

In the Cave of the Heart: Silence and Realization

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Hidden in the depth of the heart
and in the highest heaven
Is that mystery of glory and immortality
which only those can find
Who have renounced all things
and themselves.¹

This verse is freely translated from the Mahānārāyana Upanishad and was apparently a favourite of Swami Abhishiktānanda's, for he quotes it, in differing guises, several times. I think it fairly epitomizes his insight and his realization.

I have only recently made the acquaintance of Swami Abhishiktānanda and am not really entitled to speak of him. There are those who can, foremost among whom would be Dom Bede Griffiths. But I am so attracted to Swami Abhishiktānanda, so moved by his inspired writings on the life of renunciation and the non-dual experience, that I would like to offer the little I have to say to his memory.

Swami Abhishiktānanda was a French Benedictine monk, Dom Henri Le Saux, who, after thirteen years in a Benedictine monastery, received permission to go to India in 1948. There he and Fr. Jules Monchanin founded the ashram of Shantivanam (Forest of Peace) as "an attempt to integrate into Christianity the monastic tradition of India".²

In 1949 he met Śrī Ramana, called the Maharishi or great seer, in the south of India, at the foot of the sacred mountain Arunāchala.³ This was the beginning of Fr. Le Saux's deep experience of Hindu spirituality, about which he wrote some half dozen books.⁴ He says of this meeting:

In the Sage of Arunāchala of our own time I discerned the unique Sage of 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.⁵

The following year, 1950, Dom Henri took the name Swami Abhishiktānanda (meaning 'the bliss of the Anointed One, i.e. Christ'), and between that time and 1955 he made several visits to Arunāchala, spending months of silence in the caves on the holy mountain. Śri Ramana had died in 1950, but Abhishiktānanda was drawn by the mountain itself, where Shiva had manifested Himself as a column of fire and light, higher than the heavens, deeper than the depths of Earth. Arunāchala, mountain of the rosy dawn, is a Presence of Shiva Himself and is spoken of as a person. Abhishiktānanda says:

His heart will never again know peace who has once paused, even for a moment, to attend to the gentle whisper of Arunāchala. From that moment Arunāchala will hold him in a relentless grasp and will make sport of him to the bitter end. Darkness after light, coldness after embraces, he will never find release until he has been wholly emptied of everything in himself that is not simply Arunāchala and that still treats Arunāchala as an 'other'.⁶

Thus Abhishiktānanda began to enter into the mystery of the non-dual experience which illumined his Christian faith, revealing to him anew the Trinitarian life and meaning of union with Jesus, whom he regarded as the True Guru.

In the years 1955–56 he met and lived with his personal teacher, Śri Gnānānanda, also in South India. "The meeting with the guru", says Abhishiktānanda, "is the essential meeting, the decisive turning point in the life of a man". In the deepest of human encounters "there is a fusion and the two *become* one in love and desire, but in the meeting of the guru and disciple there is no longer even fusion, for we are on the plane of the original non-duality...What the guru says springs from the very heart of the disciple. It is not that another person is speaking to him...From the very depths of his being, from the newly discovered cave of his heart, thoughts well up which reveal him to himself...Advaita (non-dualism) remains for ever incomprehensible to him who has not first lived it existentially in his meeting with the guru".⁷

The gist of Śri Gnānānanda's teaching was that meditation is the one thing necessary. Ceremonies, ascetical practices, the state of life, are all secondary. "The only thing that matters is that one casts off all

that hinders one from giving oneself utterly and completely to this silent meditation in the depth of one's being".⁸ One who really desires something does so with one's whole being and gives up everything in order to obtain it. "The unique and indispensable condition for spiritual realization is singleness of purpose".⁹ "When the call of the within, the call of the Real, makes itself heard, then every possible free moment should be reserved for the practice of meditation".¹⁰ "Return within and contemplate in the mirror of your heart...The heart is the mirror where one sees (God)...as he is, in Himself, undivided, beyond all limitation as (beyond) all otherness, in the non-duality of being".¹¹

The Cave of the Heart

Swami Abhishiktānanda spoke often of the heart, the depths of the heart, the recesses of the heart, the "cave" of the heart, wherein God is to be found. He used the Sanskrit word *guhā*, which means a 'secret' or 'hidden' place, such as a cave or crypt.¹² It refers to a special state of consciousness, something very deeply hidden in us, which requires some effort on our part to reach. We have to search for it perseveringly. According to Swami Gnānānanda, it is "when the place in the heart has been found", that "the guru appears".¹³ Therefore, much of the work of our spiritual lives—our meditation and the life of moral purity, service, and self-restraint that supports it—is initially oriented just to locating this 'hidden place' in ourselves and learning to situate our consciousness there.

