West”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 241.

<sup>20</sup> J.L. Mehta: “The Saving Leap”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 96, ft. 10.

<sup>21</sup> J.L. Mehta: “The Transformation of Phenomenology”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 74. This rejection of perennial problems is not necessarily a rejection of a perennial philosophy in the sense of a common experience that is expressed in different ways.

If there is any hope of an ultimate unity of divergent philosophies and religions, it lies not in the throwing of dubious bridges across them, not in questionable syntheses and compromises, but solely, through a going back of each to its own origins, in the leap into this swaying region, vibrant with the possibility of giving voice to its primordial word in a multiplicity of tongues.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, the use of Loy's categories in this thesis is something that must be done with caution, and without yielding to the temptation of making easy syntheses. We must also be alert to any synthesis attempted by Abhishiktānanda in his descriptions of his experience. The 'method' of examining his described experience is itself a way of dialogue with Abhishiktānanda, and a dialogue with the Indian sources that he interprets. It is a way and not a method. Mehta says that comparative philosophy is like Heidegger's own work which

...is not a system and, by reason of the very task it has set before itself cannot be one. It is rather a trail blazed, a path traversed, a way taken by thought, as he calls it, toward the one goal of enshrining in language, or rather preparing to do so, the unuttered thought of Being.<sup>23</sup>

He says that Westerners are too concerned with methodology, and do not realize that this concern is itself an assumption that must be questioned. In our study of religion, concentrating on social science and anthropology, we have too little regard for truly religious thinking.<sup>24</sup> Method is part of the very subjectivism that Heidegger seeks to overcome.<sup>25</sup> Our way of using concepts is itself open to question. Mehta says that the Western metaphysical tradition of thinking, conceptualizing, objectifying and being concerned with the truth of being is "at the root of the present world-night as also of the progress behind which it hides itself."<sup>26</sup>

In reading Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience, we must acknowledge our own assumptions. One of the assumptions made by this thesis is to be open to

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<sup>22</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 90. Following Heidegger, Mehta says that the ultimate unity is the sphere of the *Ereignis*. It is inaccessible to representational thinking.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 35. The Way is to follow the movement of the showing by Being. Mehta says (p. 50) that in speaking of this Way, Heidegger has in mind something like the *Tao*.

<sup>24</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Beyond Believing and Knowing", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Concept of Progress", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 82.

Abhishiktānanda's self-understanding of his *advaitic* experience. This means that my approach to his experience does not exclude in an *a priori* fashion the authenticity of the experience. For example, a Freudian interpretation of his experience would emphasize Abhishiktānanda's closeness to his mother, and would see his efforts at obtaining the experience as nothing but a desire to return to the womb, the 'oceanic experience.'<sup>27</sup> I do not use such reductivist approaches in this thesis, except where Abhishiktānanda himself refers to them, such as his views of our desire to 'project' a God outside ourselves.

### *B. Experience and Concept: Four Models*

One of the assumptions that Abhishiktānanda makes (and which we in turn make as we read his descriptions of his experience) relates to the issue of whether or not our experience can be adequately described. This chapter discusses four epistemological models of the relation between our concepts and our experience. These four models are (1) The Model of Immediate Experience (2) Constructivism (3) Hermeneutics and (4) the Yogic Model. Over time, and as his views changed, Abhishiktānanda used several of these models to describe his experience.

#### 1. The Model of Immediate Experience

##### a) Romanticism

Romanticism developed in response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Some of its representatives include Blake, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Thoreau. They held that there are limits to rationalism; our experience is more than we can conceptualize. According to Romanticism, reality is 'immediately' given to us in our experience. Using our intuition, we can experience reality as a whole. This intuitively experienced wholeness is then broken up when we analyze that experience using concepts. Our intuition is blocked and veiled by our concepts; we need to pierce the 'veil' of concepts. As Blake says, "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See for example J. Moussaieff Masson: *The oceanic feeling: the origins of religious sentiment in ancient India*, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> William Blake: "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", *The Works of William Blake* (Wordsworth, 1994), p. 184.

We are born with the ability to intuit reality immediately. As Wordsworth says, "...trailing clouds of glory do we come from God, who is our home."<sup>29</sup> But our modern calculative thinking has resulted in our loss of these depths of experience. Romanticism therefore looks to the past to find these lost depths of experience. It also looks to children's experience, and to 'primitive' cultures that are supposedly unspoiled by conceptualizing.

Gadamer has criticized Romanticism as being irrationalistic. He says that in its opposition to rationalism, Romanticism takes the same schema of the conquest of *mythos* by *logos*, but it inverts the priority in favour of myth and symbol.<sup>30</sup> Because of this, Romanticism often cannot account for anything positive in science, and its own views, put in opposition to science, are often seen as 'irrational'. But because they have no other model of doing science, when Romantics do engage in theoretical work, they often use the same methods that they otherwise deplore. For example, some of the Indologists who had a romantic fascination with India adopted methodologies similar to those that had been objected to by the Romantic Movement.<sup>31</sup>

Gadamer also criticizes Romanticism as being subjectivistic. He says that the Romantic view—that we can have immediate experience—relies on an individual, subjective experience. Gadamer says that this view derives from an aesthetic model of subjective experience that first appeared in autobiographies. The idea of *Erlebnis* was introduced to describe the subject's life; *Erlebnis* was seen as an original and individual creative experience to which an artist or a poet could then give expression. Gadamer rejects this. For him, every *Erlebnis* is itself already determined *a priori* by pre-existing historical realities such as society, state and the entire heritage of the past. Gadamer's view is representative of what I will refer to as the Hermeneutic Model.

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<sup>29</sup> William Wordsworth: "Ode. Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", *The New Oxford Book of English Verses*, ed. Helen Gardner, (Oxford, 1972), p. 509.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 273.

<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: "India and the Romantic Critique of the Present", *India and Europe* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), pp. 69ff.

It is true that many of Abhishiktānanda's writings are autobiographical in describing his experience. Such writing, particularly as it appears in his *Diary*, is much more spontaneous than the more ramified writings of his theoretical work. Abhishiktānanda was conscious of using this autobiographical approach, although he was also troubled by his use of autobiography in describing *advaita*:

All is biographical and nothing is! Everything comes from the experience of this tension, but everything has been rethought by the mind, in the halo of a double culture. The "I" naturally is literary. Who has the right to say "I" when he speaks of *advaita*?<sup>32</sup>

His concern about using the word 'I' seems to relate to the issue of subjectivism in relation to autobiographical writing. How can he, as an experiencing subject, write about an *advaitic* experience in which there can be no distinction between subject and object?

In view of Gadamer's criticism of autobiographical accounts of experience (*Erlebnis*), is Abhishiktānanda's writing too subjective, too individualistic and psychological? One response to Gadamer's criticism is that this fear of subjectivism and individualism is misplaced in *advaita*, because *advaita* destroys all such subjectivity and individuality. The 'I', Abhishiktānanda says, is literary. The true 'I' is the Self. This Self is not an individual, but the source of all individuality. Gadamer's response to this would likely be to point to similar attempts by Ranke and Schleiermacher to go beyond individuality in history by an "aesthetic-pantheistic" idea of understanding.<sup>33</sup> Gadamer rejects such pantheism. In contrast, Abhishiktānanda accepts, if not pantheism, a growing panentheism. The difference between the two views reflects a difference in underlying assumptions.

Wilber has also criticized Romanticism. He criticizes Romanticism for its view of enlightenment in terms of a return to something that is pre-personal; he sees this return as a regression in our psychological development. Wilber makes a distinction between a

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<sup>32</sup> *Letters*, p. 209. (OB 23.1.69).

<sup>33</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Truth and Method*, pp. 211-218. He refers at p. 211 to Ranke's view of history as "sympathy, co-knowledge of the universe."

consciousness that is pre-personal and a consciousness that is trans-personal.<sup>34</sup> Wilber's view is representative of what I will refer to as the Yogic Model.

Abhishiktānanda makes use of the model of Immediate Experience. He contrasts the experience and its "expression" in concepts: "There is only the Awakening. All that is "notional"—myths and concepts—is only its expression."<sup>35</sup> In one of his essays in *The Further Shore* he refers to intuition as more original than concepts:

Intuitions, these flashes of light, which at their source defy expression, are transformed at the level at which they are grasped by mental reflection, into abstractions and ideas (...) Ideas, concepts, abstractions, reflections are never anything more than means of returning once more to the original intuition. That is the hidden norm to which they must be continually referred, rather than any reasoning which intuition infinitely transcends.<sup>36</sup>

Does this make Abhishiktānanda a romantic? Swami Devananda, a traditional Hindu, concludes that he was:

I have read Abhishiktānanda's book [*The Further Shore*] carefully and am not bewitched. This man was a Christian romantic à la Rousseau camouflaged as a Hindu existentialist.<sup>37</sup>

Although he does refer to Heidegger and existentialism, Abhishiktānanda does not mention Rousseau or the Romantics. But he seems to have been aware of the dangers of romanticism, at least insofar as we may have a romantic view of India. Even in 1947, before he left India, he wrote,

From here India, the land and its people, its heart and thought, are seen in a poetic haze; so on principle I am on my guard against mirage...<sup>38</sup>

Abhishiktānanda rejects this popular and superficial way of looking at India. He says that the meeting with India must be in the context of a meeting of hearts at the deepest level of

<sup>34</sup> Ken Wilber: "The Pre/Trans Fallacy", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 124ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73). This was written only a few months before his death.

<sup>36</sup> "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1975; reprinted with additions in 1984), p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Letter dated Sept. 28, 1987 from Swami Devananda to Bede Griffiths (Abhishiktānanda's successor at Shantivanam). The letter is cited by Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994), p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> *Letters*, p. 17 (18.8.47).

our being. He criticizes the many young people at the time “on the road to Kathmandu”, “in search of the sages and gurus of Rishikesh” who are disappointed because India does not fit into the framework of their own categories.<sup>39</sup>

But in this “meeting of hearts”, Abhishiktānanda still emphasizes the priority of experience (*anubhava*) over concepts. This use of the word *anubhava* in the context of the idea of immediate experience is common in modern Hindu writings, or in what Hacker has referred to as “neo-Hinduism”.<sup>40</sup> Hacker refers to Radhakrishnan as “the most typical neo-Hindu”. Radhakrishnan was of the view that all genuine religious documents and scriptures have their origin in the immediate personal experience of “seers” or rishis.<sup>41</sup> Hacker suggests that these ideas of Radhakrishnan come not so much from Hindu sources as from his reading of William James.

Halbfass says that the idea of immediate experience is more obscure and ambivalent than is usually admitted.<sup>42</sup> He agrees with Hacker that the neo-Hindu emphasis on the personal experience of the rishis is something new to neo-Hinduism, and is not to be found in traditional Hinduism such as in the writings of Shankara. Traditional Hinduism holds to the priority of the revealed word of the Vedas. The use of the word *anubhava* in neo-Hinduism is therefore open to the criticism that it is due to the influence on neo-Hinduism of Western ideas.<sup>43</sup> In addition to William James, Radhakrishnan’s sources include the ideas of F.H. Bradley, Henri Bergson and

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<sup>39</sup> Preface to *Guru*, p. viii. (1970). I can personally relate to this criticism, since I was one of those disappointed hippies in 1973. It was more than twenty years later that I was first able to see India differently.

<sup>40</sup> The term “neo-Hinduism”, as used by the Indologist Paul Hacker, refers to the interpretation of Hinduism by Hindus in response to the concerns of the non-Hindu West, and using the terminology and assumptions of the West. For example, Hacker says that William James influenced Radhakrishnan. And Vivekānanda was influenced by Deussen, a disciple of Schopenhauer. Hacker contrasts neo-Hinduism with “surviving traditional Hinduism”. This is represented by *pandit* literature, often written in Sanskrit, and by devotional tracts. It is often bitterly opposed to any Western interpretation of Hinduism. See Wilhelm Halbfass: *Philology and Confrontation* (State University of New York, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> Abhishiktānanda adopts this neo-Hindu view of Scripture as a record of experience or *anubhava*. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IX of this thesis.

<sup>42</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: “The Concept of Experience”, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York, 1988), p. 379. Halbfass refers to Gadamer’s statement that the concept of experience is among the least clarified concepts which we have. This applies not only to ‘*Erlebnis*’, which has subjective and emotional connotations, but also to the wider word for experience, ‘*Erfahrung*’.

<sup>43</sup> See also Anantanand Rambachan: *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda’s Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994)

Baron F. von Hügel.<sup>44</sup> Even if these sources are different from Romanticism (I refer to them as post-Romantic), Hacker and Halbfass have therefore raised the issue of whether the idea of immediate experience is really more Western than Hindu.

Before we conclude that Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience is due to Romanticism, we must look for other possible sources for this view. We will look at Hindu sources that pre-date the Romantic period and any European influence. We will also look at post-Romantic models of Immediate Experience such as that of James and Bergson.

#### b) Pre-Romantic Hindu Sources for the Model

Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience was strongly influenced by the Indian sage Ramaṇa Maharshi. Ramaṇa's method of "self-enquiry", which is discussed in the next chapter, emphasizes the primacy of direct experience. In this it is similar to the Immediate Experience Model. Does this mean that Ramaṇa has also been influenced by Western ideas, like other neo-Hindus? It can be argued that Ramaṇa's emphasis on direct experience does not derive from European influence but rather from Hindu *advaitic* sources that pre-date the European Romantics by many centuries. Halbfass acknowledges that there are non-traditional *advaitic* sources that emphasize direct experience and that these sources are independent of any European influence.<sup>45</sup> He refers to the "vision" of the Vedic poets, and to the Upanishads, which show an early awareness of the four states of consciousness. These states are: waking, dreaming, sleeping and the fourth state *turiya* that is beyond the other three states..

Another pre-Romantic source of the importance of experience are the poets like Tūkārām and other "poet-saints" from Maharashtra who glorify personal experience or *anubhava*. Both Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda refer in their teachings to these poet saints, and to Tamil poet-saints.

There are also traditions in Yoga that emphasize direct experience. One source from these traditions is the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Another work that is popular among yogic practitioners of *advaita* is the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a work that is often attributed to Shankara. As will be discussed

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 386. Halbfass himself questions whether these non-European sources are sufficient to support the claims of neo-Hinduism.

in Chapter III, both of these works strongly influenced Ramaṇa. The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* also influenced Gnānānanda. Abhishiktānanda was in turn influenced by both Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda. These sources are therefore direct or indirect influences for Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on immediate experience.

Buddhist traditions also emphasize the experiences and visions of the Buddha. And as Halbfass points out, the very title of the Buddha indicates an event of awakening, a "radical transformation of awareness." As we shall see, Abhishiktānanda was exposed to Buddhist thought. Western scholars also see the influence of Buddhism in Hindu works like the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.

Another Hindu source that emphasizes immediate experience is Kashmir *Śaivism*, which emphasizes consciousness and internality.<sup>46</sup> It also pre-dates any possible European Romantic influence. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Abhishiktānanda was exposed to this influence through his *guru* Gnānānanda as well as through his reading of Lilian Silburn.

A traditional Hindu source emphasizing experience is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It refers to Arjuna's direct experience of Krishna. This vision is said to be one that could not be attained by the Vedas or study (*BG* 11:48). The *Bhagavad Gītā* also refers to the experience of reaching the Self (*BG* 6:20). Abhishiktānanda expressly refers to this passage in relation to the necessity of a direct experience for oneself:

No one will ever reach his own self except through himself and in the very depth of himself, as the Gita says: *ātmani ātmānam ātmanā*, the self sees the self in the self through the self. No creature, whatever it may be, can ever do more than lead you to the door of the sanctuary, invite you to enter, and then bow and disappear.<sup>47</sup>

In view of all these sources, it is unfair to dismiss Ramaṇa's use of the model of Immediate Experience as mere Romanticism. Whether or not Abhishiktānanda's use of this

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<sup>46</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, p. 386. He says that this is so particularly for the *Pratyabhijñā* school in Kashmir *Śaivism*. See the article by H.N. Cahkravart: "Divine Recognition: *Pratyabhijñā*", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 179.

<sup>47</sup> *Guru*, p. 78.

model is consistent with his emphasis on non-monistic *advaita* is something that will be discussed in later chapters.

### c) Post-Romantic Immediate Experience

There are other advocates of the model of Immediate Experience who differ from Romanticism in that they do not merely reverse the rationalist schema, but set up alternative theories of concept formation. Bergson speaks of the ‘immediacy’ of experience. He says that there is a dynamism to our experience. This dynamism in every experience is an undivided consciousness or *durée* that cannot be wholly captured by our concepts. We cannot stop human life to investigate its essence; our experience is irreducible to thought. The development of an idea moves from our intuition to cognition. We can move from intuition to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition. We cannot pass from the word, concept or procedure to its original.<sup>48</sup>

William James also refers to an immediate experience that is prior to any conceptualizing. Our immediate experience is based on a “pure perception” prior to all division into subject and object. This pure perception is the basis of James’s radical empiricism. Pure perception is immediate knowledge. James makes a distinction between this immediate knowledge, which he calls “knowledge by acquaintance”, and our “knowledge about” something by means of concepts:

There are two ways of knowing things, knowing them immediately or intuitively, and knowing them conceptually or representatively.<sup>49</sup>

The knowledge that we have by eating an apple is different from and superior to our knowledge about an apple without tasting it. Our immediate experience (knowledge by acquaintance) is foundational to any subsequent abstraction or conceptualization. The conceptual is artificial, abstract. To know mediately or conceptually is a “representation” of that which was originally experienced.

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<sup>48</sup> Henri Bergson: *The Introduction to a New Philosophy*, tr. Sidney Littman (Boston: John W. Luce and Co., 1912), p. 57, cited by Sunnia D. Kidd and James W. Kidd: *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). p. 58, ft. 12.

<sup>49</sup> William James: *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to ‘Pragmatism’* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), p. 43 cited by Kidd, *op. cit.*, pp. 73, 74.

Gadamer's criticism of irrationality may not apply to James, at least not in the same way that it applies to the Romantics. James does not just invert the priority between rational concept and intuitive experience; he sets out a new epistemology of 'pure perception.' And he insists that there is a 'noetic' element in immediate experience—it is experienced as a kind of knowing. The criticism of subjectivity may also not apply to James. His theory allows for an experience that is prior to any subject/object division. This rules out any initial subjectivity. Furthermore, James's view of the self is not individualistic, but extends outwards to the world. It is connected with other human beings and the surrounding environment.<sup>50</sup> His theory also speaks of this being a trans-personal experience, and therefore one that is not caught by *individual* subjectivity.

The model of Immediate Experience is currently not in fashion among scholars. However, there has been a renewed interest in James's ideas of 'pure perception'.<sup>51</sup> And, as already discussed, there are many pre-Romantic sources that speak of immediate experience. This model therefore cannot be disregarded in our examination of Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience.

#### d) Symbol and myth

The Model of Immediate Experience says that our experience is more than can ever be expressed in concepts. How then can we even speak of the experience? The answer usually given is that we can use symbols to "point to" the experience. Symbols may be contrasted with signs. Signs have a fixed, unambiguous meaning in pointing to objects of our thought. Symbols point beyond objects and even beyond our language.<sup>52</sup> They therefore point beyond themselves to what cannot be said. The symbols we use never exhaust the experience that they refer to.

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<sup>50</sup> G. William Barnard: *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997) pp. 150-152.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to Barnard, I would refer to Wilber and Krüger. Despite Wilber's criticism of Romanticism, he defends the idea of immediate experience, using James's ideas of pure experience. See Ken Wilber: *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*, Boston: Shambhala, 1998), pp. 5,6. James's idea of pure consciousness is also used by J.S. Krüger in *Along Edges*, pp. 41ff.

<sup>52</sup> Krüger says that signs are fixed, unambiguous and fully known. 'Symbol' derives from the etymology 'putting together'. Symbols are a way of connecting things and of showing "the unfathomableness of reality." J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p.p. 65-67. Krüger says that symbolic integration is "below the level of analytical, conceptual thought." Similar ideas of Jung will be discussed in the Appendix of this thesis.

This is why poets can continue to write about experiences that cannot be fully expressed in anything that they may write. Mythological language is a storehouse of such symbols.<sup>53</sup>

The use of symbolism is opposed to literalism. Fundamentalist interpretations of religious use language literally (always as signs). There is also a secular literalism that refuses to admit the symbolic use of language. This includes the behavioural and social scientists, as well as medical materialists who say that religion is "nothing but" a matter of disordered physiology. Wulff says that these methods often match the fundamentalist's scriptural literalism with an opposing literalism of their own, failing to see the possibilities of metaphor or nonscientific language.<sup>54</sup> Because such behavioral scientists no longer believe in what they assume to be the literal referents of religious words, they lose sight of the possibility that these words refer to truths for which there is no literal language.

Abhishiktānanda clearly believed that the *advaitic* experience is ineffable. Even in his early (1942) manuscript *Amour et Sagesse*, he speaks of "beyond, beyond!" In many of his writings, Abhishiktānanda speaks of this difficulty of expressing the ineffable. He says that any description of the ineffable is in the realm of *nāmarūpa*, names and forms.<sup>55</sup> Words cannot describe what is beyond all names and forms. Like others who hold to the Model of Immediate experience, Abhishiktānanda frequently uses symbols (and poetry) to point to this experience that he says cannot be expressed in words. In this thesis I will attempt to open up the meaning of these symbols and poetry.

#### e) Perennial Philosophy

The model of Immediate Experience is often related to the idea of a Perennial Philosophy. That view holds that there is available to us an immediate religious or mystical experience which has common core characteristics across different religions.<sup>56</sup> This common

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<sup>53</sup> Jung's idea of the collective unconscious points to this idea of a common storehouse of symbols.

<sup>54</sup> David M. Wulff: *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: Wiley, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Rudolf Otto refers to *nāmarūpa*. *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan 1970, first published 1932), p. 26, ft. 16; also p. 78. We know that Abhishiktānanda read this book.

<sup>56</sup> For examples of perennial philosophy, see Aldous Huxley: *Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1945), W.T. Stace: *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1981) and Ken Wilber: "The Great Chain of

religious experience is then 'expressed' differently using different concepts and cultural forms. Frequently, the experience is described as an experience of 'Ultimate Reality', or an experience of the true nature of reality. Often this is said to be an experience beyond time and space, an experience of the 'Eternal', or the 'Eternal Now'. It is also often described as an experience beyond the sense of personal identity and as an experience beyond subject and object.

The Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan describes *advaita* in terms of this idea of a perennial philosophy. The term *sanātanadharma* ("eternal teaching") is used to refer to India's perennial philosophy. But according to Halbfass, the idea of a perennial philosophy is not to be found in traditional Hinduism, but is rather a feature of neo-Hinduism. It is a borrowing from the West. Traditional Hinduism did not teach a harmony between Hinduism and other religions. Shankara had sharp disputes with Buddhism. And traditional Hinduism was xenophobic in its treatment of the *mleccha* or foreigner.<sup>57</sup>

Abhishiktānanda's position on perennial philosophy is not straightforward. He says that religions are different approaches to the fundamental *advaitic* experience:

All these [religions] are different approaches of the mind to the mystery that is impenetrable to the mind. Truth is beyond, non-dual, ultimate, transcendently real [*advaita paramārthatā*].<sup>58</sup>

In 1966 he says that the *advaitic* experience underlies all true mysticism, Christian included.<sup>59</sup> Initially he tries to find parallels between Christianity and Vedānta. This is especially evident in his book *Saccidānanda*. But by 1970, he had rejected this approach. He says that one must begin with the experience itself:

The whole subject should be taken up again, starting from the Vedantin experience, and not—as I have so far done, or rather written—from the "Christian faith" and its "symbolization" [in Creeds] by the [Ecumenical] Councils; like a kind of hypothesis which is followed through to the end.<sup>60</sup>

Being", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 214ff.

<sup>57</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West", *India and Europe*, pp. 172-196, 252, 253, 345-348.

<sup>58</sup> *Diary*, p. 95 (2.7.54).

<sup>59</sup> *Letters*, p. 205 (RP, 15.7.66).

<sup>60</sup> *Letters*, p. 270 (OB, 23.12.70).

He continued to believe in one common experience underlying religions. But although religions may have a common experience, they cannot be reconciled at the level of concepts. He says,

More and more I am seeing how Christianity is founded, rooted, in the Jewish culture and mentality. There are no non-cultural religions. All our attempts at reinterpreting John have remained on the surface. We have to descend into the ultimate depths to recognize that there is no common denominator at the level of *namarupa* [names and forms]. So we should accept *namarupa* of the most varied kinds. And play the game with them in the same manner as the Lord does with the worlds. We should penetrate to the depth of each one's mystery, and accept the relativity of all formulations.<sup>61</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that on the theoretical and conceptual level, the different religions collide. There can therefore be no perennial philosophy in terms of concepts. Accepting the relativity of religious formulations means holding the doctrines of both Christianity and Vedānta in tension.<sup>62</sup> Abhishiktānanda attempted to hold both in tension, although he came to prefer more and more the Vedāntic to the Christian formulations.

## 2. Constructivism

Whereas the model of Immediate Experience was a reaction against rationalism, the Constructivist Model is in turn a reaction against the model of Immediate Experience. Constructivism is the dominant model used today in Religious Studies, at least in North America. The model is represented by the article by Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism"<sup>63</sup> For Katz, there is no experience that is not mediated, and there is no such thing as a Perennial Philosophy. Katz says we must pay attention to the 'context' of the experience; he makes a "plea for recognition of differences." For him, the Hindu experience of *Brahman* and the Christian experience of God are not the same; different concepts and beliefs mediate each experience. In Katz's view, the Hindu *advaitic* experience is not beyond all concepts. It is not a deconditioning

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<sup>61</sup> Letters p. 284 (26.1.73).

<sup>62</sup> Mehta speaks of the tension in his own life between his Hinduism and Western modernity. "I avoided as best I could a clash between the two on the conceptual level, letting the process of parallel appropriation proceed unimpeded." *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 215.

<sup>63</sup> Steven D. Katz: "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism", *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Sheldon, 1978).

or unconditioning from concepts. Rather, it is an experience that has been reconditioned by other concepts given by gurus or religious teachers. These teachers explain to the student what the experience is supposed to be like, and the goal that is to be reached.

According to Katz, all our experience (including our religious experience) is “shaped”, “formed”, and “mediated” by the beliefs, concepts and language that we bring to the experience. He says,

...the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience. (...) the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to an experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular, given, concrete context.<sup>64</sup>

These limiting parameters are our concepts. The exact way that our experience is ‘shaped’ by our concepts is not set out in any detail by Katz. Katz’s basic notion of the ‘mediation’ of our experience by our thought is not proved, but rather assumed *a priori* at the outset of the article. He does not define or show how the mediating takes place. Apart from the metaphor of ‘shaping’ he does not give any detailed epistemology.<sup>65</sup> Katz acknowledges that he relies on a “Kantian idiom.” He states that the idea of a non-mediated experience is, “if not self-contradictory, at best empty” He also says that there is no “veridical truth” unless there is data. These views are very similar to Kant’s statement that thoughts without content are empty intuitions without concepts are blind. Our concepts are ‘empty’ without something objective, sensible. And our concepts give form to the data from the manifold of sense impressions.

But Katz goes beyond even a Kantian epistemology in his emphasis on the power of concepts. Kant said that our conceptual categories give form to the manifold of sense impressions that are given by our intuition. But for Kant, these conceptual categories were universal.<sup>66</sup> These universal categories include the concepts of substance and of causation. In Kant’s philosophy, these universal categories do not add any content to the synthetic concept.

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<sup>64</sup> Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>65</sup> The criticisms of Katz that follow are taken from the collection of essays edited by K.C. Forman: *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>66</sup> For Kant, there were also forms on the intuition side. These are the sensory forms of space and time.

Katz, in saying that different concepts 'constitute' different experiences, is not using concepts in this universal sense.<sup>67</sup> He says that different concepts (or belief sets) *give different content* to the experiences. There is no "given" that we experience: "All 'givens' are also the product of the processes of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'."<sup>68</sup>

In this way, Katz goes well beyond anything that Kant suggested or which can be justified using a Kantian epistemology.<sup>69</sup> If there is no "given" that is not mediated by our concepts, then the Kantian theory of knowledge is no longer appropriate, and it does not make sense to even speak of the "mediating" character of experience. Perovich concludes that this is a hyper-Kantian view that must be proved and not just assumed.

Forman also criticizes Constructivism. He says that Katz does not explain whether every change in our belief sets will result in a changed experience.<sup>70</sup> If not every change in belief means a change in experience, then it is open to the perennialist to argue that *samādhi* and *śūnyatā* are close enough conceptually, and that the underlying experience is the same. This is something that Katz does not want to admit. On the other hand, if as Katz says, every change in beliefs results in a change in experience, what does this mean? Is the entire experience of that person different? If I learn a new concept, does that make my everyday experience different? How different? If my experience is changed by every concept I have, how can Katz avoid a totally idealist position, or even a solipsistic position? Do we not have to say, in response to Constructivism, that in our experience we come up against a reality that we do not construct?

Constructivism also cannot account for novelty in one's experience. If my experience is constituted and constructed by my pre-existing beliefs, then how can I ever have a new,

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1970) is often pointed to as another example of showing that non-universal concepts can constitute our experience. It is often said that this work shows that 'paradigms' are culturally constructed and not discovered, and that these paradigms are incommensurable. Wilber maintains that Kuhn never intended his use of 'paradigm' to be used in this way, and that Kuhn has strenuously objected to its use in this way. Because of these misunderstandings, Kuhn himself later abandoned the term 'paradigm'. See Ken Wilber: *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 26-30.

<sup>68</sup> Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>69</sup> This criticism of the Constructivist Model is based on the article by Anthony N. Perovich, Jr.: "Does the Philosophy of Mysticism rest on a Mistake?" *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>70</sup> Robert K.C. Forman, "Mysticism, Constructivism and Forgetting", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, pp. 3ff.

surprising, unexpected experience? And yet such surprise is precisely what many mystics report.<sup>71</sup> They report what may be called 'mystical heresy'. This is when a subject experiences something totally contrary to his or her previous beliefs. How can this be if the experience is formed by the belief? Katz's answer is that the new experience must be due to concepts that the subject has heard before. But this is an *a priori* denial of the possibility of a new experience.

Constructivism also does not account for spontaneous visions, or for unconscious psychic activity that becomes manifested. If beliefs are primary, why do people have experiences arising from their unconscious which cannot be traced to their conceptual beliefs? Constructivism cannot account for such new experiences arising from the unconscious.

If the Constructivist Model is true, then we cannot ever share the same experience, because we all have our own beliefs and concepts. Experiences are 'incommensurable'. If experience is incommensurable, then there is no common experience to appeal to, and no way to choose among various sets of beliefs that structure the experience. There is an emphasis only on difference. There is no way to advocate one theory over another. Whether or not a given theory is accepted will depend on sociological grounds—such as ideology, class, prejudice, gender, race, power, or whatever interests that are in fashion at the time. The loudest voice, or the most powerful voice, will win, and that is really all that can be said.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, based on incommensurability, we cannot even say that any two experiences are of the same *kind*.<sup>73</sup> In this way, the Constructivist Model takes away the possibility of any comparison among religions. It then becomes impossible to compare Abhishiktānanda's *advaitic* experience with other *kinds* of nonduality.

I do not use the Constructivist Model in this thesis. On an *a priori* basis, Katz denies the possibility of any experience going beyond our concepts. Katz says that every religious

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<sup>71</sup> See Forman, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>72</sup> See Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, p. 27. We cannot privilege our own position. Jane Flax makes this point with regard to the feminist use of Constructivism: "We cannot simultaneously claim (1) that the mind, the self, and knowledge are socially constituted and that what we can know depends upon our social practices and contexts and (2) that feminist theory can uncover the truth of the whole once and for all." (Cited by Grace Jantzen: *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 348. Jantzen's book is an example of a constructivist view of religious experience. Although she expresses reservations about the fact that it will result in relativism and power relations, she nevertheless privileges her position on the grounds that one must choose something.

<sup>73</sup> See Perovich, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

experience is mediated by our concepts. But the *advaitic* traditions insist that there is an experience that is beyond any concepts. Katz denies this self-understanding of these other religious traditions. He is therefore imposing his own cultural viewpoint (an over-valuation of conceptual thought) on those other traditions.

### 3. Hermeneutics

#### a) Everyday Experience

The Hermeneutic Model is often confused with the Constructivist Model. It is in fact quite different. The Hermeneutic Model makes a distinction between our everyday experience and our conceptual experience. Our everyday experience is not 'formed' by our conceptual experience. Everyday experience can be appealed to apart from our conceptual framework; it provides the 'understanding' that is the basis for our concepts.<sup>74</sup> There is thus less of an emphasis on incommensurability of the experience of others, and more of an emphasis on commonality of at least parts of our experience.

In appealing to an experience that is not just conceptual, the Hermeneutic Model has some commonalities with the Immediate Experience Model. But the Hermeneutic Model places more emphasis on the linguisticity of even our everyday experience.

One way of separating our experience into conceptual and pre-conceptual is to emphasize that our conceptual thinking is an action that we do. The forming of concepts is then only one of our actions. Our intellectual activity of understanding "must itself be understood as part of, and subordinate to, a wider whole encompassing the human person as a thinking, feeling and acting being."<sup>75</sup> Our everyday world is

...the kind of world in which we do certain things, have certain things and see certain things. You may theorize before that or after that. We are not talking of

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<sup>74</sup> For Heidegger, "...interpretation is grounded on understanding and is only the explicit cultivation and carrying through of the latter." J.L. Mehta: *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 202. This idea of 'understanding' probably derives from Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and on Dilthey's idea of world-and-life views. The idea of an implicit versus an explicit knowledge may also be seen in Michael Polanyi: *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1958) and in David Bohm: *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 1980).

<sup>75</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Problems of Understanding", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 268.

beliefs and commonsense but we are talking of a level which is not merely cognitive or purely cognitive.<sup>76</sup>

Another way of separating everyday experience from conceptual experience is to say that our conceptual knowledge is a different kind of knowledge than our everyday thinking. Everyday experience is the way we live as we experience it in living before we think about it. When we think about our experience, we are not having the same experience anymore. In concepts, we re-present the experience to our minds (or as Heidegger puts it, playing on the German word for representation, there is a *Vor-Stellung*). Concepts are dominated by system-building, by our trying to take possession of objects through conceptualization. In contrast to our everyday experience, concepts are objectifying or representational, a 'grasping' of an object before us.<sup>77</sup>

Conceptual or representational thinking comes from the Greek '*eidōs*'; representational thinking is a technique, to force what is being presented to us into a representation. This forcing, or metaphysical thinking, separates us from being. This type of metaphysical conceptuality is not adequate to describe or capture our life experience in its actuality:

Metaphysical thinking, as the attempt to freeze into concepts and so immobilize what *is* as something present, as *eidōs* or as an objective presence in front of us, can only falsify and distort our apprehension of the movement that is life.<sup>78</sup>

Our everyday knowledge is based on 'lived experience', on concrete experience, our common life-world, the ground-structure of the human *Lebenswelt* as such. Our everyday experience gives us an 'understanding'. Theory depends on this pre-conceptual understanding. Our everyday experience of things is not objectifying.<sup>79</sup> Neither is this lived experience something that we construct. Mehta cites Heidegger:

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<sup>76</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 232.

<sup>77</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 47,48. Heidegger plays on the German word for comprehending. 'Begreifen' is a 'Be-Greifen', to have in one's grip.

<sup>78</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Life Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 213. Cf. Krüger, *Along Edges*, p. 127: "conceptual cognition creates a split between the knowing subject and the known object. It observes and analyses from a distance, and abstracts from the warm stuff of life."

<sup>79</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 98, ft. 14.

To undergo an experience with something—be it a thing, a person, or a god—means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of “undergoing” an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something itself that comes about, comes to pass, happens.<sup>80</sup>

Because our everyday experience is not constructed, it can transform us and transform our beliefs. We respond to that which shows itself, to what manifests itself and addresses us. And also because of this shared lived experience, there is no ultimate incommensurability of experience. There is a bottom level out of which our intellectual and conceptual activities arise as we immediately experience things.<sup>81</sup> It is a common horizon, a cluster of experiences of which it seems all humanity has testified to in history, apart from theological and theoretical considerations.<sup>82</sup> There is a common life-world, of which Christian, Hindu and Chinese can be shown to be specifications and derivations. We are all human beings and talking beings who are not only capable of translating from one language to another but are of necessity doing it all the time.<sup>83</sup> There is therefore a perennial experience, although not a perennial philosophy in the sense of a finished system; explication of the experience is an unfinished and ongoing enterprise.

#### b) Linguisticity is not necessarily Conceptual

But just because our everyday experience is different from concepts does not mean it is without language. There can be a non-conceptual use of language:

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<sup>80</sup> Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 57. Cited by J.L. Mehta: “Heidegger and Vedanta”, *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 252. This emphasis on lived experience can be traced to Dilthey’s views of immediate experience. J.L. Mehta: “Heidegger’s Debts to Dilthey and Husserl’s Phenomenology”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 35ff.

<sup>81</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 230.

<sup>82</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Postmodern Problems East/West”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 245.

<sup>83</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Life-Worlds, Sacrality and Interpretive Thinking”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 214. Cf. Krüger’s idea of ‘homoversals’, the common symbols of our shared human nature. J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, pp. 89, 280.

The saying of language is not necessarily a statement of propositions about objects, but is rather a co-responding to what shows itself, to what manifests itself and addresses us.<sup>84</sup>

This non-conceptual language is the language of myth and symbol. At first sight, this seems similar to Immediate Experience. But the difference is that the Hermeneutic Model sees our pre-conceptual state as itself linguistic. In the model of Immediate Experience, language divides reality up into subject and object. But in the Hermeneutic Model, language still allows for the unity of subject and object. For Heidegger, language is the place where subject and object are at home together prior to being split asunder by conscious reflection.<sup>85</sup>

The splitting up of reality is done not by language but by our concepts. There is a kind of language where subject and object are undifferentiated. Myth and symbol are at the undifferentiated level:

...the quest for a single all-encompassing life-world must begin, to be fruitful, not at the level of conceptual differentiation, where one will find only differences, but at the pre-conceptual level of myth, legend and symbol."<sup>86</sup>

Our myths are what we take for granted and thus do not question. With regard to myth, Panikkar says, "We find it so unquestionable, we believe in it so much, that we do not even believe that we believe in it."<sup>87</sup> Panikkar also accepts the view that our experience is linguistic even if not conceptual. For him, this experience is given by symbol:

It is in the symbol that the real appears to us. It is not reality (which never exists naked, as it were) but its manifestation, its revelation. The symbol is not another 'thing', but the epiphany of that 'thing' which is-not without some symbol—because ultimately Being itself is the final symbol. Any real symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolised 'thing' and the consciousness of it.<sup>88</sup>

Although Abhishiktānanda emphasizes immediate experience, he also refers in several places to the deep linguistic structures of our experience:

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<sup>84</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 98, ft. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Joel C. Weinsheimer: *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (Yale, 1985), p. 249.

<sup>86</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Life-Worlds, Sacrality & Interpretive Thinking", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 214.

<sup>87</sup> Raimon Panikkar, Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. xix. See also Raimon Panikkar: *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-Cultural Studies* (Paulist Press, 1979), p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Raimon Panikkar: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), p. ix.

Every experience is already developed at the level of the phenomenal consciousness. But the experience of *advaita* is there with an absolutely minimal degree of development. As for the Trinitarian experience, it is highly developed. I have said and written that it required the agency of a concept (therefore a revealed one?). That is perhaps too much. We must grant their full value to the myth and the archetype, since they are pre-conceptual much closer to the primary zones of consciousness.<sup>89</sup>

On first reading, this passage suggests a movement away from the Model of Immediate Experience to the Hermeneutic Model. If the experience is “already developed”, that would seem to suggest that the experience no longer primary. But Abhishiktānanda does not say that the experience requires a concept.<sup>90</sup> He points instead to a pre-conceptual development of the experience by myth and archetype. Furthermore, the English translation of the *Diary* is a bit misleading here. The words “Every experience is already developed” are ambiguous in that they can mean either that there is development before the experience or that there has been development after the experience. In the original French, he speaks of the experience not as developed, but as *élaborée*, elaborated. Elaboration of an experience suggests that the experience comes first and is then elaborated. This is supported by the final sentence, where he says that the myths and archetypes are “much closer to the original zones (*zones originaires*) of consciousness.” That suggests that there is a primary experience, an original consciousness. When we move from that original consciousness, the experience is elaborated (or ramified). *Advaitic* thought is far less elaborated than Christian thought. How the experience is elaborated depends on the culture in which the experience is expressed:

...for the manifestations of this experience are strictly conditioned by the cultural and “religious” environment in which it develops, or ‘*happens*’.<sup>91</sup>

This interpretation of experience being elaborated by archetypes and myths, and finally by concepts, is supported by other writings of Abhishiktānanda. He says that archetypes arise at the origin of human consciousness. They are fundamental forces (*pulsions*) of being. Our

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<sup>89</sup> *Diary*, p. 289, (23.11.66).

<sup>90</sup> His reference to an earlier writing may be to *Meeting Point*, which he wrote a year earlier. On p. 9 of that work he asks whether it is possible, apart from revelation, to attain to the fullness of the Christian Trinitarian experience. But on that same page he speaks of the necessity of harmonizing our conceptual formulations with the mystery that is revealed in our inmost being. This also seems to suggest the Immediate Experience model.

<sup>91</sup> *Diary*, p. 315 (9.7.70). The French original reads “par le milieu culturel et “religieux” où elle se déploie (où elle arrive, *happens*).”

experience necessarily manifests itself in archetypes. The spontaneous *élan* of our nature towards Self is manifested in religious archetypes, like the sacred, the numinous. These archetypes free psychical energy that is extraordinarily powerful and reveal the mystery of man, the universe and God. The archetypes are released in symbols. Over time, the archetypes crystallize in conceptual formulas, rituals and religious rules (*dharma*). This results in a “sclerosis” of religious archetypes, to a conceptual and sociological sedimentation.<sup>92</sup> Abhishiktānanda says that we must go back to the original experience or intuition, beyond the cultural formulations and rites of religion, beyond all expression and even beyond the archetypes.<sup>93</sup>

Every religion is rooted in a culture, beginning with the most primordial and hidden archetypes which necessarily govern its view of the world. All that is *citta* [thought] is *nāmarūpa*. And every *nāmarūpa* has to be laid bare, so that the *satyam* [Real] may be unveiled. What a savage but marvellous purification!<sup>94</sup>

This “going beyond” concepts, myths and archetypes is for Abhishiktānanda the same as a return to the original intuition of Immediate Experience. But in our concrete situation, we begin in the context of a religion that is conditioned by culture. We begin with concepts, myths and archetypes, but we must go beyond or transcend them. This points to the Yogic Model that I will discuss.

### c) Critique of the Hermeneutic Model

One criticism of the Hermeneutic Model is that it is not consistent in its emphasis on the linguisticity of our everyday experience. Gadamer says:

Of course, the fundamental linguisticity of understanding cannot possibly mean that all experiencing of the world takes place only as language and in language. All too well known are those prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawns, dumbnesses, and silences in which the immediate meeting with the world expresses itself. And who would deny that there are real conditions to human life?<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> “Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne”, (1970), *Intériorité*, pp. 177ff. See also *Diary*, p. 233 regarding archetypes and symbols.

<sup>93</sup> “Archétypes religieux, expérience du soi et théologie chrétienne”, (1970), *Intériorité*, pp. 182, 183.

<sup>94</sup> *Letters*, p. 285 (MC 26.1.73).

<sup>95</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Philosophical Apprenticeships* (MIT, 1985), p. 179.

What are these “prelinguistic and metalinguistic dawns, dumbnesses, and silences?” This looks like the pre-conceptual awareness in the Immediate Experience Model. But the difference is that, although the Hermeneutic Model acknowledges these pre-linguistic dawns, they are not “actual knowledge.” Gadamer affirms his adherence to Kant’s conclusions in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Gadamer says,

I regard statements that proceed by wholly dialectical means from the finite to the infinite, from human experience to what exists in itself, from the temporal to the eternal, as doing no more than setting limits, and am convinced that philosophy can derive no actual knowledge from them.<sup>96</sup>

For Kant, only that which can be in the mode of an object can count as something that we can know. This restricts “actual knowledge” to what can be identified as an object, to beings rather than Being. There can be no actual knowledge of the pre-linguistic or the meta-linguistic. There can therefore be no actual knowledge of the ‘ineffable’. To speak of the ‘ineffable’ is itself a relative statement.<sup>97</sup>

Restricting actual knowledge to beings also means that our knowledge is restricted to what is in time. But is this necessarily the case? Why should we *a priori* rule out any knowledge of what is beyond time? This knowledge may not be conceptual knowledge, but it may nevertheless be real knowledge.

Mehta’s primary criticism of the Hermeneutic model is that it does not adequately explain our sense of mystery and enchantment, our need for the transcendent. Jackson, the editor of *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, refers to Mehta’s “refusal to relinquish a hold on or concern for the transcendent”:

Is Mehta out of synch with the deconstructionist fashions of postmodernism which embrace multiplicity but abandon traditional unity, meaning, center, and are suspicious of the transcendent of specialists in the sacred? His view of postmodern consciousness included the concern for regaining an enchanting world.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Foreword to the Second Edition, *Truth and Method*, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. xxxvi.

<sup>97</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Foreword to the Second Edition of *Truth and Method*, pp. xxxiv, xxxv.

<sup>98</sup> William J. Jackson, Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 20. Jackson does point out that Mehta was aware of and read those of a contrary view, like Derrida.

Although Mehta was aware of postmodern critiques of transcendence, he refers in many places to the importance of recovering the dimension of the holy. The price paid for progress has been a loss of the holy, a disenchantment and desacralization, the making of nature into an object.<sup>99</sup> But the capacity for transcendence is just as much a part of humanity as is the capacity for conceptuality:

Going beyond, the movement of self-surpassing, is as much constitutive of the human state as defining and setting up boundaries. It is this self-transcending movement, this reaching out and reaching down within, inherent in man, which defines him as *homo religiosus*, a bridge thrown across, from the realm of the visible to another shore.<sup>100</sup>

This emphasis on transcendence is found in the model advocated by Mehta, the Yogic Model.

#### 4. The Yogic Model

The Yogic Model makes a threefold distinction: (1) our everyday experience (2) conceptual experience and (3) meditative experience.<sup>101</sup> In meditative experience, we can reach a reality that is not only beyond concepts, but also beyond language and subjectivity. There is a transcendent reality that can be reached, a realm of experience beyond duality that is attained only by meditation.

The Yogic Model differs from the model of Immediate Experience in that it acknowledges that we may *begin* with language and the word, and not with a ‘pure experience’ beyond language. But although we may begin with language and symbol, we can move to a higher experience. From word we can move to theory. But we can move beyond both language and theory to a transcendent realm. And this move is what Indian thought emphasizes:

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<sup>99</sup> J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 202. Mehta speaks of a reductivism in PR 97.

<sup>100</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Beyond Believing and Knowing”, *India and the West: the Problem of Understanding*, p. 203.

<sup>101</sup> These three divisions seems to correspond to Wilber’s distinction between (1) the eye of flesh (empiricism), (2) the eye of reason (science) and (3) the eye of meditation. See Ken Wilber, “Eye to Eye: Science and Transpersonal Psychology”, in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 184ff. Similarly, Rothberg says there are several epistemologies: (1) Naturalistic (empirical), (2) Interpretive: both (a) contextual (relativistic) and (b) universal (searching for deep structures) and (3) Meditative. See Donald Rothberg: “Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism”, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, pp. 163ff. Rothberg’s interpretative category would seem to include both what I have called the Constructivist position (contextual, relativistic) and the Hermeneutic (universal deep structures).

In the Indian tradition of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist philosophy, knowledge in the highest sense is immediate, an experienced reality in which the duality of knowing subject and known object lapses. The lower, empirical, knowledge of entities in the world is mediated by language, concepts and categories, though even here, according to some schools, the conceptual activity of the mind is more a hindrance than an indispensable means of knowing.<sup>102</sup>

The Yogic Model differs from the Hermeneutic Model in its emphasis on the transcendent. The Hermeneutic Model can be criticized for considering all non-theoretical modes of experience to be pre-conceptual. It misses what Wilber calls the movement to the post-conscious or trans-personal.<sup>103</sup> The Yogic Model specifically acknowledges this move in consciousness beyond the conceptual and beyond the personal. The realm beyond thought is the state of consciousness known as the *turīya*. In meditation, this new level of consciousness is reached. It is beyond any dualistic distinctions, and is historically unconditioned.<sup>104</sup>

As an example from the West, Mehta points to Thomas Aquinas, who fell into total silence after he had a direct experience, unmediated by language or concepts, of the supreme vision. He said, "All that I have written seems to me nothing but straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me."<sup>105</sup> Mehta does not hesitate to use the word 'transcendence':

All times are times of crisis (that is life), to which the creative thinker, poet and saint respond by lifting themselves above time's ever-present immediacies, liberating themselves from them, focusing in a direction away from them—call it transcendence or inwardness—and *only so* saving people from being sucked up in the morass of the historical situation's contingent particularities.<sup>106</sup>

Some interpreters of Heidegger see a similar emphasis by him on the transcendent. Heidegger does not himself favour the word 'transcendent'; for him, the concept of transcendence has its origin in the attempt to represent objects, in view of their Being. The

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<sup>102</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Beyond Believing and Knowing", *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 205.

<sup>103</sup> Ken Wilber: "The Pre/Trans Fallacy", in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 124ff.

<sup>104</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Saving Leap", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 92, 93.

<sup>105</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language and Yoga", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 157.

<sup>106</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Postmodern Problems East/West", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 244.

concept of transcendence is 'metaphysical' in character, and inappropriate to an attempt to think of Being as such.<sup>107</sup> But Heidegger makes a threefold distinction that is similar to the Yogic Model. He distinguishes among (1) everyday experience, (2) theory, and (3) 'authentic experience.' Authentic experience is achieved by what Heidegger calls 'meditative thinking.' Heidegger says there are two types of thinking, each which is in its way legitimate and necessary: calculative thinking and meditative (recollective) thoughtfulness. Meditative thinking is different from the classical notion of Philosophy, proving or disproving a point by means of skilful conceptual maneuvering.<sup>108</sup> According to Heidegger, "Thinking begins only then, when we have realized that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most pertinacious opponent of thinking."<sup>109</sup> Authentic thinking is meditative thinking, a "listening to Being."

What we need, in this time of planetary need, is not "philosophy" as an expression of the conceptual mastery over things, but thinking as meditative recollection and as a gesture of *Gelassenheit*, releasement, of being let into the letting-be in relation to Being, as releasement toward things and openness to mystery.<sup>110</sup>

From beings to Being there is no straight path but only a leap of thought from one dimension or mode to another.<sup>111</sup> Heidegger emphasizes that this meditative thinking remains a kind of thinking. The leap out of metaphysical thinking is not an abdication of thought, not a leap into the 'mystical', into some kind of intuitive, unmediated cognitive experience. The leap is not achieved by intuition in everyday experience. Heidegger rejects the idea of *Erlebnis*, which he considers irrational. Just because conceptual thinking is inadequate does not mean that one can lapse into irrationalism or into mysticism, "the mere counterpart of metaphysics."<sup>112</sup> The

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<sup>107</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 49. Various ways of understanding transcendence will be examined in later chapters of this thesis.

<sup>108</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Philosophy, Philology and Empirical Knowledge", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 95.

<sup>109</sup> Martin Heidegger: *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 15. Cited by J.L. Mehta: "World Civilization: The Possibility of Dialogue", *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation*, p. 36.

<sup>110</sup> J.L. Mehta: "The Will to Interpret and India's Dreaming Spirit", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 184.

<sup>111</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 49.

<sup>112</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 251. Mehta's own view is that the leap is not achieved by intuition in everyday experience, but by a special meditative

leap is a leap of thought, a transformation of the nature of thought itself where it surrenders its conceptuality, its will to grasp, and is content to let what is reveal itself, and to let Truth shine forth.

Although Heidegger continues to call it thinking, Mehta says that, from the viewpoint of representational thinking, the leap is a renunciation of thought itself.<sup>113</sup> Mehta suggests that this view of meditative thinking carries Heidegger beyond the limitation of his own thought into a region of “pure” thinking, the region of Being in *its* truth, unconditioned by the particular tradition from which one happens to leap into it.<sup>114</sup>

As already discussed, Abhishiktānanda speaks of the *advaitic* experience as “going beyond” our ideas, concepts, myths and archetypes. For him, this “going beyond” is a return to our original consciousness. But he also speaks of this experience as “transcending” the archetypes, which is suggestive of the Yogic Model.<sup>115</sup> The “return” to our original consciousness is a transcending. Abhishiktānanda contrasts this “going beyond” with the “stopping short” at an idea:

Conceptual structure can never either contain or enclose the *true*, as westerners too often tend to think. Whoever stops short at ideas, misses their message.<sup>116</sup>

Abhishiktānanda himself was acutely aware of stopping short at an idea of the *advaitic* experience without attaining the experience itself. In 1953, he wrote,

Perhaps last year I had more the *idea of advaita*, of *sanmātra* [pure being]—and the idea more than the *res* [the thing itself]?<sup>117</sup>

Abhishiktānanda tried to give up even his conception of *advaita*.<sup>118</sup> He was also concerned that his own ideas of *advaita* would be used by others for their intellectual

experience. This is similar to Wilber’s view of pre/trans. The immediate experience of meditation is not the same as the pre-conscious understanding.

<sup>113</sup> J.L. Mehta: “The Saving Leap”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 90.

<sup>114</sup> J.L. Mehta: “The Saving Leap”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 92.

<sup>115</sup> *Diary*, p. 123 (5.9.55).

<sup>116</sup> Preface, *Guru*, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> *Diary*, p. 66 (21.3.53), cited in *Letters*, p. 61. This quotation itself shows the influence of scholastic terminology (“*res*”) in the formulation of his ideas.

<sup>118</sup> *Diary*, p. 114 (3.8.55).

satisfaction, but without really listening to the ideas, and without any desire for conversion or awakening.<sup>119</sup> He emphasized that *advaita* should not be seen as an idea; the *advaitic* experience goes beyond all ideas:

Advaita is not an idea. *It is!* The lightning flashes, the eye blinks, as says the Kena [Upanishad]. Then? You have either understood, or you have not understood...If you have not understood, too bad! says the same Upanishad. If you have understood, you keep quiet, says the Mundaka [Upanishad].<sup>120</sup>

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda follows this advice, and says that the *advaitic* experience is impossible to describe and that it can only be pointed to by silence:

There is no thought about the mystery which is not already *nāmarūpa*. The experience at the original moment cannot be discerned except in an "Ah"! (cp. Kena Upanishad 4,4)<sup>121</sup>

In other places, he writes of the difficulty of expressing the experience, except in cultural terms:

Of course I can stammer a few words. But that will never be more than some concepts, strictly dependent on my cultural, social, religious and mental environment, on all the previous development of my thought and my consciousness.<sup>122</sup>

At other times, Abhishiktānanda is very conceptual in his analysis of the *advaitic* experience. Of course, once the 'ineffable' has been expressed in concepts, those concepts may be analyzed. We may look to the textual and oral sources of these ideas, and how Abhishiktānanda may have adopted or changed these ideas. Of special importance here are the teachings of the two Hindu sages who most influenced Abhishiktānanda: Ramaṇa Maharshi and Gnānānanda.

Loy's comparative philosophy is sensitive to the problems of analyzing what is said to be unanalyzable. He acknowledges that those who claim to have had an *advaitic* experience generally claim that the experience is in some sense immediate, and not to be grasped conceptually.

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<sup>119</sup> *Letters*, p. 239 (OB 20.11.70).

<sup>120</sup> *Letters* p. 227 (RV, 8.3.70).

<sup>121</sup> *Diary*, p. 370 (2.2.73).

But, according to the “nondualist systems” to be considered (...) philosophy cannot grasp the source from which it springs and so must yield to praxis: the intellectual attempt to grasp nonduality conceptually must give way to various meditative techniques which, it is claimed, promote the immediate experience of nonduality.<sup>123</sup>

Mehta, too refers to this paradox of how we can express the ineffable. He refers to the “teasing relation between the pregnant silence of the Buddha and the flood of discursive talk that followed it unremittingly across the centuries.”<sup>124</sup> He asks, what is the relation between ineffability of experience and verbal articulation, between the way of the Muni and the way of the Rishi?

In the Yogic Model, the practice of meditation is essential to reaching the transcendent state. Wilber points out that this means that those who have not learned contemplation will not understand.<sup>125</sup> This view is offensive to those who hold another epistemology. But the fact that the transcendent reality can be reached only by meditation does not mean it is unverifiable. It is verified, although not in a positivist way, each time that someone becomes enlightened. Frits Staal has emphasized the importance of personal experimentation in investigating a mystical experience. Mystical experience must be studied directly and from within.<sup>126</sup> That is what Abhishiktānanda did in his life. His life was an experiment with the *advaitic* consciousness. We have Abhishiktānanda’s testimony to review of this experiment. The way that his testimony will be explored is a kind of phenomenology.

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<sup>122</sup> *Diary*, p. 371 (2.2.73).

<sup>123</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language and Yoga”, *J.L. Mehta: J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 170.

<sup>125</sup> Ken Wilber: “Eye to Eye: Science and Transpersonal Psychology”, in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (Tarcher, 1993), pp. 184ff.

<sup>126</sup> Frits Staal: *Exploring Mysticism* (University of California Press, 1975), p. 123.

### C. Phenomenology

This thesis uses dialogal phenomenology<sup>127</sup> to attempt to ‘unpack’ Abhishiktānanda’s descriptions of his experience. The method attempts to identify ‘experiential expressions’ and symbols that he uses to describe the experience. Once identified, these experiential expressions are amplified and further explicated. How does dialogal phenomenology differ from other kinds of phenomenology?

‘Phenomenology’ is a word that is often used to describe different methods of investigation in religious studies; frequently, the word is used without any investigation into or acknowledgement of the theoretical foundations of the method. Sometimes, the word is used to express some empirical investigation into the ‘facts’ of religious experience. But this does not recognize that phenomenology often has very different assumptions from empirical investigation. The loose use of the word ‘phenomenology’ also often ignores that there are several different kinds of phenomenology.<sup>128</sup>

For Husserl, phenomenology is related to ‘intentionality’. Intentionality is the common characteristic of all ‘directed’ acts. Corresponding to our intentionality is the ‘object’ as the pole of all our conceivable intentions. Our consciousness is always consciousness of something. For Husserl, intentional knowing serves as the foundation to all others; the thing is first known as the object before it is appreciated, sought, or desired. Mehta says that Husserl failed to be critical and radical enough; he did not inquire into the mode of Being of consciousness.<sup>129</sup> Mehta rejects the whole idea of intentionality as “untenable, being based on a preconceived notion of a pure cognitive awareness standing over against a world of objective entities.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup>A rather preliminary description of this method is given by Sunnia D. Kidd and James W. Kidd in their *Experiential Method: Qualitative Research in the Humanities using Metaphysics and Phenomenology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). The Kidds emphasize that this is less a method than it is a ‘way’ of dialogue.