But the *guhā* is not the only secret or hidden place, it is also the place of the secret, or mystery. At this level of consciousness the non-dual experience is realized which cannot be put adequately into words, and so remains a secret for ordinary conceptual consciousness. This fundamental Unity is also the Mystery Reality out of which all the diverse creation has arisen, the Mystery at the center of all being.¹⁴

'Mystery' here means a numinous Reality beyond anything that can be spoken, imagined, or conceived. As Abhishiktānanda says, "According to Christian revelation, the world exists in the very depths of God, the most secret and profound abyss of the Father's Love, of which it is the mysterious expression and manifestation". And he quotes the Mundaka Upanishad (2.2):

He abides, manifest, quite near,
the dweller in the cave, the great Goal,
the center of all;
on him are settled all the worlds,
all the inhabitants of the worlds,
everything that moves and winks and breathes.
He, the shining one, is the object of all desire,
tinier than the atom,
beyond the reach of all knowing.

Consequently, when one is in the *guhā*, one is united not only with God, but with all the rest of creation. As Abhishiktānanda says, “In the very center of his heart, along with God, dwell also his brother-men and the whole creation”.¹⁵

I said that the early part of our spiritual life —our formation —consists of practices that help us to find this secret place of the heart. Moral purity is always necessary; so also is generous service to others, according to one’s circumstances and vocation. The ascetical life-style, which enables one to realize concretely one’s freedom from the need to indulge the body, the senses, the emotions, and the personality, is also most helpful.

It is important to remember that all of these things are done because they are appropriate to, and expressive of, the truth, the Reality, the way things actually are. They are not therefore to be thought of by those who practise them as peculiar, special, unusual, or extraordinary, but as simply the natural, obvious, spontaneous way to live. The fact that those who observe these practices are surrounded by people who do not live this way should not alter the practitioners’ attitude of simplicity toward their mode of life, for if they begin to think of themselves as special and different and set apart, they will, by this thought alone, undermine the whole realization which they hope to gain, which is the experience of the Unity of all.

But the heart of the spiritual life is the practice of meditation, the focusing of the consciousness in the center of one’s being, in appreciation of the Mystery, the Life, the Light, and the Love that dwell there. It is a matter of being on the trail of the self—the true self, the deepest self, the most real self.

This is often a very confusing affair, because we have only one word that we use in the whole course of this journey: ‘self’ or ‘I’. Therefore I think it is important to explain to people setting out in this training that the word ‘I’, or the word ‘self’, does not have a single fixed referent. It means very different things at different stages of our progress.

In fact, the spiritual journey can be described as the shifting of the referent of the word ‘I’, or what one means by the ‘self’.¹⁶ It is as though there were a spectrum of meanings—actually states of consciousness-reality—spread out, and a little circle of light moved along from one end to the other. What happens interiorly is that the spontaneous, sincere, obvious, and unreflective meaning that one gives the word ‘I’ changes, changes very much.

This explains why the utterances of great mystics, in which they seem to identify themselves with God or Ultimate Reality, are not false or absurd or blasphemous. The ‘I’ which then speaks is not the same ‘I’ to which they referred at earlier times in their lives, before their illumination, or which they would still use in ordinary practical

conversation, and it is not the same 'I' that their shocked hearers use of themselves—thinking it is the only meaning—and which they know perfectly well is anything but united to the Sublime Ultimate. Śri Ramakrishna, for instance, explained his understanding of his realization this way: "There are two who dwell in this body. One is the Divine Mother; the other is Her devotee. It was the latter who broke his arm".¹⁷

Theoretical philosophical and theological arguments on this point may not be too helpful. What we actually have to deal with are, on the one hand, the testimony of persons who try to describe to us a radical shift in their conscious experience, their orientation to the whole of reality and to the act of existence; and, on the other hand, we have our interior experience and our efforts to find our way to the deepest and truest reality. It is a matter of concrete and interior experience. To attempt to discuss it by means of definitions, abstract derivations, external conformity with authoritative propositions, may result in *missing the concrete experience itself, whatever it may be in its transcendence of all our concepts drawn from material, exterior, and dualistic experience.*