<sup>128</sup> See Pierre Thévenaz: *What is Phenomenology?* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1962). The Kidds also review some different kinds of phenomenology at p. 71, ft. 63. Mehta also refers to Thévenaz in this connection. J.L. Mehta: *India and the West: The Problem of Understanding*, p. 36.

<sup>129</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Heidegger’s Debts to Dilthey’s Hermeneutics and Husserl’s Phenomenology”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 40.

<sup>130</sup> J.L. Mehta: “Heidegger’s Debts to Dilthey’s Hermeneutics and Husserl’s Phenomenology”, *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, 42.

Existential phenomenology rejects Husserl's identification of Being with object-being. Being is more than what can be made into an object. Existentialists also reject the primacy of the act of knowing; experience is more than knowing. For existentialists, the subjective self remains the point of departure. We experience life before we begin to observe and/or investigate it.

Dialogal phenomenology differs from these other phenomenologies by (1) going beyond the merely subjective to the inter-subjective (2) including our presuppositions in relation to what is being investigated, (3) in its emphasis on an attentive "listening to Being", and (4) in its use of the method of amplification of themes that are identified in the investigation. These four differences are also ways in which this 'method' is compatible with Mehta's approach to comparative philosophy and with the Yogic Model of epistemology.<sup>131</sup>

Whereas existential phenomenology is based on one's subjectivity, dialogal phenomenology attempts to move beyond subjectivity into intersubjectivity. The Kidds speak of the transcendent as having both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The horizontal transcendence is the move from one's own subjectivity to the being of others. This involves a view of a self that is connected both to others and to the world. Using Panikkar's words, this method assumes a self that "besides being myself is also shared by the other."<sup>132</sup>

Dialogal phenomenology acknowledges the necessity of including our assumptions. When we attempt to understand another person's description of an experience, there is no neutral phenomenological method that can be used to get at the essence of the experience that is being described. Every phenomenology brings with it certain assumptions. We do not have a pure description on which we can then add an interpretation. Nor did Abhishiktānanda have such a pure description available to him. As Heidegger says,

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an

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<sup>131</sup> The Kidds emphasize that it is more of a way than a method. It is not a method in the sense of a technique: (*op. cit.* p. 44). Radical phenomenology involves a critique of instrumentality and technique: p.62, ft. 24. Instrumentality and technique rely on what is observable, measurable, and repeatable. If it cannot be measured, the phenomenon does not exist; if it does not occur on demand it does not exist. But as James says, Truth as technically verified might miss the truth of truths. William James, *The Will to Believe*, (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), p. 21.

<sup>132</sup> R. Panikkar: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Paulist Press, 1978), p. 40.

involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.<sup>133</sup>

This acknowledgement of our assumptions differs from Husserl's phenomenology, where he sought an objective and neutral description of the object. According to Husserl, the investigator brackets his or her own presuppositions; he called this bracketing the *epoché*.<sup>134</sup> Dialogal phenomenology rejects this goal of an *epoché*.

The idea of 'listening to being' is a recurring thought in Heidegger; this idea is adopted by dialogal phenomenology. The phenomenon is that which shows itself in its being, and which we then can hear and see. Instead of Husserl's emphasis on intentionality, there is now an emphasis on attention. What is important is to pay attention to the phenomenon. In this attention, we return to our 'lived-world', the world of our original experience. This world of our original experience is the basis for our thinking.<sup>135</sup> There is an appearance of the phenomenon. There is also another kind of manifestation in the sense of *Erscheinung*: symbols. In showing themselves, symbols indicate or point to something that itself does not appear.<sup>136</sup>

Dialogal phenomenology is a way of allowing us to see and hear into the nature of things, and bringing them to light. Mehta speaks of this kind of phenomenology in relation to Heidegger's thought. Heidegger's method does not seek a proof, but ends in a 'seeing' or 'hearing' of the phenomenon, a bringing of the phenomenon to light.<sup>137</sup> Phenomenology (like the Yogic Model) is then something that must be practiced.<sup>138</sup>

There is no neutral phenomenological method that can be used to get at the essence of an experience that is being described. But we can try to achieve an ever-increasing approximation

<sup>133</sup> Heidegger: *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 190-191.

<sup>134</sup> Panikkar explores several reasons why this *epoché* is inappropriate. See R. Panikkar: *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 40-55.

<sup>135</sup> The Kidds refer here to William A. Luijpen, *Phenomenology and Humanism: A Primer in Existential Phenomenology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1966), p. 60.

<sup>136</sup> Mehta: "Heidegger's Debt to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 62.

<sup>137</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>138</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 73.

of that which is being described by a circling around the description, by an amplification, an expansion of meaning in the development of an idea. According to dialogal phenomenology, we must first try to identify 'experiential expressions'. These are short expressions or single sentences that convey qualitative dimensions of how the person has experienced a given situation. The expressions are identifiable because of their emphasis by the subject. They stand out. They may include statements regarding feeling, belief and attitude, meaning and value. These experiential expressions are best seen when they are spontaneous expressions. This is why the *Diary* of Abhishiktānanda is so important to understanding his *advaitic* experience. It is more spontaneous than the works that he published only after extensive revision. Words used to describe the nature and quality of an experience also reveal a dimension of subjectivity, the 'who' of the experience. The investigator must ask, "How and what does this phenomenon mean for this who, this person? Why was it personally significant?" The investigator must look for consistency in expression, congruency or similarity to other expressions, and distinguishing differences from other expressions.

The next stage is to identify themes within the work.<sup>139</sup> An 'amplification' is made of these themes. In this amplification, we attempt to get as much detail as possible concerning the experience reported, so that the many sides of the descriptions are taken into account without reducing the experience to any one description.<sup>140</sup> We must try to stay with and not move away from the originality of the description. By attention, there is an attempt to remain open to possible meaning by staying with the wholeness, the liveliness and vitality of the experience rather than reducing meaning to *data* by use of analysis.

Mehta finds this kind of amplification in Heidegger. Heidegger does not infer, deduce or generalize. He offers no 'logical' arguments; he 'proves' nothing. It is not a logical demonstration but understanding (*Verstehen*).

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<sup>139</sup> Heidegger refers to 'Leitmotifs of meaning': "*Leitmotifs* of thinking gives voice to a bond that binds all thinking, providing that thinking submits to the call of what must be thought." *On Time and Being*, tr. Joan Stambaugh, (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 24, cited by the Kidds, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>140</sup> C.G. Jung also uses the word 'amplification' in reference to his analysis of dreams. In Jung's way of understanding a dream, there is a similar circling of ideas, identifying themes and then amplifying them. Another comparison is Chatterjee's 'elucidation' of structures of consciousness rather than a description of them. See Margaret Chatterjee, *The Language of Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p. 131, cited by the Kidds, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

Yet, through his analyses and explorations in depth, through the reconnoitering movement of his thought, going in circles around the matter in question, he brings into view coherent structures lying buried under the surface of our everyday experience as well as the presuppositions, the light of Being, involved in the way we interpret and understand this experience.<sup>141</sup>

In Heidegger's philosophizing, there is a similar amplification, a 'repeating' of an earlier analysis on higher levels<sup>142</sup> There is a 'pointing to' in this amplification. There is a circular movement between the authentic and back again to the 'everyday' mode of *Existenz* until a clear picture of the way the two modes are related emerges into view. There is a definite relation between the 'essence' of the object of the experience and the manner of its expression by the subject.

I will use this method of amplification to attempt to unpack Abhishiktānanda's self-understanding of his experience. The use of amplification means that I am not trying to fit Abhishiktānanda's ideas into a pre-existing mold, such as a particular type of Christian theology, or of Hindu theology. If Abhishiktānanda himself makes comparisons to theologies, these comparisons must be looked at. But the attempt must be made to understand Abhishiktānanda in his own terms. And in doing so, we must look not only at the concepts that he uses, but also at the symbols and metaphors, and to his more poetic descriptions.

#### *D. Sources Investigated*

Abhishiktānanda's own writings are the primary source to understand and assess his *advaitic* experience. Fortunately, he wrote a great deal. His works include numerous books, articles for periodicals (some under an assumed name), correspondence to friends, and his private diary. Most of these writings have been published, although in some cases only excerpts have been published. An archive of all of Abhishiktānanda's works is maintained at Vidyajyoti College in Delhi. In the spring of 2001, I was able to review the Abhishiktānanda archives at Vidyajyoti College. Fr. Gispert-Sauch was most helpful to me in allowing me access to these documents.

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<sup>141</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 43.

After seeing the documents in the archives, I can now better appreciate the enormous work done by James Stuart in editing the *Letters*. Equally impressive is the work done by Raimon Panikkar and his collaborators Bettina Bäumer, James Stuart, Jacques Dupuis and N. Shanta in the translation and editing of Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*. It is hoped that the Abhishiktānanda Society<sup>143</sup> will in future make Abhishiktānanda's unpublished work available on microfiche.

In addition to Abhishiktānanda's own writings, there is a growing body of secondary literature about him and his ideas. An extensive bibliography of this literature was prepared by James Stuart, who edited the translation of Abhishiktānanda's letters. The Abhishiktānanda Society publishes a periodical, the *Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society*, which appears on an irregular basis. It is presently edited by Dr. Bettina Bäumer, and provides details about Abhishiktānanda previously unpublished.

In Delhi, I was also able to meet with James Stuart. His recollections of Abhishiktānanda were primarily with respect to the translation and publishing of his books. I value his opinion that, despite what Abhishiktānanda's books may say, he was not an acosmic, but someone who was very down to earth.

I have also corresponded with Madame Odette Baumer-Despeigne, who knew Abhishiktānanda and whose correspondence with him is included in the *Letters*. I have also corresponded with Christian Hackbarth-Johnson, who is presently researching Abhishiktānanda's life and ideas. He has reviewed both the archives in Delhi as well as those sources which were available to Abhishiktānanda at the Abbey of Ste.-Anne de Kergonan, Brittany, and he has kindly provided me with some of the results of this research.

While in India I was also able to visit Abhishiktānanda's ashram Shantivanam at Tannirpalli, Ramaṇa's ashram at Tiruvannamalai, Gnānānanda's ashram Tapovanam at Tirukoilur, and Aurobindo's ashram in Pondicherry. I had earlier visited Aurobindo's ashram in

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<sup>142</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger's Debts to Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Husserl's Phenomenology", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> The Abhishiktānanda Society, 7 Court Lane, Delhi, India 110054.

1973. Seeing all these places provided concrete images and new insights into the meanings of Abhishiktānanda's writings.

I was impressed by the beauty of Shantivanam. There are beautiful gardens, a forest of palms, a banyan tree, an almond tree, and banana trees. The chapel has impressive images on its roof, including the figure of Christ seated as a yogi. The Mass in the chapel was chanted in Tamil, Sanskrit and English and included the waving of lights, and incense in the fashion initiated by Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin, and continued by their successor Bede Griffiths. The ashram was filled with visitors, including many young people. There is a *samādhi* (memorial) over the grave of Abhishiktānanda, whose body was moved there from Indore. I am most grateful for the assistance given me by Sr. Sarananda, who provided me with information concerning Monchanin.

At Ramanasramam we were welcomed by Sri V. S. Ramanan. Again, the grounds were beautiful. There were peacocks and monkeys. I was astonished to see so many devotees from so many different countries. In the dining hall, we sat on the floor facing each other in rows, and were served our meals on palm leaves. In the meditation hall the devotees either sat silently, or walked clockwise around the *samādhi* of Ramaṇa Maharshi. Sometimes a *pūjā* was performed, and I was reminded of how Abhishiktānanda says how he found the chanting to be spell-binding, and allowed himself to be carried away by it. The presence of Ramaṇa could still be felt when I was there. We were also able to walk up Arunāchala and visit one of the caves where Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda meditated.

At Tapovanam, Swami Nityananda welcomed us most enthusiastically. We were able to see the *śīla* (image) of Gnānānanda, and participate in the *pūjā*. We participated in meditation in the meditation room there. I would recommend a visit to Tapovanam for those wanting to meditate. I was fortunate to meet Richard Allison, a devotee who had spent several years with Gnānānanda. He told me that Gnānānanda did not speak much English, so he learned mostly by example and silence. Mr. Allison had also met Abhishiktānanda once at Hardwar.

All of these impressions have helped to place Abhishiktānanda's writings in the context in which they were written.

### III. Major Influences on Abhishiktānanda

Why did Abhishiktānanda seek the *advaitic* experience in the first place? And from where did he obtain the terminology that he used to describe the experience? There are many different sources that appear to have influenced Abhishiktānanda in this way. It is important to recognize that although Abhishiktānanda may have been influenced by someone in seeking the experience or in understanding the experience in a certain way, this does not necessarily mean that his experience was nothing but that person's ideas. If we use the Immediate Experience Model, the experience is primary and the ideas are expressions of the *advaitic* experience. If we find the influences of these expressions, we may be better able to understand them. If we use the Yogic Model, then it is important to see what ideas lead up to and are eventually transcended in the *advaitic* experience.

#### A. Books

Abhishiktānanda was undoubtedly influenced by his extensive reading. Several hundred books that Abhishiktānanda owned at the end of his life have been placed in the Vidyajyoti Library at Delhi.<sup>1</sup> The books show a wide range of reading. They include Sanskrit dictionaries and copies of the *Bhagavad Gita*, various editions of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedānta-Sūtras*, writings by Shankara, Rāmānuja and various poet-saints, including the *Tiruvāçagam* (writings of a Tamil saint). The Buddhist *Dhammapada* is also in the list. Some modern Hindu writers that are included are Aurobindo, Dayananda Sarasvati, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, Ramaṇa Maharshi, Swami Ramdas, and Swami Sivānanda. Western philosophers, theologians and indologists in the list include Aquinas, Augustine, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann, Eliade, Gilson, Heidegger, Jaspers, Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel, Pascal, Rahner, Louis Renou, Rudolf Otto, Panikkar, Plato, Plotinus, van der Leeuw, von Balthazar, and Heinrich Zimmer. Some Western mystics in the list are Teilhard de Chardin, Eckhart, Hadewijch of Anvers, St. John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, Ruysbroeck, Tauler, Ste. Teresa of Avila, Simone Weil, some mystics of the Orthodox

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Hackbarth-Johnson has kindly provided me with a copy of this list of books. In addition to these books, Abhishiktānanda had other books at the ashram Shantivanam. Abhishiktānanda gave most of the books of the ashram to the Aikiya Alayam Ashram in Madras when he left Shantivanam in 1968.

church, and the books *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *the Way of a Pilgrim*. The only literature included in the list are several works by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. The *Diary* and *Letters* refer to many other books that Abhishiktānanda read.

Even during the time that he was living in caves on Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda still read many books.<sup>2</sup> Other hermits found it hard to understand why he relied on books and reading. One of them asked him what the use was of all these books. “You open them, and you close them. What is that, compared with the book of the heart?”<sup>3</sup>

Panikkar was also critical of Abhishiktānanda’s reading, although for a different reason. He comments that most of the books that Abhishiktānanda read were Western in their orientation, and that it was an “insignificant number of classical and modern writers in the Hindu tradition that he read and studied in Sanskrit.”<sup>4</sup> However, Panikkar has stated that Abhishiktānanda’s reading of the Upanishads was “excellent.”<sup>5</sup>

The writings of Olivier Lacombe seem to be among Abhishiktānanda’s main sources of information about Vedānta. Two of Lacombe’s books are included on the list of books at his death. In *L’Absolu selon le Vedanta* Lacombe says that the study of Vedānta should not be a comparison of West and East “philosophemes”; one must first know both terms of the comparison. This advice to first know both traditions before any comparison is remarkably like the views that were later expressed by J.L. Mehta.<sup>6</sup> However, Lacombe takes the position that although Hindus may reach a high stage of mysticism, this level is completed or fulfilled by the Christian revelation.<sup>7</sup> In his early writings, Abhishiktānanda himself adopted such a fulfillment view of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism. But he later abandoned this view.

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<sup>2</sup> *Secret*, p. 34, ft. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, p. 66 (L, Nov. 53). The same criticism was given in 1968 by another Swami at Rishikesh on Abhishiktānanda’s way to Gangotri. *Diary* p. 300 (7.7.68). “...the uselessness and harm of reading except to remind oneself and to explain to others. Reading burdens the memory, does not help us realize the Self.”

<sup>4</sup> Raimon Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xx.

<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> Olivier Lacombe: *L’Absolu selon le Vedanta* (Paris, 1937), p. 6. For Mehta’s views, see. Chapter II of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Olivier Lacombe: “Orient et Occident”, *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*, April/1931, vol. 16, p. 133-159. Abhishiktānanda almost certainly read this article, since, as will be shown, he was strongly influenced by a later article by Lacombe in the same journal.

Lacombe's book on Rāmānuja was also among Abhishiktānanda books.<sup>8</sup> But Abhishiktānanda mentions the ideas of Rāmānuja only infrequently in his writings.

In later chapters of this thesis, reference will be made to some of these books that Abhishiktānanda read and which appeared to influence him. The Appendix is devoted to outlining the influence of C.G. Jung. However, much of the influence on Abhishiktānanda was not by books but by individuals with whom he came in contact.

### ***B. Jules Monchanin***

One of the earliest influences on Abhishiktānanda in India was Fr. Jules Monchanin with whom he founded the ashram Shantivanam. It was from Monchanin that Abhishiktānanda learned the idea of the relative character of the Scriptures and Christian dogma.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, it was from Monchanin that Abhishiktānanda obtained many of his intellectual ideas.

Monchanin at one time thought it was essential to find a guru.<sup>10</sup> He had visited Ramaṇa Maharshi, and he and Abhishiktānanda together visited him again. Prior to Ramaṇa's death, Monchanin visited Ramaṇa again while Abhishiktānanda stayed behind at Shantivanam.

Monchanin died in October 1957. Abhishiktānanda gave the Memorial address, where he characterizes Monchanin:

A soul contemplative both by nature and by grace, nourished on the Greek Fathers, the mystics of the West, and above all the mediaeval Rhinelanders, he was in all respects ready to penetrate that secret of contemplation which is at the root of all the most fundamental institutions of India, both philosophical and religious, that mystic centre of her being from which all her civilisation has sprung.<sup>11</sup>

From the text, it is clear that by "mediaeval Rhinelanders", Abhishiktānanda is referring to Ruysbroeck, Suso, Tauler, Eckhart and their contemporary Hadewijch of Anvers, as well as the authors of *the Mirror of Simple Souls* and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It is also clear that Monchanin's interest in these mystics influenced Abhishiktānanda. In his Memorial address,

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<sup>8</sup> Olivier Lacombe: *La Doctrine moral et métaphysique de Ramanuja*, (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1938).

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, p. 138, (12.1.56).

<sup>10</sup> Letters by Monchanin, cited in *Letters*, p. 88 (11.8.39 and 12.4.50).

Abhishiktānanda says that a familiarity with these mystics is “an irreplaceable preparation for a sound intellectual understanding of Indian religious thought and a comprehensive approach to Indian mystical experience.” As shown by the list of books at his death, Abhishiktānanda read many of the writings of these Western mystics. He re-read these works as late as 1972. He refers to their writings as Christian *jñāna*.<sup>12</sup>

Although Abhishiktānanda found parallels in these writers to his own experience, he found their conceptual formulations of their experiences to be disconcerting and troubling:

And really, how badly Eckhart’s metaphysics confuse his marvellous mystical intuitions. It is the grace of the Upanishads that makes you see that everything is so simple!<sup>13</sup>

Because it was Monchanin who first showed him the relativity of dogma, Abhishiktānanda was surprised at some of his later disagreements with Monchanin. Monchanin did not approve of Abhishiktānanda’s travel to Rishikesh, “a place where *sādhus*, real or supposedly so (both kinds no doubt) devote themselves to delusive exercises, verging on a mirage.”<sup>14</sup> Monchanin also discouraged Abhishiktānanda from visiting the ashram of Gnānānanda.<sup>15</sup> Monchanin could not understand the “mythical importance” that Abhishiktānanda gave to his experiences in the caves on the mountain of Arunāchala.<sup>16</sup> Monchanin also disapproved of some of Abhishiktānanda’s writings. He thought that the chapter “Au dedans” [“Within”], a series of essays on the soul of the *sannyāsī* should not be published.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Swami Parama Arūbi Anāndam (Fr. J. Monchanin): A Memorial* (Saccidananda Ashram, 1959), pp. 7, 8.

<sup>12</sup> See for example *Diary*, p. 65 (16.3.53), *Letters*, p. 123 (FT, 26.10.59), and *Intériorité*, p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> *Letters*, p. 152. (L.20.3.63). See also *Letters*, p. 271 (MC, 13.6.72) for a similar comment regarding the language of St. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila.

<sup>14</sup> Monchanin’s letter, cited in *Letters*, p. 44 (20.12.50). This view influenced Abhishiktānanda for many years. In 1956, he raised the fear that his experience was a mirage. *Diary*, p. 180 (27.11.56).

<sup>15</sup> *Diary*, p. 142 (5.2.56).

<sup>16</sup> *Secret*, p. 50. Monchanin is there referred to by the name ‘*Purusha*’.

<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, p. 65 (L, 24.6.53). This became chapter 3 of *Guhāntara*. Abhishiktānanda commenced the writing of this book in 1952. It was not published because the censor in Paris found it “redolent of relativism, modernism, quietism, modalism and especially pantheism” (See *Diary*, p. 86). Parts of *Guhāntara* were posthumously published. See *Initiation*: “La grâce de l’Inde” and “Jusqu’à la Source, l’expérience de non-dualité”, pp. 41-64. Some other chapters were published in *Intériorité*: “Cheminements intérieurs”, “Ehieh asher ehieh” and “Épiphanie de Dieu”, pp. 41-117.

Monchanin often reacted in a way contrary to Abhishiktānanda. Monchanin wrote that he felt himself to be more Greek than Hindu:

I react in a contrary direction; never have I felt myself intellectually more *Christian* and also, I must say, more *Greek*. I experience a growing horror at the forms of muddled thinking in this ‘beyond thought’ which most often proves to be only a ‘falling short of thought, in which everything gets drowned.’<sup>18</sup>

Monchanin feared that *advaita*, like *yoga*, was “an abyss”:

He who immerses himself in it with a feeling that he has lost his balance (vertigo) cannot know what he will find at the bottom. I fear that it may be *himself* rather than the living trinitarian God.<sup>19</sup>

Monchanin’s fear of this type of experience probably derived from his study of the Rhineland mystics. Ruysbroeck in particular criticized a false mysticism where one strips oneself of all images and activity and sinks down into oneself. Then one is “bare and imageless in his senses”, a “bare vacancy”. This false repose demands no exercise of virtue, and no tension of the will. Such a rest is nothing other than “an idleness, into which the man has fallen, and in which he forgets himself and God and all things in all that has to do with activity.” In this false experience, a person “clings to himself in his rest rather than being united with God.”<sup>20</sup>

Abhishiktānanda was aware of Monchanin’s preference for Greek thought. He writes that Monchanin preferred to give up Vedānta for Greek rationalism.<sup>21</sup> He believed that because of this Greek framework, Monchanin was unable to see the depths of Hindu thought:

But I think he [Monchanin] is too ‘Greek’ to go to the depths. India presses relentlessly beyond concepts, beyond the ‘*manas*’ [mind]; how will the Greek,

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<sup>18</sup> Monchanin’s letter, cited in *Letters* p. 87 (17.12.55). Only three days previously Monchanin had written to Abbé Duperray concerning his doubts about Abhishiktānanda’s *Guhāntara*.

<sup>19</sup> Undated note by Monchanin, cited in *Letters*, p. 87. This appears to have influenced Abhishiktānanda who writes in his *Diary*, p. 74 (25.9.53): “Supposing in *advaita* I was only finding myself and not God?” Abhishiktānanda also refers to “the vertigo of Being.” See *Diary*, p. 167 (21.11.56).

<sup>20</sup> John of Ruysbroeck: *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage, The Sparkling Stone, The Book of Supreme Truth*, tr. C.A. Wynschenk Dom, ed. Evelyn Underhill (Kessinger, 1992; this book has also been published online at <http://www.ccel.org/r/ruysbroeck/adornment/adornment.htm>). See *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*, c. 66-67. See also the discussion of these warnings by Ruysbroeck by P. Nicolas de Jésus-Marie, “Éclaircissements sur les termes et les propositions de théologie mystique de Saint Jean de la Croix”. *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*, 1911, vol. 1 pp. 23ff. We know that Abhishiktānanda read this journal; perhaps Monchanin did, too.

<sup>21</sup> *Letters*, p. 241 (OB 23.12.70). This seems to contradict the statement in Abhishiktānanda’s Memorial Address that Monchanin was fully prepared to penetrate the Indian secrets.

even if a follower of Plotinus, ever make the sacrifice of his 'nous' [mind]? and yet, neither the Self, nor therefore India, will ever be reached through concepts.<sup>22</sup>

But as we will see, despite his disagreements with Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda also shared many ideas with Monchanin, and sometimes even revised his ideas in response to Monchanin's criticism.

### C. *Ramaṇa Maharshi*

#### 1. Who was Ramaṇa Maharshi?

Ramaṇa Maharshi was a Hindu sage of *advaita*. He was probably the most important influence on Abhishiktānanda. Ramaṇa was born in 1879 in Tiruchuli, Tamil Nadu (South India). He was named Venkatarāman Ayyār; this was later abbreviated to Ramaṇa. When he was 12, his father died and he moved to his uncle's house in Madurai. He attended a Christian mission school, a fact that is important because he later drew parallels between Hindu and Christian thought. For example, he said that the whole of Vedānta is contained in the two Biblical statements "I am that I AM" and "Be still and know that I am God."<sup>23</sup>

As a young boy, Ramaṇa had a profound experience as a result of an enactment of death by himself. He had a sudden, violent fear of death. He lay down and imitated a corpse stretched out stiff, held his breath and kept his lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape. He realized that, even if his body died, his self would survive. He felt that he became absorbed in this self or 'I'; this feeling never left him after that.<sup>24</sup> It is believed that Ramaṇa was fully enlightened in this experience, without instruction from any *guru* or teacher. A few months after this experience, Ramaṇa secretly left his home and travelled alone to the temple town of

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<sup>22</sup> *Letters*, p. 72 (L, 17.6.54).

<sup>23</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1994, first published 1955), p. 307. There are many other references to these Biblical statements by Ramaṇa. On p. 102 of the same book, he says that the Biblical statement "I AM THAT I AM" is the best definition of God, and is more direct than the *mahavakyas* like *Brahmaivaham*, *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Soham*. "The Absolute Being is *what* is. It is the Self. It is God. Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact God is none other than the Self."

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Osborne: *Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970).

Tiruvanammalāi, because a relative had told him about the sacred mountain Arunāchala which is located there.<sup>25</sup>

For about six months Ramaṇa lived in the temple in a trance, maintaining almost complete silence and seemingly oblivious to his physical discomfort. After that, he lived in the temple grounds, other nearby shrines, and in a nearby orchard. He continued to ignore his physical body, and had to be looked after by others. One of his devoted followers was Paḷanisvāmī, who stayed with him for 21 years. Ramaṇa moved from this orchard to a cave on Arunāchala. This practice of meditating in caves on Arunāchala was a practice that Abhishiktānanda was later to emulate. Ramaṇa lived in caves on Arunāchala for 23 years, until December 1922 after the death of his mother.<sup>26</sup> It was after this time that the ashram really was formed around Ramaṇa.

In 1912, while still living in the caves, Ramaṇa had a real near-death experience. While he was walking back to his cave, a sudden weakness overcame him. He said that the landscape in front of him gradually was shut out, as if a curtain was being drawn across his vision. Darkness and faintness came over him three times. He says that a bright white curtain completely shut off his vision, his head was swimming and his breathing stopped. His skin turned blue. His companion held him in his arms and began to lament his death. Ramaṇa says he could feel the clasp of his companion and hear his words. He saw the discoloration of his own skin and felt the stoppage of his circulation and breathing, and the increased chilliness of his body's extremities. He says this condition lasted for ten to fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed through his body with enormous force. Circulation and breathing revived, and he perspired from every pore. He opened his eyes and got up and said, "Let's go." Ramaṇa said that he did not bring on this fit on purpose, but that it was one of the fits he got occasionally, and that this one was more serious.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> He had not realized that Arunāchala was a real place until a relative mentioned that he had come from there, and that it was located at Tiruvanammalāi.

<sup>26</sup> His mother had joined him in 1916; his younger brother came soon after, and was to become the head of the ashram at the base of Arunāchala. At the time of the mother's death in 1922, there was only one thatched shed to be used by the ashram. Ramaṇa's mother was buried (burial being reserved for saints), not cremated, and Ramaṇa wanted to be near her tomb.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Osborne: *Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 60. Page 14 of the same book relates that as a boy he had once slept so soundly that no amount of beating could wake him up. See also *Saccidānanda*, p. 21.

Ramaṇa said that his enlightenment was not based on Scripture or on the study of other works. At the time of his enlightenment at his home in Madurai, he had not even heard of 'Brahman' or 'samsāra'. The only books he had read were the Bible, the *Periapuranam* [stories of 63 Tamil saints] and bits of the *Tayumanavar* [hymns of the saint Tayumanavar (1706 - 1744)].<sup>28</sup> After his enlightenment, he read other books, and found that they "were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name."<sup>29</sup> It is said that Ramaṇa's experience was therefore not due to these books, but that it was an immediate experience. It seems certain that he had not engaged in any yoga or other spiritual disciplines prior to his enlightenment.

But was Ramaṇa influenced to seek the experience by the few books that he had read before his experience? Osborne says that prior to his enlightenment, Ramaṇa was inspired to emulate the saints when he read the *Periapuranam*:

[Ramaṇa] was overwhelmed with ecstatic wonder that such faith, such love, such divine fervour was possible, that there had been such beauty in human life. The tales of renunciation leading to Divine Union inspired him with awe and emulation.<sup>30</sup>

Even if Ramaṇa's experience was not due to books he had read, his teachings were very much influenced by these books. Admittedly, to analyze his teachings on the basis of the books which he studied is very much a Western analytical approach to his biography. His devotees, following a traditional hagiographical approach to his life say that there was no development or change in his teachings.<sup>31</sup> That view would seem to imply that at the time of his enlightenment he had instant conceptual knowledge as well. Whether or not he was influenced by these books, it is clear that Ramaṇa used ideas in the books he read in order to explain his experience to his disciples. For example, when he was staying in the temple grounds and orchard, Paḷanisvāmī

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<sup>28</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (Samuel Weiser, 1972, first published 1962), p. 11. It is however possible that he was influenced to seek this state by the Bible's "Be still and know that I am God." See also the discussion on the *Tayumanavar*, *infra*.

<sup>29</sup> Cited by Osborne, *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Osborne makes this statement in his Preface to *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. by Arthur Osborne, (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997). p. 11: "There was no change or development in his philosophy during the half century and more of his teaching. There could be none, since he had not worked out any philosophy but merely recognized the expositions of transcendental Truth in theory, myth, and symbol when he read them."

would bring him books from the library and read them to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa had a prodigious memory, and he would then summarize the works for Paṇanīsvāmī. These books appear to have included the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.<sup>32</sup> Later, when Ramaṇa was living in one of the caves, he continued to read books from the library, and also Sanskrit books belonging to another Swami living nearby. In 1899, while he was living in the first cave *Virupaksha*, someone brought him a copy of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a work that is attributed to Shankara. Ramaṇa read it and made a Tamil prose translation of it.<sup>33</sup>

This reading of other works occurred prior to his own writings, and many years before he was called Ramaṇa Maharshi. That event did not occur until 1907, when Ganapati Sastri visited the Swami, as he then was known, in his cave. Ganapati Sastri (also called Ganapati Muni) had visited many sacred places in India, and had learned to repeat *mantras* and to perform *tapas* (asceticism). He was not satisfied, and so he asked Ramaṇa what *tapas* was. Ramaṇa replied that if one observes the source where the notion 'I' arises, and the source where the *mantra* is produced, and if the mind is absorbed into that source, that is *tapas*. Sastri was overjoyed and declared that the Swami must thereafter be known as *Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa*, and as the *Maharshi* (the Great Rishi). He referred to Ramaṇa as a manifestation of God. *Bhagavan* means 'the Divine'. Sastri wrote a book in Sanskrit in praise of Ramaṇa that he called the *Ramaṇa Gita*.<sup>34</sup>

But the instruction that Sastri received from Ramaṇa came more than seven years following Ramaṇa's reading of works such as the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. As will be shown later in this chapter, Ramaṇa's ideas are derived from these works.

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<sup>32</sup> Mahadevan mentions that a work called the *Vāsiṣṭham* was brought to him by Paṇanīsvāmī. Mahadevan mentions the work but does not relate it to Ramaṇa's ideas. See T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramaṇa Maharshi: The Sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), pp. 37, 38.

<sup>33</sup> An English translation is included in *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, pp. 124-173.

<sup>34</sup> Ganapati Muni: *Ramaṇa Gita: Dialogues with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, tr. A.R. Natarajan (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1994).

Ramaṇa himself wrote very little. These works have been collected and edited by his disciple Arthur Osborne. This includes his translations of other works.<sup>35</sup> Most of the books that set out Ramaṇa's ideas are records of conversations with him, and letters written from disciples at the ashram at Tiruvannamalai.

## 2. Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi

### a) Self-Enquiry

Ramaṇa's primary teaching was the teaching of the quest for the self. He called this the *ātma-vicāraṇa*, the enquiry into the *ātman* or Self. Between 1900 and 1902, while he was maintaining silence in Virupaksha cave, he wrote out instructions for the disciple Gambhīram Seshayyar. After Seshayyar's death, these were arranged and published as a book under the title *Self-Enquiry*. The book "*Who am I?*" derives from replies given during the same period to another disciple, Sivaprakasam Pillai. Both works are contained in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*.<sup>36</sup>

Ramaṇa centered all his spiritual guidance and teaching on this simple question: "Who (am) I?" He said that this very question "Who am I?" is itself the revelation of *Brahman*. This method of self-enquiry is the straight, short and direct path to realization.<sup>37</sup> This method of self-enquiry is superior to *bhakti* (devotion) as well as to yoga.<sup>38</sup>

Self-enquiry is the quest and pursuit of the true Self within the self. The cause of bondage is our mistaking the body or the not-I for the Self. One must seek the actor who is behind the acting, the thinker behind the thought, the one who wills behind the act of willing. The enquiry focuses inward, for the Self is found in the "cave of the heart." This Self remains

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<sup>35</sup> Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997). Ramaṇa's translations into Tamil have been translated again into English. In addition to the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* it includes some brief translations from the *Agamas*.

<sup>36</sup> Osborne says that *Self-Enquiry* was written in 1901. But it was only many years later that it was published by the ashram as *Vichara-sangraham*, which means 'A Compendium of Self-Enquiry.' The English translation was not published until 1937. *Who am I?* was first published in 1936.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah: *Conscious Immortality: Conversations with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1996, first published 1984), p. 45.

the same through all our states of consciousness: waking, sleeping, dreaming, and the fourth state, *turīya*, which is achieved in the enquiry. The goal is to attain the natural state (*sahaja samādhi*), the deepest, innate truth of our nature. This state is lived with full awareness only when one has experienced the Self. Ramaṇa refers to this as the “I-I”. This “I-I” is not ego or individuality. It is a limitless expanse of consciousness. To know the Self we must destroy the ego. When the ego vanishes, Reality will shine forth of itself.<sup>39</sup> If we find out who we really are, enlightenment or realization will inevitably follow.

This realization of the Self is by “direct and immediate experience”. It is an “Intuitive Knowledge of the Heart”.<sup>40</sup> The Self is self-luminous because it is self-evident and does not depend on an external knowledge to be known.<sup>41</sup>

The realization is beyond expression; words can only point to it; one knows *samādhi* only when one is in *samādhi*.<sup>42</sup> This experience is contrasted with knowledge that depends on subject and object.<sup>43</sup> Mere book learning is of no use. One should follow a *guru* who knows *Brahman*. Practical application is needed, not theoretical knowledge. “After Realization, all intellectual loads are useless burdens and are to be thrown overboard.”<sup>44</sup>

#### b) The *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*

Ramaṇa translated the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* into Tamil in 1899, before he gave the instructions that were later published as *Self-Enquiry*. What has not been sufficiently recognized is that the teachings contained in *Self-Enquiry* are largely derived from the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*. *Self-Enquiry* makes extensive use of the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, and explicitly refers to it in places. Even the basic idea of self-enquiry or *vichāra* appears to derive from the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*. The

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<sup>38</sup> S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1990, first published 1959), pp. 133.

<sup>39</sup> S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 92. See also *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 53, 185, 222.

<sup>40</sup> “Self-Enquiry”, *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 25, 29.

<sup>41</sup> S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 13.

word *vichāra* is used there several times to refer to an inquiry into the reality of one's own true nature. For example, Verse 15 uses *vichāra* in the sense that to know one's own nature one should practice meditation on this subject. The same verse stresses the necessity of first finding a guru who has true knowledge of Brahman. The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* also stresses other doctrines used by Ramaṇa: the necessity to get rid of the delusions created by one's mind, the four states of consciousness, the self-luminous Self, *śakti* as the power of God, and the need for direct experience in the cave of the Heart. Verse 62, for example, says

An illness is not cured just by pronouncing the name of the medicine without drinking it, and you will not be liberated by just pronouncing the word God without direct experience. [*anubhava*].<sup>45</sup>

In his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* Ramaṇa emphasized this necessity of direct experience. True liberation can be achieved by Self-enquiry or *vichāra*, and not by book learning.<sup>46</sup> The Self shines as ever-present, direct experience within the heart.<sup>47</sup> Or, as Ramaṇa translates it,

This supreme Self is self-effulgent with manifold powers (*shakti*), incapable of being known by anyone, and yet is experienced by everyone as the "I-I" in the heart.<sup>48</sup>

Liberation cannot be attained through yoga, ritual or even by study of the scriptures. Even knowledge of the *mahavakyas* (great sayings) like "I am Brahman" will not remove bondage without direct experience. Obtaining the experience is like finding a treasure trove. It is not good enough to hear about the treasure. One must actually dig for it. One can be liberated in this life, as a *jīvanmukta*.

Authorship of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* is traditionally ascribed to Shankara. Some Western scholars have questioned this. For example, Halbfass does not believe that the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

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<sup>45</sup> *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, tr. John H. Richards. Online version at file:///Macintosh%20HD/Thesis/Sacred%20Texts/VIVEKACHUDAMANI%202. See also *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, 9th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

<sup>46</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 139.

<sup>48</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 170.

was written by Shankara.<sup>49</sup> The main reason that some scholars question its authenticity is that it adopts a theory of three truth values or levels of reality: the existent, the nonexistent, and that which is *anirvacanīya* or indeterminable as either real or unreal.<sup>50</sup> Paul Hacker however is one scholar who believed that the work is an authentic writing by Shankara; he has written about the use of this word *anirvacanīya*.<sup>51</sup> Initially, the word *anirvacanīya* was used in cosmology. The *Rg Veda* (10,129) uses the word when it says that prior to the origin of the world there “was at that time neither being nor nonbeing.” Later the word was used to refer to the ‘Reality’ that is reached in the *advaitic* experience. This experience transcends all experience and is best described in negative terms. Both being and non-being are known empirically. But the transcendent *advaitic* experience goes beyond empirical knowledge; it is therefore described as “neither being nor nonbeing.” Whether or not Shankara adopted this view of a third level of reality is debated. But it should be noted that even Shankara’s disciple Sureśvara speaks of the self as “that which is above being and nonbeing”. But later disciples of Shankara used the term *anirvacanīya* in connection with the doctrine of illusion, and it came to mean ‘not truly existing.’ This represents quite a change of meaning of the word. Instead of a transcendent experience of a third level of reality, it refers to illusion. At the time of this change in the meaning of *anirvacanīya*, Vedānta became highly intellectualized and logicized; mysticism was confined within the bounds of logic.

It is precisely on this point—a third level of reality—that Ramaṇa relies on the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*. He says that the doctrine of *māyā* is often misunderstood, and that Shankara did not deny the reality of the world. He only denied the world’s reality when it is considered apart from *Brahman*:

Shankara has been criticized for his philosophy of *māyā* (illusion) without understanding his meaning. He made three statements: that Brahman is real, that the universe is unreal, and that Brahman is the universe. He did not stop with the

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<sup>49</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: *India and Europe*, pp. 384, 392. Halbfass says that the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* gives more significance to personal emotions and visions than is seen in other writings that he recognizes as written by Shankara. In other words, it emphasizes personal experience (*anubhava*) in the sense of *Erlebnis*.

<sup>50</sup> Karl H. Potter, ed.: *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils* (Princeton, 1981), p. 335.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Hacker “The Theory of Degrees of Reality in Advaita Vedānta”, *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (State University of New York, 1995), pp. 137-152.

second. The third statement explains the first two; it signifies that when the Universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. What it amounts to is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the self.<sup>52</sup>

Ramaṇa's reference to the three statements of Shankara refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. In his prose translation of this work, Ramaṇa summarizes the teaching in three statements. He says that the first statement, that *Brahman* (alone) is real, is the standpoint of reason. The second, that the universe is unreal (illusion) is from the standpoint of non-existence. The third, that *Brahman* is the universe, is the standpoint of absolute dissolution. In this third viewpoint, "all that seems separate from me is myself." It is recommended as the most important viewpoint for Realization:

Although all three of these viewpoints are aids to Realization, the third, in which one conceives everything as one's own Self, is the most powerful. Therefore, knowing the impartible Self to be one's own Self, by one's own experience, one must abide in one's own true nature, beyond any mental form. What more is there to say? The whole world and all individuals are really Brahman, and abidance as that impartible Brahman is itself Deliverance.<sup>53</sup>

Ramaṇa's translation is very free, often transposing paragraphs from the original. It has no verse divisions. Other translations of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* do not enumerate these three different viewpoints. But they do support the teaching that the universe is nothing but *Brahman*:

Verse 478. The verdict of all discussions on the Vedānta is that the *Jīva* and the whole universe are nothing but *Brahman*, and that liberation means abiding in *Brahman*, the indivisible Entity.

Verse 521. The universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of *Brahman*; hence it is in all respects nothing but *Brahman*.<sup>54</sup>

Ramaṇa emphasizes this teaching that the universe is *Brahman*:

The Vedantins do not say that the world is unreal. That is a misunderstanding. If they did, what would be the meaning of the Vedantic text: "All this is Brahman"? They only mean that the world is unreal as the world but real as Self. If you regard world as non-self, it is not real. Everything, whether you call it illusion

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<sup>52</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, 9th ed., (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

(*Maya*) or Divine Play (*Lila*) or Energy (*Shakti*) must be within the Self and not apart from it.<sup>55</sup>

Ramaṇa's emphasis on seeing *Brahman* in all things may differentiate his teachings from that of other *advaitins*, and from Shankara, especially if the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* is not by Shankara. However, as will be discussed in more detail, Ramaṇa is not consistent in this emphasis on the reality of the world. In other recorded sayings and writings, he takes the view that the world has no reality. In this more monistic view, the emphasis is not on seeing *Brahman* in all things. The emphasis is rather on the *jñāni* or realized person realizing one's acosmic nature beyond space and time. This inconsistency in Ramaṇa is also an inconsistency that remained with Abhishiktānanda all his life. On the one hand he wanted to participate in the world, enjoying it as a manifestation of *śakti*. On the other hand, he wanted to retreat in solitude as an acosmic monk or *sannyāsī*.

### c) The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*

Another influence on Ramaṇa's teaching is the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, which he read while living in the caves of Arunāchala. This work was known at least as early as 13th century CE, but may date from as early as the 6th or 7th centuries. For example, Olivier Lacombe dates it in the interval between Gaudapāda and Shankara.<sup>56</sup> It is attributed to Valmiki, the author of the *Rāmāyana*. Western scholars say that the work is syncretic, with borrowings from Yoga, *Sāṃkhya*, *Śaiva Siddhanta* and Mahāyāna Buddhism.<sup>57</sup> The work tells how Vāsiṣṭha, one of the primal sages, gives instruction to Rāma. Rāma becomes enlightened, and returns to rule his kingdom. This is an example of a *jīvanmukta* (one who is liberated in this life). Such a person can lead an active life without incurring any further bondage or *karma* from one's actions.

It is clear that, like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* is a source for Ramaṇa's teaching of self-enquiry. According to the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, liberation is achieved only by the conquest of the mind by self-enquiry, and specifically the question "Who am I?":

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<sup>55</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 19.

<sup>56</sup> Olivier Lacombe: *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta*, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> See Christopher Chapple, Introduction to *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, tr. Swami Venkatesananda (State University of New York, 1984), p. xii. Quotations are from this edition of the work.

What is inquiry? To inquire thus: “Who am I? How has this evil of *saṃsāra* (repetitive history) come into being?” is true inquiry—knowledge of truth arises from such inquiry. (II, 34)

Not everyone enquires into the truth of the self. But it is this self alone that is to be sought, adored and meditated upon (III, 194). By this enquiry of self-knowledge, one obtains infinite consciousness. There is no other way of liberation from bondage (III, 229).

There is no liberation as long as one clings to the reality of ‘you’ and ‘I’. The enquiry is to be one of direct observation (III, 107). We are warned against taking our stand on concepts and percepts of the mind (III, 211). We are to rely rather on pure experience (III, 234). Immediate experience is described: “whatever vision arises within oneself, that is immediately experienced. Consciousness (as subject) itself becomes, as it were, the object of knowledge (III, 62). You cannot merely verbally deny a dual notion of existence. Such denial itself becomes a further distraction (III, 39). We are to become conscious of the self in all states of awareness.

Like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also speaks of the power or energy (*śakti*) of infinite consciousness (III, 73). This *śakti* brings into manifestation and sustains the infinite variety of beings, from the Creator to the blade of grass (III, 193). It is always dynamic and active. This supports the doctrine that the world has some reality. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* specifically refers to the world as an object in a mirror which is neither real nor unreal (III, 230). Two attitudes are conducive to liberation. One is that “I am the transcendental self.” The other is that “I am all and everything” (III, 234).

Ramaṇa frequently refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and he even incorporates six couplets from it in his *Supplement to Forty Verses* (verses 21 to 27).<sup>58</sup> He also refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* in *Self-Enquiry*—in support of his view that we should not search for the Self outside ourselves. It constantly shines as “I-I’ within the Heart.”<sup>59</sup>

This thesis looks at Abhishiktānanda’s non-monistic interpretation of *advaita*. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* lends support to this view. It says that when the mind drops the perception of duality there is neither duality nor unity (III, 75). Unity is seen only in opposition to duality. We are to

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<sup>58</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 80.

<sup>59</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 27.

be freed from the conditions known as duality and non-duality (III, 209). The all-pervading consciousness is not an object of knowledge; it is beyond the concepts of unity and diversity. It is that other than which nothing else is (III, 214).

It is obvious that the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* influenced Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa in turn influenced Abhishiktānanda. It is thus very likely that Abhishiktānanda was indirectly influenced by the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.

#### d) The *Ribhu Gita*

Ramaṇa refers to the *Ribhu Gita* many times. It is an extract from a much longer epic, the *Sivarahasya*. It tells of the experience of nonduality by the sage known as Ribhu. The focus of the text is on the Self. In order to achieve bliss, one must discard the mind. There is nothing that is not-self (1:11). Verse 24 says that if there is no “you”, there is no “I”. The *Ribhu Gita* refers to the heart-space within all beings (1:59). It is also significant in its view of nonduality as beyond mere unity:

26. If there is duality, there is (a concept of) nonduality; in the absence of duality, there is no (concept of) nonduality either. If there is something to be "seen," a seer is also there; in the absence of anything to see, there is no seer at all either.<sup>60</sup>

This would also appear to be an indirect source for Abhishiktānanda’s view of *advaita* as non-monistic.

#### e) The *Tripura Rahasya*

One of the publications still for sale at Ramaṇa’s ashram is the *Tripura Rahasya*. Its English translation contains the subtitle: “The Mystery Beyond the Trinity.”<sup>61</sup> It is unclear who chose this title for the work. It may have been the English disciple of Ramaṇa, Major Chadwick. Chadwick wrote the Foreword to the book. The *Tripura Rahasya* is a *tantric* work. It refers to the Supreme Goddess by various names. She is called Tripura, because Her Body consists of

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<sup>60</sup> *Ribhu Gita*, tr. Dr. H. Ramamoorthy, (Society for Abidance in Truth, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> *Tripura Rahasya: The Mystery Beyond the Trinity*, tr. Swami Sri Ramanananda Saraswathi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1989). It is attributed to Dattatreya, the *guru* of *Patañjali*.

three *śaktis* (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva).<sup>62</sup> Chadwick says that Ramaṇa considered this as one of the greatest works of *advaita* and often quoted from it. Ramaṇa regretted that it was not available in English.

According to this work, the Pure Self sometimes unfolds itself as the cosmos, and at other times withdraws Itself and remains unmanifest. Therefore Cosmos and the Self are only the same, but different modes of the one Reality which is Consciousness.<sup>63</sup> The Cosmos is therefore not unreal. It is real in the same way that an image in a mirror is real; the Cosmos is a real image of the Self. This book was important for Ramaṇa. It helps to explain his view that the world is real, although only insofar as it is dependent on *Brahman*. And yet, as we will see, Ramaṇa often denies any reality to the multiplicity of the world.<sup>64</sup>

The *Tripura Rahasya* also emphasizes the importance of direct experience. It says,

Second-hand knowledge of the Self gathered from books or *gurus* can never emancipate a man until its truth is rightly investigated and applied to himself; direct Realisation alone will do that. Therefore, follow my advice and realise yourself, turning the mind inward.<sup>65</sup>

#### f) The *Tayumanavar*

As already mentioned, Ramaṇa had read parts of the *Tayumanavar* before his enlightenment. It is unclear what parts of the *Tayumanavar* Ramaṇa had read as a boy. But his reading of the *Tayumanavar* could have induced him to seek a trance state. The *Tayumanavar* says,

When I think, I will have to shuffle this body  
I swoon in fear, my heart trembling  
Long, long indeed is the distance between

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<sup>62</sup> See Gopinath Kaviraj: “The Philosophy of Tripura Tantra”. Online at <http://www.hubcom.com/magee/tantra/philtan.htm>

<sup>63</sup> *Tripura Rahasya* Chapter XI, verse 85 says, “That which shines as ‘Is’ is Her Majesty the Absolute Consciousness. Thus the universe is only the *Self—the One* and one only.”

<sup>64</sup> “Cheminements Intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 58: Abhishiktānanda says that Ramaṇa often says that it is only the *non-jñāni* who see a multiplicity of *jñāni*.

<sup>65</sup> *Tripura Rahasya* 18: 89,90.

The blissful state of Transcendent Silentness  
And this ignorant one.<sup>66</sup>

Later in life Ramaṇa recited portions of the hymns in the *Tayumanavar*. He used to quote the following from the *Tayumanavar*: “When overpowered by the wide Expanse which is without beginning, end or middle, there is the realization of non-dual bliss.”<sup>67</sup>

Of all the stanza’s in the *Tayumanavar*, Ramaṇa preferred the one that says, “Ego disappearing another ‘I-I’ spontaneously manifests in full glory.” This manifested state is called *mouna*. The *Tayumanavar* defines *mouna* (silence) as “that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego.”<sup>68</sup> This is an obvious source for Ramaṇa’s teaching of self-enquiry.

The eternal Being is that state where you have disappeared. You are eternal and also still. This cannot just be done by the mind telling us to be still. He quotes the *Tayumanavar* as saying that silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves.<sup>69</sup> Ramaṇa explains this doctrine of the *Tayumanavar* with the story of someone who is told that the medicine he is given will work if only he doesn’t think of a monkey. Naturally, he will always think of the monkey. Conscious, deliberate effort is necessary to reach the state of stillness.<sup>70</sup> It is the state that is free from thoughts.<sup>71</sup>

#### g) Comparison to Shankara

Ramaṇa is generally seen to be following the traditional *advaitic* teaching in Hinduism. For example, Mahadevan sees continuity with Shankara’s thought.<sup>72</sup> Ramaṇa himself was asked whether his teaching agreed with that of Shankara. His reply was “Bhagavan’s teaching is an

<sup>66</sup> Canto 2. Online translation of the *Tayumanavar* at [www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/thayumanavar/](http://www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/thayumanavar/), published by Himalayan Academy.

<sup>67</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> These references are cited in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 111.

<sup>69</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 547.

<sup>70</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 555, 606. See also *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 606.

<sup>72</sup> T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramana Maharshi: The sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977). It is interesting that Mahadevan does not emphasize other *advaitic* sources of Ramaṇa’s ideas. As discussed in this thesis, these sources may have ideas quite different from Shankara’s.

expression of his own experience and realization. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara's."<sup>73</sup> Ramaṇa emphasized his own experience, and not whether or not his thought agreed with that of Shankara. This emphasis on his own experience or *anubhava*, is significant. Halbfass says that Ramaṇa has become "a living symbol of the idea of religious experience."<sup>74</sup>

Eliot Deutsch has interpreted Shankara in terms of a philosophy of experience.<sup>75</sup> But Halbfass says that this emphasis on direct experience, or *anubhava* is absent in Shankara. Shankara does not base any veridical claims upon personal experiences of his own; he does not even speak about them. His ultimate authority is the Veda, and particularly the Upanishads.<sup>76</sup> The Upanishads are authorless, and do not record anybody's personal experience; they are rather an objective structure that guides experience. Shankara criticizes such principles as "voice of the heart"; guidance must be by the Vedas because there can be false *anubhava* which does not recognize non-duality. In order to recognize non-duality, Scripture is needed.<sup>77</sup>

Halbfass says that although Shankara uses the word *anubhava*, it is not to be confused with "personal experiences" or "observations" which one could use as evidence for or against the Veda. It is rather used to refer to an ultimate experience, a goal, the knowledge of *Brahman* (*brahmajñāna*).<sup>78</sup> Halbfass seems to be rejecting a romantic interpretation of Shankara's references to experience or *anubhava*. But Shankara's view is consistent with what we have referred to as the Yogic Model of experience. Shankara says that we start with Scripture, but move beyond this knowledge to an ultimate experience. Experience is transcendence, not a subjective state of mind.

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<sup>73</sup>*The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 15. It is interesting that this question was asked by Olivier Lacombe, the author of the article that most influenced Abhishiktānanda while he was still in France. At the time of his visit to Ramaṇa, Lacombe was the attaché consul for France in Calcutta. See Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Tiruvannamalai, 1946), p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass, "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, p. 384.

<sup>75</sup> Eliot Deutsch: *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, 1969).

<sup>76</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass: "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West," *India and Europe*, pp. 388.

<sup>77</sup> See also Anantanand Rambachan: *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Sankara* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991).

<sup>78</sup> This emphasis of *anubhava* as a goal, with Scripture as a basis, is more in accord with the Yogic Model of Experience rather than Immediate Experience.

Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa's state of trance is evidence of a direct experience (or *anubhava*) that is more immediate than the knowledge of the *mahavakya* "I am He". Because of this immediate experience, Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa was greater than Shankara. He still saw traces of duality in Shankara:

Shankara understood *so'ham*—I am He; for Bhagavan there is only *aham*—I. The "ashes" of duality that still appeared in Shankara were never there in Bhagavan. Bhagavan's experience required years of "trance" before his body could be brought back to normal.<sup>79</sup>

This seems to reflect Ramaṇa's view that all meditation, even meditation on the great sayings or *mahavakyas*, requires an object to meditate on, whereas in self-enquiry there is only the subject and no object.<sup>80</sup>

Ramaṇa himself was asked whether Shankara was only an intellectual and not a realized person. He answered that we should not worry about Shankara, but should rather realize our own self. Ramaṇa also emphasized that the different doctrines of *advaita* were unimportant. We should seek the experience without asking questions about the exact nature of the experience. He said that non-dualism or dualism cannot be decided on theoretical grounds alone. If the Self is realized the question will not arise.<sup>81</sup>

### 3. Abhishiktānanda's Previous Information about Ramaṇa Maharshi

It is surprising that Abhishiktānanda had only two brief meetings with Ramaṇa; on neither occasion did he have any conversation with him. He says that Ramaṇa died before he was able to act as his *guru* (in fact, Ramaṇa did not accept any disciples and did not initiate anyone). The influence of Ramaṇa on Abhishiktānanda would seem to be more due to Abhishiktānanda's reading of his works and to speaking with his disciples than to his brief meetings with him. This reading was both before and after his meeting with Ramaṇa.

Even before he went to India, Abhishiktānanda had heard of Ramaṇa. But the information he gained was not very extensive. Surprisingly, he seems unaware of Paul

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<sup>79</sup> *Diary*, p. 76 (27.11.53).

<sup>80</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 112. As we have seen, Ramaṇa was influenced in these ideas by the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.

<sup>81</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 27.

Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*, a book that is largely responsible for introducing Ramaṇa to the West. This book had already been translated into French while Abhishiktānanda was still living in France.<sup>82</sup> In *Secret*, Abhishiktānanda says that Ramaṇa's own writings had not yet been published in French, but that he had read some pamphlets and articles about him. An earlier draft of *Secret* gives more information on these early sources of information:

Dès avant de venir aux Indes j'avais entendu parler de Ramana Maharshi: les conférences de Jean Herbert dans la collectiën de Trois Lotus, la page si curieusement incompréhensive de Lanza del Vasto dans un livre pourtant remarquable, l'article surtout de Olivier Lacombe dans les *Études Carmélitaines*. Ses oeuvres elles-meme n'avait pas encore été traduites, par suite de mesquines querelles au sujets de droits d'auteur. Tout cela était assez pour me faire désirer vivement le rencontrer et en lui et autour de lui rencontrer cette Inde traditionnelle et permanente sous les couches superficielles qui la recouvrent, pour laquelle avant tout j'étais venu ici.<sup>83</sup>

The first source mentioned by Abhishiktānanda is a reference to Jean Herbert's book *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde*.<sup>84</sup> This is a 45 page booklet about several of India's holy men and women, including Ramaṇa, Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Ananda Ma, and Gandhi. Herbert made two visits to Ramaṇa's ashram. He wanted to include references to Ramaṇa's work in a book, but he was refused permission.<sup>85</sup> This must be what Abhishiktānanda means by quarrels about author's rights. Herbert writes that, unlike other *gurus* in India, Ramaṇa hardly ever talks to his disciples. Being a *rishi*, one who has "seen" God, Ramaṇa is content to "radiate" in silence. Although a person may arrive with questions and problems, these problems are solved naturally after a brief time with Ramaṇa, Ramaṇa does not claim to teach anything new, but wants to guide his disciples into their own direct and personal experience of the Divine. Herbert briefly describes the method of Self-Enquiry. He says that this leads to the further step

<sup>82</sup> Paul Brunton: *A Search in Secret India* (A Search in Secret India (London: Rider & Co. 1970, first published 1934). The French translation was published several years latter as *L'Inde Secrète* (Paris: Payot, 1940).

<sup>83</sup> I am indebted to Christian Hackbarth-Johnson for this information. This information is on page 43 of a typescript of Abhishiktānanda from 17.12.1962, starting as "Sous le signe de l'Arounachala", the second part of the manuscript of which the first part was *Gnānānanda*.

<sup>84</sup> Jean Herbert: *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde* (Paris: Les Trois Lotus, 1937).