Therefore, again, it seems to me important to explain to those undergoing training the unavoidable limitations of all statements and all systems of concepts, and the advantage of a rich supply of descriptions of the interior experience, told in various images, out of diverse backgrounds. All of these, of course, are only so many "fingers pointing at the moon", as the Buddhists say, but the hope is that those who hear these descriptions will look not at the finger, but in the direction in which it points, and will see the moon. If sighting along one finger works, the goal has been attained. If not, then perhaps some other indicator will evoke the recognition, stimulate the soul to open itself, awaken the deep self, or provoke the breakthrough.

In the end, it is a highly personal affair, We cannot lay down a single pattern, a unique path, and say to everyone "This is the only way", except with respect to the most general requirements. The task of the guru is to discern what is the path of the pupil, not to force the pupil to walk on the guru's path. Then the guru helps the pupil to walk this way, with all the skill and insight that the guru can muster. But at a certain point, the guru has to send the disciple out into the unknown, alone.

Silence

Meditation is really a matter of keeping silence, silence of all kinds, on all levels of our consciousness. This is how we penetrate within, to the secret place of the heart. It can be described under many metaphors. I like to think of it as a kind of relaxation, or letting go, and sinking in

toward the center. The Bhagavad-Gītā likens it to a tortoise drawing in its limbs,¹⁸ and it does rather feel that way. One withdraws from ordinary sense experience, inward toward the vital and emotional feelings; withdrawing from them, one sinks into the memory and the mind; concentrating inward from that, one focuses attention as intuitive insight, within which is the deep sense of appreciation of value, devotion and dedication, and joy in existence, at the very heart of which is the sheer awareness of existence itself.¹⁹

As this sinking inward takes place, what is falling silent is the many-layered sense of identity which provides all the predicate attributes for our statement of self-being: I am this, I am that. I am a body of such dimensions, coloration, gender, and age. I am a personality of such a type: extroverted, perceptive, Virgo with Libra rising, in search of my Anima, limited by parental injunctions, whatever. I am an individual called by such a name, belonging to such a family, race and nation, having such a biography. I am the child of these parents, the spouse of this person, the parent of these children. I am a practitioner of this profession, a member of this church and that political party. I am a believer in such a creed, a follower of such a path, a renunciate of such an order, a pupil of such a teacher.

I am the mind that remembers all these things, that reasons, that concludes; I am the aesthetic sense that appreciates beauty in the world, ideas, and people. I am the sensitivity that feels happy or sad, angry, compassionate, amused, alienated, secure. I am the will that originates actions and sanctions attitudes. I am the witness who observes all these things and notes that it is itself reflexively conscious, and wonders how that can be and longs to find the root being of it all. All of these are ways in which we identify ourselves.

But what if, as St. Augustine and his mother, St. Monica, asked themselves, what if

all the tumult of the body were to quiet down, along with all our busy thoughts about Earth, sea, and air? What if this very world should stop, and the mind cease thinking about itself, go beyond itself and be quite still? What if all the fantasies that appear in dreams and imagination should cease, and there be no speech, no sign: ...so that we should hear the voice of the One who made all things, not through any symbol, but we might hear the One whom in these things we love, might hear that very Self without these? And what if that could be continued on, and all other visions be withdrawn, and this one ravish, and absorb, and wrap up its beholder amid inward joys? And what if life could be forever like this single breathless moment of illumination!²⁰

Would not that be meditation? Would not that be finding the secret place of the heart? Just as the voices of the creatures of the world proclaim: "We did not make ourselves but there is One who made

us”, and then fall silent, so all the costumes of the real self, the attributes that clothe the central naked ‘I am’, admit that they are not the self and cease to speak in our name.

Thomas Merton has a passage in *New Seeds of Contemplation* where he speaks of the sense of ‘I’ that is still identifying itself with various attributes: “I wind experiences around myself ...like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface”. But all these wrappings are “destined by their very contingency to be destroyed”. Our sense of identity has to let drop all the attributes that follow the word ‘I am’, so that it alone stands in the secret place at the core of our being, where, as Thomas Merton says, “the secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God”.²¹

The Book of Privy Counsel (also known as *A Letter of Private Direction*), by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, gives this instruction:

Offer up your naked, blind feeling of your own being.
And, as I often say, always take care that it is naked,
and not clothed by any quality of your being...or with
any other special condition proper to man’s being rather
than to the being of other created things.

You must have no more regard for the qualities of God’s being than for the qualities of your own being. For there is no name nor feeling nor regard which agrees better, nor even so well, with eternity, which God is, as does that which may be had and seen and felt in the blind and loving regard of this word “Is”.²²

It is by this kind of silencing of all other words or thoughts that the secret place of the heart, the core of being, is found.

Dualism and Non-Dualism

Thus the first moment of self-realization comes about by a kind of negation—not so much a denial of one’s attributes as a forgetting of them, a dropping of one’s sense of identification with them. Later I will say something about the second moment of self-realization in which the finite expression of the self comes back.

In this initial meditation the important thing is to preserve the sense of active, subjective existence: not passive, not objective, and not essence—not *what* one is but only *that* one is. The meditation is not *reflection on* oneself, for that would be to make an object of oneself; it would be *doubling* the consciousness, so that one part of it became an object of knowledge for another part which is the subject doing the knowing. We must rather *keep our eye single*, just coincide

with the subjective awareness in the very act of being aware. Be the doer, not the done. Set your hand to the plough and go straight ahead without looking back to see the furrow you have ploughed.²³

One knows that one is just by actually *being* and coinciding consciously with that act of being. Although we say that the self is not 'known', or that we 'forget ourselves', we certainly do not become unconscious. In this conscious act, we coincide in vivid awareness with our own act of being a conscious subject—and/or with God's act of being a conscious subject; we will come to that in a moment.

Remember that this is a description of an experience and as such is only a finger pointing to the experience. It is no use saying that 'subject' is a correlative term and there is no such thing as a 'subject' without an 'object' and that all consciousness must be consciousness *of* something. This experience is an experience of that which was the subject which knows objects and now has no objects before it.

Śri Ramana tried to help people coincide with themselves by repeatedly asking, "Who are you?" If you reply, "I don't know" he will ask, "Who is this who says, 'I don't know'? And who is it who knows that I know that I don't know?" In this way he tried to provoke people to jump out of this whole endless circular chase and focus their attention, not on the objects, or on the fact that there are objects, or even on the fact that there are *no* objects, but just on—or better, *in*—the subject itself *as subject*.²⁴

This is what is called the non-dual experience, because the duality of subject and object has been transcended. It can also be arrived at in another way, by religious devotion, in which the subject is lost in what had been the object, as I shall describe in a moment. And the question can be raised as to whether this naked subjective consciousness—in spite of being attributeless, so that it is a pure 'I am', and in spite of being without foundation in the sense that there is nowhere else that one might stand from which to view it—is in any sense continuous with God or discovered as in union with God. The sense in which this question can receive a positive answer may become clearer as we go along, especially when we get to the 'I-I' experience.

But first I want to make a comment on the debate that often arises as to whether the truth about Reality is that there is an ultimate and irreducible duality of God and soul, or whether the last word is that God and the soul are somehow one. Abhishiktānanda, for instance, speaks of "the temptation to 'add up' God and ourselves, his creatures, on the grounds that we are not God—thus falling into a dualism no less contrary to the faith than monism".²⁵ Looking at the matter only in terms of experience, not in terms of definitions or authoritative theological teachings, it seems to me that an interesting thing can be observed, namely, that if one sets out to have the non-dual experience, one may well find it very useful, if not absolutely

necessary, to use a dualistic method of devotion and self-offering in order to get rid of the obstacle of the ego; and on the other hand, if one sets out to be a dualist by practicing devotion to a chosen form of Deity, the exigencies of the devotion itself will inevitably lead to a non-dual experience.

Consider the first case, setting out to have the non-dual experience. One may have some understanding and appreciation of the goal of the spiritual life as the discovery of the true self which is not the ego, and yet all that one may find interiorly seems to be the ego. Even one's desire to attain the goal may be seen to be contaminated with ego-motivation, because one wishes to *attain* it as an achievement, or one wishes to feel satisfied that one has done everything that life offers, or wishes to have some ultimate and ravishing experience. One might even advert to the fact that these desires are contaminated by ego and wish that this was not so, because one doesn't want to be a failure in this business of the spiritual life. But that makes that desire too an ego-desire. And so on. As far back as one can go in the motivation, there is impurity.