<sup>85</sup> As reported in *The Maharshi*, January/February 1996, Vol. 6-No. 1. See website [www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/janfeb96.htm](http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/publish/janfeb96.htm). Herbert was eventually able to publish the works of Ramaṇa: *L'Enseignement de Ramana Maharshi* (Albin Michel, 1972).

of union with the Divine, which he explicitly compares to Jesus' words, "I and the Father are one."

*Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde* gives only brief information about Ramaṇa. It was expanded in a book that Herbert published ten years later.<sup>86</sup> It is unclear whether Abhishiktānanda read this later work. In this later book, Herbert says that Ramaṇa does not usually appear to be conscious of anything that happens around him. He most often does not talk except about indifferent subjects, and he attaches a considerable importance to the perfection of each of his acts, even the act of undoing a package. He passes his days in an almost complete immobility, stretched out on a couch at the foot of which his disciples prostrate themselves and burn incense. For his whole life, Ramaṇa has allowed "commercial parasites" to install themselves around him and to monopolize him. Ramaṇa allows them to drive away, sometimes with clubs, and within his view, his oldest and most faithful disciples.<sup>87</sup>

On a positive note, Herbert writes that disciples receive from Ramaṇa an astonishing spiritual impulse. One look from him can change a person's life completely. An apparently insignificant word can open vast horizons, a sign from him can be more convincing than long explanations.

Herbert says that Ramaṇa has written a few verses of poetry, to which he allows the most contradictory interpretations to be given. In 1940, Herbert published *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*, containing French translations of some of these contradictory interpretations of Ramaṇa's teachings.<sup>88</sup> It is also not clear whether this book was ever read by Abhishiktānanda. But he later read studies by disciples of Ramaṇa. If these works were available to Herbert, they

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<sup>86</sup> Jean Herbert: *Spiritualité hindoue*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947). Monchanin referred Abhishiktānanda to this book in his letter dated August 13, 1949 See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 62.

<sup>87</sup> This may be a reference to Paul Brunton, who was forced away from the ashram in 1936. Brunton had given interviews in the press criticizing the way that the ashram was run. Brunton refers to "threats of physical violence"; he feared to ever return to the ashram. This fact is not mentioned by the ashram, which continues to publish Brunton's works praising Ramaṇa. Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (Rider, 1969, first published 1941), pp. 16-18.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Herbert: *Études sur Ramana Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940). Herbert does not mention any prose works by Ramaṇa. Nor do the authors of the works he cites make any reference to *Vichara-sangraham* or *Self-Enquiry*.

were likely also available to Abhishiktānanda. They are important in that they show both monistic and non-monistic interpretations of Ramaṇa's teachings.

In his Preface to the book, Herbert says that the Maharshi's real teachings are in the way that he interprets works that he refers to. His responses to questions from disciples are usually intended not so much to provide information as to give the questioner a shock and making him or her reflect. Thus, the answers must always be seen in relation to the context in which they are given. Herbert says that the Maharshi believed that the paths to truth vary according to individuals; each can interpret what he hears or reads, as long as this interpretation helps him progress from the point he finds himself. Therefore, there can be contradictory interpretations.

*Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* contains a long article by Dr. Lakshman, who gives a monistic interpretation to Ramaṇa's teachings.<sup>89</sup> It is Lakshman's view that Ramaṇa's experience at the age of 16 gave him an experience of the Self, but that it was not until later that Ramaṇa learned that there is no God, world outside of Self.

In contrast to this monistic interpretation, Swami Siddheswarānanda's article says that Ramaṇa's conception of life embraces the totality of life, which for an Indian includes the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. One can not say that the exterior world did not interest Ramaṇa. Siddheswarānanda cites the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* as support for this viewpoint. He says that going beyond ego does not signify that one is dead to all sensibility. In realization of the Self, one does not just content oneself by denying false ideas of reality; the positive element is most important, and that is to know the place of the ego with respect to the totality. If that were not the case, says Siddheswarānanda, people could find emancipation without making any personal effort, like sleep without dreams, or like a loss of consciousness, where all perception disappears completely.

An article by another disciple, Anantachari, records that when Ramaṇa himself was asked for an interpretation of his poems, Ramaṇa said that he had no idea at all what he meant when he wrote the poetry. He reports Ramaṇa as saying, "How can I explain what I wanted to say? I didn't want to say anything at all." A similar viewpoint is expressed in the article by Swāmi

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<sup>89</sup> This is a French translation, with revisions, of *Maha Yoga or the Upanishadic Lore by "Who"* (Tiruvannamalai, 1961).

Tapasyānanda, who also asked Ramaṇa how his teaching corresponded to that set out in a book about him. Ramaṇa said that it was very difficult to know, since he himself did not have any particular doctrine. He himself did not have any desire to write a book. On this view, it is not that there are contrary interpretations of Ramaṇa but that he himself did not have any viewpoint. It is perhaps no wonder that Abhishiktānanda, too would later have difficulty in interpreting the “teachings” of Ramaṇa, and that Abhishiktānanda’s own ideas alternated between monistic and non-monistic views. A further article by Swāmi Tapasyānanda is interesting in an unexpected way. He says that Ramaṇa has a unique imperturbable serenity, and that he just exists, without waiting for anything and without any anxiety at all. But he also says that he does not know whether or not Ramaṇa is really a *jñāni*. Swāmi Tapasyānanda also records that he asked Ramaṇa to instruct him in spiritual matters. Ramaṇa’s first response was that the best instruction was by silence. According to Ramaṇa, the *advaitin* has no opinion no express and no teaching concerning Vedānta. Because he had no particular doctrine, Ramaṇa could not say whether books about him corresponded to his “teaching”.

Abhishiktānanda’s reference to the “curiously incomprehensive page” by Lanza del Vasto is a reference to the book *Return to the Source*.<sup>90</sup> First published in 1943, this book has sold over a million copies in France alone. The author gives a brief account of his meeting with Ramaṇa in 1937. Del Vasto is critical of Ramaṇa’s appearance: “a little man who goes about half naked and remains perfectly simple in the midst of the great honours done to him”; “the grey eyes in his dark face are mild and vacant”; and “He has been laid on a small sofa styled in the worst taste.” He criticizes the fact that Ramaṇa chewed betel nut and that he “sometimes opens his mouth wide and belches.” He refers to the self-enquiry practiced by the disciples:

The disciples look at Him who Is and think of what they are. Or, rather, they think of what they are not. They are not this arm or this leg, this head or this heart, they are not this body, they are not this anxiety or this joy, this hope or this remorse, this anger or this love, nor any of these changing emotions. They are not their thought, since their thought ceases when they sleep, whereas they do not cease to be. They are not the I that names itself.

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<sup>90</sup> Lanza del Vasto: *Return to the Source*, tr. Jean Sidgwick (Simon and Schuster, 1971, first published in France in 1943 under the title of *Le Pèlerinage aux Sources*), pp. 92-97. The quotations are from pp. 96-97.

Del Vasto rejects Ramaṇa's model of spirituality. He says,

There is a Christian restlessness in me that prefers itself, imperfect as it is, to the perfect serenity of which I see the model here. If I had the rare courage and the power to dedicate myself to godliness, I should seek it, not so much in the peace of absolute sleep as in the frenzy of the enamoured soul. If I had the rare courage and the power to do so, I should still not think I had the right to seek salvation by myself and for myself. I should have to reach my own good through the good of others, and I maintain that charity is greater than wisdom.

This is extremely harsh criticism. Del Vasto left Ramaṇa's ashram to look for Gandhi at Wardha (the site of Gandhi's ashram), in order to "learn how to be a better Christian." It is clear that Del Vasto's article could not have influenced Abhishiktānanda to view Ramaṇa in any positive light.

Abhishiktānanda's main source of information about Ramaṇa came from the article by the Indologist Olivier Lacombe in the journal *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*. Olivier Lacombe had a three-hour visit with Ramaṇa in 1936. A record of his brief visit is contained in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.<sup>91</sup> Lacombe asked Ramaṇa whether his ideas corresponded with Shankara, and about the various yogas and methods in Hinduism. Ramaṇa told him that the method chosen will vary according to the standpoint of the aspirant, although he also said "To remain in the Self amounts to all these [yogas] in their highest sense." Once a person is realized, he will use his own language to teach about it. Lacombe recorded his reflections of this brief visit in the October 1937 volume of *Études Carmélitaines*.<sup>92</sup> Lacombe saw Indian yoga as a natural spirituality as distinct from the supernatural spirituality given by the Holy Spirit. Yoga is a conquest of the soul by itself, a kind of dis-incarnation, the isolation of the spirit in its native and original purity. Yoga starts by emptying one's consciousness and proceeds ultimately to an intuitive knowing beyond sensing and discursive thought.

Lacombe refers to Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. He relates the story of Ramaṇa's enlightenment at the age of 16, and how Ramaṇa did not have previous knowledge or training. He says that the

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<sup>91</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1994), pp. 155-157.

<sup>92</sup> Olivier Lacombe: "Sur le Yoga indien", *Études Carmélitaines*, October, 1937, pp. 163-176. The next year the same Journal (October, 1938) published another article by Lacombe, "Un Exemple de Mystique Naturelle: L'Inde." and an article by Maritain: "L'Experience Mystique Naturelle et le Vide". Maritain recommends that Catholics should study the experience of the Self where all religious implications are absent. The 1938 volume of *Études Carmélitaines* contains a full page photograph of Ramana Maharshi. In 1954 Abhishiktānanda refers Fr. Lemarié to these articles. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54).

foundation of Ramaṇa's mysticism is the "grasping of the soul by itself" in the depth of its substance, a depth that is beyond even the most spiritual actions, and beyond the root of our powers of knowing and loving. This grasping of the soul by itself is a radical conversion, and also a passage from extraversion to introversion. For Ramaṇa, the shock of fear of death rendered him immediately introspective or introverted. Ramaṇa's later sayings as a sage were designed to give a similar psychological shock to those who asked him questions. He wanted to plunge them into their depths, to convert them in a radical introversion. But although this experience of introversion is valuable, Lacombe says that Ramaṇa "exalted the experience of the individual self to the experience of the universal self."

Disciples of Ramaṇa soon knew about Lacombe's 1937 article in *Études Carmélitaines*. It is referred to by Swami Siddheswarānanda, one of the writers in Herbert's *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*. Swami Siddheswarānanda disputes the characterization of Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. He also disagrees with the view that Ramaṇa proceeds by a psychological shock that was the equivalent of his own fear of death and by which he became introverted. He says that Maharshi never provoked a shock, because he did not have any preconceived idea of the results of his action. He was just not concerned with psychological or philosophical problems.

Monchanin also read and referred to Lacombe's articles, including the article on Ramaṇa and yoga. Contrary to Lacombe, Monchanin did not think that the idea of a natural mysticism based on ecstasy necessarily implied a distinction between nature and supernature.<sup>93</sup>

While still in France, Abhishiktānanda had also read other works about Hindu religious experience:

Deep contacts with Hindu thought, books and people. Even before I came here, they had already made a mark on me. A hidden spiritual sympathy, this sense of the Unity, of the ONE, of God at the source of my being, of the fading out of this 'ego' as soon as you penetrate into the interior of yourself so as to reach the unique 'I'.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Letters dated November, 1953 and February 24, 1954. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), pp. 119 and 134. Monchanin's views should be contrasted with those of P. de Lubac who insisted on the distinction between nature and supernature.

<sup>94</sup> *Letters*, p. 53 (L. 10.2.52).

Based on his rather limited knowledge about Ramaṇa, Abhishiktānanda wanted to meet him and to have his *darśan* (public viewing). He believed that in this way he would find the true India that is often obscured by superficialities.

#### 4. Time Spent with Ramaṇa Maharshi

Abhishiktānanda's first meeting with Ramaṇa was in January 1949. He and Monchanin had received their Bishop's encouragement to spend time at Ramaṇa's *ashram*. Monchanin had had two previous visits to the ashram. Abhishiktānanda considered this visit to Ramaṇa's *ashram* as an initiation into Hindu monastic life.<sup>95</sup> Abhishiktānanda was filled with great anticipation. He thought that it could not fail to be a high point in his life:

Something had to take place, when once a physical contact was established between myself and him. Of that I had not the slightest doubt: this man had a message for me, a message which, if not conveyed in human words, would at least be spiritually communicated; for, as it had been clearly explained to me, spoken words were the least important of the ways by which the Sage communicated his experience.<sup>96</sup>

Abhishiktānanda's expectations of what to expect upon meeting Ramaṇa seem to derive from Herbert's descriptions of Ramaṇa. But although Abhishiktānanda had high expectations, and had been told what to expect from Ramaṇa, he in fact felt let down and disappointed. Ramaṇa seemed so ordinary, like a kindly grandfather, shrewd and serene. When Abhishiktānanda entered the room, Ramaṇa was reading his mail.

If I had hoped to meet a perfect inhabitant of the other world, I would have been greatly disappointed. I could see for myself and was also told that Bhagavān has passed the stage of ecstasy. Henceforth he is able to attend to the details of daily life without the concentration of his thought on the Self being impaired to the slightest extent.<sup>97</sup>

Abhishiktānanda saw Ramaṇa at his *darśan*. By this time, the *darśan* had become a kind of ritual. Abhishiktānanda was bothered by the way Ramaṇa was called 'Bhagavān' [Lord] and

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<sup>95</sup> *Diary*, p. 8 (24.1.49).

<sup>96</sup> *Secret*, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Diary*, p. 9 (24.1.49).

by the prostrations that were made to him.<sup>98</sup> Ramaṇa was treated practically as if he was a *mūrti* [image] in one of the Hindu temples.<sup>99</sup> Monchanin introduced Abhishiktānanda to Ramaṇa, but Abhishiktānanda stayed silent. He says that Ramaṇa's response to his introduction by Monchanin was with "a smile so full of kindness as to be unforgettable."<sup>100</sup> Abhishiktānanda concentrated on looking with deep attention at Ramaṇa. He says that at first he looked in vain for the halo that he had been told to expect around him. Furthermore, Ramaṇa was too distant, being separated from the crowd of devotees by the sanctuary and by the privileged disciples who remained constantly at his side.<sup>101</sup> He had read so much about the peace emanating from the ashram that he was "frankly disappointed".<sup>102</sup>

Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin went back to see Ramaṇa in the afternoon of the first day. At this time, Abhishiktānanda seemed more impressed by the rhythmic chanting of the priests, which he refers to as "spell binding". He says that these chants, which he was hearing for the first time, "issue from the archetypal sources of being, and that they irresistibly draw those who chant them or hear them into the same most secret sources of being."<sup>103</sup> He gave up trying to understand the chanting, and simply allowed himself to be held and carried along. In the evening, there were questions to Ramaṇa by his followers. Abhishiktānanda did not understand the Tamil language at that time and so did not understand what was being said.

Abhishiktānanda awoke the next day with a fever, but he went to the *darśan* anyway. In the afternoon, Monchanin introduced him to a disciple of Ramaṇa named Ethel Merstone, and he expressed his disappointment and skepticism to her. She said, "You are not receptive; you must be receptive, open, before *Bhagavān*." Merstone told him he should make himself empty. His meditation must be one of pure expectation. He should not insist that everything should come by the paths he had previously determined.

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<sup>98</sup> *Diary*, p. 7 (24.1.49), *Secret*, p. 5. But Abhishiktānanda says he had forgotten that the French and English use terms like 'Monseigneur' and 'My Lord'.

<sup>99</sup> Abhishiktānanda speaks of the "incurable ritualism" of the Hindus.

<sup>100</sup> *Diary*, p. 8 (24.1.49).

<sup>101</sup> *Guru*, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Diary*, p. 9 (24.1.49).

<sup>103</sup> *Secret*, p. 7.

Abhishiktānanda attended the evening *darśan* in a condition that was half dreaming. He was not sure whether this was due to a new receptivity in himself or whether it was due to his fever. But he says that something released in him “zones of para-consciousness”:

Even before my mind was able to recognize the fact, and still less to express it, the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. A melody made itself felt, and especially an all-embracing ground bass... In the Sage of Arunāchala of our own time I discerned the unique Sage of the eternal India, the unbroken succession of her sages, her ascetics, her seers; it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss.<sup>104</sup>

Abhishiktānanda refers to Ramaṇa’s expression as that “unique presence of the self to the self within the self”<sup>105</sup>

Because of his fever, Abhishiktānanda returned that evening to his own ashram (Shantivanam) at Kulittalai, where he stayed in bed three days. His dreams were all about Ramaṇa. In these dreams, he would try to incorporate into his previous mental structures his experiences with Ramaṇa. These attempts were always in vain.<sup>106</sup> He wrote to his family about his “Pilgrimage to a Hindu ‘saint’ who is regarded by Hindus as God himself. Extremely thought-provoking.”<sup>107</sup>

Abhishiktānanda saw Ramaṇa only one more time, again in 1949, when he spent ten days at Tiruvannamalai. On this visit, Monchanin did not accompany Abhishiktānanda. Alone, Abhishiktānanda lived as a Hindu. The first day he dressed all in white, but the next day he wore the orange *kavi* of the Hindu *sannyāsī*. People addressed him as “Swami”<sup>108</sup>.

At the time of this second visit, Ramaṇa had been diagnosed with a tumour, and visitors were being turned away. But due to the intervention of Ethel Merstone, Abhishiktānanda was allowed to stay. At the *darśan* of Maharshi, Abhishiktānanda tried not to allow his efforts at

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<sup>104</sup> *Letters*, p. 30. See also *Secret*, p. 9. This seems to contradict his more spontaneous account that he did not perceive any halo. Perhaps he was able to discern it only when he was more receptive.

<sup>105</sup> *Secret*, p. 21.

<sup>106</sup> *Secret*, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> *Letters*, p. 30 (F, 13.2.49).

<sup>108</sup> *Letters*, p. 31 (F, 29.8.49).

rationalization to become an obstacle as they had been on the first visit, and he tried simply to attend to the hidden influence.<sup>109</sup> Because Ramaṇa was ill, no conversation with him was possible. Merstone pointed out to Abhishiktānanda that at Arunāchala, there was not only Ramaṇa, but also the Temple and the mountain itself, all of which were means of grace.<sup>110</sup> This seems to be the first idea by Abhishiktānanda that he could look to Arunāchala as a source of inspiration and guidance.

At the time of this second visit, Merstone put Abhishiktānanda in touch with other disciples who tried to explain to him the teachings of Ramaṇa. He met a Brahmin who is unnamed. The Brahmin told Abhishiktānanda that the sufferings of Ramaṇa reminded him of the suffering of the Lord Jesus. The Brahmin also told him that the central point in Ramaṇa's teaching was the mystery of the heart. One must find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought; one must cease identifying oneself with what one merely has or does.

According to this disciple, the most central point in Srī Ramaṇa's teaching is the mystery of the heart, of which the best treatment is that by Ganapati Sāstri [another disciple] in his *Srī Ramaṇa Gītā*. Find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought, make that one's permanent dwelling, cut all the bonds which keep this heart at the level of sense and outward consciousness, all the fleeting identifications of what one *is* with what one *has* or what one *does*.<sup>111</sup>

This Brahmin disciple copied out for Abhishiktānanda a verse from the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad*, 12.14:

Heaven is within the inner chamber,  
the glorious place  
which is entered by those who renounce themselves.

Monchanin visited Ramaṇa on February 14, 1950, while Abhishiktānanda stayed at Shantivanam. Monchanin reports that he was filled with admiration for Ramaṇa. He asked himself whether he was the victim of a mirage; he concluded it was not, because he did not stop for an instant of being the lucid master of himself. Nevertheless he says that he was "seduced" by Ramaṇa. Monchanin writes that there was mystery in this man who had found by his own experience the essence of India's mysticism—"an unpitying, obstinate negation of all that is not

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<sup>109</sup> *Secret*, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> *Secret*, p. 13.

the Necessary One [l'unique nécessaire]".<sup>112</sup> Monchanin visited him a fourth time on March 7, 1950. Ramaṇa was dying, but he seemed to be detached and almost absent to his own body. Monchanin wrote Abhishiktānanda that the death of Ramaṇa should not sadden beyond measure those at the ashram, because the *Shakti* is immortal. He says that Ramaṇa's devotees call it "mother".<sup>113</sup>

Abhishiktānanda wanted to visit Ramaṇa a third time in the spring of 1950. But Ramaṇa died two days before his planned visit.

At the end of 1950, Abhishiktānanda spent three days at Ramaṇa's *ashram* with some European friends.<sup>114</sup> He meditated and he listened to chants, including Ramaṇa's own composition *Upadesa Sāram*. A *pūjā* [ceremonial worship] was given in honour of Ramaṇa at the *samādhi* [the monument erected at the tomb of Ramaṇa]. A similar *pūjā* was held at the temple and in the small room where he had died, or where, as it was explained to Abhishiktānanda, Ramaṇa had achieved *mahānirvāna*, renouncing for ever all manifestation under the conditions of space and time. A statue had been erected at the *samādhi*; a verse [*sloka*] from the *Ramaṇa Gīta* was engraved on it:

In the midst of the cave of the heart,  
in form of the I, in form of the Self,  
unique and solitary,  
Brahman's glory shines  
directly from Himself on Himself.  
Penetrate deep within,  
your thought piercing to its source,  
your mind having plunged into itself,  
with breath and sense held close in the depths,  
your whole self fixed in yourself,  
and there, simply BE!<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *Secret*, p. 14. The reference is to Ramaṇa's own verse in *Ramaṇa Gītā*, p. 19, Ch. II, v. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Letter dated March 6, 1950, cited in *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 72. See also *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 293.

<sup>113</sup> Letter May 1, 1950. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 77.

<sup>114</sup> *Secret*, p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> *Secret*, p. 21. See *Ramaṇa Gītā*, p. 18, Ch. II, v.2.

Many of Abhishiktānanda's later writings echo the ideas in this *sloka*.

At the time of this visit in 1950, Abhishiktānanda also “providentially” met another Brahmin, Śrī Kuppusāmī Aiyar. Aiyar showed him the hermitages or ‘caves’ on the mountainside of Arunāchala, and he introduced him to some of the dwellers in these caves. This was a “real revelation” to Abhishiktānanda. Aiyar also arranged for Abhishiktānanda to take over one of these caves for meditation.<sup>116</sup>

Abhishiktānanda stayed in caves on Arunāchala on several occasions.<sup>117</sup> In 1952, Abhishiktānanda spent several months in the cave Vanatti on Arunāchala. He had contacts with *sādhus*, temple priests and members of the Ramaṇa ashram. People offered signs of reverence to him. He would sometimes go down to the *pūjā* that was celebrated every Friday at the ashram. It was a ceremony that lasted almost three hours. There would be a recitation of 300 names of *Devi* [the Goddess, or *Śakti*].<sup>118</sup> Abhishiktānanda also visited the Temple in Tiruvannamalai. In 1953 he was there for the ten day Festival of Lights (*Thībam*) in the middle of November. He made the 12-kilometer circuit of the mountain with pilgrims. He describes how that same month he spent a night in the underground crypt of Patala Linga at the Temple in Tiruvannamalai. This was where Ramaṇa had spent the first few months after his enlightenment. Abhishiktānanda says that during this night at Patala Linga, he had a ‘meeting’ with Ramaṇa. This meeting “took place on a plane that has nothing in common with any visual, auditory or psychic phenomenon whatever—literally at the one level where Ramaṇa can always be truly met.” It was an attempt at a ‘real’ contact, and a “communion that makes light of distances, whether in time or space.”<sup>119</sup>

In May 1954, Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin explored Hinduism for six weeks. They went to Ramaṇa's ashram again. Monchanin describes this visit:

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<sup>116</sup> *Secret*, p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> In 1952, he stayed in Vanatti cave for ten days in total silence from March 29. He stayed in the same cave from May 19-Aug.10; the first three weeks were in silence; he moved to the quieter cave of Aruptāl Tīrtham in July. In 1953, he was in this second cave from March 3-31, and again from Nov.3-Dec. 27. In 1954, he stayed for a week at Easter in the cave of Skanda Ashram, where Ramaṇa had lived. Then he stayed in the cave of Sādei Sāmī from May 26-June 30. This was an empty cave he had not previously known about. In 1955 he was at Arunāchala for parts of January, July (in Virupaksha cave) and December. In 1954 he stayed briefly. His last stay was December 1955.

<sup>118</sup> *Secret*, p. 44.

<sup>119</sup> *Secret*, pp. 114-116.

We both had the impression that we were living a 'Golden Legend' (where what is perceived and what is imagined are indistinguishable), and at times to be in direct contact with an experience, a transcendent apprehension which completely eludes all images, concepts and norms. A pure mysticism which, like the horizon, retires before the observer.<sup>120</sup>

From Christmas, 1954 to February 1955 Abhishiktānanda stayed in a cottage at Ramaṇa's ashram. He met Ethel Merstone again, and had long talks with her. He also met other disciples of Ramaṇa. One of these disciples was Major Chadwick. Chadwick had collected the funds for a celebration every Wednesday, *chakra-pūjā*. This was a very long ceremony in honour of the divine *śakti* [energy or power]. This *śakti* was symbolically represented by the *Śrī Chakra* in *kundalini yoga*; it was like a kind of pyramid on a square base, at the top of which is a series of superimposed triangles. This emphasis on *śakti* and *kundalini* among disciples of Ramaṇa is significant, since these ideas play a large role in Abhishiktānanda's own thought.

Another disciple he met at this time was S.S. Cohen, with whom Abhishiktānanda had some of his best conversations concerning Ramaṇa's teaching. But Abhishiktānanda found Cohen rather too intellectual in his approach.<sup>121</sup>

He also met Sundaresa Aiyar. Aiyar told him, "If you want to know exactly what the Mahārshi thought, you must yourself become what he was. You will then have nothing further to ask."<sup>122</sup> Later in his life, Abhishiktānanda did attempt to become like Ramaṇa.

Another person that Abhishiktānanda met is referred to only as Sujāta; she was a Buddhist nun. Abhishiktānanda discussed Zen Buddhism with her. She also had many books by D.T. Suzuki, which Abhishiktānanda "read with the greatest interest."<sup>123</sup> The fact that a disciple of Ramaṇa was also interested in Zen Buddhism explains many of the parallels that Abhishiktānanda later sought to draw between *advaitic* experience and Zen Buddhism.

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<sup>120</sup> *Letters*, p. 73. According to a note, the "Golden Legend" probably refers to the story of Sunderamūl, told in *Secret*, pp. 97-101. Abhishiktānanda retold the story and compared it to "un conte de légende dorée."

<sup>121</sup> *Secret*, p. 38.

<sup>122</sup> *Secret*, p. 41.

<sup>123</sup> *Secret*, p. 43.

Abhishiktānanda also met Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan.<sup>124</sup> Mahadevan was a professor of philosophy (he has been previously referred to in the Introduction to this thesis). Mahadevan had had an interest in Ramaṇa at least as early as 1930 when he was 18 years old.<sup>125</sup>

At this time Abhishiktānanda also read more of the books about Ramaṇa. He read some commentaries on Ramaṇa's Forty Verses [*Ulladu Nārpadu*]. He was surprised by the differences of interpretation in these commentaries. He thought that the commentary by T.V. Kapali Sāstrī was rather forced in making Ramaṇa's thought to conform with Aurobindo.<sup>126</sup>

## 5. Disciples of Ramaṇa Maharshi who had a major influence

### a) H.W.L. Poonja ("Harilal")

'Harilal' is the name used by Abhishiktānanda to refer to H.W.L. Poonja.<sup>127</sup> In Abhishiktānanda's opinion, he had never met an *advaitin* who was so sincere and authentic. What is surprising in this opinion is that Harilal was not a *sannyāsī*, but rather a manager of iron and manganese mines in Mysore.

Abhishiktānanda met Harilal in 1953, while Abhishiktānanda was meditating in one of the caves.<sup>128</sup> Harilal had been one of Ramaṇa's disciples. Harilal was extremely intuitive, once getting off a bus in Rishikesh just before it crashed.<sup>129</sup> Harilal had seen a vision of Ramaṇa before ever meeting him—he had 'seen' Ramaṇa in the Punjab at the same time that Ramaṇa was actually in his ashram at Tiruvannamalai.<sup>130</sup> He now told Abhishiktānanda that Abhishiktānanda

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<sup>124</sup> *Secret*, p. 82, ft. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984). In vol. 8 of *Notebooks*, p. 223, 6:150, he says it was in 1930). In Vol. 10, p. 133, 2:413 he says that Prof. T.M. Mahadevan was also present as an 18 year old student.

<sup>126</sup> *Secret*, p. 41. This shows a familiarity with Aurobindo's thought at the time. Over time, Abhishiktānanda had an increasing appreciation for Aurobindo.

<sup>127</sup> H.W.L. Poonja appears in the video, "Abide as the self: The Essential Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi" (Inner Directions, 1995).

<sup>128</sup> *Secret*, p. 81.

<sup>129</sup> *Secret*, p. 95.

<sup>130</sup> *Secret*, p. 90.

had “called” for him to come. He had passed Abhishiktānanda in the bazaar, and had seen this call in his eyes.

Harilal’s *advaita* was more extreme than Abhishiktānanda was accustomed to. Harilal asked Abhishiktānanda what the use was of knowing Sanskrit and other languages, or of reading so much:

You have read a great deal—naturally—so did I at one time, but now I read little (...) There is only one book, the ‘living’ book that is within you ... Reading is only one step on the ladder. Instead of reading, think (i.e., meditate); instead of thinking, keep essential silence within, a silence beyond (...) both the thought and the non-thought that within you meet the Supreme.<sup>131</sup>

and

Leave aside study for thought, thought for the void, the void for what is beyond the void. Why learn languages? What language do you need to converse with the Self?<sup>132</sup>

Harilal said that everything that one says, reads, writes and thinks about God is far from God. Ramaṇa had told Harilal that you have to take a leap. Only when you leave everything behind, *devas* [Gods] along with everything else, can you find the vision that has no beginning and no ending, the vision of Being, of the Self. The true Self is what remains when nothing is seen or thought any more. Just realize that *you are*. *Tat tvam asi*—you are That! He said that there was only one thing that Abhishiktānanda lacked—to “enter into the *guhā*, the cave of your heart, and there realize that *you are!*”<sup>133</sup>

Harilal tried to persuade Abhishiktānanda to take the final plunge into pure *advaita* and to abandon every kind of religious observance.<sup>134</sup> He said that *advaita* is not a religion, and is not concerned about religious observance. Harilal said, “You call yourself a Christian; but that is meaningless at the stage you have reached.”<sup>135</sup> Harilal advised Abhishiktānanda to stop his

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<sup>131</sup> *Letters*, p. 62 (L. 29.4.53). This same thought is incorporated by Abhishiktānanda in *Ermîtes du Saccidananda*, p. 156.

<sup>132</sup> *Diary* p. 64, (14.3.53).

<sup>133</sup> *Secret*, p. 86. This language recalls the admonition of Jesus to the rich young ruler in the Gospels.

<sup>134</sup> *Diary*, p. 66 (23.3.53).

<sup>135</sup> *Secret*, p. 84.

prayers, his worship and his contemplation of this or that. The prayers and other religious rituals are unimportant because the *ātman* is bound by nothing.<sup>136</sup>

According to Abhishiktānanda, Harilal did not maintain his own adherence to this radical *advaita*. By 1971, Harilal had gone back to the path of *bhakti*, or devotion. He stressed an *abheda-bhakti* [devotion without any distinction between the Lord and his devotees]. Harilal had had a vision of the Cosmic Christ coming to him, where Christ was higher than the heavens and also infinitely close.<sup>137</sup>

Still later, Harilal became a *guru* with his own followers. He was known as Sri Poonja, or more often, Papaji. He died in 1997. A collection of his poems and sayings from 1990 to 1997 was published in 2000.<sup>138</sup> These teachings emphasize a radical *advaita* of a monistic kind, denying any reality to the world. He says that the ultimate truth is that “nothing ever existed.” This radical *advaita* seems to indicate that Harilal had changed his views again since 1971.

#### b) A. Shastri

A. Shastri was a disciple of Ramaṇa and of Gaṇapati Sastri (one of the first disciples of Ramaṇa). Abhishiktānanda met with Shastri in November 1953. Shastri spoke to him about *kundalini*. He also helped Abhishiktānanda to integrate Patañjali’s yoga with Ramaṇa’s teachings.<sup>139</sup> According to Shastri, no *advaitic* experience would be possible without the entry into trance produced by the awakening of the *kundalini*. He said that Ramaṇa had told him that the ‘grace’ needed for the supreme experience, *arul*, is in reality nothing else than the *kundalini śakti*.

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<sup>136</sup> *Secret*, p. 93.

<sup>137</sup> *Letters*, pp. 242-243 (SG 26.1.71). *Diary* p. 332 (24.7.71).

<sup>138</sup> Sri H.W.L. Poonja: *The Truth Is* (Samuel Weiser, 2000). The Introduction to the book claims that Poonja was realized when he was 8 years old, but that this Realization “infinitely blossomed” when in his 30’s he met Ramaṇa Maharshi. There is no mention of changes in his teachings.

<sup>139</sup> *Diary*, p. 77 (27.11.53). Patañjali is the author of the classical text on Yoga, the *Yoga-Sūtra*. This integration would also help Abhishiktānanda to integrate Gnānānanda’s teaching, which emphasized meditation.

## c) Dr. Dinshaw K. Mehta

Dr. Dinshaw K. Mehta was another disciple of Ramaṇa who had an important influence on Abhishiktānanda. D.K. Mehta was a Parsee, the founder of the Society of the Servants of God. Mehta had also been Gandhi's doctor. Abhishiktānanda met him in Bombay in July 1955.<sup>140</sup>

Mehta helped Abhishiktānanda in resolving his crisis of trying to incorporate his experience with Ramaṇa into his previous mental structures. Mehta gave Abhishiktānanda guidance in the form of mystical and esoteric messages that he said had been received at night from a "personal but gnostic Christ." Abhishiktānanda said that these *scripts* of Mehta were not revelation dictated from outside, but were rather the often painful translation of a "revelation" received from a higher plane. This revelation is incapable of reaching the level of normal consciousness, but passes through ideas, images and symbols of the subconscious and finally manifests in automatic writing as a result of yogic concentration.<sup>141</sup>

Abhishiktānanda regarded his meeting with Mehta as providential. He believed that his trip to Bombay had been only a means for him to meet Mehta. It was a "turning point" for Abhishiktānanda.<sup>142</sup> But he continued to have doubts. He wondered whether it was a bad sign that during this visit, the *ara*, the heavy stone that he used in the Eucharist, was broken.<sup>143</sup>

Mehta introduced Abhishiktānanda to his method of analyzing the different levels of consciousness and to a technique of psychological introspection that would help him to integrate his inner conflicts. Abhishiktānanda describes this meditation as a kind of psychoanalytical treatment:

Meditation along these lines is very like a method of psychoanalytical treatment. It is a matter of integrating into consciousness the whole world of the "memory". In order at the same time to bring it to the consciousness of this trans-liminal and through the development of consciousness, beyond this trans-liminal. And this

<sup>140</sup> *Diary*, pp. 106ff. (27.7.55). *Letters*, p. 82 (1, 18.7.55). D.K. Mehta should of course not be confused with J.L. Mehta.

<sup>141</sup> *Diary*, p. 108 (28.7.55).

<sup>142</sup> *Diary*, p. 140 (19.1.56). Abhishiktānanda says that this "turning point" had been "long ago recognized in the lines of my hand." *Diary*, p. 109 (29.7.55). It is not clear who did this reading of Abhishiktānanda's palm.

<sup>143</sup> *Diary*, p. 111 (31.7.55). He had not been saying Mass for several days.

involves a transformation of consciousness itself. For better and for worse, since this “trans-gression” [passing-over] of the immediate world of our experience leads us at the same time into the subconscious and the supra-conscious. [...] In the last analysis we are in C.G. Jung’s world of archetypes. Metapsychic powers are then necessarily attained, together with potential effects on the body and on matter.<sup>144</sup>

For Mehta, the human being must reach level of the supra-conscious, and must realize God’s presence in time and by his works.<sup>145</sup> In the journey from superficial ego to the fundamental *aham* [I or Self], there are a number of stages or levels. There are the seven mansions of St. Teresa, the seven levels of Gurdjieff, the seven *chakras* of Hinduism, the seven heavens of Hinduism. “All these levels are essentially or rather primarily psychological levels, the stages in the self’s realization of itself.” The Christic level is the level interior to one’s own *aham*. And the level of angels is also interior to a person. This view that there are stages in the journey to the real Self will be considered in the next chapter.

According to Mehta’s scripts, Abhishiktānanda was to practice total surrender and to devote himself entirely to deeper interiorization. One must have absolute faith in the mystery of the beyond into which one throws oneself.<sup>146</sup> Mehta wanted Abhishiktānanda to give up all reading.<sup>147</sup> Mehta also wanted him to abandon the Christian faith; this was unacceptable to Abhishiktānanda. Mehta asked him to concentrate on a single point, a thought, a feeling or a perception. But Abhishiktānanda says that meditating on a symbol no longer worked for him:

I am already too Hindu and too advaitic to do that. Even the symbol of the Cross no longer speaks to me. So I concentrate on the Heart of Christ, *hrid*, in the Hindu understanding of the mystery of the Sacred Heart.<sup>148</sup>

Mehta’s advice led to Abhishiktānanda’s relinquishing of his previous ‘conception’ of *advaita*.<sup>149</sup> The idea of total surrender seems to be one of the most important ideas that Abhishiktānanda obtained from Mehta.

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<sup>144</sup> *Diary* p. 107 (28.7.55).

<sup>145</sup> *Diary*, pp. 110, 11 (30.7.55).

<sup>146</sup> *Diary*, p. 107 (27.7.55). *Letters*, p. 83.

<sup>147</sup> *Letters*, p. 85 (L. 18.9.55). In this letter he calls Mehta his *guru*.

<sup>148</sup> *Diary*, p. 107 (27.7.55).

Abhishiktānanda met Mehta again on his trip north in March 1957. On the way, Abhishiktānanda had stopped to meet with Gnānānanda and Harilal. Abhishiktānanda spent 10 days at Mehta's bungalow 20 miles from Poona. At this time Abhishiktānanda expressed the hope that Mehta would one day reach the full *advaitic* experience, which Abhishiktānanda then regarded as inferior to his own experience.<sup>150</sup> This statement shows that Abhishiktānanda had by this time moved away from some of the teachings of Mehta.

In August 1967, Abhishiktānanda spent another four days with Mehta. Mehta was giving advice to seekers. Every evening people came to Mehta for advice. They would prostrate before him and record what he said on tape.<sup>151</sup>

In 1970, Mehta wanted to involve Abhishiktānanda in a project to introduce a spiritual element into Indian politics.<sup>152</sup> Abhishiktānanda did not accept this involvement. By this time, Abhishiktānanda is referring to Mehta as a 'prophet' who makes decisions by "pure pseudo-inspiration."

#### 6. The influence of Ramaṇa Maharshi on Abhishiktānanda

Ramaṇa had the most marked influence on Abhishiktānanda.<sup>153</sup> Many of Abhishiktānanda's writings describe the teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi.<sup>154</sup> In 1955, Abhishiktānanda compared the influence of Ramaṇa to that of Christ:

The Christ, whom I first knew and loved in his historical life in Jesus, and then in his epiphany in the Church, at the end of time (of my time) has appeared to me in the form of Bhagavān Śrī Ramaṇa.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> *Diary*, p. 114 (3.8.55). Abhishiktānanda finds it 'funny' that his new 'master', Mehta, was not in the traditional Hindu or purely *advaitin* line.

<sup>150</sup> *Letters*, p. 114)

<sup>151</sup> *Letters*, p. 193 (l. 27.8.67).

<sup>152</sup> *Letters*, p. 225 (L, 25.1.70).

<sup>153</sup> This is Panikkar's view. *Diary*, Preface p. XIII.

<sup>154</sup> One of the most extensive accounts is in *Saccidananda*, 19-41. See also *The Secret of Arunāchala* and *Guru and Disciple*, where Abhishiktānanda describes Ramaṇa's teaching.

<sup>155</sup> *Diary*, p. 129, (28.10.1955).

He recommended Ramaṇa's method of finding liberation as preferable to all other ways, such as psychological methods.<sup>156</sup> He says that in Ramaṇa's method, we find that the fundamental experience of *advaita* is innate within us.<sup>157</sup> Abhishiktānanda says that he found grace, peace and non-duality in Ramaṇa, and he sought to find the *Bhagavan* in himself. In 1971, he still saw Ramaṇa as his ideal:

The ideal which is most profoundly mine—the one to which unconsciously everything in me is referred—is that of Ramaṇa—such a perfect example of Vedānta—and this ideal of Ramaṇa would not have been able to root itself at such a depth in my psyche if it had not encountered a call already expressed, a 'surfacing', an "awakening".<sup>158</sup>

It is interesting that Abhishiktānanda relates this idealization of Ramaṇa to the fact that ever since his youth, he had unconsciously envied those who did not believe or those who were educated outside of all belief:

I envied their *autonomy*, in the noblest sense of the word. It seemed to me that they possessed something of which I was ignorant and which I did not have.<sup>159</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that he transferred this envy to the saints of Vedānta, including Ramaṇa.

Abhishiktānanda also appreciated the lack of speculation or emotion that in Ramaṇa's teachings. Abhishiktānanda thought that many Hindus are overly logical in their expositions of the *advaitic* experience. But he was also opposed to what he believed was excessive emotionalism in others:

But the so-called Hindu Masters of today are either too speculative or too emotional. I had the grace of meeting Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda ...and it was truly at their feet that I learnt something from the Upanishads.<sup>160</sup>

But later he was forced to accept some measure of emotionalism:

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<sup>156</sup> *Letters*, p. 201 (to Sister Térése). (TL 1.6.68; 8.6.68).

<sup>157</sup> *Intériorité*, p. 183. Here he says that the experience is at the dawn of the supra-mental, to use Aurobindo's terminology.

<sup>158</sup> *Diary*, p. 328 (2.7.71).

<sup>159</sup> *Diary*, p. 328 (2.7.71).

<sup>160</sup> *Letters*, p. 218 (OB 24.8.69).

My rationalism finds itself forced to accept (with dread) a dimension of *emotion*, in the best sense, within the spiritual life [...] Who has the right to set limits in advance to the Spirit? The Spirit is in David's dance and in the visions of our *bhaktas* here, just as much as in the silence of those we call sages.<sup>161</sup>

Some of this emotionalism he came to appreciate during his encounter with Gñānānanda.

#### D. Gñānānanda

##### 1. Who was Gñānānanda?

The name 'Gñānānanda' means 'knowledge which is itself bliss' or 'both knowledge and bliss'. Abhishiktānanda writes, "No one ever struck me like that man did."<sup>162</sup> He details his meeting with Gñānānanda in *Guru and Disciple*. This book on Gñānānanda was completed in 1968. It was written in the third person—Abhishiktānanda refers to himself in the book as 'Vanya' in order to protect his anonymity. He did not believe that the book would be understood or published in his lifetime. His fear that the book would be rejected was justified in view of the Paris censor's rejection of an earlier work of his, *Guhāntara*. However, he did live to see the publication of *Guru and Disciple*. It was originally published in 1970 as *Gñānānanda, un maître spirituel du pays tamoul*. In the last year of his life, Abhishiktānanda said that it was his best book and did not need to be re-written:

Of all that I have written, *Gñānānanda* is almost the only thing that remains afloat. All the rest consists of *nāmarūpa* amusing itself with the 'theology of fulfilment'.<sup>163</sup>

Even as late as 1966, Abhishiktānanda was not aware of any writings by Gñānānanda.<sup>164</sup> But there is a book that has since been published providing transcripts of some of his teachings, which were recorded by some of his devotees.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup> *Letters*, p. 244, (FT, 27.2.71).

<sup>162</sup> *Letters*, p. 179. (MT, 4.4.66).

<sup>163</sup> *Letters*, p. 286 (MC, 4.2.73).

<sup>164</sup> *Letters*, p. 203 (MT, 3.7.66). "Gñānānanda wrote nothing, but he said and always said, marvellous things."

<sup>165</sup> C.T. Indra (ed.): *Sadguru Gñānānanda: His Life Personality and Teachings* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1979). It is interesting that this book makes reference to and includes some of Abhishiktānanda's writings about Gñānānanda, including lengthy and appreciative excerpts from *Guru and Disciple*. The book also includes *Gnana*

It is difficult to reconstruct the history of Gnānānanda. He was very reserved about his past, and the information compiled by his devotees appears to be more hagiographical than historical. As mentioned by Abhishiktānanda, his devotees said that he was anywhere from 120 to 153 years old, and that he knew the poetess Auveyar whom they say lived twenty centuries before.<sup>166</sup> It is said that Gnānānanda was born in a Brahmin family, in Karnataka State. He was named Subrahmanyam. He left home at an early age and was a disciple of Swami Sivaratna Giri, of Jyotirmutt, one of the four mutts which tradition says was established Shankara himself.<sup>167</sup> Gnānānanda was initiated by his *guru* into the 'Giri' order of this mutt at age 39. Gnānānanda always put great emphasis on his lineage; in all documents, he recorded his name as "Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Gnānānanda Giri Swami, disciple of Paramahansa Parivrajakacharya Varya Sri Sivaratnagiri Swami, belonging to the Kashmir Jyotir Mutt Peetam of the lineage of Adi Sankara Bhagavat Pada."<sup>168</sup>

It is also said that Gnānānanda spent many years at Gangotri, the source of the Ganges.<sup>169</sup> This may have influenced Abhishiktānanda, who later took a pilgrimage to Gangotri.

In 1944-45, Gnānānanda settled in the village Siddhalingamadam, 6 miles from Tirukoilur and 26 miles from Tiruvannamalai on the southern banks of the river Pennar. Gnānānanda was initially known as a medicine man. He was known as 'Vaidya Swami'; he treated his patients with herbs and *siddha* medicine. Gradually an ashram formed around him; this moved nearer to Tirukoilur in 1954; it became known as 'Sri Gnānānanda Tapovanam'. The name derives from the words *tapas* and *vanam*. *Tapas* means 'intense heat'. Derived meanings of *tapas* include references to ascetic practices such as zeal, fervour, and austerity. *Vana* (or *vanam* in Tamil) means "a wood or a forest." Tirukoilur is a city of temples, within view of the sacred mountain Arunāchala. The largest temple there is dedicated to Vishnu. It was also at Tirukoilur that the first three *Alvars*, or *Vaishnavite* saints are said to have received their vision

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*Inda Veli*. This is a collection of letters, tape-recorded addresses by Gnānānanda, and sayings as recollected by disciples.

<sup>166</sup> *Guru*, pp. 25, 26.

<sup>167</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 7. The establishment of the *mutts* by Shankara is questioned by scholars like Halbfass.

<sup>168</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 9, ft. 1.

<sup>169</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 10.

of the Lord. The town also has Śaivite temples, which are associated with the *Nayanmars*, the Śaivite saints of Tamil Nadu.

Gnānānanda was known for his proficiency in many languages including Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Kanarese and Telegu. He is also said to have had an extraordinary memory, being able to quote many verses in these languages. Some writings with which Gnānānanda is said to be familiar include the writings of the *Alvars*, the *Nayanmars*, the teachings of the *siddhas*, and the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.<sup>170</sup>

Gnānānanda claimed to have known Ramaṇa Maharshi. He said that he visited him around 1910, when Ramaṇa was then a young boy practicing meditation in caves. He also said that he had talked to other Hindu sages, such as Sai Baba of Shirdi, Ramakrishna, Vivekānanda and Aurobindo. The writers of *Sadguru Gnānānanda* suggest that he was making the point that a *jñāni* like himself is beyond space and time. He was known as a *thrikalagnani*, one who can know triple time: time past, time present and the future. He is said to have been able to do astral travelling, telepathy and to see events unfolding elsewhere. He could also transform inanimate objects.<sup>171</sup> Abhishiktānanda seems to have been unaware of these powers attributed to Gnānānanda. He writes that Gnānānanda had nothing to do with a cheap spirituality:

The life of Sri Gnānānanda, just like that of Sri Ramana Maharshi, exhibits no trace of anything extraordinary. No ecstasies, no *siddhis*, no esoteric teaching, no claim to have a mission, as is so often the case with so-called gurus; these corrupt their spiritual gifts which initially are often quite genuine, through an uncontrollable urge to dominate others and inflate their own ego [...] The path which he teaches is basically one of total renunciation, whose final result is that no place is left for the ego to show itself.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, pp. 56, 61, 94, 158.

<sup>171</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda* p. 51, 64, 67. These are all *siddhis*. See Swami Sivananda: *Tantra Yoga, Nada Yoga and Kriya Yoga* (India Divine Life Society, 1986), p. 8 for a list of *siddhi* powers.

<sup>172</sup> *Guru*, Preface p. xvi. See also *Letters*, p. 102 (F 19.3.56): "Outwardly there is nothing extraordinary about him. He does not read your thoughts, does no miracles: but when he speaks to you, it is as if what he says was coming out of your own heart." He is also seemingly unaware of Gnānānanda's expertise in astrology. *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 59. In *Diary*, p. 29, he condemns astrology as unworthy of God to be developed and with "no other excuse than invincible ignorance."

T.M.P. Mahadevan was also acquainted with Gnānānanda, and visited his ashram several times. He refers to the “child-like nature” of Gnānānanda, and to his “beaming face and soft voice.”<sup>173</sup>

It is said that, like other *siddhas*, Gnānānanda was also mystifying and unpredictable. He had ways of deflating one’s ego. For example, he did not greet a manager who came; he also did not greet a Governor of a State for an hour, and he would sometimes treat disciples with cool indifference.<sup>174</sup>

## 2. Teachings of Gnānānanda

### a) Self-enquiry

Gnānānanda’s main teaching was *vichara* or self-enquiry. This teaching was also referred to as *adhyatma yoga* (yoga concerning Self). Gnānānanda’s devotees emphasize that this teaching was similar to that of Ramaṇa Maharshi. Like Ramaṇa, he was strongly influenced by the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* and the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*.<sup>175</sup> They also say that this teaching is supported by classical Hinduism. They refer to the Katha Upanishad and to Shankara’s teaching in his *Sutra Bāshya* as being similar to this method of self-enquiry.<sup>176</sup> Gnānānanda had a preference for certain Upanishads, particularly those in which the *mahavakyas* are embedded.<sup>177</sup> A poem of Gnānānanda refers to this self-enquiry:

When I reach the depth of Thee,  
Oh, what will happen to me?  
Oh, what will happen to Thee?  
When I reach the depth of me,  
There is no longer Thee or me.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>173</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, Preface by T.M.P. Mahadevan, p. xxiv.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 44-48.

<sup>175</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, pp. 19, 35, 92, 94, 129, 130, 158, 279. *Guru* p. 84: “If you want to do yoga, begin by asking yourself who wants to do yoga.”

<sup>176</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 79 ft. 1 cites Ka. Up. 1.3.12: “The wise one having realized this Atman through the adhyatma yoga overcomes both elation and grief.” It also cites Shankara’s *Sutra Bāshya* 1.4.1. Adhyatma Yoga is a “concentration of the mind which has been withdrawn from the sense-objects”. The reference by Shankara is said to be Ka. Up. 1.3.13.

<sup>177</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 155.

<sup>178</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 149.

In this self-enquiry, the seeker seeks that place where nothing but pure awareness remains. One must not only get at the source of the "I" where thought no longer exists, but one must see that no thought arises. Gnānānanda used to also recite the following verse with respect to the importance of rooting out the idea of oneself:

There where nothing is,  
Everything in fact is.  
Penetrate this secret,  
And you will vanish from yourself,  
Then alone, in truth YOU ARE.<sup>179</sup>

Like Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda also liked to recite passages from the *Tayumanavar*. For example, he refers to the following in reference to the quest for the Self:

There the thought (mind) was born and there the thought (mind) died and rose purer. All states exist there. There the duality of experiencing ego and Witnessing Self is transcended.<sup>180</sup>

#### b) Meditation/Yoga

Unlike Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda emphasized yogic meditation, or *dhyāna*. Whereas Ramaṇa warned that meditation could reinforce the ego of the person meditating<sup>181</sup> Gnānānanda insisted on silent meditation, or *dhyāna*. He said that this meditation is the one essential spiritual practice; other practices such as *tapas*, solitude, vigils, fasting, or poverty, are all secondary.<sup>182</sup> Gnānānanda said that one does not discuss the subject of meditation; one immerses oneself in it, giving up everything else. The meditation is on the spirit in the depth of the heart, the *guhā*. The

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 280. See also p. 254. "Help me to cry a halt to this wandering of the mind."

<sup>181</sup> Appel à l'intériorité" (1970), *Intériorité*, p. 162. See also "Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore*, p. 71, where he says that meditation is only at the psychological level, and that although *ātman* can be found underlies all levels of being, it should not be tied down to any one level.

<sup>182</sup> *Guru* pp. 65, 66. *Tapas*, solitude, vigils, fasts and non-possession are secondary and have no direct connection with 'realization'.

key in meditation is the renunciation or annihilation of the mind. Gnānānanda was fond of saying, "Submit to me and I will strike down the mind."<sup>183</sup>

Gnānānanda says that the mind must be freed from all thought, and be lost in the *ātman*. The seeker is torn away from all signs. There is to be no reading, no prayer, no *pūjā*, only sustained *dhyāna*. The *sādhaka* or seeker must eliminate thought, by being a witness to these thoughts and ceasing to give them volition (*sankalpa*).

In this meditation, *prānāyama* is important—the attention paid to inhalation and exhalation of breath. The source of the breath is the source of the "I".<sup>184</sup> The meditation is without thoughts, although *mantras* may be used, such as *soham* ("He is I").<sup>185</sup> To avoid being carried away by thought, one is to find out who thinks the thought. He compares it to diving for a coin. The ocean is the mind, *manas*. The waves are its *vritti*, incessant movement, the turmoil of our thoughts. The waves must be stilled in order to see where to dive. Once the water has become calm and limpid, it is child's play to find the coin.

### c) Kashmir Śaivism

The lineage of Gnānānanda from Kashmir Śaivism is important in explaining the similarities to Kashmir Śaivism in much of Abhishiktānanda's thought. Panikkar refers to the influence of Kashmir Śaivism on Abhishiktānanda, but he does not appear to know that Gnānānanda may have been the source of at least some of this influence.<sup>186</sup> Even earlier, Monchanin had provided Abhishiktānanda with information about Kashmir Śaivism. Monchanin

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<sup>183</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 100. Osborne reports that Ramana said the same thing. See Preface to *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978), p. 12.

<sup>184</sup> *Guru*, p. 68: "There where the I springs up, springs up the breath."

<sup>185</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 130. A comparison is made to Ramaṇa, who said that this is a key *mantra* for meditation in his *Upadesa Saram*.

<sup>186</sup> Panikkar places the influence much later in Abhishiktānanda's life—towards the end of his life. See *Diary*, Introduction, p. xxiii. He also says that Abhishiktānanda learned at the same time the positive value of *śakti*. We have already seen that A. Shastri mentioned *śakti* and *kundalini* to Abhishiktānanda. The first reference by Abhishiktānanda to Kashmir Śaivism pre-dates even his meeting with Gnānānanda. See *Diary*, p. 40, (1.6.52), April 13/52, where he refers to *Pratyabhijñā* (a doctrine that teaches the recognition of Shiva in the soul). Early references to *śakti* include *Diary*, p. 58 (2.2.53): The Virgin is the *śakti* of Christ. *Diary*, p. 67(24.3.53): Mary as *Parā Śakti*. *Diary*, p. 80 (6.12.53): *yantras* [diagrams] filled with *śakti*, energy. *Diary*, p. 79 (5.12.53): *śakti* as *māyā*.

had corresponded with Lilian Silburn, the scholar who first explained Kashmir *Śaivism* for the West.<sup>187</sup>

In Kashmir *Śaivism*, the symbolism of the heart is central.<sup>188</sup> Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes the *Śvetāśvatara* Upanishad, which speaks of Rudra-Shiva as the Supreme Being, the great Self, seated in the Heart of creatures.<sup>189</sup> The transcendence of Shiva is ultimate in one's heart; the heart is thus the home of both the individual and the cosmic Self. The Heart of Shiva is not static; it is rather always in perpetual movement, a state of vibration, a continuous contracting and expanding. It is, paradoxically, a dynamic stillness. There is an emphasis on *śakti*, seen as a cosmically creative force that carries out the tasks of creation, maintenance and reabsorption of the universe. This power is also present in the body as the *kundalini* force. We are to use every means to grasp this force of *śakti* permeating the body, the mind, and the world, and to reintegrate this power into the non-dual.<sup>190</sup> It is the power is the Goddess, who is never separate from Shiva. *Śakti* drives the process of manifestation, or of emission of the entire universe from Shiva. This dynamic view of ultimate reality, together with the view of *Śakti*, is essential for Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic understanding of *advaita*.

Kashmir *Śaivism* also emphasizes esoteric *tantric* traditions. These traditions arose as a reaction against the Upanishadic emphasis on renunciation. *Tantric* practitioners try to reconcile

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<sup>187</sup> In a letter dated August 13, 1949, Monchanin refers Abhishiktānanda to a study by Renou and Silburn about the Vedic notion of Brahman. See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995). Some of Silburn's works were in Abhishiktānanda's possession at his death. Abhishiktānanda recommended to Bettina Bäumer the reading of Silburn's works (See *occasional Bulletin* #15, January, 1994, p. 20). In a November, 1949 letter to Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin shares his enthusiasm for the writings of Sūryanārāyana Śāstri, a professor at Madras. Śāstri gives a non-acosmic view of Shankara. Monchanin explicitly refers to terms including *Sivādvaita* and *pratyabhijñā*. Monchanin again refers to Śāstri in his letter to Abhishiktānanda of March, 1953.

<sup>188</sup> This description is taken from Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega: *The Triadic Heart of Shiva* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989).

<sup>189</sup> This Upanishad dates from the 5th or 6th century B.C.E.

<sup>190</sup> Muller-Ortega, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 51, 82. This power is centrifugal, emissional and expansive in one of its aspects. But it is also centripetal, absorptive and unitive. The centripetal motion is the *kundalini* energy that impels one back to the source and center of one's being. Abhinavagupta, one of the founders of Kashmir *Śaivism*, identifies this centripetal motion with the Goddess in the Heart, and with the Supreme Word, *Om*. In meditation, there is a doubling back of consciousness upon itself. This generates a sounding, a vibration, which is the *śakti*. This sound is also produced in the meeting between *guru* and disciple; the meeting produces a powerful vibratory sound from the depths of silence of the *guru's* consciousness. This silent sound is the sound-form of the Goddess.

the ascent to *mokṣa* or liberation with the experience of joyful enjoyment of the world. This influence is evident in Gnānānanda:

In our life there is in fact nothing that is profane. Nothing, no movement of our limbs, no activity of our senses, is untouched by sacredness which we bear in ourselves and which surrounds us.<sup>191</sup>

A tantric *jīvanmukta* (one-who-is-liberated-while-alive) has become a man-god, "a divinized being acting within the world rather than seeking to transcend it." By a *tantric sādhanā*, a journey of return, we unmask the presence of Shiva within ourselves, playing Shiva's own game of *līlā*. *Līlā* is the play of Shiva in creating and destroying the manifested world. In the return, we return to the unmanifested origin. The ultimate goal of Kashmir *Śaivism* is that of identity with Shiva.