A good way to break out of this vicious circle is to take the attitude of the servant of God, or the instrument of the Absolute, and to devote oneself completely to doing the works of the Lord and to imagining oneself as that through which Another acts. In this way everything is referred to the Infinite Self, nothing is retained for the ego. One sincerely says, "I do nothing of myself; if any good is done through me, it is the work of That One who is above and beyond. Nor is it any glory to me that I am an instrument, since all are instruments". Since there is no illusion about the tricks of the ego, this is a perfectly true statement.

However, what will happen if this attitude is persevered in with sincere humility and devotion, is that the consciousness will gradually become purified. Since one has really given up all hope of 'attaining' or 'achieving' or 'experiencing', and has offered oneself in total sacrifice to the Unique Real One, the ego is slowly but surely burnt away. One will forget all about it and about trying to get rid of it. And then one day one may accidentally notice that it just isn't there anymore. One is still living and still conscious, but that thing in one which used to be the seat of conscious life and motivation has somehow dissolved and disappeared. Only God is there in that empty space in the center of one, doing all the compassionate loving, the forgiving, the healing, the creating, the seeing the significance of life, the valuing the preciousness of all that is—in fact, all the things that are actually occupying one's living consciousness. The person who tries to describe this state of affairs may say something like this: "I'm alive—here I am—and yet it's not 'I', at least not as I used to mean 'I' when I said it, but God is living in me".²⁶

Now consider the second case, setting out to have the dualistic experience. What happens here is that one is strongly drawn by love for God in some form. God is experienced as an Other Person, over against myself. I may also feel that God loves me, too, perhaps even that God loved me first and loves me more. But now, how does this loving relation advance and develop?

The more one loves God, the more one longs to know God and to draw near to God, to be close, to be intimate. If one is devoted to God in the form of a human being, an Avatâr, or the Incarnation, then one will be eager to share that human consciousness which is the expression among us of the Divine. The devotee will study the Avatâr's life, will try to enter into the Incarnation's way of seeing, thinking, feeling, acting. The lover will pray to be admitted to the secrets of the Divine/human consciousness, and the prayer will be granted. An intimate person-to-person sharing will develop, full of revelations.

God's grace will draw the devotee into the Divine Life. More and more the devotee will begin actually to enter the consciousness of the Beloved. The devotee will see through the Avatâr's eyes, love with the Incarnation's heart. Finally, the devotee will enter so intimately into that Consciousness that its very consciousness of its own identity will be revealed. The devotee will experience from the inside, from within the conscious reality of the Beloved, that Divine One's own awareness of being the Divine One. Neither the devotee's love for God nor God's love for the devotee will be satisfied with anything less. The devotee who has experienced this will understand, for instance, the words put on the lips of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: "I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father".²⁷

This is what I spoke of as the way of coming to the non-dual experience by the subject being taken up into what had been the object. Only, of course, it is not *as object* in the end. The devotee-subject is united to the Divine One as Supreme Subject, swept up into the current of God's own subjective act.

The 'I-I' Experience

I want to try and say a little bit more about this kind of non-dual experience. You see that it is not a pure monism. On the other hand, the dualism of subject and object has been transcended. Swami Abhishiktânanda holds that the Trinitarian experience excels the basic Advaita experience, although the latter is necessary.²⁸ I have also tried to develop a kind of Trinitarian Non-dualism²⁹ through what I am going to call the 'I-I' relation, or subject-subject coinherence.

Let me approach it this way: The trouble with our consciousness in the state of ignorance or not-seeing, our sinful consciousness or unredeemed consciousness, is that it sees reality as broken up into

separate pieces, all outside each other, all alienated —‘othered’ —from each other. But none is really self-sufficient and all are more or less competing in a context of scarcity, and all therefore are potentially hostile to one another: each one must always be alert to defend and augment one’s own limited being.

It is this world-view that in our human consciousness becomes the subject-object perception, seeing that which is ‘other’ than oneself, over against oneself. This relation is expressed grammatically as I-it, I-him, I-her, we-them. The sense of outsidership is very strong in this perception. There is a coldness, a distance, a non-involvement, an absence of the one spoken about, that we all instinctively sense in this grammatical mode.