Kashmir *Śaivism* is also notable for its emphasis on direct experience. The system of Abhinavagupta (a 10th century Kashmiri teacher) stresses direct experience over the more speculative activities of system-building and doctrinal argumentation. Gnānānanda refers to the importance of direct experience over conceptual knowledge. He makes the comparison to reading a railway timetable (conceptual know-ledge) and actually getting on the train.<sup>192</sup>

Kashmir *Śaivism* is suspicious of language; language has an empty or merely instrumental character. Gnānānanda advised a disciple not to waste time learning Sanskrit. He also advised not trying to give a name to the 'void' or *śūnya*, since by definition it is beyond all names.<sup>193</sup>

The influence of this Kashmir *Śaivism* is evident in many of Abhishiktānanda's writings. Abhishiktānanda makes a reference to the directness of the *advaitic* experience, and he relates it to *Śaivism*: "From my Shaivism, thanks to the Upanishads, I go straight to the goal."<sup>194</sup> It is an

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<sup>191</sup> *Guru*, p. 58.

<sup>192</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 155.

<sup>193</sup> *Guru*, pp. 66, 67.

<sup>194</sup> *Diary*, p. 149 (11.4.56). The footnote says that by 'Shaivism' he does not mean a system like *Śaiva Siddhānta*, which is not *advaitin*, but that he means the religious and monastic environment at Tapovanam and Arunāchala. The footnote therefore misses the influence of Kashmir *Śaivism*.

“interior mystery that is not thinkable, not to be grasped”<sup>195</sup> Abhishiktānanda prays for Shiva to awaken within him:

Sadā Shiva, awake within me! That was my “prayer” the other Friday at the *samādhi*. For in the depth of myself there is no other but You, not other but Myself.<sup>196</sup>

Abhishiktānanda also refers to the sound “OM”. Although this is emphasized in all kinds of Hinduism, Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes this sound in relation to the depths of silence. Abhishiktānanda refers to it as “the last sound through which man still tries to say something about God when he has once and for all abandoned all words and all concepts conceived by men and before he has entered into definitive silence.”<sup>197</sup> And in *The Mountain of the Lord*, he writes:

The OM which breaks forth from the roar of the Ganges, from the rustling of leaves, from the twittering of the birds and echoes indefinitely across the sheer cliff faces, is the OM which wells up in the pilgrim’s heart like an infinite echo repeating itself, increasing and finally merging into the primordial OM in the silence in which all is said.<sup>198</sup>

And, as in Kashmir *Śaivism*, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes *śakti* as inherent in each of us as our most elemental power:

In fact, there is probably nowhere else in the world where the mystery of the Presence has been felt as intensely as it has been in India since the remotest Vedic times—and that as a supremely active presence, the whole sphere of the divine Shakti, which somewhat resembles the *shekinah* of Jewish tradition. It is a presence that is immanent in every being that has issued from the hands of the Creator...<sup>199</sup>

Abhishiktānanda speaks of “the awakening to being” as being equivalent to the awakening of *śakti* (the explosive uncoiling of the *kundalinī* according to the tradition). In this same entry in the *Diary*, Abhishiktānanda uses the phrase “ascent to the depth”, the phrase that was used by the editor Panikkar as the title to the *Diary*.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> *Diary*, p. 142 (3.2.56). [*acintya, agrāhya*].

<sup>196</sup> *Diary*, p. 135 (4.1.56).

<sup>197</sup> *Guru*, p. 39.

<sup>198</sup> *The Mountain of the Lord*, p. 151.

<sup>199</sup> *Guru* p. 35.

<sup>200</sup> *Diary* p. 160, (12.11.160). See also *Diary* p. 209 (30.5.57).

Kashmir *Śaivism* emphasizes *śakti* as the female side of Shiva. Shiva is both male and female. Gnānānanda also refers to this. He says that the universe is sustained by twin eternal principles: Shiva and his *Śakti*.<sup>201</sup> Abhishiktānanda refers to this androgynous character of Shiva as illustrating nonduality. Shiva is neither man nor woman, not half man and half woman, not man plus woman. He says that this is symbolic of the mystery of the relation between God and ourselves that cannot be expressed on the basis of our present concepts.<sup>202</sup>

#### d) *Bhakti* and *Guru* Devotion

Gnānānanda emphasizes the importance of *bhakti* (devotion) to Vishnu, including Vishnu's *avatars* Rāma and Krishna. Gnānānanda says that only after the seeker has attained purity of mind through *karma*, and is psychically awakened by *bhakti* is he or she introduced to *jñāna*.<sup>203</sup> Abhishiktānanda says he never was able to participate in this worship of Vishnu; he could not identify with the depths of the subconscious from which these rituals issued.<sup>204</sup>

Unlike Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda emphasized devotion to himself as *guru*. This devotion is known as *guru bhakti*. According to Gnānānanda, one can attain realization only through the guidance and blessings of a *guru*. The *guru* is the one who by personal experience knows the path to the Real.<sup>205</sup> The *guru* and disciple exist only in relationship to one another. There is between them a non-dual reciprocity:

Guru and disciple form a dyad, a pair whose two components call for each other and belong together. No more than the two poles (of a magnet) can they exist without being related to each other. On the way towards unity they are a dyad. In the ultimate realization they are a non-dual reciprocity.<sup>206</sup>

In the *guru* and student relationship, there is itself an *advaita*; they are not two:

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<sup>201</sup> *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 298.

<sup>202</sup> *Diary*, p. 153 (72.7.56). *Sadguru Gnānānanda*, p. 142: Gnānānanda sometimes dressed as *Devī*, the Goddess.

<sup>203</sup> Gnānānanda said that a woman could also be a *jīvanmukta*. *Sadguru Gnānānanda* p. 41. Footnote 1 on the same page refers to the *Yoga Vāsishṭha*, which says that a woman has an equal right to self knowledge and if she makes an effort she can realise the self even earlier than a man does.

<sup>204</sup> *Guru*, p. 16. Abhishiktānanda was not attracted to Hindu *bhakti* so much as *jñāna*. *Diary*, p. 59 (22.2.53): His needs as a *bhakta* were fulfilled by the Church. He did, however, participate in devotion to Shiva, the formless God of whom the highest worship is "simply to disappear in him and to be no more capable even of giving him a name."

<sup>205</sup> *Guru*, p. 11. See also *Diary*, p. 31 (3.4.52).

In human encounters duality is still left intact. At their best we may say that a fusion takes place and that the two *become* one in love and desire; but in the meeting of guru and disciple there is not even a fusion, for we are in the sphere of the original non-duality.<sup>207</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that Gnānānanda always distinguished between the outer *guru* (the *guru* in visible form, the *guru-mūrti*, the instrumental *guru* who shows the way), and the *advaita guru* “who is the very light which shines from the *ātman* when it is finally discovered.” It is only this inner *guru* who can make one take the plunge into *advaita*. The true *guru* is ‘yourself’ within your own self.<sup>208</sup>

It seems that Gnānānanda later put more emphasis on himself as *guru*. In 1959, several years after Abhishiktānanda’s visits, a statue of Gnānānanda (his *silā*, or *vigraha*) was made. It is a life-sized image of him, carved from a single black stone. It was installed in a niche in a wall of the hall at the ashram. Devotees coming to the ashram would make their offerings to it. Later it was installed in a small *mandapam* with four pillars. Gnānānanda would stand by it while his devotees performed *pūjā* to the image. Marriages were also solemnized in front of it. Seven years before his death (or *mahasamadhi*) in 1974, Gnānānanda also prepared a hexagonal pit with the characteristics of a *samādhi* (memorial to a saint). He laid great stress on the power that emanates from *samadhis*, such as that of Ragothama Swami, the *Madhwa* saint, whose *samādhi* was across the river from Tapovanam.

Gnānānanda’s disciples believe that during his life Gnānānanda was a *jivanmukti* and that his *samādhi* today contains great powers. Prayers are said at Gnānānanda’s *samadhi* today, and his devotees believe in his assurance “Wherever and whenever you think of me, I shall be with you.”

<sup>206</sup> *Guru*, p. 12.

<sup>207</sup> *Guru*, p. 12.

<sup>208</sup> *Guru*, p. 84. Abhishiktānanda was introduced to Gnānānanda by his friend Harold Rose. Rose was an English Roman Catholic. He had been a novice Buddhist in Ceylon from 1949-52 and was also disciple of a Sufi when Abhishiktānanda met him. *Lettres d'un sannyāsi chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 127 (4.3.55).

### 3. Time spent with Gnānānanda

Abhishiktānanda spent three days with Gnānānanda in December 1955. He speaks of this as an “overwhelming encounter”. He says that for the first time he knew what India means by the term *guru*. “For the first time I understood *gurubhakti* and *guru-śakti* [devotion to the *guru*, power of the *guru*.]<sup>209</sup>

A few months later, Abhishiktānanda stayed with Gnānānanda for three weeks. He lived in a Hindu-Brahmin-Shaivite setting. He sat on a tiger skin with Gnānānanda.<sup>210</sup> One night Abhishiktānanda spent all alone in the temple with the Shiva *linga*. There were songs and dances around the sacred flame. In the spring of that same year he went to another ashram of Gnānānanda, where he stayed for three days.<sup>211</sup>

### 4. The influence of Gnānānanda on Abhishiktānanda

Abhishiktānanda believed that his meeting with Gnānānanda was “providential”.<sup>212</sup> He believed that this meeting fulfilled at a higher level the meeting that he had had with Mehta in Bombay. Like Mehta, Gnānānanda wanted Abhishiktānanda to meditate without thoughts, leaving aside not only all distractions and all useless conversation but even all reading. Abhishiktānanda compared his meeting with Gnānānanda to a meeting with Christ: “How mysterious that Christ can take for a Christian the form of a Shaivite *guru*!”<sup>213</sup>

Although Abhishiktānanda had initially gone to Tapovanam merely out of curiosity, the few words that Gnānānanda spoke to him went right to his heart, uncovering depths he had never suspected. He says that he learned nothing new at the level of words or ideas; but a communication beyond words had been established between them at the deepest level in each of them. It seemed to him that everything that Gnānānanda was saying to him was welling up directly from the inmost recesses of his own heart.<sup>214</sup> Although Gnānānanda never initiated him

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<sup>209</sup> *Letters*, p. 87 (L, 24.12.55) and *Diary*, p. 131 (25.12.55).

<sup>210</sup> *Letters*, p. 91 (19.3.56).

<sup>211</sup> *Letters*, p. 94 (MT, 24.6.56).

<sup>212</sup> *Diary*, p. 139 (14.1.66).

<sup>213</sup> *Letters*, p. 89 (L.20.1.56).

<sup>214</sup> *Guru*, p. 9.

in a formal *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda considered Gnānānanda to be his *guru*, and was willing to give himself over completely to him.<sup>215</sup> He says, “If that man were to ask me tomorrow to set out on the roads naked and silent like Sadāshiva *Brahman*, I would be unable to refuse.”<sup>216</sup> Abhishiktānanda found radiant peace, equability, and equanimity manifesting in Gnānānanda.<sup>217</sup> He says,

You felt that for him all distinction, *bheda*, was annulled and had vanished. In each disciple it was as if he directly perceived his truest personality, the Self alone, the *ātman*.<sup>218</sup>

Abhishiktānanda described the experience of being face to face with a *guru* with the experience of being face to face with ‘oneself’ in the most secret corner, with all pretence gone. The meeting with the *guru* is the decisive turning point in one’s life. But it is a meeting that can only take place when one has gone beyond the level of sense and intellect. What the *guru* says springs from the very heart of the disciple. It is not that another person is speaking to him. It is not a question of receiving from outside oneself new thoughts that are transmitted through the senses. When the vibrations of the master’s voice reach the disciple’s ear and the master’s eyes look deep into his then from the very depths of his being, from the newly discovered cave of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself.

Abhishiktānanda followed *gurubhakti*. He would prostrate himself before Gnānānanda:

My guru is the first man before whom I have been willing to prostrate. I now do it in fine style; a controlled fall to the ground, with arms extended, touching the ground first with the ears, then with the forehead; then half rising, you do it again, then you stand up and touch the master’s feet with your hands, which are then brought up to the eyes.<sup>219</sup>

It is interesting that one of the first questions that Abhishiktānanda asked Gnānānanda was whether his position concerning supreme reality was *dvaita* or *advaita*. Does any difference remain between God and creatures? Gnānānanda’s answer was, “What is the use of such questions? The answer is within you.” Abhishiktānanda also asked whether Gnānānanda

<sup>215</sup> *Letters*, p. 87 (L. 24.12.55).

<sup>216</sup> *Letters*, p. 90 (L. 14.3.56).

<sup>217</sup> *Diary*, p. 139 (14.1.56).

<sup>218</sup> *Guru*, p. 83.

performed rites of initiation. The answer was, “Initiations—what is the use of them? Either the disciple is not ready, in which case the so-called initiation is no more than empty words; or else the disciple is ready and then neither words nor signs are necessary.”<sup>220</sup>

### *E. Buddhist Influences*

As already mentioned, Abhishiktānanda was introduced to the works of D.T. Suzuki by a disciple of Ramaṇa in 1949. He read the available books “eagerly”.<sup>221</sup> He also refers to writings by Alan Watts, another popularizer of Zen for the West.<sup>222</sup>

The reading of Buddhist sources in Ramaṇa’s *ashram* must have contributed to Abhishiktānanda’s view that the *advaitic* experience is similar to the enlightenment experience or *satori* of Zen Buddhism.<sup>223</sup> For Abhishiktānanda, Hindu *advaita* and Zen Buddhism speak of the same *advaitic* experience.<sup>224</sup> He refers to the enlightenment that he seeks as *satori*.<sup>225</sup> He refers to the meaning of *buddha* as ‘awakening’.<sup>226</sup> This awakening is something beyond

<sup>219</sup> *Letters*, p. 91 (MT 25.3.56).

<sup>220</sup> *Guru*, p. 8.

<sup>221</sup> This appears to have included D.T. Suzuki: *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. See *Intériorité*, p. 44, ft. 9. The first series of these essays by Suzuki was first published in 1949; the second series was already available in 1950.

<sup>222</sup> *Diary*, p. 39 (1.6.52): “Christ left us his own ‘genius’, that is, his Spirit.” In *Intériorité*, p. 46, ft. 14, the editor J. Dupuis cites the following quotation regarding the oneness of God, included in Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York, 1947). “A oneness indeed which is actually more real and intimate than what we normally would describe as identification.” At p. 138, Watts says that we need some terms other than pantheistic monism or theistic dualism if there is to be a vital relationship between mysticism and Christian theology. It is clear that Abhishiktānanda read this book, since he recommended it to Fr. Lemarié. *Lettres d’un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 58 (11.6.52).

<sup>223</sup> *Intériorité*, p. 43. He cites the familiar “I collect wood, I carry water” referred to in Suzuki’s *Essays on Zen*:

*O la chose merveilleuse!*  
*O la chose surnaturelle!*  
*O la chose miraculeuse!*  
*Je ramasse du bois et je tire de l’eau.*

<sup>224</sup> *Diary*, p. 140 (21.1.56).

<sup>225</sup> *Diary*, p. 49, (15.7.49). “*Satori* is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in “myself.” And God himself is not this centre, for God is without place [*a-deśa*], as he is without time [*a-kāla*]; this God is as really in his *līlas* as in himself, if we venture to make the distinction.”

<sup>226</sup> *Intériorité*, p. 50.

concepts. Abhishiktānanda uses the Buddhist raft analogy to explain how concepts are useful but one must leave them behind.<sup>227</sup> He compares the awakening of Buddha to that of Jesus.<sup>228</sup>

In 1952, while he was meditating in the cave, Abhishiktānanda continued to think about parallels with Buddhism:

Passing beyond joy is one of the degrees of Buddhist , meditation [*dhyāna*]. When “my” joy becomes full, it has ceased to be mine, and that is precisely why it is full, it is the joy, the Peace, primordial, essential, the very same as God enjoys in himself, in “me”, in every being...<sup>229</sup>

At this time, Abhishiktānanda speaks of his baptism as a vow of *bodhisattva*, and of his commitment to live “every minute *Zen*”.<sup>230</sup>

In March 1953 Abhishiktānanda writes:

Yesterday evening I finally understood the Buddhist position of *anatman*, (unsubstantiality of the self). It is not myself who encounters the Real in the depths of my self. My feelings just as my thought are powerless. It is only in [the eclipse] of my awareness of myself that there appears that awareness of the Self. It is not myself who attains to the Depths, it is the Depth itself which reveals itself in the disappearance of this (peripheral) self.<sup>231</sup>

It is interesting that Monchanin was also interested in Buddhism. This interest began as an adolescent, when Monchanin’s father gave him a copy of the *Legend of the Buddha*.<sup>232</sup> Monchanin even gave lectures on Buddhism.<sup>233</sup> Abhishiktānanda said this interest was more due to the fact that Buddhism had a monastic life, unlike the life of the Hindu monk.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>227</sup> *Diary* p. 69 (30.3.53). and p. 169 (22.11.56).

<sup>228</sup> *Diary*, p. 156 (6.11.56).

<sup>229</sup> *Diary*, p. 48 (15.7.52).

<sup>230</sup> *Diary*, pp. 49, 50 (17.7.52 and 21.7.52).

<sup>231</sup> March/53 letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 20.

<sup>232</sup> *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), pp. 20, 172

<sup>233</sup> In 1949, Monchanin gave a talk in Pondicherry on “The Absolute according to Buddhism”. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux* ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 55.

<sup>234</sup> *Diary* p. 114, (8.8.55). This remark by Abhishiktānanda seems an oversimplification, especially in view of the fact that Monchanin apparently had less interest in monasticism than he did.

Gnānānanda also taught Abhishiktānanda to think about Buddhism and Hindu *advaita* as complementary:

Later on, when Vanya [Abhishiktānanda] recalled this conversation, he admitted that he had never previously understood as he then did, the Buddha's teaching about the need for our meditation to be successively purified. We have to leave behind the place of thinking, then that of joy, then that of peace; next, in more advanced meditations, we have to leave behind in their turn all the negations which have acted as supports in leaving behind one stage after another, until we have passed beyond every affirmation and equally every negation, and have entered the total silence, in which one who has reached so far is no longer aware of being silent—since he has passed into the *ākāsha* of the heart, the 'super-space', which can no longer be circumscribed or localized.<sup>235</sup>

Other devotees of Gnānānanda also associated him with Buddhist teachings. Gnānānanda is said to have visited many Buddhist viharas.<sup>236</sup> At times he gave questions similar to *Zen koans*.<sup>237</sup> Gnānānanda's teaching is also reminiscent of Buddhism in stressing that attachment is the root cause of every experience, good as well as bad.<sup>238</sup> This view is also expressed by Abhishiktānanda, who says,

What impedes the flash [of enlightenment] is that the spirit is clogged with all kinds of desires and mental conceptions—a truth which the Buddha pressed upon mankind with unequalled force.<sup>239</sup>

In 1956, Abhishiktānanda tried meditating using the Buddhist mantra, *OM mani padme OM*. He interpreted it as meaning "everything is *padma*." He found it too complicated as a *mantra* "at present".<sup>240</sup>

In 1972, he says that Buddhism was needed to correct the over-conceptualization in the later Upanishads in Hinduism:

Later, people want to discuss and argue (Śvetāśvara, Maitrī), and it needed the stern application of the Buddha's rod to call them to order.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> *Guru*, p. 67.

<sup>236</sup> *Sadguru* p. 10.

<sup>237</sup> *Sadguru* p. 199.

<sup>238</sup> *Sadguru*, p. 122. Of course there are also many Hindu sources which stress the importance of avoiding desire and acting without attachment.

<sup>239</sup> "Approach to the Upanishads", *The Further Shore*, p. 71.

<sup>240</sup> *Diary* p. 156 (7.11.56). But see *Diary*, p. 170 (23.11.56).

For Abhishiktānanda, the Maitri Upanishad represents the end of the great age of the Upanishads. The earliest Upanishads, the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*, are the ones which “most faithfully express Upanishadic thought in its radical purity.” They imply a “stripping off of everything ‘religious’”. But the *Kaṭha* and the *Maitrī* Upanishads represent a “falling back” on discursive thought. The Buddha reinstated the value of experience as supreme, although he developed this intuition by using concepts very different from those used by the Upanishads:

For instance, in place of the concept of *sarvam, pūrnam*, the All, Fullness, Totality—which had not been able to prevent that experience from being analysed to death—he offered instead that of *sūnya*, the void, vacancy. He himself maintained and required others to maintain silence on all questions termed transcendental; but one knows well how the silence of the Buddha came to be expounded by countless commentaries...<sup>242</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that the mission of the Buddha was to express in “drastically negative” terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.<sup>243</sup>

In 1971, Abhishiktānanda met a Japanese Dominican, Fr. Oshida.<sup>244</sup> Oshida had an ashram in Japan called ‘Takamori’ (“the cave of divine silence”). Oshida gave a brief course of *zazen* at Jyoytiniketan, which Abhishiktānanda attended. Later, Abhishiktānanda took him to Hardwar, Rishikesh and Delhi. Abhishiktānanda comments:

The same theological problems and paradoxes (?) as we have here. Freed from all formulas, he is ‘existentially’ Christian at a depth so much greater than that which is reached by rites and symbols. But when it is a question of defining how and why he is Christian, it is impossible capture this reality—all explanations are elusive. Only he who has reached the ‘depth’ can understand one who speaks

<sup>241</sup> *Letters* p. 271 (MC, 13.6.72).

<sup>242</sup> “Approach to the Upanishads”, *The Further Shore* pp. 77, 78. This view of the Upanishads may derive to some extent from Olivier Lacombe. See his article “Orient et Occident”. *Études Carmélitaines*, April/1931, vol. 16, pp. 133-159. At p. 147 he speaks of the time of the Upanishads, when Indian spirituality “se pétrit”. In *L’Absolu Selon le Vedanta*, he says at p. 9 that Shankara knew only the *Bṛihadāraṇyaka*, *Chāndogya*, *Taittirīya*, *Kaṭhaka* and *Kena* Upanishads.

<sup>243</sup> *Intériorité*, p. 178.

<sup>244</sup> Oshida has written about this meeting. See “God’s Harpstring”, Abhishiktānanda Society Occasional *Bulletin* (6.12.82).

from the 'depth'. A smile, a freedom, which those who do not know completely misunderstand.<sup>245</sup>

He refers to Fr. Oshida as living his ancestral Zen and his Christian faith "in a marvellous harmony and with total freedom in the Spirit an intensely Christian heart in a Buddhist psyche."<sup>246</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Abhishiktānanda speaks about Buddhism in a letter to Marc Chaduc, his disciple:

It is good that you should have had this experience of Buddhism. Provided that you do not become attached even in that to the form of the without-form! For me everything is in the Upanishads. But the Buddha's radically purified training is a marvellous aid for getting inside them. It is a radical deliverance from our attempts to think [...] later we have to be able to recognize the value of the *namarupa* [...] We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist.<sup>247</sup>

Abhishiktānanda makes frequent reference to Buddhism in several of his writings. The awakening of Śakyamuni is referred to in numerous entries in the *Diary* as late as 1973.<sup>248</sup> He refers to the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen, and other references to Zen.<sup>249</sup> He refers to the value of *koans*.<sup>250</sup> He refers to *śūnyatā*<sup>251</sup> and to *satori*.<sup>252</sup> Because of these numerous references, we must make reference to Buddhist explanations in later chapters. At this point, it must be emphasized that Abhishiktānanda's use of Buddhism is in the context of its similarity with *advaita*. Whether or not his interpretation of Buddhist doctrines like *satori*, *śūnyatā* or *anātman* are correct remains to be investigated.

<sup>245</sup> *Letters* p. 273 (OB, 30.1.71).

<sup>246</sup> Letter to Fr. J. Lemarié, 1971, cited in Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", *Cistercian Studies* 1983, vol. 4, p. 323.

<sup>247</sup> *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

<sup>248</sup> *Diary*, p. 145 (5.3.56), p. 169 (22.11.56), p. 270 (12.4.64), p. 305 (12.1.69), p. 378 (21.4.73).

<sup>249</sup> *Diary* p. 247 (13.11.62); p. 288 (11.11.66); p. 310 (14.1.310): "the incompleteness of Zen"; He had met with representatives of Zen who maintain necessity of series of enlightenments; p. 323 (24.11.70); p. 367 (3.1.73): *zazen*. *Letters*, p. 187 (RP, 29.10.66); p. 238 (M, 13.11.70).

<sup>250</sup> *Guru*, Preface, p. xv.

<sup>251</sup> *Diary*, p. 46 (12.6.52); p. 52 (2.8.52); p. 68 (39.3.53); p. 81 (6.12.53).

<sup>252</sup> *Diary*, p. 49. "Satori [enlightenment] is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in "myself." And God himself is not this centre, for God is without place [*a-deśa*], as he is without time [*a-kāla*]' this God is as really in his *līlā* as in himself, if we venture to make the distinction." Enlightenment is *buddhatvam*, *satori* is a "passing beyond".

I have already mentioned that Abhishiktānanda eagerly read the writings by D.T. Suzuki. It should be noted that Suzuki's approach, as well as that of other popularizers of Zen for the West, such as Blofeld and Watts, has been criticized by some writers as giving a romantic spin to Zen teaching. Dale S. Wright says that the very idea of Zen enlightenment put forward by these writers is based on a Western romanticism.<sup>253</sup> Wright says that this romantic view has become the orthodox view of Zen—that Zen mind is “pure experience”, the immediate, direct apprehension of the objective world as it is on its own prior to the subjective mediation of language and thought. It is the Eternal Now, a timeless reality. But Wright says that this view is contrary to the texts. Wright suggests not making the move to a timeless, transcendental experience. For him, all human experience is finite, historical and open to transformation. Temporality and experience are inseparable. Even the experience of timelessness occurs in time. Wright says that theologies of eternity share the experience that temporalized life is pain and that the divine is “Wholly Other” than this.

But Wright's analysis needs to be looked at more closely. He is insufficiently critical of the model that he himself uses (the Hermeneutic Model), and of his reliance on Kant for his emphasis on finitude. Wright also does not acknowledge the extent to which his view of Zen changes Zen's own interpretation of itself. For example, he explains the Zen doctrine that Zen is “beyond transmission” in a way that is the reverse of Zen understanding. The usual meaning is that Zen cannot be taught by words; rather, an enlightened master is needed to show the way by “mind-to-mind transmission”. But Wright reverses this and says that the historical lineage of the Zen masters was the basis for the doctrine. In other words, the doctrine was necessary to maintain the tradition that had developed. The very idea of enlightenment is changed. It is no longer the repeating of the Buddha's experience, or of anyone else's experience. The “going beyond” of Zen is a historical transcendence; it remains in the world and does not repeat or replicate someone else's experience. What remains of enlightenment is the experience of the absence or void as “mystery”. Lacking secure and solid ground, the freedom and contingency of finite existence can be experienced.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Dale S. Wright: *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 181.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

If these are the only two possibilities: a timeless, secure ground versus a completely contingent and utterly finite experience, then it is clear that Abhishiktānanda chose the first. And it may be that the writings of D.T. Suzuki influenced him to express his ideas in romantic terms. But the Yogic Model, discussed in the chapter on Methodology, can incorporate some of the insights of Wright while maintaining a view of transcendence.

### F. Abhishiktānanda's Disciple Marc Chaduc

#### 1. Guru/Disciple relationship

Marc Chaduc was a young French seminarian who came to India with the specific purpose to learn from Abhishiktānanda. They started corresponding in May 1969, and they met in October 1971. Their first few days were spent in ceaseless conversation. Chaduc says,

By the second evening Fr. Le Saux (Henri) had 'volatilized' all my questions. He plunges (me) into the Source, beyond *logos* [the level of reasoning].<sup>255</sup>

It may seem strange that a disciple was himself an influence on Abhishiktānanda. But in teaching Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda learned what it was like to be a *guru* to someone else:

With him [Marc] and two young Hindus I experience from the other end what the *guru* is. It is really the *chela* (disciple) who *makes* the *guru*, and you have to have lived it, in order to grasp this relationship 'beyond words (...) Frightening, and what a responsibility. As I have often written, I think that a theology that goes further ought not to be written down, for fear of being misunderstood and misleading people; it can only be left to be divined from spoken words.<sup>256</sup>

Abhishiktānanda believed that the Upanishadic teaching is a secret which cannot be written down and is only properly passed on by means of the secret communication of *guru* to disciple.<sup>257</sup> The student must be prepared for the *advaitic* experience. Otherwise, the student will only hear words, which he or she would interpret wrongly, at the level of the mind.<sup>258</sup> There

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<sup>255</sup> *Letters*, p. 255 (L.16.11.71).

<sup>256</sup> *Letters*, p. 259 (OB 7.1.72). The two young Hindus are Ramesh Srivastava and Lalit Sharma. Abhishiktānanda first met them in 1966, but told them they were not yet ready to become disciples. *Letters*, p. 186 (L, 8.10.66).

<sup>257</sup> *Letters*, p. 267 (OB 22.5.72). This is very similar to the "mind-to-mind transmission" in Zen Buddhism.

<sup>258</sup> *Letters*, p. 177 (AMS 29.1.66).

is a danger of a false *advaita* that is thought and not experienced. The Vedantin secret must not be revealed except to the competent:

The Vedantin secret should however remain closed and only be revealed to the *adhikārī* [competent, one who is authorized, initiated], otherwise people would take it for the stupid position of the Rāmakrishna Mission and other Vedantin pedants—or else for the secularism that Vivekānanda often implies. [...] However there comes a time when...one should be able to accept [one's] the *anubhava* and one should dare to awaken to it those who are ready, whatever may be the anguish and the heartbreak.<sup>259</sup>

If the *guru* and disciple are each 'competent', the *guru*'s word "is like an arrow that goes straight to the disciple's heart and at once causes the spring to flow."<sup>260</sup> But the *guru* does not refer to his own experience:

...the *guru* who refers to his *own* experience shows by that very fact that he has missed *the* experience. Whoever has not disappeared in the light cannot testify to the light<sup>261</sup>

Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc had several retreats together. When not together, they wrote each other letters every day. As will be discussed in Chapter IV, it was in one of these retreats that Abhishiktānanda believed that he had finally attained to the *advaitic* experience.

A most unfortunate result of the relationship between Abhishiktānanda and Marc Chaduc was the destruction of much of Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*. Abhishiktānanda gave Chaduc his *Diary* entries from November 18, 1966, for him to do with as he liked. Chaduc copied excerpts from the *Diary*, and then threw away the original. There appears no reason to believe that the entries were not copied correctly; there are sufficient parallels in letters written by Abhishiktānanda from the same period. But much of the context of these published *Diary* entries is missing, as well as details of the relationship between Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc. Chaduc himself wrote a personal diary for this period of their time together. That diary is in the possession of Madame Odette Baumer-Despeigne; she does not allow anyone else to see it. One can only speculate as to what is in this diary, and what the reasons may be for suppressing it.

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<sup>259</sup> *Diary*, pp. 322, 323 (18.11.70).

<sup>260</sup> "Approach to the Upanishads", *Further Shore*, p. 71.

<sup>261</sup> *Letters*, p. 238 (M, .13.11.70). He says that the Christian *guru* is never anything but the manifestation of the Lord.

Only a very few excerpts from Chaduc's journal have been published by Odette Baumer-Despeigne.<sup>262</sup> These excerpts will be discussed in the next chapter, where I will explore descriptions of Abhishiktānanda's experience. From other information, we know that Chaduc could be cruel in what he said, and could say the most amazing things to Abhishiktānanda.<sup>263</sup> It seems that Chaduc challenged Abhishiktānanda to be faithful to his own writings. As a result, Abhishiktānanda turned more towards the acosmic model of a monk or *sannyāsī*.

## 2. The *dīkshā* of Marc Chaduc

Marc Chaduc was initiated as a *sannyāsī* in a joint ceremony performed both by Abhishiktānanda and by a Hindu, Swami Chidananda. Abhishiktānanda writes:

The rite was reduced to its essentials, without any Hindu reference. Chidananda was especially happy. He told me that he had rarely been as much satisfied after giving *sannyasa*.<sup>264</sup>

Prior to the *dīkshā*, Chaduc fasted. The night was devoted to reading the Bible and Upanishads. At 4 a.m. the Eucharist was celebrated. The stone plate and cup used in the Eucharist were later thrown into the Ganges, for "the real *sannyas* is the end of all signs."<sup>265</sup>

Abhishiktānanda describes the ceremony:

Very simple ceremony, but it was simply too beautiful. The three of us were simply radiant. Deep in the Ganga he pronounced the old formula of renunciation. I join him; he plunges into (the) water; I raise him up, and we sing our favourite *mantras* to the *Purusha*. He discards all his clothes in (the) water, and I receive him as from the maternal womb. We envelop him in the fire-coloured dress. We communicate to him the *mahavakyas*, and I give him the 'envoi': "Go to where is no return..." And immediately he went on, his begging bowl in hand, to I do not know where...<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct.

<sup>263</sup> Conversation between Bäumer and Visvanathan, Susan Visvanathan, *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of Abhishiktānanda, A French Monk in India* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998). *op. cit.* p. 98.

<sup>264</sup> *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

Abhishiktānanda regarded the *dīkshā* as more than a simple sign; he referred to it as a symbol in the language of Jung, in religious terms, a mystery.<sup>267</sup> As a *sannyāsī*, Chaduc was not-born. He received the name *Ajatananda*, meaning 'bliss of the not-born'. He had achieved the realm beyond time. But the *dīkshā* would "... fix in time an ending of time, to which those who locate themselves in time and space may refer."<sup>268</sup>

Abhishiktānanda envied Chaduc's courage.<sup>269</sup> He says that Chaduc showed what he should have had the courage to do earlier, "putting into practice the beautiful things I wrote. I am too much a 'litterateur', as M. [Monchanin] used to tell me."<sup>270</sup>

After the death of Abhishiktānanda, Chaduc returned to France for a year for family reasons. He returned to India, and in January 1975, he settled in a hut for a ten year period of silence (*mauna*). The hut had been purchased by the Sivānanda ashram. In April, 1977, Chaduc disappeared. His glasses were found in his hut, but there was no sign of him. It is believed that Chaduc may have ended his own life by offering himself to the Ganges in the rite of *jala-samādhi* allowing his body to be carried away by the Ganges in order to release his *ātman*.<sup>271</sup>

## G. Other Important Influences

### 1. Raimon Panikkar

As stated in Chapter II, the comparative philosophy of J.L. Mehta is relied on in this thesis. Of interest here is the fact that Panikkar taught at some of the same universities as J.L.

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<sup>267</sup> *Letters*, p. 313 (JS, 20.9.73).

<sup>268</sup> *Letters*, p. 296 (MC, 24.4.73).

<sup>269</sup> *Letters*, p. 303 (MT, 6.7.73).

<sup>270</sup> *Letters*, p. 302 (MR, 3.7.73).

<sup>271</sup> Chaduc was strongly influenced by Swami Ram Tirth, who was rumoured to have ended his own life this way. Another disciple of Abhishiktānanda also disappeared—Sister Tèrese. She was from the Carmel of Lisieux in France. She moved to India, and stayed first at the Carmel of Pondicherry. Abhishiktānanda met her in September 1965. He also visited her at Rishikesh and Jyotimiketan. Abhishiktānanda corresponded with her frequently. About the same time that Marc arrived in India, Sister Tèrese received permission to lead the life of a hermit in the Himalayas, and Abhishiktānanda found a place for her to stay in Hardwar. She disappeared from her hut in 1976. *Diary* p. xxviii; *Letters* p. 255.

Mehta, and he corresponded with Mehta.<sup>272</sup> Panikkar has described his life as being Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist.<sup>273</sup>

Panikkar was also a long time friend of Abhishiktānanda. Abhishiktānanda first met Panikkar in 1957.<sup>274</sup> He stayed with him the last half of August 1957. Panikkar at that time was a professor at Kashi Hindu University. After that, Abhishiktānanda had many visits with Panikkar. They had many long talks together, and they shared their thoughts for more than ten years.<sup>275</sup> Frequently, they would spend Christmas together. Once they took a three-week pilgrimage together to Gangotri in the Himalayas. They spent several weeks together at Varanasi, and they had planned to spend another month there together in 1973.<sup>276</sup> After Abhishiktānanda's death, Panikkar edited Abhishiktānanda's *Diary* for publication. Panikkar also wrote an article about Abhishiktānanda that will be referred to in this thesis.<sup>277</sup>

It is often difficult to tell who influenced whom.<sup>278</sup> Like Abhishiktānanda, Panikkar saw *advaita* as non-monistic. Panikkar says that *advaita* opposes simultaneously both pure monism and pure dualism. It also transcends as well as embodies both the extremes.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>272</sup> Panikkar met Mehta in 1954, when they were both at Banaras Hindu University. Mehta was at first prejudiced against him as a priest. See Raimon Panikkar's Introduction to *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), p. xiv.

<sup>273</sup> See Joseph Prabhu, ed. *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), p. 5.

<sup>274</sup> *Letters*, p. 104 (L.27.5.57).

<sup>275</sup> Comment by James Stuart. *Letters*, p. 216.

<sup>276</sup> They spent a week together in December 1957 and again in December 1958. Panikkar was then absent from India for 4 years. On his return, they met in March, May-June (3 week pilgrimage to Gangotri), October and December of 1964. In January 1965, they both climbed to the top of Arunāchala to celebrate a Christian liturgy. In December 1965, Abhishiktānanda spent three weeks at Varanasi with Panikkar. They both attended a seminar in 1968. They met in Varanasi in the fall of 1968. In 1970 Panikkar was in Europe. They both attended a seminar in Nagpur in October 1971. They had planned to spend a month together at Varanasi in 1973. This never took place.

<sup>277</sup> Raimundo Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda" *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University) 3 (1982), n. 3, 429-51.

<sup>278</sup> Abhishiktānanda's influence has been seen in Panikkar's *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973) and *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). See Wayne Teasdale: "Abhishiktānanda's Mystical Intuition of the Trinity", *Cistercian Studies*, 1983, No. 1, pp. 59-75), p. 74. Abhishiktānanda himself said that he would not have the impertinence to call Panikkar his disciple; he was too intelligent for that. But Abhishiktānanda says that there was a mutual listening and osmosis. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 310 (30.12.64).

<sup>279</sup> R. Panikkar: *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 281.

One clear influence by Panikkar on Abhishiktānanda is his book *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*.<sup>280</sup> Abhishiktānanda read this book and was very impressed by it. At the time, Abhishiktānanda was also fearful of it, because of its statement of the “provisional truth” of Christianity. He wrote to Panikkar:

You have that terrible phrase on p. 63 [of *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*] that Christianity is ‘provisional’, only of this world.<sup>281</sup>

This view, that Christianity is only provisional, was later a position that Abhishiktānanda adopted for himself.<sup>282</sup>

One crucial influence of Panikkar is therefore with respect to Abhishiktānanda’s changing views of religious pluralism. In Chapter II, I have referred to Abhishiktānanda’s view that religions, myths and archetypes are culturally conditioned, and that we need to go beyond them. In a letter to Panikkar, Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that this means that that the so-called Christian approach to the ‘mystery’ is just one of the approaches.<sup>283</sup> It is one of the marvellous dreams that are fashioned in order to express the drive of our *psyche*. This psychic drive is expressed in culturally conditioned symbols: “...no deep ‘drive’ can be expressed without symbols. There is no religion without a culture.”<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Raimon Panikkar: *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964).

<sup>281</sup> *Letters*, p. 187 (29.10.66). *Diary*, p. 286 (24.10.66). “R.P. [Panikkar] has written this incredible line about Christianity: “provisional, just for the time being,” *Unknown Christ*, p. 63. And so? It is Vedānta that holds the key to eternity. The Church then is only for the not-risen ones, for those who do not have the experience of the *asmī* [I am].”

<sup>282</sup> *Letters*, p. 178 (L.22.9.63); *Diary* p. 286 (24.10.66); citation from *Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981, first published 1964) p. 63.

<sup>283</sup> *Diary*, p. 282 (RP, 23.12.72). James Stuart says that this view appears to have been at least partly triggered by Panikkar’s essay on the “Supername”: “Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality: the Supername”, Jerusalem: Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Theological Studies, 1972). A *Diary* entry from 1971 refers to Panikkar’s view that every theological problem arises out of a particular faith. (11.12.71). See also *Diary*, p. 371 (2.2.73), where Abhishiktānanda specifically refers to Panikkar’s idea of the Supername.

<sup>284</sup> *Letters*, p. 285 (MC, 30.1.73).

## 2. Chidananda

Swami Chidananda was the *Acharya* at Sivānanda Ashram, Rishikesh, and the successor to Swami Sivānanda.<sup>285</sup> He was born as Sridhar Rao in 1916, the son of a prosperous *Zamindar* (landowner). He graduated in 1938 from Loyola College. His education at this Christian college is significant, because Chidananda later makes many parallels between Christianity and Hinduism.<sup>286</sup> He joined Sivānanda's ashram in 1943, and was initiated in 1949. In 1959, he made a three-year tour to America, as the representative of the Divine Life Society. He made another global tour in 1968.

Abhishiktānanda often stayed at the Sivānanda Ashram. His first mention of Chidananda is in 1965. He considered Chidananda to be "a truly spiritual man" whose friendship he greatly valued.<sup>287</sup>

Chidananda provided the Hindu side to the joint initiation or *dīkshā* of Marc Chaduc. Although Abhishiktānanda had visited the ashram many times, Chaduc was responsible for bringing Abhishiktānanda and Chidananda together. Chidananda has been interviewed by Sister Vandana about this meeting with Abhishiktānanda. He said of Abhishiktānanda,

It is something very wonderful and very mysterious, the way in which we both just absolutely went into a state of at-one-ment, we saw each other the very first time. (I had heard of him in 1969 in Lyons.) It was as though we had known each other always—a perfect and absolute empathy[...] I could see from his face that an inner light had sparked in him.<sup>288</sup>

Chidananda says that Chaduc and Abhishiktānanda

...were both imbued with the purest spirit of highest Vedanta. They had both gone into the realms of the Unknown, the Undefinable, the Transcendental; not

<sup>285</sup> The ashram is run by the Divine Life Society. Among the 300 books that Sivānanda is said to have written are his books *Kundalini Yoga* (Divine Light Society, 1971) and *Tantra Yoga, Nada Yoga and Kriya Yoga* (India Divine Life Society, 1986).

<sup>286</sup> See the Website at <http://www.SivanandaDlshq.org/saints/chida.htm>.

<sup>287</sup> *Letters*, p. 173 (AMS, 12.7.65). Abhishiktānanda heard of the Sivānanda ashram at least as early as 1955 when he was at Gnānānanda's ashram. *Guru*, p. 93. In the early days, monks from Sivānanda's ashram would stay with Gnānānanda. The connection apparently continues to this day, since when I visited Tapovanam in 2001, there were two visiting monks from Sivānanda Ashram. There is a reference to Sivānanda's ideas on *guru-bhakti* in *Ermîtes du Saccidananda*, p. 99, ft. 7. *Guru-bhakti* was also emphasized by Gnānānanda.

<sup>288</sup> Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December 1974, p. 497.

drawn into “name and form” as though they had, in their aspirations, pierced “the cloud of unknowing” and had come out into pure white light.<sup>289</sup>

Before the *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Chaduc about Chidananda:

The Greek and Cartesian mentality. Chidanandaji plays marvellously with both of them; in any case, are they not both simply *ideas*? Certainly this experience of advaita deals a heavy blow to all laws, rites and formulations.<sup>290</sup>

Based on his discussions with Chidananda, Abhishiktānanda wrote *Sannyasa: The Call to the Desert*. This book was first published in serial form (7 issues) in the Sivānanda Ashram publication *The Divine Life*, from September 1973 onwards. Chidananda prescribed this book to be read by those in the ashram who wanted to be initiated. The book has since been included in *The Further Shore*.

In his own book *The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga*<sup>291</sup> Chidananda seems to accept the Samkhya dualism between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* (p. 6). But later in the book, he says that *Prakriti* is nothing but *māyā* and that therefore there is no *Prakriti* at all (pp. 135, 145). We should reject that which is unreal (p. 66). We recognize the unreal by reason of our mind, which is also unreal. When thought ceases, mind ceases. In this connection Chidananda writes about the doctrine of no-mind, *Amanaskatga*:

Through our thought-process only we come to the conclusion that inside us there is something other than the body. Through our thought-process only we recognise the existence of the mind. If there is no thought-process, we will not even know that there is a mind. (p. 176)

Chidananda says that there is a link between the mind and the inner sense-centre. It may be cut off, then the outer sense may perceive the object and the inner sense may register it, but the mind will refuse to pay attention to it (p. 128). One is then detached, unaffected, with a witness-consciousness. Chidananda also refers to intuitive experience and the direct vision by the Yogis. He cites the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* for the distinction between self and not-self (p. 67). He is against the seeking of special powers or *siddhis*, but he does mention the importance of *śakti* and *kundalini* (pp. 123, 193).

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<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.* It is interesting how Chidananda’s description uses both Christian and Hindu terms.

<sup>290</sup> *Letters*, p. 294 (MC, 12.4.73).

Chidananda sees many similarities between *advaita* and other religions. He refers to the Buddha, and also makes comparisons to Christianity. For example, he says that renunciation is like the agony of Jesus (pp. 24, 28).

Abhishiktānanda continued to visit Sivānanda Ashram as late as 1973. He read a book there by Sivānanda that made him want to return to the sacred texts.<sup>292</sup> It was while he was staying at Sivānanda Ashram in 1973 that Abhishiktānanda had his heart attack. At the time of his heart attack, he was found lying in the road by a friend from Sivānanda ashram.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Swami Chidananda: *The Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga* (The Divine Life Society, 1991). Page numbers cited are from this edition.

<sup>292</sup> *Letters*, p. 328 (MC, 8.4.73): "Sivānanda's book has made me go to the texts [Hindu Scriptures]".

<sup>293</sup> This was Mother Yvonne. Her account of finding Abhishiktānanda after his heart attack is set out in the article by Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 500.

## IV. Abhishiktānanda's Description of His Advaitic Experience

### A. Doubts and Authenticity of the experience

Abhishiktānanda had doubts concerning the authenticity of his *advaitic* experience. He wondered whether his experience was a “mirage” and whether he was risking his eternity by continuing the experiments with the experience.<sup>1</sup> What kept him going in his experiments with *advaita* was his belief that if the Christian mystery is true, it will still be intact beyond the *advaitic* experience.<sup>2</sup> He was also aware of the possibility of misunderstanding the experience, or of confusing it with feelings, or with an impulse from the subliminal psyche.<sup>3</sup> He wondered whether he was attracted to *advaita* only because it was exotic, daring, and rare.<sup>4</sup> In the view of some Hindus, these doubts show that Abhishiktānanda did not attain the *advaitic* experience:

I must say that the idea that Abhishiktānanda had to reconcile his *advaitic* experience with Christianity is absurd. If it is true, then I postulate that he did not have the *advaitic* experience. *Advaitic* experience is self-contained and its own proof. It does not require reconciliation with any sectarian creed. It transcends them.<sup>5</sup>

Abhishiktānanda himself agreed that his doubts were not consistent with an *advaitic* experience:

In the experience there is no doubt—*na samśaya!* So what do these doubts mean? The ego [*aḥamkāra*] and the intellect [*buddhi*] are unwilling to disappear.<sup>6</sup>

Panikkar had discussions with Abhishiktānanda about his doubts. In his “Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, written after Abhishiktānanda's death, Panikkar writes:

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, p. 180 (27.11.56).

<sup>2</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21 (17.4.56).

<sup>3</sup> Abhishiktānanda “Esseulement” (1956), *Intériorité*, p. 136; “Notes de théologie trinitaire”, *Intériorité*, p. 239.

<sup>4</sup> *Diary*, p. 75 (27.9.53).

<sup>5</sup> Sita Ram Goel: *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi; Voice of India, 1988, revised 1994), p. 137 (Correspondence from Devananda to Bede Griffiths). Goel says at p. 65 that Abhishiktānanda's poetry was mistaken for mystical experience.

<sup>6</sup> *Diary*, p. 373 (13.4.73).

You knew that the true experience is irresistible and that you had not yet undergone it, since doubts were still creeping into your...what? Was it not the *mind* that was responsible for all this conflict? You used to retort, when you felt that I was making it too simple: Would not the entire structure of Christianity collapse? Would it not mean “the explosion of dogmatic, cultural and sociological Christianity?” So what? was my immediate, exasperating reaction.<sup>7</sup>

From Abhishiktānanda’s own writings, it is evident that he did not achieve the *advaitic* experience until at least 1972, the year before he died, and perhaps not even until his heart attack in 1973.

In 1953, while in the Arutpal Tirtham cave at Arunāchala, he wrote that he had had more the *idea* of *advaita* than the *res* [the thing itself, the reality]. He wrote that he had not had the experience itself:

For the time being I am playing with *advaita*. I am like someone on the point of taking a swim in the sea, who reassures himself, dips a toe in the water, and indefinitely postpones the dive which alone will give peace. I try to understand my *advaita* as a Christian and a Westerner...<sup>8</sup>

When Harilal first met him in 1953, he urged Abhishiktānanda to make the plunge into *advaita*. They met again in March 1957. Harilal was amazed that Abhishiktānanda had not yet “arrived” at the *advaitic* experience.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of 1956, Abhishiktānanda made a retreat at Mauna Mandir [The Temple of Silence] at Kumbakonam. He stayed for 32 days in an underground room in total seclusion and complete silence. Food was handed in through the window. His only book was the breviary, and his only activity was celebrating the Eucharist and writing in his diary. While on this retreat at Mauna Mandir, Abhishiktānanda wrote that he had not yet achieved the experience:

I was hoping, at least in some ways, that here the enlightenment would take place and that the definitive light, the experience [*anubhūti*] would solve the problem by transcending it, whatever might be the practical consequences of this experience. But here, nothing!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Raimundo Panikkar: “Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University, 1982), n. 3, p. 439.

<sup>8</sup> *Diary*, p. 66 (21.3.53 and 23.3.53).

<sup>9</sup> *Diary*, p. 201 (21.3.57). Harilal had originally told him that non-realization was nothing but an excuse to escape from reality. Abhishiktānanda: “Un Ermite de l’Inde, Harilal”, *Revue Monchanin* (1970), Vol. III, No. 5, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Diary*, p. 194 (6.12.56).

In 1967, Abhishiktānanda expressed the fear that, despite all that he had written, his so-called experience might be nothing but a projection of his desire to exist (*besoin d'être*).<sup>11</sup> The Self that he was trying to experience is said to be not subject to death; he therefore wondered whether his attempt to reach it was merely a desire to survive death.

In 1969, Abhishiktānanda spoke of the anguish that had pursued him since his experience at Arunāchala some 16 years before. This anguish included his growing awareness of the incompatibilities of his Christian religious beliefs and practices with this experience.

In May 1972, Abhishiktānanda was at Phūlchatti, a simple ashram near Rishikesh. He was there with his disciple Marc Chaduc. While they were there, Chaduc had a profound spiritual experience, which will be described in more detail later in this chapter. It was only at this time that Abhishiktānanda's doubts were dispelled. He wrote in his diary, "The experience of the Upanishads is true, *I know it!*"<sup>12</sup>

In a letter written a month later, Abhishiktānanda again wrote that he now knew the *advaitic* experience for himself:

I think that now I shall no longer approach P. (or indeed anyone else) with the thought that *he knows* and that *I do not know*, for *now I do know, vedāham!*<sup>13</sup>

This passage shows that, up to this time, Abhishiktānanda had been comparing his experience with what he observed and what others told him, including his friend Panikkar. Had these other friends criticized his experience as not being authentic? Abhishiktānanda shows a little resentment evident here with respect to these past criticisms. In any event, these friends, including Panikkar, concede that by the end of his life, Abhishiktānanda did in fact reach the "other shore", the *advaitic* experience.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Diary*, p. 294 (5.3.67).

<sup>12</sup> *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72).

<sup>13</sup> *Letters*, p. 303 (MC, 3.6.72).

<sup>14</sup> Raimon Panikkar: "Letter to Abhishiktānanda", p. 431. Panikkar himself says that there can hardly be any doubt about the validity of Abhishiktānanda's experience. See *Occasional Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society* #7, Nov. 1983. However, André Gozier says that Vedāntists consider that Abhishiktānanda had only known *savikalpa samādhi*, corresponding to ecstasy, and not *nirvikalpa*. André Gozier: *Le Père Henri Le Saux à la rencontre de l'hinsouisme* (Paris: Centurion, 1988). This book by Gozier has in turn been criticized as inconsistent and too hasty. See *Occasional Bulletin* #14 (December, 1992).

## B. *Criteria of Authenticity*

Abhishiktānanda claimed to have experienced *advaita*. But how do we decide as to the authenticity of this experience? Do we just accept Abhishiktānanda's word that he achieved the experience? Can his claim be disputed? William James gives a way to judge the authenticity of an experience. He sets out three criteria by which to judge whether a religious experience is authentic: (a) immediate luminousness of the experience (b) philosophical reasonableness and (c) moral effect.<sup>15</sup> All of these will be looked at in this thesis.

### 1. Immediate Luminousness of the Experience

This is the primary criterion of authenticity. It is related to James's distinction between mere "knowledge about" something and a "knowledge by acquaintance". James explains this difference as the difference between knowing facts about an apple and actually tasting the apple. In assessing authenticity, James says that we must ask whether the person having the experience has a sense of the immediate force of this knowledge by acquaintance. Is the experience impossible to ignore? Is it at least as vivid as sensory experience? Does it have more reality than other experiences? Is there a feeling of new depths of truth being given?<sup>16</sup>

Immediate luminousness is a criterion that can be verified only by the person having the experience. A non-mystic does not have this vividness of experience, and so can only rely on the testimony of someone like Abhishiktānanda. We can, however, examine this testimony to see whether it claims or displays such immediacy. This chapter of the thesis looks at Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience to assess their vividness and directness.

### 2. Philosophical Reasonableness

This criterion is less direct than immediate luminousness. It asks how the person makes sense of the experience. When our experience conflicts with our previous psychological or cultural expectations, this causes anxiety; we search for a new interpretive grid. We try to maximize the continuity with our previous beliefs, but to still address the unexpected conflicts in

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<sup>15</sup> William James: *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> William James: *Talks to Teachers on Psychology and to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (Harvard, 1983), p. 139.

the experience. Abhishiktānanda recognized this process in his own life. He writes of trying to incorporate his new experience with Ramaṇa Maharshi into his previous mental structures without shattering them.<sup>17</sup> Even after 1972, when he was certain of the *advaitic* experience, he still tried to make sense of his previous beliefs. He says that the teaching of *advaita* destroys all the *nāmarūpas* of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> The following chapters of this thesis are an attempt to assess the philosophical reasonableness of Abhishiktānanda's explanations of his experience.

### 3. Moral effect

It was because of James's interest in mysticism that he proposed a pragmatic theory of truth and not a correspondence theory. The truth of a statement, including a statement about a religious experience, is judged by the results that it brings. According to James, we must ask whether the religious experience initiates, on the whole and over the long run, positive consequences for the individual and for the community.<sup>19</sup> William Barnard has written about this pragmatic theory of truth in relation to mysticism. In Barnard's view, pragmatism can work to assess claims that have been made in a nondual context.<sup>20</sup> The moral effect of Abhishiktānanda's experience will be addressed in Chapter VII of this thesis.

#### *C. Levels of Advaitic Experience*

The idea of levels of *advaitic* experience is useful for this thesis, particularly in view of the fact that it was not until the year before his death that Abhishiktānanda himself believed he had achieved the *advaitic* experience. Most of Abhishiktānanda's writings were therefore written prior to what he regarded as the definitive experience. If there were no stages or levels to the *advaitic* experience, then these writings would have to be regarded as mere speculations. On

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<sup>17</sup> *Secret*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Diary*, p. 351 (20.5.72).

<sup>19</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harvard, 1985), p. 25. James points out that this is an amplification of the Biblical testing of the "fruits" of religious experience. Zaehner uses a similar criterion in judging the value of a mystical experience: does the experience result in love? R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

<sup>20</sup> Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (State University of New York, 1997), pp. 347, 348. At p. 281, Barnard points out that the connection with these criteria of authenticity is not always seen because when James formulated these criteria of authenticity, he had not yet articulated his pragmatic theory of truth.

the other hand, if there are stages to the experience, then even early writings can be reviewed in this thesis, since they may disclose preliminary levels or stages.

Ken Wilber has written about various levels in the *advaitic* experience. Wilber refers to a “Spectrum of Consciousness”—different levels of consciousness, which precede the *advaitic* experience.<sup>21</sup> At one end of this spectrum lies the narrowed sense of identity associated with egoic consciousness; at the other end of the spectrum is the supreme “identity” with cosmic consciousness which is found in the *advaitic* experience. As our consciousness progresses along this spectrum, various dualities are overcome as we move beyond our personal ego to the *advaitic* experience and to the True Self.<sup>22</sup>

Wilber distinguishes between three modes of knowledge: The eye of flesh (sensory objects), the eye of reason (mental objects) and the eye of contemplation (the transcendent).<sup>23</sup> He correlates these three modes of knowledge to the first three levels of consciousness described by Hinduism: waking, dreaming and deep sleep (also called the Gross, Subtle and Causal levels). Wilber distinguishes several stages within each of these three levels. The fourth level of consciousness, *turīya*, which Wilber refers to as Absolute Spirit or Mind, transcends all three levels; it is beyond all dualities.

Although the vocabulary certainly differs, the idea of levels of *advaitic* experience can be found in Abhishiktānanda’s own writings. Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *advaitic* experience until at least 1972. But he writes that he had “tastes”, “touches” or “glimpses” of the experience. As we will see, he describes his experiences with Ramaṇa and Gnānānanda as “glimpses.” Abhishiktānanda refers to various experiences which are not the complete experience but which point to the *advaitic* experience:

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<sup>21</sup> Wilber refers explicitly to Ramaṇa’s method of Self-Enquiry; Wilber’s writings are therefore useful in describing Abhishiktānanda’s experience. See Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1977) and Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (eds.) *Paths Beyond Ego* (New York: Tarcher, 1993). I have simplified Wilber’s scheme for the purposes of this thesis. Wilber says that this is a “perennial psychology”, corresponding to the perennial philosophy. I recognize that Wilber’s ideas contain assumptions that may not always correspond to Abhishiktānanda’s. Although there are differences between them, the idea of levels of experience is a fruitful one to use in understanding Abhishiktānanda’s experience. A detailed one to one correlation of Wilber’s ideas to those of Abhishiktānanda is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Wilber says that failure to overcome these dualisms leads to differing pathologies at each level, necessitating different kinds of psychological therapy.

For it is the “touches” of the Spirit on the soul—often fleeting and gentle, but at times overwhelming and devastating—which prepare the soul for the ultimate revelation that she herself is *sat-cit-ānanda* within the supreme and only *Saccidānanda*. At first they are like brief flashes in the night; later they resemble the gentle, pervasive radiance of the dawn, and are the sign and precursor of the full appearance of the Self, at the sunrise of Being.<sup>24</sup>

Abhishiktānanda therefore believed that there are experiences that are precursors of the full experience. We have also seen that Abhishiktānanda was influenced by D.K. Mehta, who spoke of seven levels of consciousness, corresponding to the *cakras* and to various angelic orders.<sup>25</sup> Abhishiktānanda sometimes refers to these *cakras*. In other places, Abhishiktānanda refers to the four stages of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep and *turīya*). He says, for example, “Everything explodes when you have reached the fourth [stage of consciousness].”<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda writes of there being “tastes” of the *advaitic* experience. In 1956, Abhishiktānanda wrote, “Whoever has once had the “taste” of *advaita* on his tongue, no longer enjoys the flavour of anything else.”<sup>27</sup>

These various levels of experience are themselves distinguishable only as a result of logical distinctions and dualities. Do these distinctions still apply once one has achieved the *advaitic* experience? Abhishiktānanda says that once a person achieves the *advaitic* experience, the experience has no “taste” at all. He says that the supreme experience has neither taste nor form by which one can refer to it to either think or talk of it. It cannot be perceived by any of the senses, and is outside all pairs of opposites. One can say nothing of the experience. It just is. When the experience appears, all thoughts disappear, just as the stars disappear when the sun

<sup>23</sup> Abhishiktānanda also refers to the eye of flesh and the eye of reason. *Guhāja*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 185.

<sup>25</sup> The *Yoga Vāsishtha* also refers to seven stages in meditation. See Andrew O. Fort: *Jivanmukti in Transformation* (State University of New York, 1998), p. 94.

<sup>26</sup> *Letters*, p. 301 (RP, 25.6.73).

<sup>27</sup> *Diary*, p. 136 (6.1.56). The metaphor of “taste” is used by Ken Wilber, who has published a book with the title *One Taste*. Wilber argues for many levels of religious experience, corresponding to various levels in the “spectrum of consciousness.”

appears.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the very idea of “tastes” or “stages” is something that applies only to one who has not yet achieved the experience.

#### *D. Pre-1972 “Tastes” of the Advaitic Experience*

##### 1. Ramaṇa Maharshi

###### a) Numinousness and Mystery

Abhishiktānanda’s first “taste” of an *advaitic* experience was during his brief visits with Ramaṇa Maharshi. Abhishiktānanda speaks of this experience with Ramaṇa as a “glimpse” of *advaita*:

Ultimately, all arguments and reflections are secondary. There is one fact which determines everything: the religious experience which I had on non-Christian ground with an intensity never even glimpsed until then, but which was in line with all that I had obscurely felt before. Ramaṇa’s *advaita* is my birthplace. The original womb [*mūlagarbha*]. Against that, all reasoning is shattered.<sup>29</sup>

He said that the chants, which he heard for the first time at Ramaṇa’s ashram, carried him to an unknown world, the source of his being.<sup>30</sup> It was an intense religious experience for Abhishiktānanda. We could perhaps say that this was a numinous experience, an intense religious experience of the holy.<sup>31</sup> But numinousness in itself is not decisive in indicating an *advaitic* experience. A feeling of the holy may sometimes be more indicative of a dualistic religious experience, since the “holy” is perceived as other than oneself. As we shall see in Chapter IX of this thesis, Abhishiktānanda rejects any view of God as Wholly Other. Therefore, Abhishiktānanda’s descriptions of his religious experiences should not be seen in such dualistic terms. Rather, they are a recognition of a mystery that is not other than the source of his own being.

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<sup>28</sup> “Notes de théologie trinitaire” (1973), *Intériorité*, pp. 239, 240; *Further Shore*, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> *Diary*, p. 122, (Sept. 55).

<sup>30</sup> *Secret*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> See Rudolf Otto: *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford, 1923).

b) Explosion, shock, shattering

The *advaitic* experience gives a shock, it is “shattering”, it causes an “explosion”. “Everything explodes when you have reached the fourth *mātra* of the OM.”<sup>32</sup> Abhishiktānanda speaks of Ramaṇa’s *advaita* as a “shattering” of reasoning. Wilber regards this as one of the essential stages in the *advaitic* experience—the going beyond our normal reflexive logic to what he calls “vision logic.” In vision logic, we go beyond the subject-object relation involved in conceptual thinking. The extent to which *advaitic* experience affects thinking will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VI of this thesis.

Abhishiktānanda refers to overwhelming experiences (“*éblouissements*”).<sup>33</sup> These experiences shatter one’s previous conceptions, whether these conceptions are Christian or Hindu. This is how Abhishiktānanda described the mission of the Buddha. He says that the mission of the Buddha expressed in “drastically negative” terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.<sup>34</sup> Abhishiktānanda’s experience with Ramaṇa undermined his previous conceptual system, including his beliefs as a Catholic Christian. He said that the Greek structures that are now present in Christian thought have to explode.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting that Monchanin used the same metaphor of “explosion” to describe the effect of mystical experience upon ideas. In 1956 he wrote,

L’expérience mystique conduit au silence, elle est rigoureusement indicible. A son contact, les idées explosent, fission de toute expérience humaine sous la pression divine.<sup>36</sup>

It is therefore possible that Abhishiktānanda obtained this idea of the “explosion” of ideas from Monchanin. However, he did not just write about it. He experienced this explosion in a way that caused him personal anguish.

The shattering caused by *advaita* is not just a shattering of concepts, but of one’s view of one’s self:

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<sup>32</sup> *Letters*, p. 301 (RP, 25.6.73).

<sup>33</sup> *Letters*, p. 199 (OB 8.3.68).

<sup>34</sup> *Intériorité*, p. 178.

<sup>35</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “An Approach to Hindu Spirituality” *Clergy Review*, (1969) Vol. LIV, No. 3, p. 166.

It is a question of a veritable fission of the self, the nuclear explosion of the individual and the passage to the Totally-Other, who is no longer an other.<sup>37</sup>

Elsewhere he describes this “fission of the self” in more detail:

In the mystical fission there is revealed the impermanence of the superficial ego; in this implacable light the substance and the heart itself of this ego appears. It is unattainable and incomprehensible and undefinable to human thought and to psychological consciousness, just as the matter which has been pierced through in its substance itself by the mechanism of fission, finally appears to the scientist as only a point of energy.<sup>38</sup>

Abhishiktānanda thought of his own writings as causing such an explosion. He once said that the cover-design for his next book should be the mushroom-shaped cloud that goes with a nuclear explosion.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. Caves of Arunāchala

### a) Devotion to Arunāchala

Arunāchala is one of India’s most sacred mountains and stands over the temple town of Tiruvannamalai. The mountain is formed from igneous rock, and its summit is 1000 meters above sea level. The mountain is identified with Shiva; it has been regarded as a colossal *Shivalinga*.<sup>40</sup> It is said that Shiva appeared as a column of fire on Arunāchala, creating the original symbol of the *lingam*. Every November/December full moon, there is a festival celebrating this legend. A huge fire, lit from a 30-meter wick immersed in 2000 liters of *ghee*, burns from the top of Arunāchala for several days.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Jules Monchanin: *Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), p. 277.

<sup>37</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> “Présence de Dieu-Présence à Dieu”, *Intériorité*, p. 148 [my translation].

<sup>39</sup> Diary, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73). Sara Grant: “Time Bomb or Tomb-Stone?, *Vidyajyoti*, Feb. 1988, p. 88.

<sup>40</sup> M. Eliade observes that rocks often have a religious significance and point beyond themselves: “In its grandeur, its hardness, its shape and colour, man is faced with a reality and a force that belongs to some world other than the profane of which he is himself a part.” M. Eliade: *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (New American Library, 1958), p. 216. Cited by J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 67.

Abhishiktānanda spent many months in solitude in caves on Arunāchala. Abhishiktānanda was imitating Ramaṇa's experience.<sup>41</sup> He dressed as a Hindu monk and meditated on the teachings of Ramaṇa. Abhishiktānanda believed that his meditation in the caves was in some ways even more important than Ramaṇa himself:

If Ramaṇa was indeed great, how much more so must this Arunāchala which drew Ramaṇa to himself, how much more so the mystery of Arunāchala? In the end then Ramaṇa would only be one of those—no doubt the greatest of those belonging to our time—who in the course of ages have quenched their thirst at this fountain which never ceases to flow, and in the shelter of the Mountain have discovered in the depth of their own heart the living mystery of Arunāchala.<sup>42</sup>

But Abhishiktānanda also says that if Arunāchala was a *guru* to Ramaṇa, it was because he had projected the true *guru* in himself onto this outward form.<sup>43</sup> In other words, Arunāchala pointed the way to the true *guru*. It is for this reason that Abhishiktānanda later recommends his disciple Chaduc to go to Arunāchala: "The peak, the caves, the waters [of Arunāchala], all that is your own mystery!"<sup>44</sup>

Abhishiktānanda also relates the silence of the mountain to Ramaṇa's teaching by silence. "In silence, you taught me silence, O Arunāchala! You who never leave your silence."<sup>45</sup>

Ramaṇa wrote devotional poetry in praise of the mountain Arunāchala.<sup>46</sup> Some see this devotion or *bhakti* by Ramaṇa as inconsistent with his *advaita*. Does not devotion imply an "other" to whom one is devoted? And is such *bhakti* consistent with an *advaitic* experience that denies any distinctions? In any event, Abhishiktānanda also imitated Ramaṇa in writing such devotional poetry to Arunāchala.

<sup>41</sup> Abhishiktānanda had also been impressed by the fact that St. Benedict, the founder of his order, had lived as a hermit in a cave for three years. See *A Benedictine Ashram*, pp. 53-54. The Rule of St. Benedict expressly refers to hermits or Anchorites.

<sup>42</sup> *Secret*, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> *Guru*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Letters*, p. 292 (MC 30.12.71). Chaduc did go, and was robbed of all his things at Arunāchala.

<sup>45</sup> *Diary*, p. 34 (4.4.52). This echoes Ramaṇa's own "The Marital Garden of Letters" or "Hymn to Arunāchala", v. 36. *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, pp. 52ff.

<sup>46</sup> "The Marital Garden of Letters" or "Hymn to Arunāchala", v. 36. *Collected Works*, pp. 52ff. Abhishiktānanda translated some of Ramaṇa's poems; see *Letters*, p. 142. *Secret*, p. 23 contains a long quotation from Ramaṇa's "Marital Garland."

Abhishiktānanda continued to compose poems to the mountain Arunāchala even when he was absent from it. For example, in October 1956, he wrote a poem while on his silent retreat at Mauna Mandir. Abhishiktānanda calls the mountain “Lord”. I quote excerpts from both the original French and the English translation

Je chanterais un chant pour mon Bien-Aimé  
 mon Seigneur Arunāchala  
 des mots que Lui-même puisa dans mon cœur  
 en son propre cœur.  
 Je tresserai une guirlande de fleurs  
 pour mon Bien-Aimé Śiva Arunāchala  
 de fleurs qu’il cueillit Lui-même au jardin de mon cœur  
 en son propre cœur.  
 ...  
 Et je me consumerai comme l’encens  
 que j’élève devant Toi  
 de Toi venu, à Toi passé  
 Seul rien que Toi  
 O Arunāchala....

This has been translated as:

I will sing a song for my Beloved  
 my Lord Arunāchala  
 with the words that He himself drew from my heart  
 in his own heart.  
 I will plait a garland of flowers  
 for my Beloved Shiva Arunāchala  
 with flowers that he Himself plucked in the garden of my heart  
 in his own heart.  
 ...  
 And I will burn myself up like the incense  
 that I offer before Thee  
 having come from Thee, having passed into Thee,  
 nothing but thyself alone,  
 O Arunāchala....<sup>47</sup>

In another poem composed at the same time, Abhishiktānanda says,

...  
 Tu m'as violée, ô Arunāchala  
 comme une vierge à qui on dit des mots d'amour,  
 et Tu m'as laissée là,  
 comme ça, devant Toi...

...  
 Et je reste là, gisant, nue, comme ça,  
 et je n'ai même plus la force de me relever,  
 je suis couverte de honte,  
 je n'ose même plus me regarder...  
 Tout cela, c'est Ton œuvre, ô Arunāchala...

This has been translated as:

You have ravished me, O Arunāchala,  
 like a young girl to whom someone has made love,  
 and you left me here, like this before you.

...  
 And I remain here naked, prostrate, like this,  
 and I no longer have even the strength to rise,  
 I am covered with shame  
 I no longer dare even to look at myself...  
 All that is Your work, O Arunāchala<sup>48</sup>

There are allusions here to the poetry of the Song of Solomon in the Bible. But there are also distinct allusions to Ramaṇa's own devotional poems to Arunāchala.

In another remarkable poem, he calls the mountain "Jesus": "O Jesus Arunāchala!"<sup>49</sup> What is absolutely new for Abhishiktānanda is this feeling of devotion for something in a non-Christian context:

And if to become Christian again I had to give you up, O Arunāchala, to abandon you, O Ramaṇa, then I would never be able to become Christian again...<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *La montée*, pp. 199, 200; *Diary*, p. 159 (11.11.56).

<sup>48</sup> *La montée*, p. 204; *Diary*, pp. 163-164 (15.11.56).

<sup>49</sup> *Diary*, p. 162 (15.11.56).

<sup>50</sup> *Diary*, p. 175 (24.11.56).

b) *Guhāntara*

Abhishiktānanda says that it was during Lent of 1953 while he was in the cave at Arutpāl Tīrtham that he understood *advaita*. He then wrote the essential pages of *Guhāntara*.<sup>51</sup> ‘*Guhāntara*’ means ‘the dweller in the cave’.<sup>52</sup> Abhishiktānanda intended a double reference: to the *sannyāsī* in the cave, and to the one who dwells in the ‘cave of the heart’. The book was an attempt to record his new understanding of *advaita*.

When Abhishiktānanda attempted to publish *Guhāntara*, the Roman Catholic censor found the work to be heretical.<sup>53</sup> This questioning of Abhishiktānanda’s orthodoxy also caused disagreements between himself and Monchanin, even though Monchanin had written a favourable Preface to the book.<sup>54</sup> *Guhāntara* was never published during Abhishiktānanda’s lifetime. But most chapters of the book have since been published.<sup>55</sup> A few parts still remain unpublished.

Abhishiktānanda says that *Guhāntara* was “the immediate expression of the overwhelming experience.” He says,

Each day I rediscover its meaning afresh, as if the words had poured forth even before I had become aware of them.<sup>56</sup>

It may be questioned whether Abhishiktānanda is correct that *Guhāntara* was an “immediate expression” of his experience. Much of *Guhāntara* is highly ramified or conceptual

<sup>51</sup> *Diary*, p. 213 (16.5.58).

<sup>52</sup> Monchanin’s Preface is reproduced in *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l’Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), pp. 269-273. The word ‘*Guhāntara*’ was coined by Abhishiktānanda himself. At first he intended it as a pseudonym for authorship of the book. *Letters*, p. 70, ft. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Abhishiktānanda was therefore surprised when in 1954 he lent a copy of *Guhāntara* to Ethel Merstone. She found it “intolerably Christian”.

<sup>54</sup> Monchanin admired the book even if he disagreed strongly with parts of it. Monchanin wrote to a friend that that no one had ever gone as far in their spiritual apperception of Hinduisim as Abhishiktānanda had in this book, and that it demanded a re-thinking of the Trinity and of creation. *Lettres à Père LeSaux*, p. 128, note 2.

<sup>55</sup> These parts have been published in *Initiation*: “La Grace de L’Inde (pp. 41-47) and “Jusqu’à la source, l’expérience de non-dualité”(pp. 57-64).

These parts have been published in *Intériorité*: “Cheminevements Intérieurs” (pp. 41-80), “Ehieh asher ehieh” (pp. 81-102) and “Epiphanie de Dieu” (pp. 103-126)..

<sup>56</sup> *Letters*, p. 68 (L, 8.12.53). Later he wrote that some of the words he wrote were only fully understood very much later. *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

Even those parts of *Guhāntara* which are in poetic form contain many conceptual ideas. For example, the first poem begins,

Arunāchala est un symbole  
 et Arunāchala est une réalité,  
 un haut lieu de la terre dravidiennne,  
 rougeoyante, arouna, aux rayons du soleil levant,  
     où se vénère le Linga de feu,  
 le signe élémentaire du Dieu vivant  
     qui parut au Buisson  
     et sur l'Horeb  
 le Feu qui consume et le feu qui éclaire,  
     Deus ignis consumens,  
     Lux mundi  
     Paran jyoti  
     Phōs hilaron  
 la lumière joyeuse de la gloire immortelle  
     du Bienheureux,

A literal translation of this would be:

Arunāchala is a symbol  
 and Arunāchala is a Reality,  
 a high-place of the Dravidian land  
 taking on the red hues, Aruṇa [God of the dawn], in the rays of the rising sun,  
     where is venerated the linga of fire,  
 the elemental sign of the Living God  
     who appeared in the Burning Bush  
     and at [Mount] Horeb  
 the Fire that consumes and the fire that enlightens,  
     Deus ignis consumens, [Consuming fire of God]  
     Lux mundi [Light of the world]  
     Paran jyoti [Highest light or truth]  
     Phōs hilaron [Joyful light]  
 The joyful light of the immortal glory  
     Of the Blessed One,  
     Bhagavan.<sup>57</sup>

In this brief excerpt we see comparisons between the revelation of God to Hindus and the Biblical revelation. Abhishiktānanda compares the flame and lingam of Arunāchala [the reddish, dawn-coloured mountain] with the revelation of God to Moses and to the revelation in Christ

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<sup>57</sup> A slightly different translated version is given in *Secret*, p. 53. The name 'Arunāchala' itself means 'the red-coloured mountain' ('aruna' means 'colour of dawn', and 'āchala' means 'mountain').

who is the light of the world. Latin, Greek and Sanskrit words are combined. There are references to ancient Christian hymns such as *Phos Hilaron* and to the Hindu reverence for light [*jyoti*]. He compares them all to the joyful light he found in Ramaṇa [*Bhagavan*].

Most of *Guhāntara* consists of essays. These essays are at least as complex as anything else that Abhishiktānanda has written. Some of the philosophical and theological issues discussed in *Guhāntara* are: the nature of enlightenment, the difference between *saguna* and *nirguṇa Brahman*, the difference between *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samādhi*, and the four states of consciousness ending in the *turīya*, the state of the one who is liberated in this body (*jivanmukti*), the role of the *guru*, and the importance of the *sannyāsī*. Abhishiktānanda compares the spirituality of India in its popular form to that of those who know *Brahman*, and he compares the relation of Hindu spirituality to Christian spirituality. I will discuss all of these issues in more detail in this thesis.

Of special interest are those passages in *Guhāntara* that deal specifically with the focus of this thesis: Abhishiktānanda's understanding of how *advaita* is nondual but also non-monistic (*an-eka*). As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda relates this understanding to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In Chapter X, I will also examine Abhishiktānanda's use of the word *aneka*.

After he had written *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda met Harilal. Harilal's extreme *advaita* raised doubts about what he had written about *advaita* in *Guhāntara*. Abhishiktānanda asked, "Have I, who dared to write it, understood it myself?"<sup>58</sup> And elsewhere he writes,

And my *pride* in having *realized something* has been swept away [...] The great pride of being convinced that one has passed beyond *advaita* when one has scarcely set foot on the path. . .<sup>59</sup>

There is a recognition here by Abhishiktānanda that *advaita* is a path which he had just commenced. This again suggests that there are stages or levels to the experience.

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<sup>58</sup> *Letters*, p. 70 (L, 23.1.54).

<sup>59</sup> *Diary*, p. 113 (2.8.55).

c) Solitude-Silence-Poverty

Abhishiktānanda sums up his experience in the caves in three words: “Solitude-Silence-Poverty.” He says that before he had just been a dilettante in his practice of monasticism, but that in the caves he was confronted with what he still lacked for this practice to be complete.<sup>60</sup> During his first stay in the caves, he had a theoretical understanding of *sannyāsa*. By the next year, *sannyāsa* was for him no longer a thought, a “concept”, but rather an “inborn summons”.<sup>61</sup>

His record of his experience in the cave refers to being “alone.” It is being “alone in the very aloneness of the Alone.” The solitude of the *sannyāsī* is an imitation of the aloneness of *Brahman*, “That besides which there is no other” (*ekam advitīyam*). Everything that the primitive Upanishads attribute to *ātman* or *Brahman*, uniqueness and aloneness (*kaivalyam*) is attributed by the Sannyasopaniśads to the *sannyāsī* himself. The *neti-neti* becomes incarnate by the *sannyāsī*’s total refusal of all.<sup>62</sup> The solitude is not only an external solitude but also an internal solitude of the soul, in the cave of the heart:

où, seul, devant Dieu l’on est;  
 où, seul, avec Dieu l’on est;  
 où, seul, en Dieu l’on est;  
 où, seul, de Dieu l’on est;  
 où, seul, est Celui qui est...

[where all alone, before God one is,  
 where all alone, with God one is,  
 where all alone, in God one is,  
 where all alone, from God one is,  
 where alone, is He who IS.]<sup>63</sup>

Later, he denies even this description of the solitude. He says that the solitude is an experience of *kevala*, the Absolute, an experience of the infinite solitude of God, not solitude with God, nor in God, the alone to the Alone, the alone with Alone, but the Alone infinitely and essentially alone.<sup>64</sup> Solitude is being alone, naked, a stripping, a spiritual nakedness. It is a

<sup>60</sup> *Diary*, p. 33 (3.4.52).

<sup>61</sup> *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53).

<sup>62</sup> Foreword to *Further Shore*, p. ix.

<sup>63</sup> *Ermîtes du Saccidananda* (1954), p. 81.

<sup>64</sup> *Initiation*, p. 58.

stripping of habitual thought-forms, patterns of concepts, symbols and imagery, and of our deepest convictions. For the Christian, the stripping of solitude means that everything, his very faith, seems to be torn away from him.<sup>65</sup>

Abhishiktānanda found the discipline of silence difficult. But he says that the communication of thought by words is only necessary when there is a sense of duality.<sup>66</sup> By keeping silence he also wanted to achieve this realm beyond duality.

The experience in the caves confirmed for him the necessity of *sannyāsa* or Hindu monasticism. Abhishiktānanda saw Hindu monasticism as the bridge to Christian spirituality. In this connection it must be remembered that one of his initial reasons for going to India was to find a more rigorous monasticism than he had experienced at Kergonan. But this raises the following issue: to what extent was Abhishiktānanda's embracing of Hindu monasticism and *sannyāsa* in fact influenced by Christian traditions, especially the apophatic traditions of some of the Christian mystics and desert fathers? As we shall see in Chapter VI, Abhishiktānanda's extreme apophaticism led him to reject even the Hindu formulations of the *advaitic* experience. Furthermore, we must ask whether Abhishiktānanda is correct that monasticism is necessarily linked to the *advaitic* experience. Monasticism can also be used in a very dualistic view of spirituality, where one retreats from the material world. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter VII, which looks at the difference between an acosmic view of *advaita* and a view that emphasizes world-accepting creativity.

#### d) Transcendence of Ego

His experience in the caves also led Abhishiktānanda to stages of consciousness that he had not previously experienced. He writes of the experience of the transcendence of his ego while in the caves:

Dive down into myself, to the greatest depth of myself. Forget my own "aham"  
[I], lose myself in the "aham" of the divine *Ātman* who is at the origin of my

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<sup>65</sup> J.D.M. Stuart: "Abhishiktānanda on Inner Awakening", *Vidyajyoti* (1982), vol. 46, p. 481.

<sup>66</sup> *Diary*, p. 35 (4.4.52).

being, of my consciousness of being. And in this unique—or primordial—*Aham* feel all beings as myself.<sup>67</sup>

This idea of “plunging within” is something that Ramaṇa wrote about, and Abhishiktānanda’s writings here reflect his reading books about Ramaṇa during his stay in the caves.<sup>68</sup> Many of his writings at this time are an echo of Ramaṇa’s ideas. Such writings therefore do not always carry the immediacy and vividness of an experience. It is however clear that Abhishiktānanda was experiencing an inwardness he had not experienced before. He writes that he experienced a loss of interest in externals because of this inwardness.<sup>69</sup> Such inwardness can be considered a stage in attaining *advaita*. It is the plunging inward of the eye of contemplation. But again an issue arises: is it necessary for such an inward experience to result in a lack of interest in externals? Does such a devaluation of external things not set up a new dualism? This will be discussed in Chapter VII of this thesis.

The practice of *sannyāsa* is a “stripping” that is both material (poverty and asceticism) and spiritual (of one’s self). There is a renunciation not only of physical things but also of one’s mental concepts, and even of one’s own ego:

Qu’en vain je n’ai pas pénétré en Ta caverne,  
que du mien, que de moi, rien oncques ne soit plus.  
Qu’en Toi je passe, que Toi je devienne “...”  
Et de *moi*, les traces mêmes, tu les as consumées.

May I not have entered Your cave in vain;  
of ‘mine’ and ‘me’ may nothing any longer remain.  
May I pass into You, may I become You [...]  
and of *myself* you have burnt up every trace.<sup>70</sup>

He says that Arunāchala has “snatched away all in them that might still have power to say: “I!”<sup>71</sup> The true self is other than the ego: “I am farther away, under, deeper than the self that is speaking, eating, looking, listening, walking, thinking, desiring.”<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Diary*, p. 35 (5.4.52).

<sup>68</sup> See for example *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 75: “Ulladu Narpadu”, verse 28 (“one should dive into oneself”).

<sup>69</sup> *Letters*, p. 63, (L.29.4.53). In the booklet by Jean Herbert, *Quelques grands penseurs de l’Inde*, which Abhishiktānanda read before going to India, Herbert himself compares Ramaṇa to medieval mystics who, in seeking union with God, cease to take interest in all other things (p. 25).

<sup>70</sup> *La Montée*, p. 56; *Diary*, p. 37 (6.4.52).

According to Wilber, progressing along the spectrum of consciousness involves a going beyond one's ego. Even if Abhishiktānanda had not achieved realization of the Self, he had progressed in these levels.

#### e) Light, Fire and Flash

Abhishiktānanda uses the imagery of light to describe his experiences at Arunāchala. He compares the story of the light on Arunāchala to the inward light that he experienced:

...in the very hearts of those who approach him Shiva Arunāchala suddenly appears, a pillar of fire which has no end either below or above, as it was in the beginning of things, a consuming flame and a guiding light, a spring of eternal Love!<sup>73</sup>

This finding of Shiva within the heart, a Transcendence within Immanence is what Abhishiktānanda referred to as the "ascent to the depths."<sup>74</sup>

Much later, Abhishiktānanda remembered his experience of inner light at Arunāchala. He wrote his disciple Chaduc:

Anyone who is the recipient of this overwhelming Light is at once petrified and shattered; he can say no more, he cannot think any more; he just remains there, outside space and time, alone in the very aloneness of the Alone; it is an unbelievable experience, this sudden breaking in of Arunāchala's infinite pillar of light and fire.<sup>75</sup>

Here again is the metaphor of being "shattered". The metaphor is linked with its opposite, of being "petrified". The shattering is linked to thought and speech. The *advaitic* experience is beyond both. There is a shattering of all conceptual forms. One is to free oneself from the *vrittis* of the mind, to reduce one's mental activity to nothing but consciousness of oneself, "and in the infinity of his own consciousness he can finally plunge into the supreme Consciousness and the supreme Self."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *Secret*, p. 57.

<sup>72</sup> *Diary*, p. 42 (3.6.52).

<sup>73</sup> *Secret*, p. 51. On page 52 he compares this light to the burning bush experienced by Moses.

<sup>74</sup> This is also the title chosen by Panikkar for Abhishiktānanda's *Diary*: "Ascent to the Depth of the Heart".

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Introduction to *Secret*, p. ix.

<sup>76</sup> *Diary*, p. 36 (5.4.52).

The light is a fire which burns and consumes one's self:

O Arunāchala [...]  
 De combien déjà--et depuis quand?--  
 n'as-tu pas ainsi ravi le cœur?  
 Papillon je me suis laissé tromper à ta flamme  
 et tu m'y as consumé.  
 Consume-moi, brûle en moi tout ce qui n'est pas Toi.  
 O Colonne de Feu, ô Colonne d'Amour.  
 O *Tejo-Linga*, ô Sperme de Feu.  
 Que de ton Feu, je renaisse Toi...

Fire of Arunāchala.  
 From how much already--and since how long?--  
 have you not thus ravished my heart?  
 Like a moth, I have let myself be deceived by your flame  
 and in it you have consumed me,  
 Consume me, burn up in me all that is not You.  
 O pillar of fire, O pillar of Love.  
 O *Tejo-Linga*, O fiery Sperm,  
 From your Fire, let me be reborn as You.<sup>77</sup>

The light is also a lightning flash that occurs in the blink of an eye. This is how Abhishiktānanda describes Ramaṇa's awakening: the lightning flashed: "That all passes away and disappears; but *myself*, I remain, *I am*."<sup>78</sup> Abhishiktānanda refers to the Kena Upanishad regarding this illumination by Ramaṇa: "A lightning-flash; the eye blinks--Ah!--"

Advaita is not an idea. It is! The lightning flashes, the eye blinks, as says the Kena. Then? ; You have either understood, or you have not understand...If you have not understood, too bad! Says the same Upanishad. If you have understood, you keep quiet, says the Mundaka...<sup>79</sup>

In Abhishiktānanda's understanding of the Upanishads,

...what is important are these 'flashes', the lightning, the bursts of light, the break-throughs which open the abyss—not a gulf which would separate, but the abyss of yourself.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *La montée*, p. 56; *Diary*, p. 36 (6.4.52).

<sup>78</sup> *Secret*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Letters*, p. 227 (RV 8.3.70).

<sup>80</sup> *Letters*, p. 271 (MC, 9.6.72)..

A vision of light is commonly found in reports of mystical experience. The highest mystical realization is generally referred to as “illumination”, “enlightenment”. Abhishiktānanda says, “Light is the sign par excellence of the Presence of God.”<sup>81</sup> This light is often associated with the ascent of *kundalini* power into the *sahasrāra cakra*. For example, Gopi Krishna describes a light during his *kundalini* experience:

Whenever I turned my mental eye upon myself I invariably perceived a luminous glow within and outside my head in a state of constant vibration, as if a jet of an extremely subtle and brilliant substance rising through the spine spread itself out in the cranium, filling and surrounding it with an indescribable radiance.<sup>82</sup>

Abhishiktānanda also connects his experience at Arunāchala with the *kundalini* experience and the ascent to the *sahasrāra*. When he was about to leave Arunāchala, he writes, “To light the lamp of the *sahasrāra*, you need a match.”<sup>83</sup> Arunāchala was the match that started this light for him.

Was Abhishiktānanda describing what he hoped for or what he had already experienced? From other writings, we must conclude that he had not fully experienced what he was writing about. In March 1956, Abhishiktānanda describes his condition since his time at Arunāchala as a “dawn” before the light:

... even before the sun rises, the sky is lit up. *Jyoti, shānti, ānanda* [light, peace, joy]. The birds are already singing, and my heart is already singing. Await with joy the appearance of the wonderful disk.<sup>84</sup>

Abhishiktānanda had experienced something of the inner light, but only a dawning. Again, he had experienced no more than a taste, or stage along the way:

I think that to all our agonies there is only one real answer—that which is beyond concepts, in that mystery of the depth, which however only lights up for the one who has dared to penetrate into it by definitively passing beyond the whole level of sense and intellect, that is, the experience to which we are called by the *advaita*

<sup>81</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “Abhishiktānanda on Aikiya Alayam” (Aikiya Alayam Series 4, 1975), p. 31.

<sup>82</sup> Gopi Krishna: *Kundalini: Evolutionary Energy in Man* (Shambhala, 1971), p. 87. See also Swami Muktananda: *The Play of Consciousness* (Campbell, Calif.: Shree Gurudev Ashram, 1974), p. 63.

<sup>83</sup> *Diary*, p. 69 (30.3.53). Once the match has been used, there is no further need for it; he could therefore leave Arunāchala.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in Introduction to *Secret*, p. x. Yet in *Diary*, p. 37 (6.4.52), he writes that one must get beyond even joy and peace, because if they are felt, one has not yet reached the inmost depth.

of our rishis. Alas, I have not yet had the courage to place myself in the conditions for that experience. However, even its dawning is a blessing, and gives one a zest for life, whatever the turmoil on the surface.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, although Abhishiktānanda had some experience of an inner light, he himself recognized that this was not the complete *advaitic* experience.

#### f) Outside space and time

Abhishiktānanda refers to the *advaitic* experience of being “outside space and time.” “In breaking down the fortress of the body, in penetrating within, I am beyond place and time.”<sup>86</sup> He says on the same page that “the *aham* is the superficial ego liberated from the *upādhis* [superimposed limitations] of *idam* and *kālam*, of space-time.” This state of being outside space and time appears to have been something that Abhishiktānanda had read about in the Upanishads. His descriptions at this time do not seem to indicate a direct experience by himself of that which is beyond time and space, but only a desire or a belief that this is what would occur in the *advaitic* experience.

#### g) Happiness and “Naturalness”

The high points of his whole life were at Arunāchala.<sup>87</sup> Abhishiktānanda felt happy and at peace as nowhere else. But Harilal told him that this joy and peace was something he was in fact projecting onto the cave.<sup>88</sup> True happiness and joy was something inward, unrelated to being in the cave.

While meditating on Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda also experienced a greater sense of “naturalness”:

It is precisely the “naturalness” of my life at Arunāchala that has been my experience this year. Last year it was still something novel, more or less forced,

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<sup>85</sup> *Letters*, p. 99 (L.31.10.56).

<sup>86</sup> *Diary*, p. 42 (3.6.52).

<sup>87</sup> *Diary*, p. 70 (30.3.53).

<sup>88</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “Un Ermite de l’Inde, Harilal”, *Revue Monchanin*, Vol. III, No. 5, 2-14, p. 7.

perhaps conceptual. This year it has seemed to me so simple, so natural, so connatural, (*saha-ja*)....<sup>89</sup>

It must be emphasized that Abhishiktānanda's use of the word "natural" is not to be understood as a reference to a "nature" that is opposed to "grace" in the way that Olivier Lacombe described the *advaitic* experience. For Abhishiktānanda, the natural experience is not to be superceded by something else. This is also the teaching of Ramaṇa, that the *sahaja* experience is the culminating experience. Abhishiktānanda compares the natural state as the return to Paradise spoken of by the Greek Fathers and by Tauler.

#### h) Greater closeness to God

During his time in the caves, Abhishiktānanda also experienced a greater closeness to God. After several months in the cave, he wrote,

This Arunāchala is strange—Never in my life have I felt so much at peace, so joyful, so near to God, or rather one with God, as on this mountain.<sup>90</sup>

Although he felt peace and joy, he regarded even this peace and joy as a hindrance to achieving the inmost depth:

C'est oublié de tout que je veux,  
c'est le seul souvenir de Toi qu'il me faut,  
c'est la seule conscience de Toi,  
Ta propre conscience éternelle,  
dans une paix et une joie trop pures alors  
pour être ressentie comme mienne, dans l'essentiel.

Forgetfulness of all is what I want,  
what I need is only the remembrance of You, only the consciousness of You,  
Your own eternal consciousness,  
in a peace and a joy that are then too pure  
to be felt as mine, in the one essential thing.<sup>91</sup>

Nearness to God does not necessarily imply a nondual experience if God is viewed as "Other". Indeed, in Hindu *advaitic* thought, devotion to God is on a lesser plane than a true

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<sup>89</sup> *Letters*, p. 64 (L. 29.4.53). The word '*sahaja*' means 'born with', from '*saha*' meaning 'with' and '*ja*' meaning 'born'.

<sup>90</sup> *Letters*, p. 57 (F, 21.8.52).

<sup>91</sup> *La montée*, p. 57; *Diary*, p. 37 (6.4.52).

*advaitic* experience. However, Abhishiktānanda speaks not only of “nearness”, but also of being “one with God”. What Abhishiktānanda was moving towards, in theory if not in actuality, was a sense of “union” with God, or of non-difference between himself and God. It was at least a conceptual breakthrough for him to realize that there need be no separation between himself and God. He describes this conceptual breakthrough that he reached on Arunāchala:

In my own innermost centre, in the most secret mirror of my heart, I tried to discover the image of him whose I am, of him who lives and reigns in the infinite space (*ākāśa*) of my heart. But the reflected image gradually grew faint, and soon it was swallowed up in the radiance of its Original. Step by step I descended into what seemed to me to be successive depths of my true self—my being, my awareness of being, and my joy in being. Finally nothing was left but he himself, the Only One, infinitely alone, Being, Awareness and Bliss, Saccidānanda. In the heart of Saccidānanda I had returned to my Source. “*Tat tvam asi.*”<sup>92</sup>

And yet Abhishiktānanda worried about a total plunge into *advaita*. So although he wrote about Ramaṇa’s idea of the plunge within, and of transcending his ego, he had not yet fully experienced it.<sup>93</sup> He retained his Christian beliefs as an anchor:

It is precisely my long acquaintance with the liturgy and the Early Fathers that saves me from Shankara’s *advaita*. *Advaita* is so overpowering! ‘Disappearance in the One!’<sup>94</sup>

Abhishiktānanda’s feeling of nearness to God, and union with God will be further explored in Chapter IX.

### 3. Gnānānanda

Abhishiktānanda had a further taste of *advaita* in his experience with Gnānānanda. He refers to “that experience [*anubhava*] which Swami Gnānānanda had let me glimpse.”<sup>95</sup> Gnānānanda’s emphasis was on meditation or *dhyāna*.

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<sup>92</sup> *Saccidananda*, p. 172.

<sup>93</sup> Vattakuzhy therefore oversimplifies when he says that Abhishiktānanda awakened to the mystery of non-duality at Arunāchala. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy: *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiktānanda* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981).

<sup>94</sup> *Letters*, p. 53 (L.10.2.52). Panikkar points out that Abhishiktānanda limited his dialogue to one particular form of Vedānta. See Panikkar, Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxiii. Why did Abhishiktānanda not consider Rāmānuja’s doctrine of *Viśiṣṭadvaita*? In fact, as we shall see, Abhishiktānanda was aware of Rāmānuja’s views of the Self, but he rejected them because he found them too dualistic.

<sup>95</sup> *Diary*, p. 162, (15.11.56).

Even before meeting Gnānānanda, Abhishiktānanda had taken lessons in yoga from a Swami across the river from Shantivanam. He learned control of breathing and concentration of thought while fixing attention on the space between the eyes.<sup>96</sup>

Although Gnānānanda emphasized the importance of meditation, he also said that meditation is not the goal of human life. The awakening is an experience of being, not just a practice of meditating:

do not meditate—Be!  
do not think that you are—Be!  
don't think about being—you are!<sup>97</sup>

The purpose of meditation is to bring one to the awareness of being.

Abhishiktānanda also refers to Gnānānanda's *sahaja* (natural state of realization). He speaks of Gnānānanda's "radiant peace, the equability, equanimity, *samatva*."<sup>98</sup>

While with Gnānānanda, Abhishiktānanda experienced a kind of "waking sleep", a sleeping without sleeping. Ramaṇa also speaks of such "waking sleep" or *jagrat sushupti*:

That is the state of the *jnani*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. There is the awareness of the waking state and the stillness of sleep. It is called *jagrat-sushupti*. Call it wakeful sleep or sleeping wakefulness or sleepless waking or wakeless sleep. It is not the same as sleep or waking separately. It is *atijagrat* (beyond wakefulness) or *atishushupti* (beyond sleep). It is the state of perfect awareness and of perfect stillness combined. It lies between sleep and waking; it is also the interval between two successive thoughts. It is the source from which thoughts spring...<sup>99</sup>

This is what Ramaṇa calls "Abiding in the Self". The Self is Witness in all of our states of consciousness, whether waking, sleeping or deep sleep.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Letters*, p. 44 (F.13.12.50).

<sup>97</sup> *Secret*, 73.

<sup>98</sup> *Diary*, p. 139, (14.1.56).

<sup>99</sup> Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 563, 564. See also *Collected Works*, p. 94. On p. 139, Ramaṇa writes, "It [the Self] is the witness of the intellect in the waking, dream, and deep sleep states. It shines as "I-P", as ever-present, direct experience." See also *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. At pp. 121 and 339, Ramaṇa identifies wakeful sleep with the state of *samadhi*. It is abiding in the Self. At p. 271 he identifies it with *mukti*.

<sup>100</sup> But this Witness does not imply an object and a subject to witness. The Witness is simple Being. Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 150, 440.

For Gnānānanda, even the waking sleep stage is to be overcome. Gnānānanda told Abhishiktānanda to delve deeper until only pure awareness remains.<sup>101</sup> Thus, even the “waking sleep” experience is only a stage to the ultimate experience.<sup>102</sup>

#### 4. Himalayas

In 1959, Abhishiktānanda made his first trip to the Himalayas. He records this pilgrimage in his book *The Mountain of the Lord*. In 1961 he acquired land at Uttarkashi for a hermitage; he spent much of his time here after he cut his ties with Shantivanam in 1968. Uttarkashi is the last stop on the way to Gangotri, the source of the Ganges. He found the Himalayas helpful for his inward journey of meditation: “Mountains concentrate you, limit your horizons, but make you go deep.”<sup>103</sup>

In June, 1964, he and Panikkar spent three weeks in the Himalayas, making a pilgrimage to Gangotri. At Gangotri, Abhishiktānanda praised the acosmic life of total renunciation, the life led by the naked Hindu ascetics who remained there all year round in total silence. Panikkar asked him, “Then why not *you*, here and now? Abhishiktānanda felt sad since he had not achieved such total renunciation, and Panikkar felt that he had, perhaps, been too “logical.”<sup>104</sup>

Panikkar left, and Abhishiktānanda spent three weeks alone at Uttarkashi. He did not have with him even a single book; it was a complete “fast of the mind”, just a murmuring of OM.<sup>105</sup> In a poetic description written during this time he describes his desired union with God:

Il n'y a pas de place en moi pour Dieu et pour moi à la fois. S'il y a Dieu, je ne suis pas; s'il y a moi, comment Dieu pourrait-il être? Dilemme de l'homme qu'il faut que lui ou bien Dieu disparaisse.

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<sup>101</sup> *Guru*, p. 99.

<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Wilber says that the stage of the Witness must itself be overcome. In the Witness stage, there is still a dualism between the witness and that that is witnessed. “It is when this last trace of dualism is finally and completely shattered that one awakens to Mind, for at that moment (which is *this* moment), the witness and the witnesses are one and the same.” Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, (Quest, 1977), pp. 273-274.

<sup>103</sup> *Letters*, p. 146 (L.15.7.62).

<sup>104</sup> Raimon Panikkar: “Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, p. 444.

<sup>105</sup> *Letters*, p. 162 (MT, 28.6.64).

[There is no place in me for God and myself at the same time. If God is there, I do not exist; if there is myself, how could God exist? Dilemma of man for whom either he or God must disappear.]<sup>106</sup>

This does not appear to be the record of a direct experience. It is rather more on the level of theory, dealing with the issue of identity in *advaita*. But it does show the desire for union that he had at the time.

### *E. The Advaitic Experiences in 1972–1973*

Although Abhishiktānanda had “tastes” and “glimpses” of the *advaitic* experience, it was not until 1972 that he *knew* that this experience was true. We must therefore give more weight to the experiential expressions used by Abhishiktānanda after 1972. These experiences can be divided between those experiences with his disciple Marc Chaduc, and the experiences from and after Abhishiktānanda’s heart attack.

#### I. Experiences with his disciple Marc Chaduc

##### a) Phūlchatti

In 1969, before Chaduc even arrived in India, Abhishiktānanda wrote to him: “Be concerned to be and not to do...or even to understand intellectually...Give a sabbatical year at least to your Mind!”<sup>107</sup>

They first met in October, 1971; they spent several days in deep discussions. They then went to Hardwar and Rishikesh. In November, Chaduc wanted to show Abhishiktānanda the small ashram of Phūlchatti he had discovered upstream from Rishikesh. Phūlchatti is a simple ashram for pilgrims on their way to Badrināth. They walked along the Ganges. In his own journal, Chaduc describes a strong spiritual experience:

It was on the way to Phūlchatti that the grace erupted. In these mountains which have sheltered so many contemplatives, overwhelmed by the interior vision, the Father was seized by the mystery of the purely acosmic one who leaves all in response to the burning invitation of God. The blessed one who receives this

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<sup>106</sup> Cited in Introduction to *Intériorité*, p. 16 (June, 1964 at Gangotri).

<sup>107</sup> *Letters*, p. 219 (MC 29.9.69).

light, the Father told me, is paralysed, torn asunder, he can no longer speak nor think, he remains there, immobile outside of time and space, alone in the very solitude of the Alone. Absorbed in this way, the Father relived—lived again—the sudden eruption of the infinite Column of fire and of the light of Arunāchala, that myth which was the source of that interior awakening which had flashed forth in him in 1953. For a brief moment, he could only stagger under the excess of the interior drunkenness, and I had to support him. At that very moment there opened within myself an abyss which had been hidden to that point. Later we realized that this experience was the beginning of the *mauna-diksha*, the initiation by silence which is the work of the Spirit alone. One does not have any awareness of being *guru*; if words spring forth, they come from the source [...], a communion of infinite purity with the mystery of the non-dual Spirit, a regard which passes from depth to depth.<sup>108</sup>

These are Chaduc's words, not Abhishiktānanda's. But they are a valuable record of what occurred, especially in view of the fact that we do not have the complete *Diary* of Abhishiktānanda for that same period. Did Abhishiktānanda himself have an *advaitic* experience? Abhishiktānanda had described to Chaduc what he had written about in the caves at Arunāchala—the state of being outside of time and space, alone in the very solitude of the Alone. Chaduc understood from Abhishiktānanda that the experience is one that “erupts”, and “overwhelms”. It is “sudden”, and “flashes forth”. It is an “interior awakening”. There is reference to “fire” and “light”. There is a “mystery” of the “acosmic” one who is outside of time and space. And there is reference to “silence”, which was also Ramaṇa's principal means of teaching.

But is it true to say that Abhishiktānanda re-lived with Chaduc an interior awakening that had first flashed forth in 1953? We must recall that Abhishiktānanda's own testimony is that he had not achieved the *advaitic* experience at Arunāchala, but only tastes of the experience. It seems that he was re-living those *glimpses* of the inner light. He clearly had some kind of experience, since Chaduc saw him “stagger under the excess of the interior drunkenness.” Abhishiktānanda himself wrote about the impact or blow of this experience: “blows like Phūlchatti cause the experience of Arunāchala to vibrate unbearably”.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

<sup>109</sup> *Letters*, p. 272 (MC, 16.6.72).

In Panikkar's opinion, the real reason for Abhishiktānanda's joy may be just the fact of having a disciple, a "son" of his own. After Abhishiktānanda's many renunciations, having a disciple represented a turn towards humanness, away from an acosmic interpretation of *advaita*.<sup>110</sup> Panikkar writes:

He who had dreamed of being a solitary, an acosmic, but without attaining to it, and therefore was tormented with guilt—this *sannyāsī* discovered all the human warmth of a personal, concrete and living relationship. All his abstract theories collapsed and were reborn afresh in the concrete. [...] This fatherhood, this love for his spiritual son, which I would call profoundly human, was what in his last stage fulfilled him.<sup>111</sup>

Panikkar says that the unpublished diary of Chaduc proves this.<sup>112</sup> Chaduc probably omitted from his selection of Abhishiktānanda's diary details of the guru-disciple relationship.

This view that Abhishiktānanda was fulfilled by the *guru-disciple* relationship seems to be confirmed by a later letter from Abhishiktānanda to Chaduc from Gyansu about the November experience:

This non-dual dyad of which I spoke in *Gnānānanda*, we have lived out with such intensity. In discovering you as son, I have found myself.<sup>113</sup>

Some of Abhishiktānanda's writings about this non-dual with his disciple Chaduc are almost erotic in tone, such as this letter to Chaduc:

A total depth of exchange in the present moment. Then eternity of this exchange lived in the present...For every exchange, every kiss, is the mystery of the not-two, when it is lived in its total purity and without a trace of 'making use of' the other.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Panikkar: "A Letter to Abhishiktānanda", *Studies in Formative Spirituality* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University) 3 (1982), n. 3, pp. 448, 449.

<sup>111</sup> Panikkar, *Introduction to Diary*, p. xxvii.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>113</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

<sup>114</sup> *Letters*, p. 292 (MC 4.4.73).

The realization that there are not-two (*advaita*) was momentarily focussed in their own relationship. There was a nonduality between them both. "I am now following you; or better, I am you here, and you are I there."<sup>115</sup>

Both Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc had profound experiences at this time in November, 1971. But it is unlikely that these can be considered to be a full *advaitic* experience for either of them. Chaduc speaks of an "abyss" opening within himself. These are the words that Abhishiktānanda used when describing his experience with Ramaṇa.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps Abhishiktānanda told him about that, too. Something happened to Chaduc, just like something happened to Abhishiktānanda when he met Ramaṇa. But in both cases, the experience was only a glimpse, one stage of the *advaitic* experience.

#### b) Feast of the Ascension

From May 1 to 20, 1972, Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc spent three weeks again at Phūlchatti where they studied the Upanishads together. It was on May 10, 1972, during a vigil on the day of the Feast of Ascension in the Christian calendar, that Chaduc had a profound spiritual experience that resolved Abhishiktānanda's doubts about *advaita*. Chaduc experienced an illumination that was also a kind of death. He describes the experience on that day, which was also his 28th birthday:

A sudden and overwhelming vision of the *param jyotir*, of the Great Light for three hours; engulfing the total depths of myself, in the ineffable Light which I am. An experience of annihilating, beatifying death, an awakening to Self! At the same time I had the definitive revelation that Henri (Le Saux) is my *guru*. I saw him in his blinding glory, transfigured in this Light. But he experienced the terrible anguish of not knowing if I was going to "return", and if so, if it would be with all my faculties [...] This Light of "great death" overwhelmed both of us equally.<sup>117</sup>

Again there are references to light: "Great Light", "ineffable Light". But unlike Abhishiktānanda's references to light in his experiences in the cave, Chaduc's reference to light

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<sup>115</sup> *Letters*, p. 256 (MC 6.12.71).

<sup>116</sup> *Secret*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>117</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22.

seem to be more than metaphor. Chaduc actually had a vision that lasted for three hours. He says that the Light overwhelmed them both equally. However, it is not clear whether Abhishiktānanda also experienced the same vision, or whether he was overcome by Chaduc's vision. Other evidence suggests the latter interpretation.

Chaduc says that he realized at that time that Abhishiktānanda was his *guru*. His description of Abhishiktānanda's "blinding glory" seems to refer to the description of Jesus' transfiguration.<sup>118</sup> Just as the disciples saw the glory of Jesus, so Chaduc sees the glory in Abhishiktānanda.

Chaduc speaks of an "annihilating death" in relation to "an awakening". His experience of illumination was a kind of death; he was so deeply plunged that Abhishiktānanda feared he would not 'return', and Abhishiktānanda says that he had to exercise all his authority as *guru* to summon him back.<sup>119</sup> It seems clear that Chaduc's experience was a kind of near death experience.

The next day, Abhishiktānanda reflected on this experience in his *Diary*. He writes that he *knows* that the experience of the Upanishads is true.<sup>120</sup> This statement is interesting. For one thing, Abhishiktānanda does not speak of the experience as being "immediate"; rather, he interprets the experience by the Upanishads. This is in accordance with the Yogic Model of Experience, which begins with concepts but moves beyond them. The experience is pointed to by the Upanishads, but the experience is on another level.

Abhishiktānanda wrote to a friend about Chaduc's experience:

I understood there [at Phūlchatti] that the Upanishad is a secret which is only properly given in the secret of the communication of the *guru* to the disciple.<sup>121</sup>

But what is interesting here is that Chaduc, the disciple, experienced *advaita* before Abhishiktānanda had himself experienced it! Chaduc's experience of death and life was only

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<sup>118</sup> Matt. 17:2.

<sup>119</sup> *Letters*, p. 266.

<sup>120</sup> *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72).

<sup>121</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 22. May 22/72.

experienced vicariously by Abhishiktānanda. A month later, after he had returned to Gyansu, Abhishiktānanda writes:

I continue to remember (as if it was my own) your experience. This morning it was so powerful during the Mass. It left me with a breathlessness which I still have at noon.<sup>122</sup>

Abhishiktānanda did not himself have the experience that Chaduc described. He only had a vicarious experience of Chaduc's experience, "as if it were" his own. Murray Rogers, a friend of Abhishiktānanda, is also of the opinion that what happened here was an experience for Chaduc. What Abhishiktānanda had been hoping for for years had happened to Chaduc immediately.<sup>123</sup>

For the disciple to have an *advaitic* experience before his *guru* has the experience is contrary to the entire *guru* model in India. The tradition says that there is a direct transmission from a *guru* who has had the *advaitic* experience to the disciple who has not. That was also Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of the *guru* relation. As early as 1952 he wrote that people only find the way to God with the help of someone who knows it by personal experience. The true *guru* is himself realized, and can therefore penetrate to the soul of his disciple.<sup>124</sup> "One can transmit only what one has oneself. No one can awaken a sleeper if one is asleep oneself."<sup>125</sup> How did Abhishiktānanda explain this inversion of that relation? How could the secret of the Upanishads be transmitted by one who had not yet experienced it? Abhishiktānanda uses Christian imagery to explain this inverted *guru*-disciple relation! He tries to explain it by a reference to the Trinity. Jesus the Son reveals the depth of being in the Father. Until the Son appears, the depths of the Father are not known.

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<sup>122</sup> *Letters*, p. 270.

<sup>123</sup> This is the view of Murray Rogers, as said to Visvanathan: *An Ethnography of Mysticism: The Narratives of Abhishiktānanda, a French Monk in India* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1998), p. 86. Abhishiktānanda says that Chaduc seized the experience with the radicality of his age. Abhishiktānanda says it was an experience of both joy and anguish. *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 407 (28.8.72).

<sup>124</sup> *Diary*, p. 31 (3.4.52).

<sup>125</sup> Abhishiktānanda: "The Priest for Whom India Waits, for whom the World Waits" (1964), *Eyes of Light*, 108. See also "The Upanishads, an Introduction", *Further Shore* p. 62: "He alone can pass on this experience who has known it himself, who has been awakened, within, the *evamvid*, he who knows *thus*." And in "Communication in the Spirit", Abhishiktānanda says, "The guru must be *brahmanishtha*, established in the knowledge and experience of Brahman (Mund. Up. 1,2:12)."

dans le fond du Père le Fils  
 dans le fond du fils le Père  
 dans deux mains qui s'étreignent  
 le mystère du Père et du Fils.  
 Jésus a révélé le fond de Dieu, de l'Être.

in the depth of the Father the Son  
 in the depth of the Son the Father  
 in two hands that clasp each other  
 the unique mystery of the Father and the Son.  
 Jesus has revealed the depth of God, of Being.<sup>126</sup>

In this case, Chaduc, his "child" had engendered the experience in Abhishiktānanda, his "father".<sup>127</sup> Abhishiktānanda wrote the following in connection with Chaduc's experience: "The Lord has said to me: *Today I beget you.*"<sup>128</sup> Panikkar summarizes Abhishiktānanda's idea of the Trinity, which he realized for himself in his relation of *guru* to his disciple Chaduc:

The I cannot experience Itself in a logical identity: the I (subject) of the experience becomes the myself (object). The Myself implies already the Thou, the Logos, the Son, the *advitīyam*. There has to be an other, *alius* not *aliud*, namely the Son, who "causes the birth" of the Father, as we might say in a paradox, "when" the Father gives birth to the Son.<sup>129</sup>

Until his *guru*-disciple relationship with Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda had not had this Incarnation experience, the experience of Fatherhood in bringing forth the Son, of being a *guru* in time and space, in flesh and blood.

In the May 11, 1972 entry in his *Diary* where he describes Chaduc's experience, Abhishiktānanda also makes references to the Trinity. He refers to the Father and the Son, and to the Resurrection. He writes,

Et je sais que ce que j'ai enseigné dans *Sagesse* est vrai,  
 même si mal exprimé.  
 La Trinité à tous les échelons,  
 profondeur des profondeurs

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<sup>126</sup> *La montée*, p. 425; *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.72).

<sup>127</sup> See William Wordsworth's poem, "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" (1802), where he says, "The child is father of the man." Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a poem on this subject in 1918. Abhishiktānanda says in "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished): "Le Fils fait être le Père. Le Père fait être le Fils."

<sup>128</sup> *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

<sup>129</sup> Raimon Panikkar: Introduction to *Diary*, p. xxvii.

r el du r el: *satyasya satyam*  
 [...] *qui habite une lumi re inaccessible.*

And I know that what I have taught in *Sagesse* [*Saccidananda*] is true, even if  
 badly expressed,  
 The Trinity at every level,  
 the depth of every deep,  
 the Real of the real, *satyasya satyam*  
 ...who dwells in unapproachable light. [1 Tim. 6:16]<sup>130</sup>

This is a remarkable interweaving of Hindu Upanishadic themes and Biblical themes. The light of awakening is compared to Biblical references to light. The idea of the Trinity is related to every level of the whole world as it arises from the Real. In *Saccid nanda*, Abhishikt nanda says that just as Christ comes from the Father by the Spirit, the manifested world comes from *Brahman* by his * akti*. The world as such is also real, just as Christ is real. This is reminiscent of Rama a's views on the reality of the world as set out in the *Vivekac d ma i*, that all is *Brahman*. This view of the reality of the world is confirmed by the same *Diary* entry of May 11:

In the light of the * tman*, (of *Brahman*, Mund. Up. III, 1,1) all relationships between beings (the whole gift of self to the self of each being: food, *annam*) are pure being, being itself, unique being. There are no things that would be added together and would coexist separately in the area of that light. They are not distinguished from that light, from that being, and yet they are for one another,

in the depth of the Father the son  
 in the depth of the Son the Father  
 in two hands that clasp each other  
 the unique mystery of the Father and the Son  
 Jesus has revealed the depth of God, of Being

He has reached that light–*tejas*–in the bosom of the Father, in his ascension with his body, *sa ar rah*; at his bodily death he reached it beyond death. He resumed his body again–beyond that detachment of the Purusha from (in) this body of mortal flesh. For it is at the boundary of the * ar ra* that we meet the Supreme [*uttamah*] Purusha.

The Resurrection is *j vanmukti*.

In the light of *Brahman* the world is a mystery of threeness, an interweaving of trinities.

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<sup>130</sup>*La mont e*, pp. 425, 426; *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72). It is interesting that here Abhishikt nanda affirms what he wrote in *Saccid nanda*, whereas less than a year later he said that the whole Trinitarian thesis in *Saccid nanda* had collapsed. (*Diary*, p. 369, 2.2.73). And yet even after this later date, Abhishikt nanda interpreted his experience with Chaduc in a trinitarian manner.

It is the *world* that is a mystery of threeness. The world is not illusion. Rather, all relationships between beings (the plural manifested reality) are pure being. They are “not distinguished from that light” and yet “they are for one another”. This is an example of Abhishiktānanda’s view of non-monistic *advaita*. The beings are not distinguished from the Unmanifested, and yet they still are for one another, in relation to one another.