Now, this can be contrasted with what is called the I-Thou perception, or I-You. We have only to attend to it a little to realize that this represents a complete shift in consciousness. The ‘You’ is spoken *to*, not spoken *about*. The ‘You’ is present, not absent. ‘You’ are near, not distant. ‘I’ am definitely *involved* with ‘You’. There is warmth in this relation—whether friendly or unfriendly. There is recognition that ‘You’ are also an ‘I’.

And most important, I think, ‘I’ somehow enters into ‘You’ in a face-to-face orientation. Not, perhaps, all the way in, especially if the intention is unfriendly. But the conscious intention does not just bounce off the surface of ‘You’ as it does off the surface of ‘it’ or ‘her’ or ‘him’. The addressed ‘You’ does not have a hard surface, but is more like a ball of luminous gas, like a star. One’s intention as one says ‘You’ goes out toward it and somehow *into* it, and of course, one is similarly permeable to the intention of ‘You’ when spoken to. One has a sense that it is not clear where the outside boundaries of ‘I’ and ‘You’ are, where one leaves off and the other begins. The perception of each being outside the other becomes a little blurred and uncertain, and the notion begins to seem somewhat inappropriate or inapplicable.

But this is not the ultimate relation. There is something beyond, which we can call, to continue the grammatical figure, ‘I-I’. This is not a face-to-face encounter. This is a co-incidence of two subjects, both facing the same way, so to speak. Each has entered so perfectly into each that it is not right to say ‘other’ any more. Each sees through each’s eyes and feels through each’s heart, enters into a confluence with each’s action. There is no sense of separation, of outsidership; each is totally inside each.

Consider this figure: suppose two spotlights playing on a stage; there are two distinct circles of light. Now the two begin to move toward one another, now overlap slightly, now overlap more, now perfectly coincide, so that only one circle of light shows on the floor, although we can still see two beams coming down from the projectors.

Neither of these beams of light went out of business as they moved into conjunction, yet the effective circle of light became one by being not-separated. Each beam could say of the one circle: "It is I".

When 'I' coinheres in 'I', there is no duality in the sense of subject and object, one and other. But neither does the concrete interior subjective sense of being, being conscious, being happy, just disappear. It's still there, still functioning, but it is inside all that it had regarded as 'else', as 'other'; and all *that* is equally inside *it*. And all those erstwhile supposed 'others' are also retaining their concrete interior subjective senses of actually being and being conscious, and being happy. Yet they are all sharing in the one existence, the one consciousness, the one happiness, because all that any one is, is completely open to each one, is totally given and shared with each one. Nothing is hidden, nothing is reserved for oneself alone, nothing is refused.

In the Greek theology of the Trinity, this is the way the Divine Persons give themselves totally, each to each, and thus constitute their Unity.³⁰ This is the union that is simultaneously communion, a unique kind of union, which can be achieved only by love. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples, "I call you friends, the ones I dearly love, because *all* that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you".³¹ The total self-disclosure and total union of wills means that each knows each from the inside, as each one knows oneself, and both act in unison. This is the experience of God dwelling in one and acting through one, but now thoroughly integrated into one's own self-realization.³²

Now, perhaps, we can say something about the question mentioned earlier: whether the 'I am' discovered by the method of Śri Ramana is in any sense continuous with God or in union with God (see the section *Dualism and Non-Dualism* and note 24). If I come to the bottom of my selfhood and find the ultimate 'I', I must find That which is continuously infusing existence into me, That which is the Source of *all* existence and *all* 'I-ness', the Original I AM, which is making my 'I' to *be* an 'I' by loving it into existence *as* an 'I', from the inside. That is, my 'I' is born of an original profound 'I-I' relation of coinherence at the center of what is thus realized to *be* my being.³³

In the earlier description, we had approached the 'I-I' relation from, as it were, *our* side of the confluence, as something *we* realize. But the original 'I-I' relation is something that characterizes *God*, something God does, something God realizes.³⁴ Perhaps we may dare to think of the interior of the Trinity as the intense Life of such 'I-I' relationships, total intersubjectivity that is absolute unity: unity with internal differentiation, differentiated subjects whose complete mutual coherence is their unity; and both the differentiation and the unity vested in the total self-giving of love which is the inmost nature

of God. And then, God has also an 'I-I' relation with each of us, which relation is our being. God pours out, as it were, energy of existence as God's act of being an 'I'—for the essence of I AM is also MAY YOU BE, since God *is* love—and this act of God's pouring out existence *is* my 'I'. When I experience my deepest 'I', what I am experiencing is God's love in the *act of loving*, which act of loving constitutes my selfhood, in fact, actually *is* my selfhood.