The reference to the *Purusha* gives a personal aspect to the experience. He says on the same page,

I have come to know that mighty Person, golden like the sun, beyond all darkness.  
By knowing Him a man transcends death; there is no other path for reaching that goal.<sup>131</sup>

This *Purusha* is “the golden embryo” of all. The *Purusha* is unborn but comes in every birth. The *Purusha* is his own light (B IV, 3,6). There is an “explosion” of the “sun” when *Purusha* reveals himself:

Oh! quand il se découvre,  
quand le soleil explose,  
la fin du monde  
alors Je suis.

Oh! when he reveals himself,  
when the sun explodes,  
the end of the world,  
then I am.

A further reference in this description is also important for this thesis. He refers to this striving to the *Purusha* as the “aspiration” towards the *sahasrāra*. This is the thousand-petalled lotus in *Kundalini* yoga. The *sahasrāra* is the *cakra* at the crown of the head.<sup>132</sup>

Bettina Bäumer refers to this ‘mystical outburst’ by Abhishiktānanda. She links his “I know” to the connection (or “upanishad”) that Abhishiktānanda makes between the ascension of Jesus, the ascension of the *Purusha* in the Chandogya Upanishad, and the yogic ‘ascension’ to the *sahasrāra*.<sup>133</sup> The idea of the *sahasrāra cakra* was not something new for Abhishiktānanda.

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<sup>131</sup> *Diary*, p. 348 (11.5.73). The reference is to SU II, 8.

<sup>132</sup> *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

<sup>133</sup> Vandana (ed.): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: The Man and his Teachings* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1986), p. 18.

He referred to it when he first meditated in the caves of Arunāchala. But he is here making connections with other doctrines and ideas.

Even if Abhishiktānanda himself had had only a vicarious experience, he was profoundly affected by Chaduc's experience. The experience convinced him of the reality of *advaita*. He wrote to Chaduc about it:

I don't know when I shall recover from that Phūlchatti, which was lived by both of us at a depth of which even your ecstasy was only a quasi-external sign....now I do know, *vedāham!*<sup>134</sup>

It is Chaduc who had the ecstasy. Abhishiktānanda says that this ecstasy (which he apparently did not have) was "only a quasi-eternal sign" of something deeper that they both experienced. That experience seems to have been the nonduality between them both as *guru* and disciple.

Abhishiktānanda also wrote about Chaduc's experience in a letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne:

For the moment, it is necessary "to return" from Phūlchatti and for the body to regain itself. It is too overpowering to feel oneself in the presence of the True, and how can one express in words that which words would only betray.<sup>135</sup>

Five days later, he wrote Odette Baumer-Despeigne again about the experience. He described the time with Chaduc as:

...days of extraordinary fullness, even if physically devastating for me. All that I have said now seems to me off the point, so academic. What is important in the Upanishads are the 'correlations', which go beyond all the words employed and pierce the living flesh like electric shocks [*comme des flash?*] Neither books nor lectures can convey this experience. You have to awake to another level of awareness. [...] I now *know* that the Upanishad is true, *satyam*. I would like Marc to live it so deeply beyond the 'names and forms' that he may be able to repeat it in Europe, stripped of all its exotic oriental trappings and springing directly from the Source.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> *Letters*, p. 270 (MC, 3.6.72).

<sup>135</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23, (22.5.73). *Diary*, p. 348 11.5.72 refers to SU , III, 8: "I have come to know that mighty Person, golden like the sun, beyond all darkness."

<sup>136</sup> *Letters*, p. 268 (OB, 28.5.72).

## c) The night of Pentecost

During the same three-week period in May, 1972, Chaduc had another experience—this time on the roof of Sivānanda Ashram. It was on the night of May 27-28. He called it “the night of Pentecost”. The experience “shattered” them; they were unable to celebrate Mass the next morning.<sup>137</sup> Abhishiktānanda writes of the experiencing a “shuddering as if some force was carrying me off... as a horse shakes off dust from its hair.”<sup>138</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says he did not physically recover from what he had seen in this *upadesha* [teaching] of fire.<sup>139</sup> Abhishiktānanda speaks of this experience in terms of “light”, “fire”, “spark” and “flash”.

*Jyotis-sampanna* [all changed into light, merged in light]—*tejas-sampanna* [all changed into glory]. How keep going after that? What reading can be “interesting” what company can be interesting?<sup>140</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that there is nothing further to do except to bear witness to the fullness of light.<sup>141</sup> It is pure light, supreme light [*param jyoti*], pure sun [*āditya*]. Hindu terms for light are compared to Biblical terms:

*Tejas*, glory, is the *doxa* of the Gospel, the *qabod* of the Bible. To come near to it burns you, *cornutus Moses* [shining of Moses’ face]. [...] The great lesson of the Upanishads: that brightness, the *tejas* of Being... which burns, swallows up in the Self. The immense place given to the Sun—and also to Agni and the lightning [*vidyut*] in worship and thought comes precisely from this intuition of light, *jyoti*, *tejas*, within the heart.<sup>142</sup>

It is the Light of the world, the rays of the sun, Supreme light, and joyful light. “God is too great a light for one to hold out in his presence. One vanishes. Absorbed in the Source who is *jyotih* [light].”<sup>143</sup> It is an experience of *Purusha* shining as the self in the depth of oneself.<sup>144</sup> It is the

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<sup>137</sup> *Letters*, p. 267.

<sup>138</sup> *Diary*, p. 268 (OB, 28.5.72).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Diary*, p. 355 (2.6.72).

<sup>141</sup> *Diary* p. 355 (10.6.72).

<sup>142</sup> *Diary*, pp. 355, 356 (10.6.72).

<sup>143</sup> *Diary* p. 359 (3.8.72).

<sup>144</sup> *Diary* p. 360 (29.8.72).

burning heat that is at the origin of everything.<sup>145</sup> It is a return of the human being to the light that shines of itself [*svayam jyoti*].<sup>146</sup> He compares the experience to a Light that empties, annihilates, and fulfils one.

But Abhishiktānanda also mentions that this is sometimes experienced only in a “glimpse”:

Of the fire that I am, of the fire that anyone is who has even had only a glimpse of Brahman. A fire that burns—slowly perhaps but inexorably—in all the *nāmarūpas* [names and forms] of whoever comes near him. ---Christianity is first of all upanishad, correlation, not direct teaching. Correlation causes the spark of experience [*anubhava*] to flash, that alone gives fulfilment.<sup>147</sup>

On May 29, Abhishiktānanda writes to his sister about the experience:

I burn with the desire to make this known, to communicate this interior burning, an uncontrollable, burning and transforming presence. This communication takes place directly from spirit to spirit, in the silence of the Spirit.<sup>148</sup>

In June, Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc:

I need time in order to assimilate the Light experienced at Phülchatti, this sudden and earthshaking vision. Christianity is an explosion of the Spirit [...] The words which I am able to speak to you have validity more by their resonance than their immediate meaning.<sup>149</sup>

This experience with Chaduc inspired Abhishiktānanda to write the *Introduction to the Upanishads*.<sup>150</sup>

In June, 1972 Abhishiktānanda starts to have periods of breathlessness.<sup>151</sup> This is probably evidence of his heart problems at the time. He writes of the impossibility of taking any real interest in anything whatever. He reports that his mind could keep quiet, and that he could neither meditate nor practise *japa* (prayer, *mantra*).

<sup>145</sup> *Diary*, p. 376 (17.4.73).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Diary*, p. 351 (28.5.72).

<sup>148</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23, (22.5.73).

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> This is included as part of *The Further Shore*.

<sup>151</sup> *Diary*, p. 355 (10.6.72).

Later in 1972, Abhishiktānanda was able to resume meditation. He writes,

Just like yoga, the various kinds of *dhāranā-dhyāna* (concentration, meditation) have their own value as methods, as instruments, but to absolutize them, even to absolutize them simply as methods, is to fall into the trap of *māyā*. In *sati* [Buddhist mindfulness?] there is no more than a succession of ‘*happenings*’. Is there still an observer [*sākshī*] who knows that there are ‘*happenings*’? It is just “that”, *tad*, which remains, *avaśishyate!*<sup>152</sup>

In January, 1973, Abhishiktānanda writes that human beings need *zazen*, meditation, silence, just as they need sleep.<sup>153</sup>

In February, 1973, there is a reference in a letter to Chaduc which seems to confirm that Abhishiktānanda himself had not yet had an authentic *advaitic* experience:

There is something which I have the impression of having grasped, but without being able to express it. Nothing new, even so. There has been nothing new since Arunāchala, twenty years ago. But the mind seems to be always carried a little further on, it is like the landings on a staircase—or so it seems.<sup>154</sup>

If there had been “nothing new since Arunāchala”, this would mean that Abhishiktānanda had not himself had the *advaitic* experience. There are landings on a staircase, levels towards the experience, but not the experience itself. He may have been vicariously thrilled with Chaduc’s experiences, which he envied. His letters from April, 1973 seem to confirm that he had not yet attained the experience. In April, Abhishiktānanda writes to Chaduc that the duality which we assert between *advaita* and *dvaita* is precisely a mistake.<sup>155</sup> He seems to be using the Māhāyana Buddhist doctrine that *samsāra* is *nirvana*. He says that there is no time when one is realized, and that there is no distinction between *advaita* and *dvaita*.

Whoever expects an “experience”, so that he can say that he is “realized”, knows nothing about anything. There is nothing to be renounced, nothing to be released from,...*Dhyāna* [meditation] is not a means. For there is no means—neither meditation nor rite nor *gnosis* nor *guru* nor scripture [...] So long as *mokṣa*,

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<sup>152</sup> *Diary*, p. 361, (1.11.72). This is a reference to the mantra of fullness from BU V, 1 and IsaU: “That is fullness, this is Fullness, from Fullness comes Fullness. When Fullness is taken from Fullness, Fullness remains [*avaśishyate*]” [Panikkar’s translation, *The Vedic Experience*, p. 806].

<sup>153</sup> *Diary*, p. 367 (3.1.73).

<sup>154</sup> *Letters*, pp. 285, 286 (MC, 1.2.73).

<sup>155</sup> *Letters*, p. 293 (MC, 12.4.73).

*ātman, brahman, nirvana*, is still thought of as some thing, you are going away from it even while looking for it.<sup>156</sup>

Abhishiktānanda's *Diary* records the same view that one should not seek "realization":

Pay no attention to the idea of being realized or to that of not being realized. All that steadily inflates the ego. So long as I think of an ego that has to be transcended or annihilated, I am simply feeding it! The *sādhana* for *moksha* lies simply in the stopping [*nivṛitti*] of the *manas*.<sup>157</sup>

Harilal had told Abhishiktānanda that "the fundamental obstacle to realization is precisely the notion that this realization is still awaited."<sup>158</sup> Abhishiktānanda was now facing this truth. But the fact that he had to consciously reject the goal of realization also means that he himself had not yet experienced it. In April, 1973, Abhishiktānanda writes,

To speak of a time to come—to hope for it—when I will be "realized" is absolutely meaningless. ...To desire salvation [*moksha*] is a false word at the level of the Absolute [*paramārtha*]. Pay no attention either to the idea of being realized or to that of not being realized. All that steadily inflates the ego. So long as I think of an ego that has to be transcended or annihilated, I am simply feeding it.<sup>159</sup>

This is the paradox of the meditative practice. Realization is not attained as long as it is sought. But to say that there is no realization is only true *at the level of the Absolute*. That does not mean that seeking realization is false at the level of the relative. Until we have obtained realization there is a goal to be achieved, the "further shore" of the heart.<sup>160</sup> As Ramaṇa said, "One must ferry over to the shore of Liberation that Self which is immersed in the ocean of *samsāra*."<sup>161</sup> But this "further shore" is only further in relation to this shore.<sup>162</sup> In other words, the truth that *samsāra* is *nirvana* is only known after realization. Abhishiktānanda recognized this when he said that to say [at the relative level] that there is no realization can be a "counsel of despair" to one who has not achieved it:

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<sup>156</sup> *Letters*, p. 296 (MC, 23.4.73).

<sup>157</sup> *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73).

<sup>158</sup> *Secret*, p. 82. Harilal said that he neither read books nor meditated.

<sup>159</sup> *Diary*, p. 377 (19.4.73).

<sup>160</sup> *Diary*, p. 284.

<sup>161</sup> *Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, p. 129.

<sup>162</sup> *Diary*, p. 295 (22.9.67).

A Ramaṇa, a Buddha are extremely rare events in history. So we console ourselves by saying that no one ever awakes, there is only the One who is Awake. Surely that is a counsel of despair? Just as much as that of Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) or the Epicureans? The truly practical, *existential*, answer is that of the Gospel. Unfortunately we have so covered it up (*adhyāsa*) with myths and theological gnosis. . . or on the other hand, as in these days, we have so emptied it of its mystery, the Real. . . (.) This deep Reality is there, *nihito guhāyām* [hidden in the cave of the heart], beyond the heavens, and *I* know it, but *manas* [mind] does not know that *I* know it and yet well knows that if *I* did not know it, it could not itself even say, *I do not know.*<sup>163</sup>

What is going on here? Abhishiktānanda is obviously wrestling with the fact that he has not yet attained the *advaitic* experience. What does he mean by the reference to the Gospel providing the truly practical, existential answer? Is he again looking to Christianity to provide some of his answers? From this time, Christian imagery begins to play a larger role for him, especially imagery about the prophet Elijah.

#### d) Chaduc's *dīkshā*

Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc found themselves together again at Phūlchatti from May 12 to June 27, 1973. From June 4-10 they were together at Rishikesh and Haridwār. Abhishiktānanda writes Panikkar that "everything explodes when you have reached the fourth *mātra* of OM [...] Everything explodes, everything goes away, and then what is left? *Etad val tad*; That, just that!"<sup>164</sup>

From June 27 to 30 they were at Rishikesh for Chaduc's *dīkshā*. In the previous chapter we saw how Abhishiktānanda envied Chaduc's experience at the *dīkshā* and the fact that Chaduc was able to go off on his own. Abhishiktānanda felt that Chaduc had left him, "not just physically, but that he has passed into a sphere of the sacred to which I have no access".<sup>165</sup> This again suggests that Chaduc had had an experience that Abhishiktānanda himself had not. Abhishiktānanda confirms this in the same diary entry: "The one who was after me has gone ahead." This seems to be a reference to John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus, where John acknowledged that Jesus was greater than himself. Abhishiktānanda also saw this *dīkshā* in

<sup>163</sup> *Letters*, pp. 295, 296 (MC, 21.4.73).

<sup>164</sup> *Letters*, p. 301 (RP 25.6.73). This is a refrain from the Katha Upanishad.

<sup>165</sup> *Diary*, p. 382 (3.7.73).

terms of Elijah—that he had united Chaduc with a tradition that went back to the Desert Fathers and behind that to Elijah.<sup>166</sup> After Chaduc's *dīkshā*, Abhishiktānanda wrote this poem:

Tu n'es plus seulement l'enfant  
né de moi  
que j'aime follement  
mais tu fus transfiguré  
comme je le fus aux tiens.  
En toi j'ai le *darshana*  
du Non-Né.  
*Ajata.*  
Ta *diksha* comme ton envoie de mai  
m'a fait frissonner jusqu'au fond de l'être  
m'enlevant à moi-même  
me perdant aux espaces infinis  
où je ne sais plus rien  
où je me cherche en vain.  
OM.

This has been translated as

You are no longer the child  
begotten by me  
whom I love extravagantly  
but you were transfigured before my eyes  
as I was before yours.  
In you I have had *darshana*  
of the Unbegotten  
*Ajata.*  
Your *diksha*  
as your flight of May  
shook me to the depths of my being  
stripping me of myself  
losing myself in infinite spaces  
where I no longer know anything  
where I search in vain. OM<sup>167</sup>

It was in Chaduc that Abhishiktānanda had a vision of the Unbegotten; Chaduc had been transfigured before him. It was Chaduc's *dīkshā* and his "flight of May" [1972?] that had shaken Abhishiktānanda to the depths of his being. It was not Abhishiktānanda's own experience.

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<sup>166</sup> *Letters*, p. 303 (FT, 6.7.73).

## e) Ranagal

In July, 1973, 10 days after Chaduc's *dikshā*, Abhishiktānanda met Chaduc by 'chance' in a hermitage at Kaudiyalā near Rishikesh. Abhishiktānanda had been considering acquiring this hermitage, since Gyansu was becoming hard for him to reach. Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc took refuge from a thunderstorm in a small deserted Shaivite temple which Chaduc had discovered on the other side of the Ganges at Ranagal. They spent three days there without food. Abhishiktānanda says that they were in a state of high experience, in what can only be called a "holy inebriation" like the *keshi* of the Ṛg Veda.<sup>168</sup> He also says that these days in the jungle were so spiritually powerful that his body could not stand up to it.<sup>169</sup>

Chaduc records these events in his diary:

During these few days Swamiji [Abhishiktānanda] was as if driven by a force which went beyond him. They were lived out through certain great symbols such as the taking up of the Prophet Elias in his fiery chariot, that of *Dakshinamurti*, the manifestation of Shiva as a young *guru* teaching by his silence, or finally the myth of the Column of fire which had neither base nor summit of Arunachal-Shiva.

On July 11, under the influence of the Spirit, there issued from the mouth of the Father, unexpectedly, words which stammered the inexpressible, suggesting that he who was after had been before, without being either after or before; that there was no longer either master or disciple [...] What was spoken cannot be remembered [...]

Suddenly a flash of lightning illumined the nearby mountain and in this light Swamiji lived again the irruption of the Column of fire and light of Shiva-Arunachala. The very depths of his being shook and trembled to the point of snapping [...] The rain fell in torrents, it ran down to the *mandir*. We remained seated for a long time in silence. An extraordinary power emanated from everything. Finally we curled up as best we could to pass the long night around the *linga* (the upright stone which is a symbol of Shiva). On July 12, as dawn appeared, it continued to rain. A power—a *shakti*—of total despoilment reigned in this place, man could no longer cover himself with any rag, there was nothing other than the Absolute who shone forth in his dazzling radiance. Still under the

<sup>167</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "*Cheminement spirituel d'Henri Le Saux: Textes inédits*", *La Vie Spirituelle* (1990) v. 691 (Sept.-Oct.), pp. 531-543, translated as "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., pp. 20-25. (Two verses of a long poem).

<sup>168</sup> *Letters*, p. 305.

<sup>169</sup> *Letters*, p. 308 (MR 6.8.73).

influence of the numinous which radiated the *mandir*, Swamiji intoned the *OM* in such a way as to make resonant the silence of the fourth syllable [...]<sup>170</sup>

This was certainly a numinous experience, as Chaduc says. Was it also an *advaitic* experience? It was obviously a very moving experience for Abhishiktānanda. Chaduc says that Abhishiktānanda trembled to the very depths of his being. What is the meaning of the strange words spoken by Abhishiktānanda about he who was after had been before? Is this not the same reference to Chaduc who had in some sense been “before” Abhishiktānanda’s own experience? Again, it is by no means clear that Abhishiktānanda himself had the experience he sought, although it was certainly a profound experience for him.

Chaduc writes about what occurred the next day:

More and more I understood that this “mystery” is the unique and non-dual mystery which resides within the heart of each one of both of us and which reveals itself in the depths of our relation of *guru* to disciple, and still more of father to son. The mystery of the *guru*-disciple communion touched at its culminating point this profound mystery of the son who “engenders” the father, in the very act in which the father engenders the son as his own, with both awakening the Unbegotten.<sup>171</sup>

This is a very explicit reference to the vicarious nature of Abhishiktānanda’s experience. It is the disciple, the son, who engenders the father. It is through Chaduc’s experience that Abhishiktānanda has the experience.

On July 14, Abhishiktānanda went to Rishikesh to shop for provisions. He said words that sounded like a final farewell to Chaduc.

When he left me, the words of farewell were more forceful than usual, and his features were again transfigured. I will never forget his last words: “Even though I depart, I will never leave you. I am always with you.”<sup>172</sup>

These words are similar to those that the Gospel records for Jesus at his ascension.<sup>173</sup> They are also similar to words said by Ramaṇa: “Bhagavan is always with you, in you and you

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<sup>170</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 23.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24.

<sup>173</sup> Matt. 28:20.

are yourself Bhagavān.”<sup>174</sup> Abhishiktānanda says that his farewell to Chaduc took the form of the great departure, *mahāprasthāna*. He was freeing Chaduc from his state of discipleship, making him a “Master”.<sup>175</sup>

Abhishiktānanda had had a premonition of death on June 29, when he heard the singing of the lament “Arunachal Shiva”, a lament that had been sung at Ramaṇa’s passing. He chanted it, too. Abhishiktānanda says that he lived that week in the *mythos* of being finally mastered by Arunāchala’s pillar of fire. He met with Chidananda that evening. On leaving, he was seized with giddiness and had to lean on the handrail of the stairs.<sup>176</sup>

When he left Chaduc on July 14, Abhishiktānanda also left his coat with Chaduc. Chaduc later saw this like Elijah saying farewell to Elisha, and leaving him his cloak.<sup>177</sup> This was also Abhishiktānanda’s understanding of his action.<sup>178</sup>

## 2. Rishikesh

### a) Abhishiktānanda’s Heart Attack: a Near Death Experience

On July 14, Abhishiktānanda left Chaduc at Ranagal and went to Rishikesh. At Rishikesh, Abhishiktānanda had a major heart attack. He was running to catch a bus. As he lay in the street, he was “providentially” recognized by a friend from Sivānanda Ashram, Yvonne Lemoine. Chidananda told her that it was not by chance that she found Abhishiktānanda and was able to help him.

Although helpless, Abhishiktānanda remained lucid in mind. After he recovered his speech, his first words were, “It is beautiful, I can’t tell you how beautiful it is! Simply to open one’s eyes on where one is.”<sup>179</sup> He wrote his sister:

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<sup>174</sup> Cited by Ramananda Swarnagiri in Herbert, Jean: *Etudes sur Ramana Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940), p. 213.

<sup>175</sup> *Diary*, p. 387.

<sup>176</sup> *Diary* p. 387 (11.9.73).

<sup>177</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> *Letters*, p. 313 (MC.23.9.73).

Everything was so wonderful during these first two weeks [after the heart attack]. Later came the stripping away of all thought, meditation, contemplation.<sup>180</sup>

A month after his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda writes,

The heart-attack was only the backdrop to a marvellous spiritual experience. I then made the discovery that life and death are only particular situations, and the 'I', the 'Awakening', is not tied to them or limited by them. Of the two weeks spent in bed I recall nothing but intense joy. It was a tremendous surprise but also a unique experience, this Awakening to the Real in the unity of the Spirit.<sup>181</sup>

Abhishiktānanda writes of a sense of a struggle within himself between the angel of death and the angel of life. He felt that his urge to live was fighting against the death-urge. He understood the imagery of being saved from *Yama*, the god of Death, and from the jaws of Sheol as described in David's psalms.

And to another person he writes,

It seemed to me as if I was navigating between the two 'shores' of being that man calls life and death, and to discover myself in the middle of the great current of Being Itself which has nothing to do either with life or with death.<sup>182</sup>

He describes his experience in his *Diary*:

And all of that made me discover myself at a level that went so far beyond all sensations. Seeing myself so weak, so incapable of thought and movement, I became free from my identification with that *myself* which previously used to think and will, used to move about and was anxious about all and sundry. Disconnection. All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be...

Another intuition or rather another form of the single intuition, that deeply affected me in those days was: *a-loka*. My freedom, my disconnection from every *loka*-situation, even from the *loka*-situation of life/death. To Be, free from all situations, physical, psychological, spiritual, or religious. Free from every situation—any ascetic setting, any form of asceticism, any form whatever. To find oneself, recover oneself in one's original purity-nakedness.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda" *Cistercian Studies* (1983) v. 4., p. 328.

<sup>180</sup> *Letters*, p. 318 (22.10.73).

<sup>181</sup> Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", p. 328.

<sup>182</sup> Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "The Spiritual Journey of Henri Le Saux-Abhishiktānanda", p. 328 (Letter to Christian Belle).

<sup>183</sup> *Diary*, p. 387.

He writes to Odette Baumer-Despeigne regarding this feeling of *a-loka*:

This heart attack has taught me that the *loka*—places, situations—are quite unimportant. Anyone who still sees a difference between the Hindu environment of Rishikesh and that of a nursing home at Indore has not (yet) understood the mystery of non-duality (*advaita*).<sup>184</sup>

Abhishiktānanda writes to Murray Rogers in September, describing his experience:

Really a door opened in heaven when I was lying on the pavement, but a heaven which was not the opposite of earth, something which was neither life nor death, but simply 'being', 'awakening' beyond all myths and symbols. This Awakening was a total explosion.<sup>185</sup>

Abhishiktānanda's experience was clearly a near death experience.<sup>186</sup> In this connection, it should be remembered that Ramaṇa also had a near death experience where his companion thought that he was dead. Is a near-death experience the same as an *advaitic* experience? Ramaṇa thought that it was, and in fact traced his enlightenment to an enactment of death at the age of 16. But cannot a near death experience also be interpreted dualistically? If it is an experience of viewing oneself from a distance, as both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda record, can this not be regarded as consciousness being distinct from the matter of the body that is being observed?

One comment made by Abhishiktānanda suggests a dualistic interpretation of the experience. Abhishiktānanda records his sense of the smallness of his body. He found it "hard to be convinced that this minimum of matter is enough to support consciousness."<sup>187</sup> This at first suggests a distinction between matter and spirit or consciousness. However, Abhishiktānanda also says that he no longer identified with consciousness either. "All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be..."<sup>188</sup> Thus it is not the case of dualistically favouring consciousness over matter.

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<sup>184</sup> Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting—A Darshan", *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 1995), p. 433.

<sup>185</sup> *Diary*, p. 311 (MR, 10.9.73).

<sup>186</sup> However, Abhishiktānanda cautions that the experience "was no grand vision, but a waiting, an awakening, quite peaceful, to something which is neither life nor death." *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

<sup>187</sup> *Diary*, p. 386.

<sup>188</sup> *Diary*, p. 387.

The majority of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience are non-dualistic. He describes being beyond all dualities, whether of life and death. He does not expressly describe being beyond time, but he does describe his being beyond space, *a-loka*. He says he was free from every situation. These descriptions of his experience have a sense of directness and vividness. It is a record of a lived experience, and not just a repeating of what he had read.

Can we regard the *advaitic* experience of Abhishiktānanda as nothing more than a physiological response to the heart attack? Abhishiktānanda's own understanding was the other way round. He said that the heart attack was caused by a spiritual experience of such intensity that the body could not resist it. He told Yvonne Lemoine, "I knew I was tired; I did not really run after that bus; I began and then I stopped." "Ce fut si beau". "A human heart cannot take so much joy, and mine could not have been big enough. It was joy—'un coup de Shiva'.<sup>189</sup>

Abhishiktānanda had previously written that the ultimate *advaitic* experience involves a kind of death.

L'homme meurt de l'expérience de ananta (infini)  
au-delà de l'au-delà  
Brahman.  
Mort, mort, en devenant Brahman, le TOUT Brahman *sarvam*.  
*Oui cela est vrai,*  
*l'engouffrement dans cette Source!*

A person dies of the experience of the infinite [*ananta*]  
beyond the beyond—  
Brahman  
Dead, dead, in becoming Brahman, the ALL, Brahman *sarvam*.  
Yes that is true,  
being absorbed in this Source!<sup>190</sup>

He says in the same passage that the *rishis* have locked away the experience in *mantras* lest it should cause a person to die at the moment of this inner disjunction. What is this disjunction? It is the movement from the mortal flesh, beyond the boundary of the *śarīra*. If the body is shaken off there is liberation; if there is liberation without shaking off the body it is *jīvanmukti*.

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<sup>189</sup> Sister Vandana, R.S.C.J.: "A Messenger of Light", *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 500.

<sup>190</sup> *La montée*, p. 426; *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

Elsewhere he says, “But the mystery of the eternal birth can only be passed on in the terrifying experience of death by the *ātman* itself.”<sup>191</sup> The death of the body may or may not follow.<sup>192</sup> He compares the experience to the death of Jesus. The death of Jesus, the great death on the cross, was less the separation of “soul” from body than feeling himself “abandoned” by God, the depth of Him whom he called the Father with so much love.

#### b) The Experience of Awakening

On July 23, Abhishiktānanda writes to Odette Baumer-Despeigne that he had experienced the Awakening:

It is wonderful to undergo such an experience which brings the fullness of peace and joy beyond all circumstances, even those of death or life. Life can never be the same since I have found the Awakening! Rejoice with me.<sup>193</sup>

This is very different from what he wrote only a few months previously, that there is no awakening, and that one should not seek realization. This letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne was completed in a trembling hand, “*OM*, that says everything! *sarvam brahman*—all is God.” These are the same words that Ramaṇa emphasized in his interpretation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*—all this is *Brahman*! It seems that Abhishiktānanda’s experience was one that gave him this perspective of seeing *Brahman* in all things. This is confirmed in a letter that he had written to Chaduc two days before:

I have to recognize that a ‘Force’ passes through being (beings?) which is terribly dangerous. For my affair was not so much the result of stupidly running after a bus, as the upshot of those two weeks, the *explosion* of which the poem spoke.<sup>194</sup>

The two weeks that he is referring to here are the preceding weeks of Chaduc’s *dīkshā* and of their time at Ranagal. Abhishiktānanda’s recognition of the “Force” passing through beings will be looked at in more detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>191</sup> *Diary*, p. 350 (20.5.72). This is a strange expression, since the *ātman* is normally seen as that which is eternal in the person.

<sup>192</sup> *Diary*, p. 355 (31.5.72).

<sup>193</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

<sup>194</sup> *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73). The poem referred to is reproduced on page 304 of the *Letters*.

Later in September, Abhishiktānanda again tries to describe the experience. He speaks of his heart attack as a “marvellous spiritual adventure”. The “center of his intuition” in the very first days after his heart attack was:

The Awakening is independent of any situation whatever, of all the pairs of opposites [*dvandvas*], and first of all of the *dvandva* called life/death. One awakes everywhere and once for all, and the awakening cannot be confused with what one sees at the moment of the awakening, and therefore with that through which one becomes conscious that one is awake.<sup>195</sup>

After his heart attack, there is no doubt for Abhishiktānanda that there is an Awakening. And he says that this Awakening is beyond all pairs of opposites.

Although Abhishiktānanda says his near-death experience was a great adventure, he also tried to de-emphasize the grandeur of the experience. He objects to the way that others were telling the story of this near-death experience, and he cautions that it should not be seen in too mythical terms:

I have heard through S.G. the manner in which things were described to A., M., etc. *Please* don't add anything to my myth. There was no grand vision, but a waiting, an awakening, quite peaceful, to something which is neither life nor death. Besides, that was helped by the fact that at that moment the 'mind' was working at an infinitely reduced speed.<sup>196</sup>

This is quite a remarkable statement. Throughout his time in India, Abhishiktānanda had sought the *advaitic* experience. Now when he believes that he finally has achieved it, he plays it down. It is true that elsewhere he describes the experience in a much more glorious way; as we shall see, he speaks of his experience as comparable to the finding of the Grail. But in this statement, he refers to the experience as a “waiting.” This reminds me of Heidegger's idea of “listening to Being”.

### c) The I-Experience

His experience confirmed for him the centrality of the “I-experience”. This experience is not something notional or conceptual, but is rather an existential awareness of being. In September, a few months after the heart attack, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Murray Rogers:

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<sup>195</sup> *Diary*, pp. 385-387 (11.9.73).

Even more after my 'beyond life/death' experience of 14.7, I can only aim at awakening people to what 'they are'. Anything about God or the Word in any religion, which is not based on the deep I-experience, is bound to be simply 'notion', not existential.<sup>197</sup>

In his *Diary*, he says much the same thing again. Abhishiktānanda says that as a result of his near death experience,

This is the culmination of the intuition that struck me in January: "Everything has become clear." There is only the Awakening. All that is "notional"—myths and concepts—is only its expression.<sup>198</sup>

#### d) Fire and Light

Chaduc waited for Abhishiktānanda at Ranagal. He had felt himself irresistibly prevented from leaving Ranagal, being *cloué par Shiva* [nailed to the spot by Shiva]. Four days after Abhishiktānanda's heart attack, Chaduc was brought the following poem in which Abhishiktānanda described his heart attack in terms of Shiva's fire:

MARC,  
 Shiva's column of fire  
 brushed against me  
 Saturday midday  
 In the bazaar at Rishikesh,  
 And I still do not understand  
 Why it did not carry me off.  
 Joy, the serene one,  
 OM tat sat  
*Ekatdrishti* [the one pointed gaze]  
*Ekarshi* [the unique rishi]  
 Oh!  
 The crowning grace  
 OM!  
 With my love.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

<sup>197</sup> *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

<sup>198</sup> *Diary*, p. 386. The January date is after Abhishiktānanda said that he knew that the experience of the Upanishads is true.

<sup>199</sup> *Letters*, p. 306.

We see again his comparison of the experience to Shiva's fire and the fire of Arunāchala. Abhishiktānanda said that he lived the events of the great week (10-18 July) in the mythos of Arunāchala's pillar of fire.<sup>200</sup>

e) Did this experience change Abhishiktānanda's views?

Abhishiktānanda said that his first night after the heart attack was filled with difficult dreams, although they were not nightmares. In these dreams, he was led from cave to cave at different altitudes. And in his dream, he himself was constantly saying,

The awakening has nothing to do with "testing oneself" against increasingly difficult life situations. It comes about in any circumstances. At every moment of life, in fact in every circumstance, *I wake up*.<sup>201</sup>

He had earlier written to Chaduc that the one-pointed gaze of awakening [*Ekadrishti*] has nothing to do with confronting exceptional situations of cold, solitude, or nakedness. It is simply opening your eyes there where you are!<sup>202</sup> In other words, it is not a matter of asceticism but of seeing clearly. Awakening has nothing to do with measuring yourself against more and more difficult living conditions. This seems to be an experience of the truth that *samsāra* is *nirvana*—that you only need to open your eyes to where you are. But whereas he had known of this before in an intellectual way, he now experiences it himself after his Awakening. In one of his last letters, he writes,

...'*Jerusalem beata*' [holy-heavenly Jerusalem] does not lie in our always mythical dreams of the future. It is *kai nun* [even now], we only have to open our eyes! That is the one thing that I should like to get people to realize from now on, if I go on living. And it is so simple that no one can grasp it...<sup>203</sup>

Does this mean that Abhishiktānanda's near-death experience had changed his views about the necessity of ascetic renunciation and acosmism? It is difficult to know, since he did not live very long and we do not know the direction that his life would have taken. The fact that he now sees enlightenment as different from ascetic tests would seem to indicate a difference. On the one

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<sup>200</sup> *Diary*, p. 387.

<sup>201</sup> *Diary*, p. 386.

<sup>202</sup> *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73).

<sup>203</sup> Cited in *Diary*, pp. 365, 366.

hand, he continues to affirm that Chaduc had understood him in a way that no one had ever understood him before. On November 23, Abhishiktānanda wrote to Chaduc again:

You are the only person, as well I know, to whom I have been able to say and to pass on everything, in words and beyond words. [...] You accepted the '*tabula rasa*' (the emptying of the mind) and from that *tabula rasa* the sparks flew. Yes, none of it was 'mine' or 'yours'. But that 'Greater One' whom you find lying beyond myself and yourself, is not-other-than you or me.<sup>204</sup>

Chaduc tried to lead a very acosmic life. Abhishiktānanda's praise of him may seem to suggest an endorsement of acosmism. Furthermore, in one of his last letters he writes that Hindu India must re-learn from Christian monks the secret and the value of the acosmic life.<sup>205</sup> On the other hand, he speaks of the fact that he survived his heart attack as a return for a purpose. The grace of returning to life was for the sake of others, to tell others of the discovery of the Grail. Returning to life was a grace, a "new lease" of life; returning to life was not for his sake but for others.<sup>206</sup> His life was to be lived in the service of his Awakening. His aim was to awaken people to what 'they are'. That suggests a very different direction than acosmism.

Abhishiktānanda writes that he was very tired. He writes that he must just simply be there, without even meditating:

It is so delightful to write—in the abstract—about the nudity of the spirit. But then the Lord takes you seriously, removes every fine thought and leaves you lying there, capable of nothing more than simply being there.<sup>207</sup>

He writes about his condition as being "like a beast before thee."<sup>208</sup> James Stuart says this is a Benedictine symbol of humility.

Chaduc wrote to him saying to come to the mountains, and he would help Abhishiktānanda to die if need be.<sup>209</sup> Does that show Chaduc's acosmism and indifference to the

<sup>204</sup> *Letters*, p. 319 (MC, 23.11.73).

<sup>205</sup> *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 420 (22.9.73).

<sup>206</sup> *Letters*, p. 308 (MT, 9.8.73).

<sup>207</sup> *Letters*, p. 321 (FT, 30.11.73).

<sup>208</sup> *Letters*, p. 314 (MC, 4.10.73). Abhishiktānanda uses the Latin phrase "*ut jumentum*".

<sup>209</sup> See *Letters*, p. 316.

world? It must be remembered that Chaduc is believed to have taken his own life by throwing himself in the Ganges. In any event, Abhishiktānanda does not accept his offer.

Abhishiktānanda says that the *advaitic* experience should not be permitted except for those who were very strong; only some are capable of it. The Vedantic secret should not be revealed except to the competent, the initiated. The experience of Vedānta drains people and is just as dangerous as drugs or psychoanalysis. “It is probably better for most people to pass the *shakti* by, than to be a carrier of it, without realising it. But some are capable of it.”<sup>210</sup>

In October, Odette Baumer-Despeigne visited Abhishiktānanda in the nursing home at Indore where he was staying (a home run by the Franciscan Sisters). She records her experience of seeing him as a kind of *darshan*:

His entire being was total transparence to the inner Mystery, joy and peace radiating in his penetrating regard which reduced one to silence, to an amazing silence.<sup>211</sup>

She speaks of the radiance of his face, the eyes of a child in the face of an old man, a being who belonged to a different category of mortals.<sup>212</sup> Abhishiktānanda kept repeating, “But in the end it is so simple; as it says in the Upanishad—“the eye just blinks...Ah!”” (Ken, 4,4).<sup>213</sup>

She asked him to speak about Shiva, but he was silent. She understood this silence as a reproach—that she had understood nothing of what he said. When they celebrated the Eucharist, Abhishiktānanda said, “This is my body” with such an *advaitic* intonation that she was petrified.

On his deathbed, Abhishiktānanda was clothed in the orange robe of a *sannyāsī*. Abhishiktānanda said to Odette:

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<sup>210</sup> *Letters*, p. 318 (MC, 26.10.73).

<sup>211</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: “The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda”, *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24. She says that all who saw him agree in their testimony to the transparence of his whole being to the divine Presence, an extraordinary radiance of his smile, and the expression of his eyes, wide open in wonder. Panikkar writes: “Everyone who visited you in the last months of your life witnesses to the fact that you were another man: transfigured.” “A Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, p. 449.

<sup>212</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne, “Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting—A Darshan”, *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 19095), p. 433.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 435.

What a story, finally, when one has done all that one can, this will be as God willed, I am ready. Now this will be always more or less like that! Behold, as God wills! What trouble I have given you!

#### f) The Grail

Abhishiktānanda compared his *advaitic* experience to the experience of finding the Holy Grail:

After some days [after the heart attack] there came to me, as if it were the marvellous solution to an equation: I have found the Grail. And that is what I keep saying and writing to anyone who can grasp the figure of speech. The quest for the Grail is basically nothing else than the quest for the Self. A single quest, that is the meaning of all the myths and symbols. It is yourself that you are seeking through everything. And in this quest you run about everywhere, whereas the Grail is here, close at hand, you only have to open your eyes. And that is the finding of the Grail in its ultimate truth, Galahad's direct sight of the inside of the vessel, and no longer just being fed by the Grail which mysteriously passes through the hall, nor even drinking from the Grail.<sup>214</sup>

The Grail is of course a Christian symbol. Abhishiktānanda uses it here to refer to his *advaitic* experience. How does Abhishiktānanda use this symbol of the Grail? First, he emphasizes the quest part of the myth. Awakening is a quest, a search. This confirms Abhishiktānanda's understanding after his heart attack that the "awakening: is something to be sought. The idea of a quest seems to negate the idea he had earlier expressed that awakening should not be sought.

Second, Abhishiktānanda explicitly says that the quest for the Grail is a "quest for the Self"

This grace of awakening—of returning to life—is not for my sake but for others. It was so clear: to announce the discovery of the Grail, to tell people: *Uttishta, purusha*, Arise, Purusha! (KathU 3, 14), discover the Grail. Look, it is in the depth of yourself, it is that very "I" that you are saying in every moment of your conscious life, even in the depth of your consciousness when you dream or sleep.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> *Diary*, p. 386, (Sept./73).

<sup>215</sup> *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73). The Purusha is the symbol of the mystery of every human being: "Jesus is the marvellous epiphany of the mystery of Man, of the Purusha, the mystery of every human being, as were the Buddha and Ramana and so many others. He is the mystery of the Purusha who is seeking himself in the cosmos." *Diary*, p. 367 (2.1.73).

Third, in referring to the Grail, Abhishiktānanda is obviously not referring to any physical object that he obtained. It is rather a state of consciousness, which he equates with the *advaitic* experience.

Fourth, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the looking within the cup. According to Christian de Troyes' *Quest of the Grail*, looking within the cup is the climax of Galahad's quest. What does Abhishiktānanda understand by this looking within? He links it to the going beyond of all notions, the "explosion" of our concepts:

Again, if my message could really pass, it would be free from any 'notion' except just by the way of 'excipient'. The Christ I might present will be simply the I AM of my (every) deep heart, who can show himself in the dancing Shiva or the amorous Krishna. And the kingdom is precisely this discovery...of the 'inside' of the Grail! (...) The awakening is a total explosion. No Church will recognize its Christ or itself afterwards. And precisely for that (reason), no one likes the 'atomic mushroom'!<sup>216</sup>

Fifth, Abhishiktānanda says that the Grail is not far, the quest is for something near at hand. You just open your eyes.

Finally, Abhishiktānanda relates the Grail to the experience of being, independently of any specific location or any specific state. He writes to his sister:

It was a marvellous spiritual experience. The discovery that the AWAKENING has nothing to do with any situation, even so-called life or so-called death; one is awake and that is all. While I was waiting on my sidewalk, on the frontier of the two worlds, I was magnificently calm, for I AM, no matter in what world! I have found the GRAIL! And this extra lease of life—for such it is—can only be used for living and sharing this discovery.<sup>217</sup>

Some of this symbolism is repeated in his letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne:

The Grail is a marvellous symbol, that old myth around which have coalesced a heap of pagan Celtic and later, Christian myths. With many others Galahad caught the fragrance of the Grail, with Bors and Perceval he drank of it, and one day it was given to him alone openly to see within it. The Grail is a symbol which has greatly impressed me; and on the second and third day of my 'adventure' it suddenly came to me—In this adventure I have found the Grail. And what is left for me to do in this life, apart from inviting others to make this

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<sup>216</sup> *Letters*, p. 311 (MR, 4.10.73).

<sup>217</sup> *Letters*, p. 308 (MT, 9.8.73).

discovery? The Grail is neither far nor near, it is free from all location. The take-off, the awakening—and the quest is over. Through all the intervening myths it is the Awakening alone that is the goal of the quest.<sup>218</sup>

Where did Abhishiktānanda obtain this imagery and symbolism of the Grail? Abhishiktānanda refers to the fact that it is an old Celtic myth. He may have been familiar with it from having grown up in Brittany. But if so, it is remarkable that he does not mention it in previous writings. Something must have occurred to make him more conscious of the Grail symbolism. It appears that Abhishiktānanda's interest in the Grail may derive from a seminar he attended in March, 1973. The seminar was at the Rajpur Centre, where Simone Weil's ideas on the Grail had been discussed. Mrs. Anne-Marie Stokes had also attended the seminar. She writes:

Simone Weil and her ardent wish to be a bridge between religions and cultures was often quoted, and also her magnificent thoughts on the Holy Grail.<sup>219</sup>

Simone Weil is known for her writings about the impact of suffering, and the importance of love of neighbour. She makes a connection with the Grail. She says that the Grail satisfies all hunger. And the first legend of the Grail says that the Grail belongs to the one who first asks the guardian of the vessel, "What are you going through?" This question implies complete love for neighbour, a recognition not that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or as an "unfortunate", but as a person exactly like us who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. We must know how to look at this afflicted person. Significantly, Weil writes about this way of looking:

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth. Only he who is capable of attention can do this.<sup>220</sup>

We do not know whether this particular article of Weil's was discussed at the Rajpur seminar that Abhishiktānanda attended. But there is a link between this "emptying" of the soul of all its

<sup>218</sup> *Letters*, p. 311 (OB, 4.9.73).

<sup>219</sup> Anne-Marie Stokes: "Recollections of Abhishiktānanda", cited in *Letters*, pp. 287-288.

<sup>220</sup> Simone Weil: "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies", *Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: Moyer Bell, 1977), p. 51. Susan Visvanathan refers to Weil's question, "What are you going through?" in her *An Ethnography of Mysticism*, pp. 47, 48, but she does not emphasize this emptying of the soul. It is in sharing of affliction that attention, waiting on God, realises itself.

contents, and what Abhishiktānanda associated with the looking into the cup of the Grail—the going beyond all notions.

This was not Abhishiktānanda's first acquaintance with Weil. As early as 1950, Monchanin wrote Abhishiktānanda about certain books by Simone Weil that he had received: *L'Enracinement* and *L'Attente de Dieu*.<sup>221</sup> But Abhishiktānanda does not write about Weil or her ideas of suffering. In fact, at the Rajpur seminar, Abhishiktānanda said, "I do not know either evil or suffering."<sup>222</sup>

Further amplification of the Grail imagery may be found in an article by Richard Smoley, introducing a special issue of the magazine *Gnosis* dealing with the Grail.<sup>223</sup> For Smoley, the true mystery inherent in the Grail myth is that the Grail is the "heart", a heart that has been illumined and awakened so that it may serve as a receptacle for divine energies. Smoley refers to several writers who have compared the Grail to such a structure of consciousness. A Russian Orthodox mystic named Alexander Mumrikov has observed that if one carries out the Jesus Prayer properly,

...one senses a kind of chalice opening upward. . . . The chalice represents the spiritual development of man. The first sphere is formed at the level of the chest. . . . The second sphere is compressed at the level of the throat. And the third sphere opens in the head.

Mumrikov goes on to say that the chalices depicted in the icons of the Orthodox Church "represent the science of those people who have learned how to direct their energy. They are able to feel the chalice in themselves and to watch the transformation of the energy as it takes place."<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 79 (Letter to Abhishiktānanda 6.6.50). Monchanin wrote briefly about Weil. See *In Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, ed. J.G. Weber, p. 118.

<sup>222</sup> Anne-Marie Stokes: "Recollections of Abhishiktānanda", cited in *Letters*, pp. 287-288. Mrs. Stokes was originally from Brittany. Abhishiktānanda had corresponded with her. He travelled to Haridwār, Rishikesh, Dehra Dun, and Rajpur with her.

<sup>223</sup> Richard Smoley: "The Illuminated Heart", "The Grail", *Gnosis* Spring, 1999, vol. 51. See <http://www.gnosismagazine.com/intros/intro51.html>.

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Dennis Lewis, "The Place of Energy in the Prayer of Jesus," in *Inner Alchemy* (San Francisco), vol. 1, no. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 3, cited by Smoley, *op. cit.* A fascinating parallel occurs in the writings of Monchanin, who compared the mysticism of Greek *hesychasm* to the *cakras* in *kundalīni* yoga. See "Yoga et hésiychasme", *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 109. In "L'actualité

This viewpoint would have many similarities with Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on the heart as the place of transformation, and on the Grail as a new state of consciousness that is attained in the *advaitic* experience. The references to the various openings seem to correspond with the *cakras*, both the heart *cakra* and the *sahasrāra*.

Another amplification suggests itself in connection with the nondual view of the Self. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that Galahad saw within the Grail, and that the Grail is neither far nor near, it is free from all location.<sup>225</sup> We may speculate that in looking inside, Galahad realized that the inside is the outside, but formed by the Grail. Shankara, following Gaudapāda, gives a similar analogy of the relation between *Atman* and *Brahman*. Just as space, which is single and continuous, may be enclosed in a pot, so the Self is manifested in various individual selves.<sup>226</sup>

As will be shown in the Appendix, Jung uses the symbol of the Grail to refer to the Self and the process of individuation. Ken Wilber uses the same symbolism of the Grail to refer to the ultimate state of nondual experience:

For those who wish to follow the mystics to this Level, it is the venture of all ventures, the quest for the Holy Grail, the search for the Philosopher's Stone, the Elixir of Immortality, the Master Game itself.<sup>227</sup>

#### g) Prophetic Imagery

As already mentioned, in the course of his experiences with Chaduc, Abhishiktānanda begins to make increased references to Elijah. Elijah is considered the founder of the Carmelite order, and Abhishiktānanda's references to Elijah probably reflect the strong tradition of silent monasticism and apophaticism that the Carmelite order embodies.

To some extent, Abhishiktānanda had always been interested in the Carmelite order. It will be recalled that the primary article that prompted him to visit Ramaṇa was one in the journal

du Carmel" (unpublished, probably written 1964. Archives, TS, 1-2.), Abhishiktānanda indicates a preference for Russian over European monasticism. "In India, monachisme will be closer to Russian than to Cluny or Cistercians."

<sup>225</sup> *Letters*, p. 311 (OB, 4.9.73).

<sup>226</sup> *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies: Advaita Vedanta up to Śaṅkara and his Pupils*, ed. Karl H. Potter (Princeton, 1981).

<sup>227</sup> Ken Wilber: *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1977), p. 296.

*Études Carmélitaines*. An article in an earlier issue of that journal concerns whether Elijah can be considered the founder of the Carmelite order.<sup>228</sup> The conclusion is that yes, he can be considered the founder, and the same Spirit anointed Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist.

Abhishiktānanda was also influenced by Monchanin's writings about the Carmelites. Monchanin wrote about St. John of the Cross, who was, together with St. Teresa, one of the later founders of the Carmelite order. In 1938, Monchanin wrote that St. John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart had the form of holiness that India asked for—rejection of the sensible, a rejection even of the noetic, a going beyond psychology, an absolute *kenosis* for the absolute of being, which is itself perceived as beyond and before all being, as presence.<sup>229</sup> Monchanin visited the Carmelites in Bangalore in 1950. He was very happy with his experience there. In a letter to Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin calls the Carmelites “an image in miniature of the Church that contemplates.”<sup>230</sup> In 1954, Monchanin was approached as to the possible contribution of an article to a special issue of *Études Carmélitaines* on Elijah. Monchanin did not contribute an article, but he appreciated greatly those that were published, especially an article by Massignon, “Elie et son rôle transhistorique, khadiriya en islam”.<sup>231</sup> In 1956, at a conference organized by Mahadevan, Monchanin spoke on St. John of the Cross. Monchanin thought that his mysticism would be of particular interest to Hindus and Moslems.

Abhishiktānanda also wrote about the Carmelite order. In 1964 he wrote “India and the Carmelite Order”.<sup>232</sup> He points out the link between the Order and the prophet Elijah,

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<sup>228</sup> P. Marie-Joseph du Sacré-Coeur: “Le saint prophète Elie est le fondateur de l'ordre du Carmel” *Études Carmélitaines*, 1924 Jul-Dec/24, vol. 9 (211-230).

<sup>229</sup> Jules Monchanin: *Mystique de l'Inde, Mystère Chretien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974) p. 143 (24.11.38). The word *kenosis* is from Paul's language in Phil. 2:7. Monchanin here uses the phrase “*kenosis* pour l'absolu du Sat.” It is unclear whether the emptying is that of humans in their attainment of Being, or the emptying of of Being. Abhishiktānanda emphatically takes the latter interpretation of *kenosis*, as we shall see in the discussion of his view of emanation from the One. Elsewhere, Monchanin does say “The Universe is the multiple *kenosis* of God...” (See *In Quest of the Absolute: The Life and Work of Jules Monchanin*, ed. J.G. Weber, p. 150).

<sup>230</sup> Letter June 6, 1950. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 79.

<sup>231</sup> Letter February 17, 1954. *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 127.

<sup>232</sup> “India and the Carmelite Order” (1964), *Eyes of Light*, pp. 64-100. See also the unpublished article “L'actualité du Carmel”, probably written in 1964. Archives, TS, 1-2. In the latter article, he says that the Carmelite order had an “oriental origin”, but that it changed when it came to the West. The essentials of the early Carmelite order were solitude and contemplation. More than any other order it witnesses to the Absolute which God placed at the depth

The one to whom God revealed Himself no longer in the flame of fire, as to Moses, but in the sound of a gentle breeze at the entrance to his cave, his *guha* (1 Kings, 19:12-13).<sup>233</sup>

The vocation of the Carmelite, in the silence of prayer, is to adore the incommunicability of God in the depths:

The marvel lies precisely in the fact that it is not what can be chanted about God that is the loftiest, the truest, but rather, that which goes beyond all manifestation, all understanding (cf. Eph. 3:19), this beyondness beyond all that can be uttered and adored. It is only there, in truth, that God is!<sup>234</sup>

The silence and solitude of the Carmelites is precisely their service.

Any soul that penetrates within, just by doing so, deepens the Church and the Church's consciousness of herself. (...) That is precisely the irreplaceable role, the very *service* of the contemplatives in the Church. (...) They do not have to try to apologize for their so-called uselessness, inefficacy. Their uselessness, their silence, their solicitude, their refusal, finally, to accomplish anything whatsoever in the outer world is precisely the nature of the *service* in the Church.<sup>235</sup>

Like Monchanin, Abhishiktānanda saw an "admirable kinship" between this vocation of the Carmelite and the fundamental vocation of India. Carmelites have the duty to immerse themselves in the deepest mystery of India. In doing this, they must go beyond even the Carmelite Order itself. He compares the prophets of Yahweh to the *rishis* of India. The prophets were the heralds of the Word; the *rishis* were the privileged witnesses of the Silence of God:

Had they met, probably neither Elijah the Prophet nor Yasnavalkya [*sic*], the *Rishi*, would have recognized or understood each other for, humanly speaking, they were approaching each other from totally opposite slopes of the holy Mountain. Nevertheless both of them were precursors of Christ.<sup>236</sup>

Abhishiktānanda's appreciation for Carmelites and other Western mystics is shown in a letter from 1959. He speaks of the early Franciscans as "wandering Christian *sannyāsīs*". His highest praise is reserved for the Carmelites:

of the heart of man creating him in his own image. The order leads one beyond all signs: "Dieu le *Todo* dans le *Nada*". He says that the rule of the Carmelite order is the minimum organization within an ecclesiastical institution.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

However, the Carmel—or at least as it is idealized in my vision of it—is perhaps what comes closest in the Church to India’s deepest aspirations: the acosmics of the Desert Fathers; the “Flee, be silent, remain at rest” of Arsenius; the ‘*nada*’ [nothing] of St. John of the Cross; above all, the going beyond, the “establishment of oneself beyond oneself” of Tauler and Eckhart.<sup>237</sup>

Abhishiktānanda compares his experience of meditating in the caves with Elijah:

Like Moses and Elijah he [the Christian] wants to hide in some cleft of the rock from which he may contemplate God. However, even the remotest and most inaccessible ‘caverns’ of his heart turn out to be occupied already, and the darkness in which he had hoped to save his personal existence from annihilation in Being is already ablaze with the glory of God.<sup>238</sup>

This Carmelite influence remained strong in Abhishiktānanda throughout his life. The close connection that Abhishiktānanda had with Sister Tèrese must have reinforced his interest in Carmelite ways of viewing mysticism and meditation. Sr. Thérèse of Shembaganur wanted to found a Carmel on the lines of Abhishiktānanda’s ideal.<sup>239</sup>

Abhishiktānanda’s increased references to Elijah may also be due to his meeting with Chidananda, who performed the joint *dīkshā* for Chaduc. Chidananda was interviewed after Abhishiktānanda’s death, and he described Abhishiktānanda and Chaduc using Christian descriptions of their mystical experience:

They had both gone into the realms of the Unknown, the Undefinable, the Transcendental; not drawn into “name and form” as though they had, in their aspirations, pierced “the cloud of unknowing” and had come out into pure white light.<sup>240</sup>

It must be remembered that Chidananda had a Christian education. He may have reinforced some of Abhishiktānanda’s ideas about prophets. Chidananda specifically said that Abhishiktānanda reminded him of some of the Biblical prophets of the Old Testament, and at other times of the Desert Fathers. His appearance reminded Chidananda of the Old Testament prophets; his spirituality, asceticism, thirst for God reminded him of the latter.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>237</sup> *Letters*, p. 123 (FT, 26.10.59).

<sup>238</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 64.

<sup>239</sup> *Letters*, p. 144 (L.13.4.62)

<sup>240</sup> Vandana: “A Messenger of Light”, *Clergy Monthly*, December, 1974, p. 497.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 498.

When she visited him in October 1973, Odette Baumer-Despeigne gave Abhishiktānanda a famous icon showing the departure of Elijah in his fiery chariot.<sup>242</sup> Elijah is borne aloft in his fiery Chariot (Chaduc said this was the fire of Arunāchala), and Elijah gives his mantle to Elisha, just as Abhishiktānanda had given his shawl to Chaduc. Abhishiktānanda looked at the picture of Elijah and commented on the mystery he had lived with Chaduc at Ranagal, the mystery of the disappearance of the *guru* in the very act of the total handing over.<sup>243</sup> Abhishiktānanda writes that only when Elijah was taken away in the chariot of fire was the Spirit given (to Elisha).<sup>244</sup> He contemplated the icon with longing.<sup>245</sup>

Panikkar also says that Abhishiktānanda felt himself to be a prophet. His vocation was dreaming the transfiguration of the Church, the purification of Hinduism and the elimination of his own ego.<sup>246</sup>

Chaduc also compares Elijah with the Hindu *sannyāsī*. He says that the Vedic image of the *keśī*, the 'hairy one', the perfect acosmic, recalls the prophetic figure of Elijah, the spiritual father of Carmel, the typical *sannyāsī* of the Old Testament, whose acosmic life is also entirely rooted in the vision of God.<sup>247</sup>

Abhishiktānanda wrote to Mother Françoise Therese, prioress of the Carmel of Lisieux, describing his experience with Chaduc. In this letter he again makes specific reference to Elijah:

The emotions of the *sannyasa* of Chaduc, more than a week absolutely beyond conception in the jungle near to the Ganges from July 10-14, were too strong. The prophet Elias was very present to us during this extraordinary spiritual week.

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<sup>242</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

<sup>243</sup> Cited by Odette Baumer-Despeigne, "Swami Abhishiktānanda: More than a Meeting--A Darshan", *Shabda Shakti Sangam*, ed. Vandana Mataj (Rishikesh, 1995), p. 434.

<sup>244</sup> "Sannyasa" *Further Shore*, p. 32. Similarly, the form of Jesus has to disappear in order to appear to disciples at Emmaus.

<sup>245</sup> *Letters*, p. 321 (AMS Dec. 3, 73).

<sup>246</sup> Raimon Panikkar *Intro to Diary*, p. xix. At p. xxii Panikkar points out that in the last years of his life, Abhishiktānanda stayed with Carmelites in the Ranchi district, most of whom were *ādivāsī*, aboriginal Indians, *tribals*.

<sup>247</sup> Marc Chaduc: Foreword to *Further Shore*, p. xi.

It is necessary to believe what your saints of Carmel say, that there are interior experiences which the body—the heart—cannot endure.<sup>248</sup>

### *F. Interpretive Expressions*

We have looked at Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience. Some have the ring of authenticity, being vivid and spontaneous. I have tried to amplify these expressions, to look at them from several sides, in order to get a more complete understanding of their meaning. Of course these descriptions also rely on words and distinctions, all of which Abhishiktānanda says disappear in the final experience. For example, some of his descriptions use concepts that he obtained from other sources, such as the *sahasrāra cakra* from *kundalini*, in order to describe the experience. But some of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions point beyond themselves. Their conceptuality is in a sense self-negating. For example, "explosion" points to the inadequacy of any kind of concept to capture the experience. Abhishiktānanda's emphasis is on the utterly ineffable nature of the experience, and the fact that it can only be experienced existentially.

Although all of Abhishiktānanda's descriptions of his experience are inescapably tied to language and culture, some descriptions of the experience are more heavily theory and concept-laden (ramified). These descriptions are less vivid and immediate, and more consciously theoretical. They are an attempt by Abhishiktānanda to integrate his experiences into his changing conceptual framework, whether that framework is theological, psychological, philosophical or ethical. We have looked at some of these, such as Abhishiktānanda's Trinitarian explanation of the non-duality in the *guru*-disciple relationship. Another example of a highly ramified description is his insistence that the "I-experience" is the same experience as that of Jesus in acknowledging God as Father.

The remaining chapters of this thesis will examine these more conceptual or theoretical descriptions. Within these theoretical descriptions, some dualities may remain, and it is my intention to try to tease out these dualities and to explore other possible solutions that may exist for the problems that Abhishiktānanda raises. We will look at these theoretical descriptions under the headings of Perception, Thinking, Action, Phenomena, and God.

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<sup>248</sup> Odette Baumer-Despeigne: "The Spiritual Way of Henri Le Saux Swami Abhishiktānanda", *Bulletin of Monastic Interreligious Dialogue*, 1993, vol. 48, Oct., p. 24.

This examination of theoretical descriptions is an application of James's criterion of "philosophical reasonableness." In applying this criterion of philosophical reasonableness, we must bear in mind that what may appear "philosophically reasonable" to the person who has had the experience may not appear reasonable to someone who has not had the experience. For example, one might be tempted to apply the correspondence theory of truth in order to judge claims of an *advaitic* experience. But, as Barnard points out, such a theory of truth does not apply to *advaita*:

Philosophers of religion who assume an epistemological realism typically claim that mystico-religious experiences are cognitive if and only if the mystic (understood as a self-existent, autonomous subject) has correct knowledge of God (understood, likewise, as an ontologically independent reality that is separate from the subject). However, what if the mystic has an experience in which the subject/object distinction itself disappears?<sup>249</sup>

In an *advaitic* experience, this subject/object distinction does disappear. From a dualistic point of view, such an *advaitic* experience appears "subjective" and noncognitive, with no "objective" referent for the experience. But from the *advaitic* point of view, the experience is cognitive but beyond subjectivity or objectivity.

One thing we can do to assess "philosophical reasonableness" is to look at the internal consistency or inconsistency of Abhishiktānanda's own understanding of the *advaitic* experience. This will be addressed in Chapters V through IX of this thesis by examining what dualities Abhishiktānanda denies, and whether any dualities, or traces of duality, still remain. Even in applying a criterion of consistency, we must ask whether the consistency is purely logical, or whether it allows for holding ideas in a paradoxical tension. Abhishiktānanda rejected a purely logical consistency. That is one reason he did not accept a monistic view of reality. So in checking the philosophical reasonableness of his ideas, we must look not only for the dualities that he denies, but also for the ways that Abhishiktānanda seeks to avoid monism.

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<sup>249</sup>Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (State University of New York, 1997), p. 348.

## V. Nondual Perception

### A. Nondifference of Subject and Object

#### 1. Some issues in nondual perception

Abhishiktānanda uses a perceptual image to describe his experience of awakening: “You only have to open your eyes.”<sup>1</sup> He says that the awakening is beyond all the pairs of opposites or *dvandva*. Prior to his awakening, he had written that the *advaitic* experience (*anubhava*) is situated in a sphere where the duality of object and subject is transcended.<sup>2</sup>

But what does it mean for the duality of subject and object to be transcended? Does this mean that there is no longer a distinction between an experiencing self and what is experienced? Is there no distinction between things and ourselves? If there is no distinction between a perceiving subject and a perceived object, can we still speak of there being “perception” in the nondual experience? Can we still speak of “things” or objects? Can we still speak of a “self” who is observing them? Or does the transcending of subject and object mean that although there is still a distinction between them, a new unity—a “nondifference”—has been found between self and object, between self and “other”?

Using comparative philosophy, we may compare Abhishiktānanda’s discussion of his *advaitic* experience to what others have said about nondual experience, both within Hinduism and in other traditions. One example of such a comparative approach is David Loy’s *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy*.<sup>3</sup> Loy contends that there is a nondual experience that is common among several different religious traditions. The main traditions that he examines are Advaita Vedānta, Buddhism and Taoism. Loy says that the philosophical differences among these traditions reflect different ways of expressing this one nondual

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, pp. 385-387 (11.9.73).

<sup>2</sup> “Notes de théologie trinitaire,” *Intériorité*, p. 237 (January, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> David Loy: *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988). This book will be referred to in this thesis as *Nonduality*.

experience. The experience is phenomenologically the same, but the experience is expressed using different ontologies.<sup>4</sup>

Because of his emphasis on the phenomenology of the nondual experience, Loy begins his study with an examination of ways that we *experience* nonduality—in our perception, in our thinking, and in our actions. The main sense of nonduality that Loy explores in these three kinds of experience is the “nondifference” between subject and object. Loy understands the “nondifference” between subject and object as the negation of the distinction between an experiencing self and what is experienced. In the nondual experience there is no distinction between one’s self and one’s experience, whether what is being experienced is a sense object (in perception), a physical action (in our actions), or a mental event (in our thought). Loy says that although the nondual experience is itself beyond subject and object, the philosophic expression of the experience tends to emphasize either the subject or the object. The Buddhist expression of the experience tends to deny the subject, as it does in the doctrine of *anātman*, or no-self. Vedānta Advaita tends to deny the object, as it does in its doctrine of *Brahman* who is only subject, One without a second.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter of the thesis deals with the first of these ways that the nondifference between subject and object is experienced—in our perception.

## 2. Nondual perception in Buddhism

### a) Development of the idea of nondual perception in Buddhism

In order to use comparative philosophy in examining Abhishiktānanda’s discussion of his *advaitic* experience, we need to briefly examine the issue of nondual perception in Buddhism.

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<sup>4</sup> As I have discussed in Chapter II of this thesis, such a distinction between phenomenological and ontological (or metaphysical) methods is open to challenge. There are metaphysical and ontological assumptions even in Loy’s descriptions, particularly his Buddhist emphasis that *samsāra* is *nirvāna*, a denial that there are different levels of Reality. It is interesting that in *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda speaks of the *kevala* experience and of *sūnyatā* as the same (“Dans le Centre le Plus Profond”, unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> According to Loy, it makes no phenomenological difference whether we call the nondual state a state of “no consciousness” where there is no self, or of “all consciousness” where everything is a manifestation of Self. *Nonduality*, p. 210.

This is especially important in view of the fact that Abhishiktānanda sometimes uses Buddhist terminology in describing his experience.

Early Buddhism has a pluralistic view of the universe. It understands reality to consist of a multitude of discrete particulars or *dharmas*. Everything, including the self, is constantly changing and impermanent. All phenomena are related in a causal continuum by the doctrine of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). The ‘self’ is only the coming together of *skandhas* that disperse at death. According to Loy, early Buddhism does not appear to have had a doctrine of nondual perception. There is no statement in the Pāli Canon that clearly asserts nonduality of subject and object:

One may view the *anātman* (no-self) doctrine of early Buddhism as another way of making the same point; instead of asserting that subject and object are one, the Buddha simply denies that there is a subject. These two formulations may well amount to the same thing, although the latter may be criticized as ontologically lopsided: since subject and object are interdependent, the subject cannot be eliminated without transforming the nature of the object (and vice-versa, as Advaita Vedānta was aware).<sup>6</sup>

Loy’s criticism of early Buddhism is that it did not see the implications of its denial of a self. If there is no subject, then the assertion that there are objects is itself questionable. This type of questioning occurs in later Buddhism.

Mādhyamika Buddhism also makes no assertion about nondual perception. It makes few (if any) positive claims. It rather refutes all philosophical positions. It adopts the theory of *advayavāda* (neither of two alternative views) rather than *advaitavāda* (the theory of nondifference between subject and object).<sup>7</sup> Mādhyamika Buddhism criticizes the self-existence (*svabhāva*) of both subject and object. They are relative to each other and must both be unreal.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> This explains why Loy moves so easily from the “nondifference” of subject and object to their nonexistence. This theory of *advayavāda* is central to Loy’s discussion of nonduality. He calls it the first sense of nonduality: the negation of dualistic thinking which makes distinctions. As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda does not accept this sense of nonduality.

<sup>8</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 29. This use of the word “unreal” in describing this lack of self-existence is confusing. Although there is no self-existence of things and “self”, this may be because they are radically inter-related, and not because they do not exist. Such inter-relation does not have to mean non-reality.

Nāgārjuna interprets the interdependent arising of things (*pratītya-samutpāda*) in terms of the absence of any being in them (*sūnyatā*). Neither subject nor object has any self-existence.

Paradoxically, having relied on causation to show this emptiness of being in things, Nāgārjuna also redefines interdependent origination in a way to deny causality:

Looking at the commonsense distinction between things and their cause-and-effect relationships, Nāgārjuna first uses the latter to “deconstruct” the former and deny that there are any self-existing things. Less obvious is the second stage, which reverses the analysis. The lack of “thingness” in things implies a way of experiencing in which there is no awareness of cause of effect because one *is* the cause/effect.<sup>9</sup>

Loy’s point here seems to be that “thingness” and “causality” are correlative terms, and that if one is denied, both must be denied (or at least, they must be understood in a new way). To explain this, Loy refers to an analogy from the later Chinese Hua-Yen Buddhism. This is the analogy of Indra’s Net, where each particular event is not isolated but contains and manifests the whole.<sup>10</sup>

...if every event that happens is interdependent with everything else in the whole universe (...) it implies the irrelevance of causality as usually understood. We find ourselves in a universe of *sūnya*-events, none of which can be said to occur for the sake of any other. Each nondual event—every leaf-flutter, wandering thought, and piece of litter—is whole and complete in itself, because although conditioned by everything else in the universe and thus a manifestation of it, for precisely that reason it is not subordinated to anything else but becomes an unconditioned end-in-itself.<sup>11</sup>

Mādhyamika Buddhism refutes the separate existence of subject and object by means of logical analysis. Yogācāra Buddhism is more psychological; it effects a withdrawal from subject and object by means of psychological trance.<sup>12</sup> Even the name ‘Yogācāra’ refers to “those who practise meditation.” According to Yogācāra Buddhism, phenomena are manifestations that arise from Mind-only, the highest reality.<sup>13</sup> There is a nonduality between these phenomena and the Mind-only from which they arise. In Mind-only, subject and object are not distinct. Subject

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<sup>9</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 277.

<sup>10</sup> *Nonduality* p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 195. Loy refers to the work of Edward Conze for this distinction.

and object are distinctions that we make or construct. A primary goal of Yogācāra Buddhism is to attain an *unconstructed awareness* of reality. In this Unconstructed Awareness, there is no longer any distinction between subject and object.

This idea of an Unconstructed Awareness is crucial to Loy's discussion of nonduality. Loy asserts that our perception begins with a "bare percept." This bare percept has no distinction between subject and object. Dualities like subject and object arise when conceptual constructs are "superimposed" on the percept. These superimpositions of thought construct our everyday dualistic experience.<sup>14</sup> In the Eastern nondual traditions, by techniques such as meditation, our everyday experience is deconstructed, so that we again "perceive" the world as it really is.<sup>15</sup> When these superimpositions are deconstructed, there is neither subject nor object in our immediate experience (whether that experience is in our perceptions, our actions or our thoughts). All that is left is the "bare percept", the Unconstructed Awareness.

Yogācāra Buddhism has many explicit passages that speak of the "identity" of subject and object.<sup>16</sup> Loy cites the following from Vasubandhu:

Through the attainment of the state of Pure Consciousness, there is the non-perception of the perceivable; and through the non-perception of the perceivable (i.e., the object) there is the non-acquisition of the mind (i.e., the subject). Through the non-perception of these two, there arises the realization of the Essence of Reality (*dharmadhātu*).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hajime Nakamura: *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal, 1987), Vol. I, p. 255.

<sup>14</sup> This does not necessarily assume the truth of the Constructivist Model, since Loy emphasizes that there can be an experience that is not constructed. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Loy gives too much deference to the Constructivist Model in his view of the constructed nature of our everyday dualistic reality. I would argue that there is a difference between saying that our superimpositions obscure the true nature of reality, and saying that our superimpositions construct all apparent differences and distinctions.

<sup>15</sup> This at least appears to have been Loy's view when *Nondualism* was first written. In his Introduction to the Paperback Edition (p. xii), he retreats from this view. He says that his former view—that nondual perception is a discovering of Reality—has the effect of reifying another duality: a duality between Reality and thought/language.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Griffiths says that this "identity" of cognized and cognizer is not to be understood in a Vedāntin monistic sense (in which the two are identical because of the view that there is only one unique undifferentiated substance in the world), but rather in the sense that both cognizer and cognized are concepts without any referent; they are constructed concepts. Paul Griffiths: "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 36-37; Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 29.

What is this state of Pure Consciousness referred to in Yogācāra Buddhism and how does it relate to the state of Unconstructed Awareness? Loy seems to regard them as the same. But according to Paul Griffiths, these states of consciousness are different, and the failure to distinguish between them has caused much confusion in philosophical discussions of nonduality.<sup>18</sup> In Pure Consciousness there is no content, whereas there is a content in Unconstructed Awareness.

#### b) Pure Consciousness

Griffiths says that the Indian Buddhist traditions describe a type of consciousness in which there are no mental events of any kind; it is a kind of trance. This is the attainment of cessation of consciousness (*nirodhasamāpatti*), or the cessation of sensation and conceptualization (*saṃjñāvedayitanirodha*). It is described as being mindless (*acittaka*).

The path to achieving the cessation of consciousness is outlined in the Pāli *Dīghanikāya* (composed about 250 years after the death of the Buddha). Griffiths cites from that work the following standardized description of the ascending series of altered states of consciousness:

By the transcendence of all conceptualizations of form, by the disappearance of conceptualizations based upon sense-data, by paying no attention to conceptualizations of manifoldness, having attained to the sphere of infinite space [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking space is unending. By entirely transcending the sphere of infinite space, having attained to the sphere of infinite consciousness [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking 'consciousness is infinite'. By entirely transcending the sphere of infinite consciousness, having attained to the sphere of nothing at all [the practitioner] remains therein, thinking 'there is nothing'. By entirely transcending the sphere of nothing at all, having entered the sphere of neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization, [the practitioner] remains therein. By entirely transcending the sphere of neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization, having attained the cessation of sensation and conceptualization, [the practitioner] remains therein.<sup>19</sup>

As one ascends through these stages, the mental functions become less and less, until they cease altogether.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Griffiths: "Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism", *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> *Dīgha-nikāya*, tr. T.W. Rhys-Davids, Carpenter, and Estlin (1890-1911: II.71.2-17), cited by Griffiths at pp. 80, 81.

In the fifth century CE, Buddhaghosa wrote a commentary on the *Dīghanikāya*. Buddhaghosa also summarized the series of states of consciousness in *The path of purification (Visuddhimagga)*. He refers to the second stage as that of boundless consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*). A deeper stage is that of 'no-thingness' (*ākāṅkṣāññāyatana*). The cessation of consciousness is the sphere of 'neither perception-nor-nonperception' (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).<sup>20</sup>

Yogācāra Buddhism uses this idea of cessation of consciousness. This is what Vasubandhu means by "Pure Consciousness" in the passage cited by Loy. It is the sphere of neither perception-nor-nonperception.

A problem with the idea of cessation of consciousness is that if there is no content in this state, how does the subject know at a later time that it was a different experience from the unconsciousness of dreamless sleep? And how does consciousness return if there has been a complete cessation of consciousness? These questions were debated within Buddhism. According to Griffiths, the Yogācāra idea of store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) was developed to provide a causal basis for the return to consciousness from the state of Pure Consciousness. The store-consciousness is said to persist even in the apparently mindless attainment of cessation.<sup>21</sup> In one Yogācāra proof of the existence of this store-consciousness, one of the elements in the proof is the fact of entry into and exit from this attainment of cessation of consciousness.<sup>22</sup> This shows that Yogācāra continued to accept the idea of cessation of consciousness.

Griffiths says that, in Western terms, Pure Consciousness is like a cataleptic trance.<sup>23</sup> He describes this cessation of consciousness as similar to a state of hibernation. Respiration, heartbeat and body temperature are all lowered. There is no reaction to external stimuli and no initiation of action. There is also no internal mental life such as image-formation or dreaming. The method to bring about this is enstatic: the practitioner withdraws from every kind of

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<sup>20</sup> This summary is by J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 289.

<sup>21</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* pp. 83-85.

<sup>22</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 93, ft. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 80.

interaction with the outside world (perceptual, cognitive, and affective) and reduces the content of her or his consciousness to zero.

How does such a state relate to the transcending of subject and object? Griffiths refers to such states that transcend subject and object as states of nondualistic consciousness. In nondualistic consciousness, there is “no structural opposition between subject and object, between apprehender and apprehended.” A “structured opposition between subject and object” is that which “irresistibly leads the ostensible subject of an experience to separate herself or himself from the content of that experience. Such a separation is usually most naturally expressed in standard subject-object sentences.”<sup>24</sup>

Griffiths says that Pure Consciousness is a kind of nondual consciousness, but only of a trivial or tautological kind. In a Pure Consciousness experience or trance, there is a cessation of consciousness. If there is a cessation of consciousness, then there can of course be no structured opposition of subject and object, and therefore no dualistic consciousness. Griffiths says that it is difficult to see what soteriological value (or even practical interest) such a cessation of consciousness can have.

Forman has a similar view of Pure Consciousness. He defines Pure Consciousness as “a wakeful, though contentless, nonintentional experience.”<sup>25</sup> He compares it to a “Ganzfeld”, a completely patternless visual field. In such an experience, observers have reported not merely seeing nothing, but of not seeing, a disappearance of the sense of vision. Observers did not know whether their eyes were open or not.<sup>26</sup>

Forman says that Pure Consciousness may be a relatively common experience in differing religious traditions, although some traditions might not even claim it. To the extent that people in various traditions have such a contentless experience, it may well be the same for each of them:

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<sup>24</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 77. Instead of using intentional sentences with subject, predicate and object, Griffiths suggests using the words “event, phenomenological attribute and content to refer to nondualistic consciousness.

<sup>25</sup> Robert K.C. Forman: “Mysticism, Constructivism and Forgetting”, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990), p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Forman, *op. cit.* p. 36.

A formless trance in Buddhism may be experientially indistinguishable from one in Hinduism or Christianity.<sup>27</sup>

Like Griffiths, Forman does not regard Pure Consciousness as having any soteriological significance in and of itself. He does, however acknowledge that it may play some preparatory role towards a more advanced spiritual life, such as *sahaja samādhi* in Rāmāṇa's experience.<sup>28</sup> It could be argued that the attainment of Pure Consciousness leads to a further state of perception of unity in the world. Indeed, this is what Vasubandhu seems to say in the passage already referred to:

Through the attainment of the state of Pure Consciousness, there is the non-perception of the perceivable; and through the non-perception of the perceivable (i.e., the object) there is the non-acquisition of the mind (i.e., the subject).

Through the non-perception of these two, there arises the realization of the Essence of Reality (*dharmadhātu*).<sup>29</sup>

This Essence of Reality is Mind-only. Thus, even if Pure Consciousness is itself without content, it leads to the realization of Mind-only. This would be a true nondual consciousness, since there would be non-difference between phenomena and Mind-only which gives rise to phenomena.<sup>30</sup>

Some writers deny that Pure Consciousness is to be equated with cessation of consciousness. Krüger, for example, says that states of trance and ecstasy are not states of nonresponsiveness, but rather states of "superresponsiveness". In these states, the individual is "transpersonally decentralising the self, responding to a deeper and wider integration of things."<sup>31</sup> My response to this comment is that it is possible that going into a trance might assist a person to "decentralise the self." But any awareness of such decentralization would only be after coming out of the trance, when one might reflect on the previous experience. For example,

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<sup>27</sup> Forman, *op. cit.* p. 39.

<sup>28</sup> Forman, *op. cit.* p. 9. I discuss Rāmāṇa's views on *samādhi* in more detail later in this chapter. As will be discussed, Abhishiktānanda also seems to view Pure Consciousness as a preparation for *sahaja samādhi*.

<sup>29</sup> Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 36-37; Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> This solution would not be acceptable to Loy. He argues that Yogācāra, in positing Mind-Only as that which gives birth to all phenomena, has reified *sūnyatā*. He therefore sees Yogācāra as a lower truth to Mādhyamika Buddhism, which prefers to speak of *sūnyatā* and avoids naming anything, even the nondual whole. *Nonduality*, pp. 25, 215.

<sup>31</sup> J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 289. He refers to Ken Wilber's explanation of "transpersonal".

one might reflect on one's continued existence despite the lack of any ego consciousness. The second part of Krüger's statement, that one is "responding to a deeper and wider integration of things" seems to be different than a cessation of consciousness. His view of "super-responsiveness" seems to refer more to the state of "Unconstructed Awareness".

### c) Unconstructed Awareness

According to Griffiths, the idea of Unconstructed Awareness (*nirvikalpañāna*) is largely a Yogācāra Buddhist idea.<sup>32</sup> According to this idea, one can have immediate consciousness of reality without reflecting any element of a conceptual scheme brought to the experience. Unconstructed Awareness is thus opposed to the Constructivist Model.<sup>33</sup>

In Unconstructed Awareness one is free from *vikalpa* or conceptual construction. The Sanskrit word *vikalpa* is a compound form the prefix *vi* (discrimination or bifurcation) and the root *kalpanā* (to construct mentally).<sup>34</sup> Our usual perception is *sa-vikalpa* (with thought construction).<sup>35</sup> *Nir-vikalpa* perception is without thought construction. There is an experience of bare sensation as distinguished from all thought about it, or what Loy calls the "bare percept."

What Griffiths emphasizes, and what Loy does not acknowledge, is that Unconstructed Awareness is different from Pure Consciousness.<sup>36</sup> Asaṅga, one of the *Yogācāra* Buddhists, explicitly rejects the idea that Unconstructed Awareness is any way like the attainment of cessation.<sup>37</sup> He also negates the idea that Unconstructed Awareness is without mental activity. It is also not the same as dreamless sleep or drunkenness. The difference from such states is that

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<sup>32</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> The idea of Unconstructed Awareness does acknowledge that at least some of our everyday experience is constructed by our concepts. This may be the idea of an autonomous self, the subject/object division, or even, according to some "idealistic" accounts of nonduality, the whole of our empirical reality. Where the idea of Unconstructed Awareness differs from the Constructivist Model is in saying that we can escape these constructions. According to the Constructivist Model, no experience can go outside the conceptual frame that we bring to it.

<sup>34</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* outlines eight categories of constructive activity of the mind. See Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 86. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is one of the earliest Yogācāra texts (maybe from the fourth century CE).

<sup>36</sup> Loy does say that Rudolf Otto's distinction between an inward way of withdrawal and an outward way of merging with reality are two ways of expressing the same experience. *Nonduality*, p. 211. This does not really deal with the issue as to whether there is a cessation of consciousness.

<sup>37</sup> Asaṅga: *Mahāyanasamgraha*. See Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 87.

Unconstructed Awareness has both an object (*dmigs/ālabana*) and some content (*rnam pa/ākāra*). Asaṅga says that the object of Unconstructed Awareness is the “indescribability of things” which is identified with the “Thusness of absence of self”. Things are “indescribable” because the way we have of describing things, of dividing the world into subjects and predicates, is the product of the constructive activity of the mind. The world cannot be adequately described by language. But although we cannot *describe* the world as it is, it can be *experienced* in Unconstructed Awareness. Unlike Pure Consciousness, Unconstructed Awareness has a content.<sup>38</sup>

The way the world actually is is pointed to by the *terminus technicus* “Thusness” (*tathatā*); this, too, is unpacked negatively. It consists in the fact that (what we take to be) independently subsisting entities, in fact, have no self, no enduring essence which gives them identity and marks them off from other things. What this amounts to is that the object of unconstructed awareness is the totality of things as they really are.<sup>39</sup>

An earlier *Yogācāra* text, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* compares Unconstructed Awareness to mirrorlike awareness (*ādarsajñāna*). Griffiths comments on this awareness:

...it is free from possessiveness (*amama*, lit. “without mine”) and it does not confront (*āmukha*) objects of awareness (actual or potential things that one might be aware of). The commentators make these characteristics of mirrorlike awareness somewhat clearer: mirrorlike awareness is without possessiveness because it creates neither of the constructed ideas ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ and because (as would seem to follow) there is in it no division between subject and object. Further, it never confronts objects of awareness, in that it does not function in accordance with the usual divisions of objects of awareness into such things as physical form; this in turn, is because in mirrorlike knowledge there is no difference between apprehension and that which is to be apprehended.<sup>40</sup>

Unconstructed Awareness does not construct rigid divisions among objects of awareness, nor does it attribute defining characteristics to them. The key point seems to be that such awareness is without a constructed idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’. One learns to see oneself without an enduring substantive existence. Or, as Loy says, the awareness that was supposed to be

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<sup>38</sup> Griffiths does say that this content is “attenuated”; it is without the “defining marks” or those things that our constructive intellect develops in order to divide and classify objects in the world of experience.

<sup>39</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 88.

<sup>40</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 89.

observing the world is now realized to be one with it; there is no discrete ego consciousness.<sup>41</sup> This absence of enduring existence is extended to all events and “things.” One sees *all* existents as without “self”, without anything that definitively and eternally marks them off from other things.<sup>42</sup>

Griffiths says that, unlike Pure Consciousness, Unconstructed Awareness has a high soteriological status, especially in the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. Unconstructed Awareness (or unmediated consciousness) is a kind of nondualistic consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Whereas Pure Consciousness is nondual in a tautological way (there is no dual consciousness only because there is no consciousness), here there is a genuine nonduality of subject and object. What is such nondual perception like?

It would consist in a series of presentations (*Vorstellungen, Vijñaptayah*) without there being any sense of separation between the presentation in question and the subject “having” it. There would be a series of pictures without any viewer. It is important to note that the “pictures” in question could possess any degree of complexity (i.e., have as much content as required)...<sup>44</sup>

Unconstructed Awareness is a perception of the world “as it is” without thought construction. It is thus different from Pure Consciousness, which has no content or images. It may be that a state of Pure Consciousness, or trance, is necessary to reach this state of Unconstructed Awareness. But the distinction between the two states seems to be important. And, as we shall see, the distinction is maintained by both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda.

### 3. Nondual perception in Vedānta Advaita

Loy points out that some Vedānta scholars have objected to speaking of “perception” in the nondual experience. In their view there is no doctrine of nondual perception in Vedānta.<sup>45</sup> Vedānta uses the word for perception (*pratyakṣa*) only in relation to the world of *māyā*. The nondual experience of *nirguṇa Brahman* is not perception at all. Although in this experience

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<sup>41</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* pp. 89, 90.

<sup>43</sup> Other kinds of nondualistic consciousness cited by Griffiths include some drug experiences and many sexual and aesthetic experiences (p. 78).

<sup>44</sup> Griffiths, *op. cit.* p. 78.

there is a seer, the Self, there is nothing to *see*, for *Brahman* is One without a second. There is therefore no object to perceive. *Brahman* is Pure Consciousness, and shines of Itself. Because *Brahman* is self-luminous, it is not dependent on anything else for its manifestation. As the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad* says,

And when [it appears that] in deep sleep it does not see, yet it is seeing though it does not see; for there is no cessation of the vision of the seer, because the seer is imperishable. There is then, however, no second thing separate from the seer that it could see.<sup>46</sup>

If in our experience there is something else that is seen, it is a result of delusion, a result of *māyā* or ignorance (*avidyā*). Objects of consciousness that are not self-luminous are dependent on a subject to be conscious of them; they are mere appearance.<sup>47</sup>

Ramaṇa seems to agree with this view that when we reach the level of *nirguṇa Brahman*, there is no longer any perception:

The duality of subject and object, the trinity of seer, sight and seen can exist only if supported by the One. If one turns inward in search of that One Reality, they fall away.<sup>48</sup>

Seer, sight and seen are only in the phenomenal world of *māyā*, which exists only because the One supports it. But in the inward search for that One Reality, these distinctions drop away, including seeing. At the level of the One, there is no longer any perception. *Brahman* shines of Itself.

Loy agrees that *Vedānta* limits the use of the term *pratyakṣa* for perception in the empirical world of *māyā*, and that *Vedānta* does not have a doctrine of nondual perception. For *Vedānta*, perception is always dualistic. Like all cognition, perception is due to *vṛttis*, the modifications of the *buddhi* (the mind). These *vṛttis* always constitute limiting conditions; *Brahman* therefore cannot be known through them. Our perception is therefore limited to the empirical world, and to *savikalpa* experience.

<sup>45</sup> *Nonduality*, p. xi.

<sup>46</sup> *Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad* IV.iii.23. Cited by Loy, *Nonduality*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> *Nonduality*, pp. 27, 65.

Loy says that whether or not we refer to “perception” in the nondual experience may be a matter of choice of terminology (like *pratyakṣa*). He sometimes uses the word “intuition” instead of perception.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, he seeks to understand the Vedāntic *advaitic* experience in ways similar to his idea of nondual perception. To do this, Loy makes use of several ideas references in the post-Buddhistic Upanishads, references in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and the idea of *nirvikalpa* experience.

#### a) The post-Buddhistic Upanishads

Loy relies on the post-Buddhistic Upanishads in support of there being nondual perception in Hinduism. The *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* describes *turīya*, the fourth and highest state of experience in terms of *prapañcopaśama*. This is a key term in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nāgārjuna uses the word *prapañcopaśama* as meaning “the repose of all named things.” It is a negative description of *nirvāṇa*, as the cessation of a dualistic way of perceiving. The *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* uses the word *prapañca* to denote the phenomenal world of manifoldness that emanates from the creator. Loy says that the meaning of *prapañca* in Buddhism is “the differentiation of the nondual world of *nirvikalpa* experience into the discrete-objects-of-the-phenomenal world, which occurs due to *savikalpa* thought-construction.”<sup>50</sup> These *Upanishads* therefore support the idea that nondual perception is what occurs when thought construction ceases.

Abhishiktānanda refers to these post-Buddhistic Upanishads. He is sometimes critical of them. For example, he says that in the *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad* dialectic has begun to “dry up”

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 27 from *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Osborne, 1977), p. 251. See also *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 160 [*Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*] “In the non-dual Brahman the threefold reality of seer, sight, and seen does not exist.”

<sup>49</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Nonduality*, pp. 53, 54.

intuition.<sup>51</sup> He quotes the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* in reference to the states of consciousness, including the fourth, *turīya*.<sup>52</sup>

b) The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

In Chapter III of this thesis, we discussed Ramaṇa's view that the world is not totally unreal. The world is *anīrvacanīya* or indeterminable as either real or unreal. Ramaṇa emphasizes certain verses from Shankara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. Loy makes reference to one of these same verses, verse 521:

The universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of Brahman; hence it is in all respects nothing but Brahman.<sup>53</sup>

We can therefore "perceive" *Brahman* in the universe. Loy sees the statement as meaning, "Reality is staring us in the face all the time, but somehow we misperceive it." Ramaṇa makes a similar statement: "We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still, we do not know it."<sup>54</sup> The ignorant thus do not see *Brahman* in the universe. Loy comments,

Taking the pluralistic universe of material objects to be real—which constitutes *māyā*—is like seeing a rope as a snake. Just as we would say afterward that we had really been seeing a rope, so "we" must actually be perceiving (or "experiencing") Brahman all the time, although we are ignorant of it—exactly what Śaṅkara says in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* verse [521]...<sup>55</sup>

The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* therefore seems to support the view that there can be a kind of nondual "perception." There is false perception and true nondual perception. What causes us to mistake the rope for a snake? The ignorant do not see *Brahman* in the universe because of superimposition or *savikalpa* thought construction. When these superimposed concepts are

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<sup>51</sup> *Letters*, p. 273 (MC, 26.6.72). Nevertheless, Abhishiktānanda also quotes from this *Upanishad*. See for example *Further Shore*, p. 80.

<sup>52</sup> *Further Shore*, p. 104.

<sup>53</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 39. The citation is from the translation by Mādhavānanda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrams, 1974), p. 194.

<sup>54</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, p. 131. Ramaṇa refers to the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* in support of this statement.

<sup>55</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 66.

removed, we experience *Brahman* or Reality. Our thought constructions prevent us from seeing the “true” nondual nature of reality.

But there is a difference between this statement in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and Loy’s view of nondual perception. After interpreting the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in accordance with the analogy of seeing a rope as a snake, Loy goes on to say,

The analogy would further seem to imply—indeed, it can hardly be meaningful otherwise—that *Brahman* should not be characterized as transcendental to sense-perception, although of course “It” cannot be perceived as an *object*.<sup>56</sup>

Loy’s view of nondual perception is opposed to any two-tier view of reality. He wants to read into this verse a Buddhist interpretation that *samsāra* is *nirvāna* and that there are not two levels of Reality. He refers to the fact that Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara were known to have been influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism, even to the extent they were both accused of being “hidden Buddhists.” He also believes that Vedānta borrowed the notion of *prapañcopaśama* from Buddhism.<sup>57</sup> He argues that seeing *Brahman* in the universe is equivalent to the Buddhist idea of the “repose of all things” once superimposition has ceased. To see *Brahman* in this way does not require a two-tier view of Reality.

The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* does not necessarily support Loy’s interpretation. The statement that the universe is “nothing but *Brahman*” is also consistent with a monistic view: the universe is “nothing but *Brahman*” because only *Brahman* is real. The ignorant do not know this, but when their veil of ignorance is lifted, only *Brahman* will be seen. Thus, this verse in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* could also be used in support of a doctrine of monism that denies any reality to the world.

We could also interpret this verse from the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* as saying that the universe is an unbroken series of perceptions of *Brahman* because *Brahman pervades* the universe of *māyā*. This interpretation is supported by passages from the Upanishads that speak of *Brahman* as pervading the universe:

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> But if Lacombe is correct, Shankara knew only the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittirīya, Kauṣītakī and Kena Upanishads; he did not have knowledge of the later Kaṭha, Śvetāsvatara, Mahānavayta, Íśa, Muṇḍaka, Praśna or the Post-Buddhistic Maitrī and Māṇḍūkya Upanishads. Olivier Lacombe: *L’Absolu selon Vedanta* (Paris, 1937), p. 9.

This Self has entered into these bodies up to the very tips of the nails, as a razor lies [hidden] in its case, or as fire, which sustains the world, [lies hidden] in its source.<sup>58</sup>

As the same nondual fire, after it has entered the world, becomes different according to whatever it burns, so also the same nondual *Ātman*, dwelling in all beings, becomes different according to whatever IT enters. And IT exists also without.<sup>59</sup>

Loy refers to these passages in the Upanishads as implying “another intermediate position between monism and pluralism”: that the *ātman* functions as a first cause which created the phenomenal world and then pervades it as a kind of spiritual essence. Loy rejects this distinction between pervader and pervaded. He says that neither Huang Po [Ch’an Buddhism] nor Shankara would accept such a distinction between pervader and pervaded.<sup>60</sup> To see *Brahman* “in” the universe is for Loy to set up a duality between different Realities.

Whether or not Shankara would accept this view of the universe being pervaded by *Brahman*, it seems to be more in line with Ramaṇa’s interpretation of the *Vivekacūdāmani*.<sup>61</sup> Ramaṇa does not deny all reality to the world; in fact, he relies on this verse to show the reality of the universe. But Ramaṇa is also very clear that there are levels of Reality. Although *Brahman* may be perceived in the universe, *Brahman* is a higher reality. The universe is real only because it is supported by *Brahman*.<sup>62</sup> Seeing *Brahman* in the world therefore means seeing the Self as the substratum of all that is seen. Ramaṇa makes the comparison to movies projected on the screen. The movies have a reality, but they do not exist without the screen. The pictures are appearances that come and go, but the screen remains.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad I.iv.7. Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Kāṭha Upanishad II.ii.9, Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 24. Loy says that these Upanishads are unrigorous, that they are “mystical rather than systematic philosophy.” This is a rather odd criticism coming from Loy. Presumably by “rigour” Loy means conceptual rigour, the very type of thinking which he later criticizes.

<sup>61</sup> This was also the view of Gnānānanda: “God pervades the whole creation.” *Sadguru*, p. 288.

<sup>62</sup> Loy acknowledges Vedānta’s two levels of reality and its view that the universe is real only because Brahman supports it. But for Loy, this causes a problem in determining the nature of *māyā*. To say that it is neither real nor unreal, and that it is indeterminable and indefinable, is for Loy “an admission of failure.” *Nonduality*, pp. 62 and 68.

<sup>63</sup> *Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 192.

Abhishiktānanda makes frequent reference to seeing *Brahman* “in” the universe. In many of these passages, Abhishiktānanda clearly holds to a view of two levels of reality, the Transcendent and the immanent. *Brahman* is the Transcendent Reality that is also wholly immanent. The Transcendent *Brahman* is known immanently by the “ascent to the depth of the heart.” Whether or not Abhishiktānanda consistently maintains such a two-tier view of Reality is something that will be explored in a later chapter of this thesis.

c) *Savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* experience

Loy also refers to the use of the terms *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* in Hinduism. The *Nyāyā* system or *darśana* within Hinduism uses the distinction. *Nirvikalpa* is perception that is “unassociated with a name” (*avyapadeśya*) whereas *savikalpa* is “well-defined” (*vyasvasāyātmaka*). When our perception becomes associated with language it becomes “determinate.” Prior to the association of our perception with language, there is an earlier stage where it is unassociated with language and is a “bare sensation.”<sup>64</sup>

Are the terms *savikalpa* and *nirvikalpa* also used in Vedānta? The word *vikalpa* is sometimes used by Shankara. But he usually uses the related idea of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). He uses the word ‘superimposition’ in the analogies of mistaking the rope for a snake, mistaking the world for the Self. Gauḍapāda also uses the word *vikalpa*. It is Potter’s view that Gauḍapāda does not use the word in the sense of “constructing”, but rather in the sense of a failure to properly understand or interpret something.

...the fact that I wrongly interpret something, say the rope as a snake, does not necessarily imply that I apparently produce the snake.<sup>65</sup>

d) *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*

A text that Loy does not mention is the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, which, as we have seen, influenced Rāmāṇa. It makes extensive use of the term *nirvikalpa*. The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* was influenced by Buddhism, and some have said that it is specifically related to Yogācāra

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<sup>64</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Karl Potter, ed.: *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 65, 68. This view of *vikalpa* accords better with the criticism I have given of the Constructivist Model: that it is a mistake to say that our construction can create content.

Buddhism. Parallels to Yogācāra Buddhism are its description of mind as a creative force, the negation of the reality of the world and the claim that all appearances proceed from the mind.<sup>66</sup>

According to Andrew Fort, the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* played a large role in popularizing the idea of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while still in a body. It also played a role in developing what Fort refers to as “Yogic Advaita.”<sup>67</sup> Yogic Advaita continued Shankara’s idea that knowledge of the nondual Self brings liberation. It also emphasized certain Buddhist ideas, as well as Yogic practices, such as exerting control of mental states. It urged “destroying the mind”. We should destroy the *vāsanās*, mental impressions which are the cause of bondage.

The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* speaks of *nirvikalpa samādhi* in which “there is no movement of thought.”<sup>68</sup> But what is interesting is that when the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* speaks of a state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, there remains a kind of perception. It tells the story of Līlā, who enters into *nirvikalpa samādhi*. It is said that she was in the infinite space of consciousness, and yet she can see the king, although he cannot see her.<sup>69</sup> She was on another plane of consciousness.

The continuance of perception is probably related to the idea of *jīvanmukti*. For the one who is liberated in this life, certain *vāsanās* remain. But they are pure (*śuddha*) *vāsanās* that are free from joy and sorrow and cause no further birth. Fort comments:

Even though awake, the *mukta*’s *vāsanās* and *vṛttis* are at rest. Thus, the liberated being is often described as “asleep while awake” detached and desireless, doing all while doing nothing, having perfect equanimity in activity. When acting with a one-pointed “sleep mind,” this being is not a doer and acts without bondage.<sup>70</sup>

Just as in deep sleep one experiences no duality or suffering, so in the *vāsanā*-less state, the knower has equanimity and a kind of coolness. This is the *turīya* or fourth state. There is a

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<sup>66</sup> Christopher Chapple finds a relation to Yogacara’s idea of mind only from the *Lankāvatāra Sutra*. He says there is a reciprocity between what is perceived and the means of perception. “The notions of agent, action and result, seer, sight, seen and so forth are all only thought (III: 103:18). *Swami Venkatesananda: The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (State University of New York Press, 1984), p. xiii, ft. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 85.

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Chapple, Introduction to *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. xiii.

<sup>69</sup> *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, pp. 53, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Fort, *op. cit.* p. 94.

state beyond even this, called the *turiyātīta*, a nondual “state” beyond great (and no) bliss. It is associated with bodiless liberation, which is even higher than liberation in the body.

In another passage from the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, the sage Vāsiṣṭha tells Rāma that *samādhi* is where one realizes the objects of the senses in a state of “not-self” and thus enjoys inner calmness and tranquillity at all times. If one can mentally renounce all false identification of the self with objects, one can then live where one likes, either at home or in a mountain-cave. If the mind is at peace and if there is no ego-sense, even cities are as void. On the other hand, forests are like cities to him whose heart is full of desires and other evils.<sup>71</sup> This is the idea of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while alive, but who still lives in the world.

To attain liberation, one must abandon the aspect of the mind called the “I” notion, *aḥamkāra*, *aḥambhāva*.<sup>72</sup> *Samādhi* is specifically said to be the same whether one is engaged in constant action or in contemplation. Thus, it is not limited to a state of trance, since in a trance, one would not be able to be in a state of action. The emphasis is on attaining a state of egolessness:

Knowledge of truth, Lord, is the fire that burns up all hopes and desires as if they are dried blades of grass. That is what is known by the word *samādhi* in which there is eternal satisfaction, clear perception of what is, egolessness, not being subject to the pairs of opposites, freedom from anxiety and from the wish to acquire or to reject.<sup>73</sup>

In *samādhi* there is “clear perception of what is.” This is not a cessation of consciousness, but a state of egolessness. This egolessness is obtained when one realizes that the light rays are not different from the sun, that the waves are not different from the ocean, that the bracelet is not different from gold, that the sparks are not different from the fire. Someone who has seen this true has an understanding that is said to be unmodified (*nirvikalpa*). We are to

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<sup>71</sup> *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, p. 222.

<sup>72</sup> Fort, *op. cit.* p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, p. 227.

abandon the perception of diversity or objectification and remain established in the *nirvikalpa* consciousness. Then we do not get enmeshed in the objects.<sup>74</sup>

e) Ramaṇa: *sahaja samādhi*

Ramaṇa distinguishes between a state of trance (which he calls *nirvikalpa samādhi*) and the highest state of consciousness, *sahaja samādhi*. He describes this state of *sahaja samādhi* in terms that are clearly related to the idea of *jīvanmukti* in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*:

In yoga the term is used to indicate some kind of trance and there are various kinds of *samādhi*. But the *samādhi* I speak to you about is different. It is *sahaja samādhi*. In this state you remain calm and composed during activity. You realize that you are moved by the deeper Real self within and are unaffected by what you do or say or think. You have no worries, anxieties or cares, for you realize that there is nothing that belongs to you as ego and that everything is being done by something with which you are in conscious union.<sup>75</sup>

Ramaṇa says that a trance is only temporary in its effects; there is no use of trance, unless it brings about enduring peace of mind. There is happiness so long as the trance lasts. But after rising from it the old *vāsanās* (latent ideas and forms of the mind) return. Unless the *vāsanās* are destroyed in *sahaja samādhi* there is no good in trance.<sup>76</sup>

To a questioner who continued to ask about the importance of trance, Ramaṇa replied,

If you are so anxious for trance any narcotic will bring it about. Drug-habit will be the result and not liberation. There are *vāsanās* in the latent state even in trance. The *vāsanās* must be destroyed.<sup>77</sup>

Ramaṇa distinguishes these levels of *samādhi*:

- (1) Holding on to Reality is *samadhi*.
- (2) Holding on to Reality with effort is *savikalpa samadhi*.
- (3) Merging in Reality and remaining unaware of the world is *nirvikalpa samadhi*.
- (4) Merging in Ignorance and remaining unaware of the world is sleep.

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<sup>74</sup> *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, p. 400. Part of this realization is also that the world is unreal. Whatever the self contemplates is materialized on account of the inherent power in consciousness. That materialized thought then shines as if it is independent.

<sup>75</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 279.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 280.

(5) Remaining in the primal, pure natural state without effort is *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*.<sup>78</sup>

In sleep, the mind is alive, but sunk into oblivion. In *savikalpa samadhi*, the mind jumps from one object to another. All kinds of thoughts rise up from the Reality within and “manifest themselves.”

In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which Ramaṇa also calls *kevala samādhi*, the mind is alive, but “sunk in life”, “like a bucket with a rope left lying in the water in the well to be drawn out.” One can come out of the state. It is therefore temporary, a mere suppression (*laya*) of consciousness, a state of trance. It is the *samādhi* of nondifferentiation; it consists of “pure consciousness”, which is capable of illumining knowledge or ignorance.<sup>79</sup> *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is the merging in the one Reality that underlies all phenomena and the remaining unaware of all transitory manifestations. The state is compared to a waveless ocean. In *nirvikalpa samadhi* one is unaware of anything but the inmost Being. It therefore appears that Ramaṇa means a state of Pure Consciousness when he refers to *nirvikalpa samādhi*.<sup>80</sup>

In *sahaja samādhi*, the mind is “dead”, “resolved into the self, like a river discharged into the ocean and its identity lost.” And yet, although the mind is “dead”, in *sahaja samadhi* one is able to continue to function in the world after enlightenment. The enlightened one lives as a *jīvanmukta*.

*Sahaja*, the highest state of consciousness is not withdrawal from the world or a cessation of activity. A person who has attained Realization may or may not withdraw from active life. Some realized persons carry on trade or business or rule a Kingdom like Rāma as described in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Realization does not mean being inert like a stone or becoming nothing:

Then how would it differ from deep sleep? Besides, it would be a state which, however exalted, comes and goes and would therefore not be the natural and normal state, so how could it represent the eternal presence of the Supreme Self, which persists through all states, and survives them? It is true that there is such a state and that in the case of some people it may be necessary to go through it. It

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 357, 358.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167.

<sup>80</sup> Loy uses the word *nirvikalpa* to refer to Unconstructed Awareness, which corresponds to Ramaṇa’s idea of *sahaja*.

may be a temporary phase of the quest or persist to the end of a man's life, if it be the Divine Will or the man's destiny, but in any case you cannot call it the highest state. If it were you would have to say that not only the Sages, but God Himself has not attained the highest state, since not only are the Realized Sages very active but the Personal God (*Īśvara*) himself is obviously not in this supremely inactive state, since he presides over the world and directs its activities.<sup>81</sup>

Ramaṇa says that *sahaja samādhi* is preferable to *nirvikalpa*, because even if one is immersed in *nirvikalpa samādhi* for years, after emerging from it one will find oneself in one's environment. One should be in spontaneous *samādhi*—in one's pristine or natural state—in the midst of every environment.<sup>82</sup> In the natural state of *sahaja* we do not go into *samādhi* and out again. We no longer have to make conscious efforts to keep the mind one-pointed or free from thought.<sup>83</sup>

Ramaṇa was asked which state of *samādhi* he was in. He said that if his eyes were closed, it was *nirvikalpa*; if open it was (though differentiated, still in absolute repose) *savikalpa*. He said that *sahaja* is the ever-present state, the "natural state."<sup>84</sup>

Ramaṇa refers to *samādhi* in his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. To attain *samādhi*, it is helpful "to regard everything as *Brahman*." The result will be that the frail tendencies of the ego will disappear like darkness before the sun.<sup>85</sup> In *sahaja* one sees only the Self, and one sees the world as a form assumed by the Self.<sup>86</sup> The importance of regarding everything as *Brahman* seems to indicate that perception continues after one attains *sahaja*. The state is not just one of pure consciousness, but a state in which there is some content.

Forman comments on Ramaṇa's distinction between *samādhi* and *sahaja samādhi*. In Forman's opinion, *sahaja samādhi* involves both external activity and some sort of internal

<sup>81</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

<sup>82</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 59. Ramaṇa refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* to support this priority of *sahaja samādhi*. It appears that he is referring to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*'s emphasis on the *jīvanmukta*.

<sup>83</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 185.

<sup>84</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 13. It is interesting that Ramaṇa uses the word "absolute repose" here, and in reference to *savikalpa*. It will be recalled that this is Nāgārjuna's closest definition of *nirvana*.

<sup>85</sup> *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 153.

<sup>86</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 184.

quiet. He thus sees it as more complex than introvertive *samādhi* or “pure consciousness.” He points out that Ramaṇa’s experience of *samādhi* preceded *sahaja samādhi* by several years.

*Samādhi* is a contemplative mystical state and is “introvertive” as Stace employs the term. *Sahaja samādhi* is a state in which a silent level within the subject is maintained along with (simultaneously with) the full use of the human faculties. It is, hence, continuous through part or all of the twenty-four-hour cycle of (meditative and nonmeditative) activity and sleep. This distinction seems to be key: introvertive mysticism denotes a transient state (after all, no one who eats and sleeps can remain entranced forever), whereas extrovertive mysticism denotes a more permanent state, one that lasts even while one is engaged in activity.<sup>87</sup>

Forman therefore makes a correlation between Stace’s ideas of extrovertive mysticism and Ramaṇa’s *sahaja samādhi*.<sup>88</sup> In extrovertive mysticism, one “perceives a new relationship—one of unity, blessedness, reality between external world and the self.”

But the correlation with Stace’s ideas is not quite as straightforward as this. Ramaṇa’s *sahaja samādhi* is related to the idea of *jīvanmukti*, liberation in the body. And there is a conflict within Vedānta regarding the nature of such liberation, and even whether such liberation is possible. For example, in the *Brahmasūtras* liberation (*brahma-loka*) is reached only after death. Rāmānuja says that liberation with a body is as absurd as saying “my mother is childless.”<sup>89</sup> Even within the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, which popularized the idea of *jīvanmukti*, liberation after death (*videhamukti*) is accorded a higher status. The main problem for Vedānta with the idea of liberation in the body is that if the body is the result of ignorance (*avidyā*), how can the body (and any ignorance) remain after liberation? Vedānta’s main solution is the idea that the body continues to exist by reason of past *karma* (*prārabdha karma*). This is *karma* that was incurred prior to liberation. After liberation, its force continues until it is spent, like the continued whirling of a potter’s wheel. The *jīvanmukta* can continue to operate in the world only because of this past karma. Final release or liberation occurs at the time of death when the body is “dropped”.

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<sup>87</sup> Forman, *op. cit.* p. 8. Forman cites Monier-Williams’ definition of *sahaja*: a quality as a disposition or a constant feature.

<sup>88</sup> See W.T. Stace: *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960).

<sup>89</sup> Fort, *op. cit.* pp. 26, 78. He cites Rāmānuja’s *Śrī bhāṣya I.1.4*.

Ramaṇa refers to this idea of *prārabdha karma*, although he says that it is an explanation that is given only to satisfy the enquirer. From the *jñāni*'s point of view there is only the Self manifesting itself in variety.<sup>90</sup> Although other people see the *jīvanmukta* acting in the world, the *jīvanmukta* is not conscious of this:

Like a passenger asleep in a carriage, a *jñāni* in *sahaja samādhi* is unaware of the happening, waking, dream and deep sleep. In *kevala samādhi*, the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep, are only merged, ready to emerge after regaining the state other than *samādhi*. In *sahaja samādhi* the activities, vital and mental, and the three states are destroyed, never to reappear. However, others notice the *jñāni* active e.g. eating, talking, moving etc. He is not himself aware of these activities, whereas others are aware of his activities. They pertain to his body and not to his Real Self, *swarupa*. For himself, he is like the sleeping passenger—or like a child interrupted from sound sleep and fed, being unaware of it.<sup>91</sup>

*Sahaja samādhi* is like being asleep in the waking state (*jagrat sushupti*).<sup>92</sup> In *sahaja*, the mind has resolved itself into the Self and has been lost. Differences and obstructions therefore do not exist. The activities of such a being are like the feeding of a somnolent boy, perceptible to the onlooker (but not to the subject). “Similarly the *sahaja jñāni* remains unaware of his bodily activities because his mind is dead—having been resolved in the ecstasy of *Chid Ananda* (Self).<sup>93</sup> This explanation of *jīvanmukti* tends towards a monistic view of Self. It devalues the world and the nondual perception of that world.

Was Ramaṇa truly unaware of objects in the world? He certainly seemed to be aware of those people who asked him questions. He also participated in some activities, such as preparing food in the kitchen, and reading newspapers and correspondence. One early disciple commented on the fact that the exterior world was in fact of interest to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was the most normal person he had ever found. He was able to think and to reason in response to questions. Even when he sat seemingly utterly absorbed in Self, he would become alert if someone nearby mispronounced a word in reciting a verse. It therefore can not be said that his mind was dead in the sense of “pure consciousness.” His mind was functioning, but as a *jīvanmukti*, “as one who

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<sup>90</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 349.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* p. 339.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* p. 154.

is wholly awake but at the same time free of characteristics of the state of waking, and free of all desire and of a sense of separate ego.” [*Vivekacūdāmani* v. 429]<sup>94</sup>

Abhishiktānanda comments on the difficulty of understanding what Ramaṇa’s consciousness as a *jīvanmukta* was like:

They say that for him who is no longer aware of *śariram* [the body], all is clear. But what exactly does that mean? Ramaṇa, for example, took his meals, was *interested* in food, its preparation, etc. I am afraid that the *idea* that we make for ourselves of this (experience of) non-awareness is false. (...) it is only ignorance that sees a difference between the *jīvan-mukta* and the *other*. I think that this duality which we assert between *advaita* and *dvaita* is precisely our mistake.<sup>95</sup>

There seems to be some confusion in Ramaṇa’s own explanations of the *jīvanmukti* state of consciousness. On the one hand, he says there is an annihilation of mind, a state of no-mind where one is not aware of any others.<sup>96</sup> This acosmic state is related to a monistic view of reality. In this viewpoint, the world of *māyā* is not given much (if any) reality. In this connection, Ramaṇa sometimes holds to an idealist view of the world. For example, he says that the phenomenal world is nothing but thought. When the world recedes from one’s view—that is, when one is free from thought—the mind enjoys the Bliss of the Self. Conversely, when the world appears—that is, when thought occurs—the mind experiences pain and anguish.<sup>97</sup> This idealist, acosmic, and monistic view appears to be related to an emphasis on the state of “Pure Consciousness”.

On the other hand, Ramaṇa also says that the *jīvanmukta*’s consciousness is not based on the ego. In the *sahaja* consciousness, one sees *Brahman* everywhere. This view grants more reality to the world, and is related to the state of Unconstructed Awareness, where one sees reality as it is. Müller-Ortega is helpful here in pointing out that *jīvanmukti* is a *tantric* idea. Practitioners of tantra reacted against the Upanishadic spirit of renunciation. They tried to reconcile the ascent to *mokṣa* or liberation with the experience of joyful enjoyment of the world, *bhoga*. A *tantric jīvanmukta* becomes a man-god. He or she is

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<sup>94</sup> Swami Siddheswarananda in *Études sur Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy, 1972), pp. 181-182.

<sup>95</sup> *Letters*, p. 293 (MC 12.4.73).

<sup>96</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 552.

<sup>97</sup> “Who am I?”, *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 46.

...a divinized being acting within the world rather than seeking to transcend it. Thus, the search is not just for a freedom that releases a person from suffering and transmigration, but for a powerful, even magical perfection (*siddhi*) and autonomy (*svātantrya*).<sup>98</sup>

The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* speaks of *bhoga*. So does Ramaṇa. He says that there are two kinds of *vāsānas*: *bandha hetuh*, causing bondage for the ignorant and *bhoga hetuh*, giving enjoyment for the wise. The latter do not obstruct realization.<sup>99</sup> If that is so, then it was Ramaṇa's view that not all *vasānas* are destroyed in the *advaitic* experience.<sup>100</sup>

I conclude that Ramaṇa's equivocation as to the nature of the *sahaja* state is due to a conflict in Vedāntic ideas about *jīvanmukti*. On the one hand, he wishes to affirm the Upanishadic renunciation of the world. This view of realization is acosmic, and in line with a Pure Consciousness experience. On the other, Ramaṇa affirms some *tantric* ideas of the reality of the world, and the life of the *jīvanmukta*—the one who attained liberation in life. The *sahaja* view of realization is more that of Unconstructed Awareness, a seeing of unity and connectedness within the world. These two different viewpoints are also evident in Abhishiktānanda's thought, and he, too sometimes confuses them.

A more consistent view of *jīvanmukti* is given by Aurobindo. Fort says that Aurobindo's perspective is more world-affirming than Shankara or Ramaṇa:

Since Aurobindo holds that existence, from grossest Matter to highest Spirit, is an integral unity, the deluded individuated self (*jīva*) is real and can evolve back to its Spiritual basis (Supermind). Put another way, for Aurobindo *brahman* includes *māyā*, and *māyā* is dynamic (*śakti*), including its derivations of mind and body. True (integral) liberation is not separation from *samsāra*, but realization of the Divine (*brahman*) in the Divine.<sup>101</sup>

For Aurobindo, there is therefore no problem in remaining embodied after liberation. He does not have to deal with the problem of remaining ignorance or *karma*.

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<sup>98</sup> Müller-Ortega, Paul E.: *The Triadic Heart of Siva* (State University of New York Press, 1989) p. 50.

<sup>99</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 280. Similarly, there are some intentions (*sankalpas*) which may be cultivated by the *jñāni*: p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> In addition to *tantric* influences, we may also look to *Śaiva Siddhanta* and to *Kashmir Śaivism* for emphases on enjoyment in the world.

<sup>101</sup> Fort, *op. cit.* p. 150.

f) Gnānānanda: *sahaja samādhi*

Like Ramaṇa, Gnānānanda distinguishes between different kinds of *samādhi*. In *savikalpa samādhi*, there is an awareness of oneself as distinct, some “memory” of oneself. In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, there is no longer a distinction between outward or inward, or between self and other. It is an ecstasy which is enstasis, and an enstasis which is ecstasy; there is no ‘outer’ (ek-stasis) which is not fulfilled and completed in what is ‘inward’, and no ‘inward’ (en-stasis) whose inwardness does not include the whole of being. In that state,

Nothing any more makes an impact on either the physical senses of the mind. You can [no] longer think or feel. People can touch you, move you about, lift you up, but you remain totally unaware of it. It is fullness, it is bliss...<sup>102</sup>

*Nirvikalpa samādhi* is therefore a kind of trance state.

But the state of *sahaja samādhi* is “even more exalted” than *nirvikalpa samādhi*. This state is achieved when you have reached the original state of the self:

Here you have passed beyond both enstasis and ecstasy. Differences are no longer perceived anywhere. The *jnānī* lives in the world like every one else; he eats, drinks, sleeps and walks about, just like everyone else. However, while others are primarily aware of the diversity of things, the *jnānī* sees them in their unity. In finding the Self, he finds himself and the self in everything. The *ego* has disappeared, which formerly came between “him”, “himself”, and other people, indeed, between his awareness of himself and his real being. Nothing henceforth obstructs the perception of reality in itself.<sup>103</sup>

This description of *sahaja* as an experience of unity with the world and loss of ego consciousness sounds more like Unconstructed Awareness than Pure Consciousness. We see the Self (or God or *Brahman*) in the world and in the “mirror of the heart.” When we see God in the universe, then we see his form with duality. When we see God “in the mirror of the heart”, then we see unity:

God is everywhere present indivisibly, *a-khanda* [...] The heart is the mirror in which he is seen. When he is seen in the universe, then his form is diversified, *bheda, dvaita*. When he is seen in the mirror of the heart, he is seen just as he is

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<sup>102</sup> *Guru*, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

in himself, undivided, *a-khanda*, without any limitation or otherness, in the nonduality of being.<sup>104</sup>

### ***B. Abhishiktānanda and Nondual Perception***

#### 1. The four states of consciousness

Indian thought refers to the stages of consciousness: waking, sleep and deep sleep. There is also a fourth stage, the *turīya* that is beyond all these states; this is the goal to be achieved in our consciousness. What does this mean? Is the *turīya* to be seen as a kind of sleep? Heidegger made the comment that “For Indians sleep is the highest life.” But as Mehta points out, no Indian texts state this.<sup>105</sup> What it does mean is that our waking state is not to be regarded as paradigmatic.<sup>106</sup> When we regard the waking state as primary, we regard thinking as the very essence of how humans are. But this is to miss out on the truly authentic mode of being, the fourth state (*turīya*) where we are at one with our essential nature, pure awareness. This is beyond both waking and sleeping.<sup>107</sup>

All three states—waking, dreaming, deep sleep—are interpreted from the perspective of the fourth state of consciousness, *turīya*. The *turīya* is therefore not to be identified with any of the three states. Abhishiktānanda expresses this idea when he says that the final stage of human consciousness is the *turīya*; free from the limitations of the previous states, but with all their positive characteristics:

- it has the simplicity and freedom from admixture of *suṣupti* (deep sleep)
- it has the sovereignty and freedom relative to time and place as manifested in dreams
- it has the fullness of clarity of the waking state<sup>108</sup>

Ramaṇa also interprets the *turīya* as beyond both the waking and sleeping states. He says that this fourth stage is really our natural state [*sahaja*], the under-current in all the three

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<sup>104</sup> *Guru*, p. 77; *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

<sup>105</sup> J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 54-56.

<sup>106</sup> See J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 282. Krüger says that modern North Americans tend toward monophasic consciousness, regarding only the waking phase as valid ('normal').

<sup>107</sup> J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Religion*, pp. 56, 59.

<sup>108</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience”, *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 480.

states.<sup>109</sup> It is also not a state of trance, since this *sahaja* state is the state of the *jīvanmukta* who moves about and acts in the world.

Unfortunately, Abhishiktānanda is inconsistent in what he says about the states of consciousness. He sometimes views liberation in terms of trance. In a *Diary* entry from 1953, he refers to the young Ramaṇa's trance in the Pātāla Linga, an underground chamber in the Arunāchala temple. He says that Ramaṇa's experience was *enstasis*, and he then relates it to the depth of dreamless sleep [*sushupti*]:

There exists in the depth of oneself a very deep place which continues to exist during dreamless sleep [*sushupti*], and is inaccessible to all superficial consciousness. It is in this abyss, in this Pātāla that the encounter takes place<sup>110</sup>

Abhishiktānanda goes on to say that this encounter with the Self is not perceived by the eyes, ears, thought or even non-thought. Abhishiktānanda therefore interprets the experience in terms of Pure Consciousness or trance.

In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda writes about the fourth state *turīya*. He describes it as the transcendent mystical state where there is neither interior nor exterior knowledge. Its essence is the experience of one's own self, which is without diversity or duality. Here he relates it to the state of *kevala* (or *nirvikalpa samādhi*).<sup>111</sup>

In 1972, Abhishiktānanda writes about the three states. He says that one must discover the *I* that is the same, unaffected by waking, dreaming, and sleeping. But he then again identifies the awakened state with that of deep sleep, precisely the error that Mehta refers to. Abhishiktānanda says that the *I* of deep sleep [*sushupti*] is the *I* that must be awakened. For the *jīvanmukta*, the *I* that is the see-er [*drashtā*], the witness [*sākshī*], is in the depth of the *I* of deep sleep. The waking *I* is only its shadow [*chāyā*].<sup>112</sup>

Even after his own awakening, Abhishiktānanda interprets his experience in terms of sleep:

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<sup>109</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 121.

<sup>110</sup> *Diary*, p. 67 (29.3.53).

<sup>111</sup> "La Grâce de l'Inde", *initiation*, p. 44.

<sup>112</sup> *Diary*, p. 353 (29.5.72). Abhishiktānanda cites Kath. Up. III, 1 and VI, 5 in support of this view.

The Awakening is paradoxically: to awake to what is beyond, and to fall asleep to oneself, to what falls short of it. The Awakening is to enter into a total sleep. But once again, only from this side can we speak of sleep, and equally of Awakening! The Awakening at the level of anyone who has consciousness is precisely to lose oneself, to forget oneself. The Awakening is the shining out of the splendour—in splendour—of the non-awakening of the eternal not-born.<sup>113</sup>

It may be correct to speak of a “total sleep” in reference to trance or to Pure Consciousness. It does not appear correct for the model of the *jīvanmukti*, or the *sahaja* awareness.

## 2. Yoga and *nirvikalpa samādhi*

Loy argues that yoga is a method to “undo” *savikalpa* perception in order to return to the bare *nirvikalpa* percept.<sup>114</sup> He quotes Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*:

*Dhyāna* is the uninterrupted concentration of thought on its object. This itself turns into *samādhi* when the object alone shines and the thought of meditation [i.e., the thought that “I” am doing it] is lost, as it were.<sup>115</sup>

For Loy, this is an undoing of our superimpositions. But is this an attainment of Pure Consciousness or of Unconstructed Awareness? Loy does not make the distinction. This is due to his idealistic assumption that the superimpositions of our thought not only obscure reality but in fact construct reality. For Loy, the “bare percept” is not a non-differentiation of subject and object, but their non-existence. There is for Loy no nondual totality like Mind-only or *Brahman*, but rather only *śūnyatā* or emptiness. There is therefore no difference for him between the deconstruction of superimpositions and the cessation of consciousness.

In Kashmir *Śaivism* there is a meditation called *śaktopāya* (“the means of energy”) where a person contemplates the real character of one’s own person. A *yogin* is to contemplate the pure I-consciousness, as distinct from the limited ego. This sounds quite similar to Ramaṇa idea of Self-enquiry. This type of meditation has been seen as a way to remove superimpositions by way of a dehypnotization:

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<sup>113</sup> *Diary*, p. 388 (12.9.73).

<sup>114</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 44. Thus, despite Patañjali’s use of *Sāṅkhya* metaphysics in his *Yoga Sūtra*, the stages of *samādhi* (yogic meditation) that he describes may include the nondual.

<sup>115</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 208, *Yoga Sūtra* 1.41.

...in fact all of us are already moving within the deep rooted hypnotism worked out on us by *māyā*, the deluding power of the absolute reality, and are therefore taking wrongly the mental and physical forms as our real Self. *Śāktopāya* should therefore be taken as such a process of dehypnotization which relieves a *yogin* from the hypnotical finitude of his person and limitations in his powers to know and to do in accordance with his will, imposed on him by *māyā*, the most powerful hypnotizing force working in the whole universe.<sup>116</sup>

For Abhishiktānanda, yoga is a psycho-physiological technique, both external and internal at the same time, of leading the spirit to total silence. Yoga is a way to liberate oneself from superimpositions and from mental concepts; one can thereby reduce one's psychic activity to a consciousness of only oneself.<sup>117</sup> He refers to Patañjali and the cessation of mental activity:

What is essential in yoga is the cessation of mental activities [*vritti nirodha*], the concentration which finally reaches beyond the *manas*.<sup>118</sup>

This reference to the attainment of total silence, the cessation of mental activity, points towards a view of yoga as an experience of Pure Consciousness.

True Yoga has only one goal: the complete silence of thought, the arrest, as total as possible, of mental movements. The same must be said, moreover, for the Japanese *za-zen* which, at bottom, is but a deviant form of yoga...<sup>119</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that Gnānānanda's teaching on meditation is related to Buddhism's teaching of successive purifications of thought.

We have to leave behind the place of thinking, then that of joy, then that of peace; next, in more advanced meditations, we have to leave behind in their turn all the negations which have acted as supports in leaving behind one stage after another, until we have passed beyond every affirmation and equally every negation, and have entered the total silence, in which one who has reached so far is no longer aware of being silent—since he has passed into the *ākāsha* of the heart, the 'super-space', which can no longer be circumscribed or localized.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> B.N. Pandit: "Śāmbhavopāya: The Divine Way in Kashmir Śaivism", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 219.

<sup>117</sup> "Cheminements Intérieurs", *Intériorité*, p. 46. "...dégagé de toutes les surimpositions (*adhyāropa*), de l'attribution du non-réel au Réel. Le yogi tâche à se libérer des tourbillons de son imagination et des ses concepts mentaux (*vritti*), à réduire son activité psychique à la seule conscience de Soi-même..."

<sup>118</sup> *Diary*, p. 135 (3.1.56). *Yoga Sūtra* 1.1.

<sup>119</sup> Abhishiktānanda: "India's contribution to Christian Prayer" (1971), *Eyes of Light*, p. 41.

<sup>120</sup> *GURU*, p. 67. Gnānānanda used to quote a Tamil verse: "Enter into yourself to the place where there is nothing."

These stages are the same stages that were referred to by Griffiths in his explanation of the idea of Pure Consciousness. Abhishiktānanda therefore believes that yoga leads to Pure Consciousness. Yoga aims at arresting the mental process of ideation, and then at the total disappearance of all images whatever. But this mental “emptiness” or “void” is not sought for itself:

The void and emptiness of mind aimed at by yoga is not actually wanted for its own sake; otherwise deep sleep would be the highest yogic achievement. Even if void was final it would no longer be the void; it would be *something*: when *nothing* is spoken of, it is no longer nothing. On the physical plane itself, void is always an approximation, a goal which is never reached. The final experience (of pure awareness) is neither void nor non-void and can be thought of only through paradoxes...<sup>121</sup>

He says that the goal of yoga is to awaken and open to higher spheres of consciousness. Once the mind is emptied and the mental processes stopped, the deep power or light—the *śakti* of the Indian tradition—which normally lies hidden and inactive, rises up and shines forth by itself. We then wake up then to what in us is beyond any process of becoming, beyond time, beyond all beginning or end.

The final aim is to discover oneself, that which remains unaffected and non-changing:

The experience of self-awareness is to be simply conscious of oneself without any qualification whatever; to be aware of simply being, apart from any kind or mode of being, apart from any consciousness of being one who does this or that. Our consciousness is reduced to its central point, as in deep sleep, but at the same time we are as fully aware as in our waking state.<sup>122</sup>

Abhishiktānanda sometimes refers specifically to *kundalini* yoga. He refers to the *cakras* used in meditation. He says that those most recommended for meditation are the heart center (*anahacakra*), the one between the eyebrows (*ajna cakra*) and the top of the head (*sahasra-cakra* or *brahmarandhra*).<sup>123</sup>

Abhishiktānanda believed that the trance of yoga was necessary in order to attain the *advaitic* experience. We must remember that he went to India with this expectation. He had

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<sup>121</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “Yoga and Christian Prayer”, *Clergy Monthly* 1971 Vol. 31, no. 11, p. 474.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473, ft. 1.

read Lacombe's article on Ramaṇa, which spoke of Ramaṇa's *enstasis*. In imitating Ramaṇa's meditation in caves, Abhishiktānanda was also seeking to attain this type of trance experience. It can be argued that the asceticism of monasticism, and the silence of the Carmelites in particular, is an isolation from sensory experience that attempts to seek a Pure Consciousness experience. Because of his expectation, Abhishiktānanda was disappointed when he first met Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was engaged in ordinary activities like reading a newspaper; he appeared to Abhishiktānanda like his own grandfather. Ramaṇa was obviously not in a trance state.

This conflict between the *enstasy* of meditation and the everyday life of Ramaṇa was resolved for Abhishiktānanda when he met A. Shastri at Arunāchala. Shastri told him that no experience would be possible without the entry into trance produced by the awakening of the *kundalini*.<sup>124</sup> Abhishiktānanda says that the "ashes" of duality that still appeared in Shankara were never there in Ramaṇa, and this is because Ramaṇa first had a trance experience:

Bhagavan's experience required years of "trance" before his body could be brought back to normal. He went into trance at Arunāchala; a flash occurred like lightning in the presence of the temple *linga*. Even if he had wished, he was incapable of speech, etc. during the early years...<sup>125</sup>

Shastri "reintegrated Patañjali" with reference to Ramaṇa. In other words, Shastri explained how yoga was essential for the *advaitic* experience. But was Shastri's interpretation of Ramaṇa correct? Ramaṇa's own words seem to indicate that yoga is not necessary. The method of Self-Enquiry is a "direct method". *Kundalini yoga* is only preliminary to full Realization.<sup>126</sup> The experience of *kundalini śakti* at the *sahasrāra cakra* at the top of the head is only a temporary realized consciousness. The blaze of light that is experienced is when the mental predispositions have not yet been destroyed.<sup>127</sup>

If one concentrates on the *sahasrāra* there is no doubt that the ecstasy of *samādhi* ensues. The *vāsanās*, that is the latencies, are not however destroyed. The yogi is there found to wake up from the *samādhi*, because release from bondage has not yet been accomplished. So he passes down from the *sahasrāra* to the heart through what is called the *jivanadi*, which is only a continuation of the *sushumna*.

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<sup>124</sup> *Diary*, p. 77 (27.11.53).

<sup>125</sup> *Diary*, p. 76 (27.11.53).

<sup>126</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, p. 358.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* p. 167.

The *sushumna* is thus a curve. It starts from the solar plexus, rises through the spinal cord to the brain and from there bends down and ends in the heart. When the yogi has reached the heart, the *samādhi* becomes permanent. Thus we see that the heart is the final centre.<sup>128</sup>

It is not the experience of the *sahasrāra* that is the key experience, but rather the experience is in the Heart. The path of the energy of *śakti* is up the pathway of the *sushumna* and then down again to the heart. In the Heart the aim is to drain away the *vāsanās*. It is by “diving into the heart” that one searches for the origin of the ego. This is the direct method of self-enquiry (*vichara*) for Self-Realization; you do not have to worry about attaining the *kundalini* experience.<sup>129</sup> The method of Self-inquiry is sufficient. It opens a tiny hole in the Heart, with the result that I-I consciousness shines forth.<sup>130</sup>

In this experience of the Heart, one experiences the true relation between the Self and the body or the mind. One must give up one’s mistaken identity with the changeful body or the mind. The body and the mind obtain their existence from the unchanging Self. Ramanā compares the relation between the Self and the body or the mind to that of a clear crystal and its background. If the crystal is placed against a red flower, it shines red; if placed against a green leaf it shines green, and so on. When one’s mistaken identity is given up, the ever-shining Self will be seen to be the single non-dual Reality.<sup>131</sup>

The emphasis in this experience of the Heart is therefore on seeing the Self or *Brahman* within everything. It is a kind of perception. Seeing *Brahman* means that it has content and is therefore different from Pure Consciousness or the state reached by yoga. Yoga is only preliminary to the real awakening, the experience of the heart.

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p. 575.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 576. Loy says that Shankara was also of the view that there is no necessity for yogic practice except for those of “inferior intellect.” See *Nonduality*, p. 239.

<sup>130</sup> *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 201

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p. 576.

### 3. *Sahaja samādhi* as a return to the world

Already in *Guhāntara* Abhishiktānanda distinguishes between *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samādhi*. *Nirvikalpa samādhi* is the *kevala* experience, the experience of the infinite aloneness and solitude of the Infinite, the One-without-a-Second.<sup>132</sup>

In “Sannyāsa”, the last major article that Abhishiktānanda wrote, he says that for Ramaṇa the highest form of *samādhi* is *sahaja samādhi*, that which is completely natural (‘innate’). He contrasts it with *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which he refers to as “ecstasy”.

In this [*sahaja*] there is no restraint of a man’s normal bodily and mental awareness, as in ecstasy (*nirvikalpa samādhi*), which itself implies a dualism; rather the *jñānī* continues to be fully aware of himself and of all around him, but within the indivisible awareness of the *ātman*.<sup>133</sup>

This description by Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that in *sahaja samādhi* there is a content to the experience. One is “fully aware of himself and of all around him.” In that state, unlike *nirvikalpa samādhi*, “there is no restraint of a person’s normal bodily and mental awareness.” Thus, in the terms we have been using, *sahaja* is not an experience of Pure Consciousness. It is an awareness of unity, an “indivisible awareness of *Atman*.”

Like Ramaṇa, Abhishiktānanda regarded yoga as preliminary to *sahaja samādhi*. In his book *Saccidānanda* he says that the *sahaja* state is to be contrasted not only with the life of division, complexity and self-delusion when we live (as so often) at the surface of ourselves, but also with the so-called *ecstatic* state when the *sādhaka* is totally absorbed within and has not yet recovered the ‘world’ in the light of the *ātman*.<sup>134</sup> Abhishiktānanda therefore believed that there must be a recovery of the world after the emptiness of Pure Consciousness. There is a return, an awakening from the awakening.

Abhishiktānanda sometimes expresses the opinion that this further awakening is not found within Hinduism, but only in the Biblical tradition. He says that Indian seers say that those who experience the ultimate experience pass beyond their selves, and do not recover their selves. According to this view, the seer never recovers the self of his external and mundane

<sup>132</sup> “Jusqu’à la Source, l’expérience de non-dualité”, *Initiation*, p. 58.

<sup>133</sup> “Sannyasa”, *Further Shore*, p. 11.

<sup>134</sup> *Saccidānandap*. 40, ft. 3.

identity. But he says that the Biblical view is that Moses came down from the mountain; Paul returned from the third heaven.<sup>135</sup>

He says that a Christian will never come to the Vedāntic experience in the same way as a Hindu does, because the Christian's faith will not allow him to accept the experience as having ultimate value. It is followed by a trinitarian experience of being:

At the very moment when the ego, the 'I' of the superficial consciousness, is about to be overwhelmed by the essential *aham*, there resounds in the depth of the spirit a triple *Aham*...<sup>136</sup>

In a later chapter, we will look more closely at what Abhishiktānanda means by such a trinitarian experience of being. He means something quite different than an orthodox understanding of the Trinity. For Abhishiktānanda, the importance of the Trinity is the affirmation of both unity and diversity in our experience. For the present, it is important only to note his emphasis that there is a further awakening. The Christian awakes from the *advaitic* awakening:

When the Christian awakes from the *advaitic* experience and from the apparent sleep in which all consciousness of himself had faded away in the overwhelming awareness of Saccidānanda, he finds himself contemplating Saccidānanda as if from within, and at the same time rediscovers himself and all things. Hitherto he had tried to penetrate the mystery of being, awareness and bliss as from outside, but the mystery withstood him like an adamant wall. He was caught in a dilemma: either he clung to an impossible dualism, imagining himself as an 'other'; or, when he experienced the incomprehensible but inevitable non-duality, his individual self vanished and was lost in an apparent fusion of identity. This meant that he could only sink into a profound sleep, *susupti*, in which he was no longer conscious of anything whatever...<sup>137</sup>

This idea of an awakening beyond the *advaitic* experience is already mentioned in *Guhāntara*. Abhishiktānanda there writes that beyond *advaita* there is a further experience that he calls *ati-advaita*, or *advaitātīta*. In this state one experiences the mystery of the Three in One and the mystery of the One in Three. This is a "trans-*advaitin* mystery of the Father Son and

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<sup>135</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 6.

<sup>136</sup> *Saccidānanda*, pp. 197, 198.

<sup>137</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 175. The awakening from the slumber of *advaita* was prophesied by the Psalmist: "and I rose up again, for the Lord sustained me." We emerge from nothingness and are reborn as "son of God." *Saccidānanda*, p. 200.

Spirit, the mystery of God in Himself, of the Self of God and of Being which is supra-personal and tri-personal. But Abhishiktānanda also says that to speak of any numbers such as three or one is not possible when we go beyond *advaita*. The sages of India were correct to say neither one nor many, but just to say, not-two, *advaita*, and not-one, *an-eka*.<sup>138</sup>

Abhishiktānanda writes that one must pass through the stage of *advaita* or Unity. *Advaita* is the stage of non-distinction, and of drastic negation, or at least a forgetting of everything that one thought that one “knew” before of God. This *advaita* is also the stage of *kevala*. At the summit of the Christian mystical experience one goes beyond *kevala*.<sup>139</sup> The purpose of *kevala* is purification in order to allow us to enter the Kingdom of God. . Here a person must renounce any distinction from God, at least any distinction conceived on the basis of things in the empirical world. The person who is “flesh” cannot enter the kingdom. There must be a complete surrender or sacrifice, an abandonment to total nothingness. The state of *kevala* is a crucible that burns away all that one is and loves. When this purification is achieved, the Spirit of God attracts the soul even further within. It seems to me that Abhishiktānanda’s idea of the purification of *advaita* is very similar to the Western mystical idea of the dark night of the soul.

Abhishiktānanda says that this advance beyond *advaita* is something that India did not know how to discover, and that its *yogis* could not realize. In a remarkable statement, Abhishiktānanda says that they remain on a sort of natural level, and that the least of those in the Kingdom of God is greater than even Ramaṇa.<sup>140</sup>

In the same article, Abhishiktānanda says that when, beyond *advaita*, the mystery of the Trinity is contemplated, the world of distinction, the *an-eka* begins to appear again (*ressurgir*) from the *Śūnyatā* where it had seemed to have disappeared. In the *kevala*, one goes beyond space and time and even beyond eternity and Being, and beyond God as conceived, in order to appear again as from the primordial *yoni*. This appearing again is the resurrection. One passes from Being back again to non-Being, from *kevala* back to *nāmarūpa*. It is the passing from God

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<sup>138</sup> “Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond”, *Guhāntara* (unpublished). See discussion of *aneka* in Chapter X of this thesis.

<sup>139</sup> “Jusqu’à la Source, l’expérience de non-dualité”, *Initiation*, p. 63.

<sup>140</sup> “Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond”, *Guhāntara* (unpublished).. The return is also again a *kenosis*. Revelation, or the epiphany in time of the Incarnate Word is nothing other than this mystery of the appearance of being in time.

as the One who is without any second to God as Creator and God as Love, the God of *kenosis*. For the *kenosis* of God is the same as the Love of God.<sup>141</sup>

These ideas are important in explaining Abhishiktānanda's 'non-monistic *advaita*.' The trinitarian awakening breaks through the dilemma of either dualism or monism. There is a rejection of the duality that imagines we are *other* than the rest of the world. There is a return to the world in an experience of communion and unity. The *advaitic* experience shows us the falsity of dualism. This sleep is "a necessary precondition" of our awakening. But we do not stop at the monism of the Pure Consciousness experience; there is an awakening from the awakening. This new awareness is an awareness that "being is essentially 'being-with', communion, *koinōnia*, the free gift of the self and the mutual communication of love."<sup>142</sup> These ideas of communion are also related to Abhishiktānanda's trinitarian view of Being.

Abhishiktānanda says that the Christian who awakes after the *advaitic* night once more finds himself or herself as well as the world, but now at a deeper level. There is a "recovering" of self and the world, and of the reality of time, of becoming, of particularity and multiplicity. The world is full of value and significance, even at the level of its temporality and diversity:

God—eternal, absolutely self-existent, with all his infinite love, his creative power and his inner tri-personal life—is fully present in the tiniest speck of matter or moment of time in the grain of sand, in the smallest microbe, in the most trivial event in the world or the life of the individual. [...] No one has the right to say that God is there only in a diminished or downgraded manifestation of himself, from which the sage must turn away, either by thought (Greek *gnōsis*) or by will (Stoicism) or by 'isolation' or contemplation (Yoga-Vedānta), in order to attain to the Real. No, the Real is precisely there.<sup>143</sup>

This is a clear statement of Abhishiktānanda's view of a nondual perception of the world, a seeing *Brahman* within all things. The *jñāni* does not discover anything new. The *jñāni* just sees reality in all its glory. The *jñāni* penetrates to the essence of things and there discovers

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* Abhishiktānanda quotes the Bengali poet Tagore: "Where would your love be if I did not exist?"

<sup>142</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 176.

<sup>143</sup> *Saccidānanda*, pp. 128, 129.

Yahweh-*Brahman*, “the One who IS.”<sup>144</sup> He or she has recovered the state of communion of the child with the world, and is connected with the entire universe.

This idea of our awakening being related to perceiving a connection with the rest of the cosmos, and of seeing everything as *Brahman* was already expressed as early as 1956:

There is no awakening to being in the depth of oneself that is not an awakening to being in every being, and in the whole history of the cosmos and of humanity, and in the whole history of each person, and in the whole of one’s own history. Yogic introversion is only fruitful on this basis. Only then does it even have a result.<sup>145</sup>

Abhishiktānanda is aware that his ideas of a further awakening and communion reflect Christian ideas. He asks whether we should try to discover in a Christian *advaita* something beyond Vedāntin *advaita*. But he says that as soon as there is a qualification, *advaita* disappears. The *dvandva* [opposites, dualisms] reappear, and we have fallen away from the Real.<sup>146</sup>

Is this idea of a return to be found within Vedānta? How does it compare to Ramaṇa’s idea of the *sahaja* experience? The issue is complicated. Like many neo-Vedāntins, Ramaṇa was influenced by Christian ideas. He was educated in a Christian school. He continued to quote from the Bible in later life. He may have incorporated ideas from Christianity that give a more positive appreciation for our relations with the external world.

Abhishiktānanda says that Ramaṇa’s own ‘return’ was only figurative, since he never really returned from the experience.<sup>147</sup> After his experience, Ramaṇa saw nothing but the reality of Being, the Self. Abhishiktānanda compares this to the Christian mystic:

When the Christian mystic ‘returns’ from his own experience, he perceives everywhere in the world the signs of the presence of the trinitarian mystery. In every rustling leaf, in every gentle breeze, in every moment and every event either in nature or history, he hears the *Thou* in which Being awakes to itself...<sup>148</sup>

<sup>144</sup> *Diary*, p. 288 (12.11.66). Cf. Bede Griffiths, who also believed that the *advaitic* night (where all distinctions, divine mystery, soul and world are gone beyond) is not the ultimate state. Divine Sonship is the first but not the full opening to the Trinitarian Mystery. See Judson B. Trapnell, “Two Models of Christian Dialogue with Hinduism” *Vidyajyoti* April 1996, Vol. 60, No. 4, p. 249.

<sup>145</sup> *Diary*, pp. 187, 188 (30.11.56).

<sup>146</sup> *Diary*, p. 266 (22.3.64).

<sup>147</sup> *Saccidānanda*, p. 196. Abhishiktānanda places the word ‘return’ in quotes because in his view no one who has truly had the *advaitic* experience ever really returns.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

It is unclear whether this comparison is meant to express an equivalence of experience between Ramaṇa and the Christian mystic. On the previous page, Abhishiktānanda writes, “the Vedāntic experience of the Self leads on to the Trinitarian experience of Saccidānanda.”

In his book *The Further Shore*, Abhishiktānanda refers to the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* with respect to this issue of return:

*Ayam ātma brahma* (This ātman is Brahma), declares the seer of the *Māṇḍūkya Up.* (v.2), when he returns—‘if ever he does return’—from his experience. Does this mean then that he might look at it as if from outside? Or is this the last word that he utters in the very moment of being swallowed up in this ultimate experience?<sup>149</sup>

The seer is able to say “*This ātman is Brahman.*” But at what point in time is the seer able to say these words? Abhishiktānanda is of the view that the *advaitic* experience is beyond words. So the words are not used during the experience itself. Are they said after the *return* from the experience? Or are these the last words uttered before being “swallowed up” in the nondual experience? This issue may be resolved if we distinguish a Pure Consciousness experience, where one is “swallowed up”, from a *sahaja* experience where one returns to the world and becomes aware of the experience, and consequently of the unity of the world, and the nondifference, *advaita*, of one’s self and *Brahman*.

Elsewhere Abhishiktānanda makes this same contrast between the absorption of the *nirvikalpa* experience and the *sahaja* experience. He compares *sahaja* to the return depicted in the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen that show the various stages of Zen Enlightenment. The eighth picture in this series is a simple circle representing empty unity. But it is followed by the picture “Returning to the Source.” This picture is of a flowering branch representing particularity. Abhishiktānanda says that when we are in the *nirvikalpa* experience of nonduality, there is nothing else other than *Brahman*. Everything flies away, there is no longer room for anything else at all. This *nirvikalpa* experience is in the cave of our heart. But from this cave of the heart,

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<sup>149</sup> *Further Shore*, p. 104.

...everything comes down again, everything is given back, as in the original state [*sahaja*] on coming out of absorption in what is beyond thought [*nirvikalpa*]. The Ten Pictures of Zen.<sup>150</sup>

In the *sahaja* experience there is a coming out of the “absorption” of the *nirvikalpa* experience.

Loy also refers to the picture of the return in the Ten Oxherding Pictures. He interprets it not as a return from emptiness to fullness, but as a finding of emptiness in the return to the world:

Emptiness at this stage is found *in* the phenomena of the everyday world. According to Kakuan’s commentary, one “observes the waxing and waning of life in the world while abiding unassertively in a state of unshakable serenity. This [waxing and waning] is not a phantom or illusion [but a manifestation of the Source].<sup>151</sup>

If we understand “emptiness” as the inter-relatedness of all things, then this may be a good parallel to the *sahaja* experience, at least as understood by Abhishiktānanda.<sup>152</sup> But Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that although everything is “given back” in the *sahaja* state, everything comes from the “heaven” that is hidden in the heart.

But everything comes from this heaven. Whatever does not come from (*ex*) this heaven is transitory [*adhruva*] and must pass away. The Church and the Eucharist, with their form, like everything else.<sup>153</sup>

In this passage, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that the source of the world that we see is unchanging. This relates to a two-tier view of reality. It should be contrasted with Loy’s Buddhist view of the “waxing and waning” of particularity; the Buddhist emphasis is on impermanence and contingency, and not of a permanent substratum to our experience.

The verse that accompanies the picture of return in the Oxherding Pictures says of the sage,

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<sup>150</sup> *Diary*, p. 288 (10.11.66).

<sup>151</sup> *Nonduality*, pp. 59, 269.

<sup>152</sup> See J.S. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 290. Hua-yen philosophy interprets emptiness as radical relationality. There is a mutual mirroring of all events in all other events.

<sup>153</sup> *Diary*, p. 288 (10.11.66).

It is as though he were now blind and deaf. Seated in his hut, he hankers not for things outside. Streams meander on of themselves, red flowers naturally bloom red.

Loy says that the phrase “as if blind and deaf” is often used in Ch’an literature to praise the one whose seeing and hearing are completely without any sense of duality. It is sometimes described as no-seeing and no-hearing. Loy says that that is why one master was enlightened in hearing the sound of a pebble striking a bamboo. “He heard the nondual nirvikalpa sound, freed from any thoughts *about it*.”<sup>154</sup>

Abhishiktānanda describes the *sannyāsī* as one who is blind, deaf and dumb, who passes through the world like one who does not belong to it at all.<sup>155</sup> If the monk reappears in the world, it is in the manner of one who is not of it anymore, not there any more. The sounds which his ears perceive, the spectacles which his eyes see, do not have the same sense as before; they do not penetrate any more in him to the same centre. He is in the world as a pure manifestation of Self.<sup>156</sup>

What does this mean, that the sounds and sights do not penetrate any more in the sage? This is not to be understood in a monistic sense, where there is nothing to see or hear since there is only Self (as in Ramaṇa’s interpretation of the *jīvanmukti*). In my view, what Abhishiktānanda means is that the sage is free from ego in such seeing and hearing. The life of the realized person or *jīvanmukta* is one who has returned to ordinary life but without ego. Abhishiktānanda expresses this view as early as 1952:

One who has attained *satori*, anyone who has been enlightened, continues to see grass as green and the sky as blue, to consider rice as something to eat and cloth as something to wear, and the train as a means of transport. What he is liberated from is the relationship to “himself” that until then he projected onto these things. Things are seen in themselves, and no longer in dependence on “himself.” Dear ones are no less loved, but there is no longer the least attachment, the least turning back on “himself”.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Nonduality*, p. 59.

<sup>155</sup> *Further Shore*, p. 7.

<sup>156</sup> “Cheminements intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 57.

<sup>157</sup> *Diary*, p. 50 (19.7.52).

Things are seen in themselves. To use the words of the verse in the Oxherding Pictures, “Streams meander on of themselves, red flowers naturally bloom red.”

In 1970, Abhishiktānanda wrote again about how the *jīvanmukta* returns to ordinary life without egotism:

The general mistake about Vedānta is to picture Vedāntin life as something different, consisting of acts, attitudes, ‘feelings’, that would be different from the acts, ‘feelings’, attitudes of our so-called ordinary life. Most often people therefore picture an “acosmic” life. Whereas nothing changes or appears outwardly in the life of one who is realized. Jesus eats, drinks, weeps, gets tired. Poonja [Harilal] manages his mines. Janaka [a Hindu king] rules his kingdom. K.’s guru arranges the marriage of his children, etc. The realized person embraces his wife with as much love and joy as anyone else. Only, he is free, does not seek *himself*. The *gunas* [natural “qualities”] take the same pleasure, a pleasure that is even greater because it is pure [*śuddha*], not mixed with egotism, etc. But in everything that is not necessary (wife, *devas*, *pūjā*, etc.), he is free, *līlā* [play]. Even in the necessary things like eating, sleeping, there is no more than the physical need of the *gunas*, not the psychological need which *ahamkāra*, egotism, has added to them.<sup>158</sup>

In this last description, Abhishiktānanda speaks of pure [*śuddha*] qualities. This is reminiscent of the pure intentions and *vāsanās* that Ramaṇa acknowledges continue to exist in the life of the *jīvanmukta*.

Abhishiktānanda says that some people physically die after their *advaitic* experience. But there are also those who return to the world. He regarded his own survival of his near-death experience as such a return. The year before this experience, he had written about the *jīvanmukta* as the person who has come back to his *śarīram* or body once the knots of the heart have been cut. The *jīvanmukta* thereafter lives his or her life against the backdrop of “the unborn”-the permanent Self.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Diary*, p. 321 (22.10.70).

<sup>159</sup> *Diary*, p. 356 (11.6.72).

#### 4. Seeing *Brahman* in all things

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the importance of seeing *Brahman* in all things. Sometimes he refers to this perceived presence as “*Brahman*”, sometimes as “God” and sometimes as “Self”. At other times, he refers to the *śakti* (the dynamic power of *Brahman*:) in all things:

There is within us a force, a reality that we do not suspect: *śakti*, spirit. A force that is not different from the self [*ātmanā na vyatiriktah*]<sup>160</sup>

At the time of his awakening, Abhishiktānanda affirmed this view of a ‘Force’ passing through beings.<sup>161</sup> This perception of God is a perception with content; it is not a trance experience of Pure Consciousness.

Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that our perception of God is not just an emotion, something ‘felt’. It is more than a sentiment, but an ‘ontic’ experience:

An adult faith is based on a real experience of God both in His presence in the depth of the soul and of His presence in the core of all things. We do not speak here, however, of a ‘felt’ experience, of a so-called sentiment of the divine Presence. We rather refer to what some call an ‘ontic’ experience, something which springs from the centre of the being and transforms all activities of man, even if he is not directly aware of it.<sup>162</sup>

*Brahman* Itself is without form and yet it appears in other persons, things and events:

In order to call me, to see me, to engender in me and cause to spring up my vision of You, You take all forms, *sarvarūpa*, You who are Without-Form, *a-rūpa*, *a-linga*. All of that is when You call me. All of that is only in Your call. It is in the bosom of everything that You cry “You” to me. In the mountain, the river, the forest, the trees growing from the vertical cliff, in each person that I meet, in each event.<sup>163</sup>

Abhishiktānanda cites the *Muṇḍaka Upanishad* in support of this view that *Brahman* is in all things:

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<sup>160</sup> *Diary*, p. 381 (10.5.73).

<sup>161</sup> *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73). The poem referred to is reproduced on page 304 of the *Letters*.

<sup>162</sup> Abhishiktānanda: “The Way of Dialogue” *Inter-Religious Dialogue* ed. Herbert Jai Singh (Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, 1967).

<sup>163</sup> June, 1964 written at Gangotri, cited in Introduction to *Intériorité*, pp. 16, 17. My translation from the French. The idea of different levels of reality underlies this idea of the “call” of *Brahman* in all things. We are called to recognize the higher nature of true reality. This pointing is the “sacramental” side of things.

He is in every element, in all he is what he is. He is in this universe in the earth, in the heavens, in that which there is between the two. He is in the breath of man, in his senses, in his thought. In him is contained all that which moves, all that which flickers, the worlds and the inhabitants of worlds. He is greater than the greatest, smaller than the smallest, outside the grasp of thought (*Muṇḍaka-Upanishad*).<sup>164</sup>

God is as much in the flight of the insect as in the contemplation of the saint. God as Self is in everything and everywhere, totally and indivisibly. That is why India even includes subhuman incarnations of God; the image (*mūrti*) that is most popular is that of Ganesh.<sup>165</sup> This appearance of *Brahman* in nature, in other people and in events is done “in order to call” one to *Brahman*. All things point to that which is beyond them:

Every being bears the sign of all; the smallest mite, the grain of sand, the electron are radiant with Brahman...and everything leads to Brahman.<sup>166</sup>

Abhishiktānanda says that everything in the world is sacramental, in pointing to God.<sup>167</sup> There is “nothing in creation that eludes the divine presence” and “everything in it is filled with grace and sacredness.”<sup>168</sup> Everything is a manifestation of God, but in its own unique way:

When once you have reached the heart of the sign, you realize that everything is essentially an epiphany, a manifestation of the Lord. Thereafter what is important are not the differences and disparities between the manifold manifestations, but the quality common to all of them—and to each of them in a unique manner—of being a sign of God. This extends from yourself to every conscious being that has ever existed or will exist, from the atom or the smallest living creature to the galaxies. In everything now the heart has been discovered—the heart in which all is discovered, all is seen, all is known. There is nowhere anything but God in himself.

Only then can the taste of Being be appreciated. And thereafter that taste—that, and no other—is recognized in every being.<sup>169</sup>

Abhishiktānanda does not deny that there are distinctions and unique manifestations of Being. What is important is “the common quality” to them all, that they all have the same

<sup>164</sup> “India and the Carmelite Order” (1964), *Eyes of Light*, p. 85.

<sup>165</sup> “Cheminevements Intérieurs”, *Intériorité*, p. 66.

<sup>166</sup> *Diary*, p. 347 (24.4.72).

<sup>167</sup> “L’ épiphanie de Dieu” (1953), *Intériorité*, p. 111.

<sup>168</sup> *Guru*, p. 38.

<sup>169</sup> *Guru*, pp. 42, 43.

“taste” of Being. It is more important to recognize that God is present in all things than to try to understand how this is so. This is why the *anjali* greeting can be made, acknowledging God in other people.<sup>170</sup>

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda uses the image of “hearing” instead of “seeing.” *Brahman* can be heard in sounds of nature as well as in the silence of the heart.

The OM which breaks forth from the roar of the Ganges, from the rustling of leaves, from the twittering of the birds and echoes indefinitely across the sheer cliff faces, is the OM which wells up in the pilgrim’s heart like an infinite echo repeating itself, increasing and finally merging into the primordial OM in the silence in which all is said.<sup>171</sup>

While Abhishiktānanda was meditating in the caves of Arunāchala, he was bothered by noise from loudspeakers that were set up in the town below. In his *Diary* he writes that even that noise may be perceived as God.<sup>172</sup>

Being able to see this manifestation of God in every being and in every person is much more important than seeking extraordinary visions, or in all those “quasi-revelations” and appearances of Jesus in which so many Christians delight.<sup>173</sup> Seeing God in other people or creatures is in fact the same as prayer:

To look with eyes enlightened by faith at trees and plants, at fruits and flowers, at birds and animals—all of them created by the Father to help and serve us and to be used by us in our ascent towards him—is also nothing less than prayer and contemplation.<sup>174</sup>

The presence of God in everything leads us to God. But the presence of God is also seen after we become awakened:

The presence of God will therefore be the first thing which the *jñāni* will see in everything he sees or meets with. It is the first thing also which the ordinary man sees in the saint whose *darshana* he has the grace to obtain.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Diary*, p. 38 (8.4.52).

<sup>171</sup> “Mountain of the Lord” in *Guru and Disciple* (London: SPCK, 1974), p. 151.

<sup>172</sup> *Diary*, p. 45 (8.6.52). God is also in the motion of the railway locomotive. “How would the locomotive go forward if the divine Act did not “manifest itself” in it?”

<sup>173</sup> *Letters*, p. 212 (MT, 14.4.69).

<sup>174</sup> *Prayer*, p. 18.

<sup>175</sup> “An Approach to Hindu Spirituality” *Clergy Review* (1969) LIV NO. 3, p. 167.

The *jñāni* sees these other beings in the Self. Where the profane only sees vulgar names and forms, where the initiated adores a divine manifestation, the awakened one does not see anything but God.<sup>176</sup> Abhishiktānanda says that the one who has passed *satori* [he uses the Zen Buddhist word] there is nothing anywhere but the Self, in the water that runs, the grass that grows, the clouds that pass, the child who sings, each work of each being. This is where the Divine Generation realises itself.<sup>177</sup> He cites Gnānānanda:

The same *prāna*, breath of life, permeates all beings. In the same way the *ātman* is everywhere, and everywhere it is uniquely itself. The *jñāni* breathes this “breath”, inhaling and exhaling it in each created being. Nowhere is there any difference. Everything is felt by him as “his own”.<sup>178</sup>

### 5. *Anātman* and Self

Sometimes Abhishiktānanda speaks about loss of self in Buddhist terms of *anātman*. The first meditation that Abhishiktānanda was given by Gnānānanda concerned this doctrine. Gnānānanda advised him that the “I” is first perceived in relationship to the world outside, to what is not-myself:

So long as anyone only knows himself in this fashion, that is, by means of outward things and with reference to them, it cannot be said that he really knows himself. At that stage, what I call “myself” simply consists of the ceaseless reactions, sensory and mental, of that biological and psychological centre which I am, in response to external stimuli. It was on account of this instability that the Buddha would not attribute substantial existence to the person, which according to his terminology he identified with the *ātman*. Whoever wishes to know himself once for all and to arrive at his true being, should aim at reaching his “I” in its unchangeable identity and sovereign freedom.<sup>179</sup>

Gnānānanda here interprets the Buddhist idea of *anātman* as denying only our shifting ego awareness. He insists that one can still reach the true “I”, one’s unchanging identity. There are some interpretations of Buddhism that see the doctrine of *anātman* in this way. For example, D.T. Suzuki seems to interpret it this way.

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<sup>176</sup> “Ehieh Asher Ehieh” *Intériorité*, p. 86.

<sup>177</sup> “Cheminements intérieurs” *Intériorité*, p. 43.

<sup>178</sup> *Guru*, p. 87.

<sup>179</sup> *Guru*, pp. 77, 78.

The denial of *Atman* as maintained by earlier Buddhists refers to *Atman* as the relative ego and not to the absolute ego, the ego after enlightenment-experience.<sup>180</sup>

Sometimes the “Mind-only” of Yogācāra Buddhism is interpreted as the true Self. Abhishiktānanda seems to have interpreted it in this way.<sup>181</sup>

Other interpreters of Buddhism reject any view of an absolute ego or True Self. They deny any fixed sense of self, either in a small sense or a larger sense.<sup>182</sup> The true nature of self is non-self, emptiness, *śūnyatā*. Sometimes Abhishiktānanda uses Buddhist expressions to refer to this sense of nonself as emptiness:

The abyss has too thoroughly engulfed me, the abyss of the Self, the abyss of Emptiness [*Śūnyatā*].<sup>183</sup>

Abhishiktānanda even denies the Hindu doctrine of the sheaths or successive layers of the Self:

For if it really was the within, it would be the within of some thing, and an absolute within is no longer a within. The final prop on which you were relying in order to discover the supreme secret must be jettisoned in its turn. There is nothing, nothing any more, void, absolute *śūnyatā*. Even the idea of within vanishes when the within is attained. What is the within? “It is.” *asti, asti...* There is no skin, no pulp and no kernel, no grain within the kernel and no new elements within the grain, these are the successive layers of an onion, each one more flimsy; when you have removed the last one, nothing remains... This nothing is the All.<sup>184</sup>

Abhishiktānanda speaks of the self as a “conglomeration that will dissolve.”<sup>185</sup> This seems to be a reference to the Buddhist idea of the self as being composed of *skandhas*. And yet he also says the opposite: that the “I” has identity and is not just a conglomeration of whirling happenings:

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<sup>180</sup> D.T. Suzuki: *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (Harper, 1971), p. 51.

<sup>181</sup> He refers to Mahayana theology that the body is a manifestation of the Self. “Cheminelements Intérieurs” *Intériorité*, p. 48.

<sup>182</sup> See the discussion by Steven Collins: *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>183</sup> *Diary*, p. 68 (29.3.53). See also *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

<sup>184</sup> *Diary*, p. 81 (6.12.53).

<sup>185</sup> *Diary*, p. 315 (25.7.70).

My I is not simply an epiphenomenon, a knot made of the plaits of the happenings which constantly whirl around, inside and outside me. The I which I pronounce today is identically the same as the I which I pronounced 10, 20, 60 years ago.<sup>186</sup>

At the time of his awakening, Abhishiktānanda said that he disconnected from all sense of his ego, but he affirmed that his true Self remained:

And all of that made me discover myself at a level that went so far beyond all sensations. Seeing myself so weak, so incapable of thought and movement, I became free from my identification with that *myself* which previously used to think and will, used to move about and was anxious about all and sundry. Disconnection. All that consciousness with which I usually moved was no longer mine, and yet I myself still continued to be...<sup>187</sup>

In his awakening, Abhishiktānanda does not speak of there being no self, but of discovering his true Self, the Grail. He perceived that his habitual consciousness was gone, but there was a wider consciousness that was not limited by any location.

Thus even if Abhishiktānanda wrote about nonself in Buddhist terms prior to his awakening, it seems clear that after his awakening he affirmed the existence of a Self, and he claimed that he had found that Self. To be without ego is to see the Self in the universe. Abhishiktānanda says that this is the ultimate meaning of *nirmamo nirahamkāra* (without 'mine' nor 'I').<sup>188</sup> This fits with what we have earlier seen about perceiving the Self or *Brahman* in the universe.

While meditating in the caves at Arunāchala, Abhishiktānanda wrote that the primordial duality is between oneself and the world:

The primordial duality that I must pass beyond is this: myself and everything else, not that between God and "me." As long as there are these "others"—outside myself, God and the world will be jumbled up in them, even though they may be distinguished and defined in a second look. As long as the world remains other [*aliud*] for me, God can never be perceived by me within myself.

Do away with that "centre" which I call "myself" and round which I draw concentric circles, which are my mind, my body, the world which basically I see in relation to myself, and finally God who, unfortunately, is no less "related" to myself.

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<sup>186</sup> Abhishiktānanda: "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 480.

<sup>187</sup> *Diary*, p. 387 (11.9.73).

<sup>188</sup> "Cheminevements intérieurs" *Intériorité*, p.44.

*Satori* [enlightenment] is attained when I have realized that the centre is as truly everywhere as it is in “myself”(...)

Feel “myself” in the tree, in the stone, in the rat, [...], in the ass, in what is hateful, in what is indifferent, as really as in this body and this mind [*manas*] which I have up to now considered as a centre of supreme interest.<sup>189</sup>

The nondual perception experienced by the enlightened person is therefore a perception that is without any ego centre. It is the seeing of the “essential interdependence” or interrelatedness. This description of loss of self as “centre” is remarkably similar to the Hua-Yen Buddhist view of inter-relatedness, or Indra’s Net. This story symbolizes our cosmos as an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all its members. One of the best versions of that story is given by Thich Nhat Hanh:

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow, and without trees, we cannot make paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either...

If you look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the tree cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are. And if we continue to look, we can see the logger who cut the tree and brought it to the mill to be transformed into paper. And we see the wheat. We know that the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, and therefore the wheat that became his bread is also in this sheet of paper. And the logger’s father and mother are in it too...

You cannot point out one thing that is not here—time, space, the earth, the rain, the minerals in the soil, the sunshine, the cloud, the river, the heat. Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper...As thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it.<sup>190</sup>

If everything is inter-related, then nothing has its own self-contained existence. The centre is everywhere. This is a nondual view of self and the rest of the cosmos.

It must however be acknowledged that Abhishiktānanda is not consistent and that he sometimes sees “Self” in a much more monistic way:

As long as I distinguish the *within* from myself who seeks the within, I am not within. He who seeks and that which is sought vanish in the last stage, and there

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<sup>189</sup> *Diary*, p. 49 (15.7.52).

<sup>190</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), pp. 3-5, cited by David Loy: “Indra’s Postmodern Net”, *Philosophy East and West* (July, 1993), vol. 43 no. 3, p. 482.

is nothing left but pure light, undivided, self-luminous [ *jyoti akhanda svaprakāśa*]. The last work to be done is to cut through the final distinction between *he who seeks* and *that which is sought*. That is the knot of the heart, *hridaya granthi*. And Ramana was right in recommending the annihilation of *the very thought of myself*, which is the source of everything else.<sup>191</sup>

In this quotation there is the idealist and monistic suggestion that everything other than self arises from the thought of self. When this thought is annihilated, there is nothing left but self-luminous *Brahman*. This is very different than the previous idea of perception of the world without ego. The experience of self-luminous *Brahman* is *nirvikalpa* experience, without any content to the experience. The superficial ego is to disappear in favour of the *ātman*. This is not seen in connection with a return to the world and a connection with the world.

There are therefore several views of the Self to be found in Abhishiktānanda: a monistic Self related to *nirvikalpa* experience, the idea of non-self and *sūnyatā*, and the view of Self as “part” of an inter-related and interconnected whole, as experienced in *sahaja*. I believe that it is this last view which is most consistent with Abhishiktānanda’s thought as a whole.

#### 6. Affirmation of the world of “objects” and distinctions

In his earlier writings, Abhishiktānanda says that for the sage there is no longer any distinction between objects. For example, in 1953, he writes,

For the Sage, difference no longer exists; he is not even one who sees the unity beneath the difference, he “is not aware” of difference itself. Do we not say that God does not know evil? He neither loves nor hates, neither desires nor fears. His peace [*sānti*] and his *ānanda* have a transcendence that goes beyond all human conceiving [*exsuperans omnem sensum*] ...The Self is manifest in all creatures and all circumstances.<sup>192</sup>

In these early writings, Abhishiktānanda seems to regard the *advaitic* experience as an experience of Pure Consciousness. The awareness of unity, of seeing *Brahman* in all things, is wholly absent here. He says that the sage “is not even one who sees the unity beneath the difference.”

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<sup>191</sup> *Diary*, p. 146 (6.3.56).

<sup>192</sup> *Diary*, p.74 (27.9.53). See also “Ehieh Asher Ehieh”, *Intériorité*: p. 97. The sage does not see differences (*bheda*) anymore. The sage is incapable of seeing other than the within.

And yet, as we have seen, there are many passages where Abhishiktānanda writes about seeing *Brahman* in the world—an experience that does not fit with Pure Consciousness. And there are passages where he specifically affirms the continuance of distinctions between things. He says that in the *advaitic* experience there is a “witnessing”, a perceiving of beings *beyond* the distinction myself/not myself:

The I as witness...simply TO BE, without reflecting on the subject as be-ing. Perceive beings beyond the distinction between myself/not-myself, but do not deny this distinction by means of an idea.<sup>193</sup>

Nondual perception is “going beyond” the distinction of myself/not-myself. It is not a denial of such distinction. Abhishiktānanda continued to regard distinctions as real. In experience, the duality of object and subject is *transcended*.<sup>194</sup> To transcend the distinction does not necessarily mean to deny that it exists. The *advaitic* experience is not following up one idea by another idea. “It is not a question of trying to persuade oneself that no differences exist.”<sup>195</sup> That would be to deny our experience in the name of logic. Elsewhere, Abhishiktānanda criticizes those followers of Shankara who by their rigid application of concepts deny the reality of the world. The same criticism can be made against Nāgārjuna’s dialectic, which denies both subject and object.

T.R.V. Murti distinguishes between Vedāntic and Mādhyamika logic. Mādhyamika considers both terms of a relational complex to be false. For example, if there is no cause without effect and no effect without cause. The cause and effect are neither identical with nor different from each other, nor both, nor neither. Therefore, both terms are unreal. In contrast to this, Vedāntic logic does not reject both the terms as relative. Vedānta can accept one as the reality or the basis of the other.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.69). As will be discussed, in this quotation Abhishiktānanda shows he does not accept nonduality in Loy’s first sense. The perception in the nondual experience is beyond the distinction of myself/not-myself. But Abhishiktānanda does not deny the distinction.

<sup>194</sup> “Notes de théologie trinitaire”, *Intériorité*, p. 237. He says that Hindu and Buddhist thinkers know how to juggle ideas as well as western thinkers, but that what counts is the experience.

<sup>195</sup> *Guru*, p. 80.

<sup>196</sup> “The Two Definitions of Brahman in the Advaita”, *Studies in Indian Thought: The Collected Papers of Professor T.P.V. Murti* ed. Harold Coward (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), pp. 81, 82.

For Abhishiktānanda, distinctions remain, but there is a realization of the *non-separation* of subject and object. Abhishiktānanda refers to the

Freshness of the simple gaze that forgets it is gazing: it is a seeing without a seer [*a-drishtri*], the non-separation [*bheda*] of the one who sees [*drashtā*], the seeing [*drishṭī*] and the object seen [*drishṭam*].<sup>197</sup>

What is overcome is the sense of a separate sense of self, or the ego, as well as the sense of objects that exist in themselves. Both are interrelated. And inter-relation does not mean the same as non-existence. The things we see, including our body, are inter-related. We see this unity when we see the world as it really is.

This is similar to some early interpretations of Ramaṇa's experience. Swami Siddeswarānanda says that going beyond the ego does not mean that one is dead to all sensibility. A realized person is not just content to deny false ideas of reality; the positive element is most important, and that is to know the place of the ego with respect to the totality. He cites the *Panchadashī* ch. 6:13:

The destruction of the world and of *jīva* does not mean that they must become non-perceptible for the senses, but that a real determination of their real nature must appear. If that were not the case, people could find emancipation without making any personal effort, like sleep without dreams or like a loss of consciousness (*l'évanouissement*) where all perception disappears completely.<sup>198</sup>

Thus, for Swami Siddeswarānanda, *sahaja samādhi*, even for Ramaṇa, is seeing the true nature of the world. It is not a case of cessation of consciousness, or of Pure Consciousness.

Heidegger also speaks of seeing of the true nature of the world. As J.L. Mehta describes it, it is

...a seeing, not as an act directed toward objective being, either in the Greek sense of *theoria* or in the modern subjectivistic sense, but as the shining forth of the *Sache* itself.<sup>199</sup>

It is tempting to try to discern a development in Abhishiktānanda's writings, from a view of *advaita* as Pure Consciousness to one of perceiving the true nature of reality in *sahaja*

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<sup>197</sup> *Diary*, p. 312, (17.4.69).

<sup>198</sup> *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy-Livres, 1972), p. 183. The translation is my own.

<sup>199</sup> J.L. Mehta: "Heidegger and Vedanta", *India and the West*, p. 254. A further comparison to Heidegger will be made in the next chapter of this thesis.

awareness. Over time, Abhishiktānanda seems to place more importance on the nature of the experience of the *jīvanmukta*. And there seems to be an increasing rejection of the idea of *māyā* as illusion. But Abhishiktānanda is not always consistent. As late as 1972 he refers to experiences where perception ceases:

That purusha of glory [*tejas*] is to be found. I am he! [*so'ham asmi*]. When the *tejas* is too strong, even the awakening, even sight disappears—how much more attentiveness to things! [...] It is deep sleep [*sushupti*], or else it is death—or else the cutting of the knots of the heart the great death. It is the reaching of the sun, in the *sahasrāra* [...] It is being carried off to the place of the self...<sup>200</sup>

It is probably fair to say that Abhishiktānanda alternates between viewing *advaita* as an acosmic experience of Pure Consciousness and viewing it in terms of the *sahaja* awareness of a *jīvanmukta*. What is crucial for our discussion is that when Abhishiktānanda had his own *advaitic* experience, it was not an experience of Pure Consciousness, but rather one of connectedness with reality. Abhishiktānanda's near death experience at the time of his *advaitic* realization shows that distinctions continued to exist for him in the experience. In his experience, he was aware of the smallness of his body, from head to foot.<sup>201</sup> And there was also an awareness of a sense of self infinitely larger than the ego. That suggests that there was still an awareness of objects.

Loy does not discuss whether near-death experiences are nondual. This is perhaps not surprising in view of the fact that near-death experiences are often reported as involving views of one's body from a distance or a height. In Loy's view of nonduality, there could be no such "object" seen. Yet Ramaṇa regarded his near-death experience as nondual. Abhishiktānanda also regarded his near-death experience as nondual.

In the previous chapter, I raised the question whether Abhishiktānanda's awakening changed his views. He writes that the experience has nothing to do with confronting exceptional situations of cold, solitude, or nakedness. It is simply opening your eyes there where you are!<sup>202</sup> In other words, it is not a matter of asceticism but of seeing clearly. It is therefore possible that

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<sup>200</sup> *Diary*, p. 355 (10.6.72).

<sup>201</sup> *Diary*, p. 386 (11.9.73).

<sup>202</sup> *Letters*, p. 307 (MC, 21.7.73).

Abhishiktānanda moved from an acosmic, Pure Consciousness view of the *advaitic* experience to one that emphasized the *sahaja* of the *jivanmukta*. Unfortunately, he did not live long enough for this to be clarified.