At this point I also participate in the Trinitarian life, for just at the point where my 'I' is realized, at this same point is the interface where the Source generates the Word—for I have my being in the Word as a co-heir of the Divine Life. My *being* is dynamically engrafted into the generation of the Word, and my concomitant *consciousness* of this being is similarly caught up in the spiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when I experience my deepest 'I', I simultaneously experience my creation, the generation, or breathing out, of the Word, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the breathing in, the return to the Source.

Realization in Fullness

Finally, a few more words must be said quickly about the second moment of realization, lest the picture be left unbalanced. The first moment of self-realization was negative in that it was a matter of relinquishing our sense of definition by identification with our various descriptions in the finite world, and discovering our dynamic union with the Infinite. The second moment is positive, because it is a matter of again living in and through and in terms of the various levels and kinds of finite description, but without seeing any separation between what we had called 'ourselves' and 'others'. There are three points: first, the community character of the self-realization; second, the creative character of the self-realization; third, the natural character of the self-realization.

There is one other thing that is also experienced simultaneously with the experience of the deep self: in discovering that my 'I' is born of God's 'I' and has its existence as a coinherence in, or confluence with, God's life, I must necessarily also discover that all 'I's' are in precisely the same real state at their root, whether or not people are 'consciously' aware of that fact. In finding myself, I also find all selves in that marvellous union which does not destroy the subjective self-realization of each of them although it unites them at that depth where they transcend the descriptions which separate them. At that level I must find that I coinhere in love all 'I's' similarly loved into existence by God's 'I-I' relation to them. At this level I am in them and they are in me, as I am in the Divine Source and the Source is in me.³⁵ In practical life this means that I spontaneously feel that whatever is done to any one of them is really and truly done to me.³⁶

Connected with this sense of community is the deep sense of the divine creativity. As soon as one coincides with the transcendent self which speaks its small 'I am'—though lost, as Abhishiktānanda says, in "the thunder of Sinai", God's almighty I AM³⁷—one is caught up in the corresponding divine word, MAY YOU BE! The nature of the self so discovered is radiant: it exists by giving itself away. This is its glory, which it receives from the Divine Glory. If it were not radiant, giving itself into all the other selves that constitute the radical union, it would not be the true self, but some aberrant isolated, caught-in-itself self-consciousness, like a lost sheep which has wandered from the flock.

It has pleased God to create the world. And the soul united with a Creator-God joins in the creative activity. Swami Abhishiktānanda says: The man who has made his abode in this center of himself is by that very fact established at the very source and origin of God's self-manifestation. Anything man does in that place shares in the power of the Spirit of God, or rather is one with it".³⁸

This will include all sorts of particular activities for us, from trivial and menial chores to great artistic, scientific, and social achievements. Peace and justice issues will be serious questions.³⁹ It will be worthwhile to expend one's human energy to relieve suffering, to uncover knowledge, to create beauty. It will also be respectable to pick up pins for the love of God, as Ste. Thérèse Martin is said to have done, because whatever the self does, it does in the realization that everything is, in a marvellous complex unity, the One God moving, living, creating, experiencing.⁴⁰ One experiences vividly, in the act of doing whatever one happens to be doing, that God is all the reality that there is in this whole real situation.

This is the realization that God is all in all,⁴¹ the realization of the Infinite not only as the formless but as the full. It is the realization expressed in the opening words of the *Īsopaniṣad*:

Fullness everywhere,
Fullness there, fullness here;
From fullness comes forth fullness,
And everywhere, one with itself,
There remains fullness.

Thus ordinary daily life is 'back', so to speak, in all its ordinariness, and yet transformed from the very bottom of its reality, up. One is not lost in some strange ecstatic state of consciousness, or producing peculiar phenomena, or making a spectacle of oneself in any way. One is doing everything naturally, living out one's true nature.⁴² Swami Gṇānānanda taught that the one who knows "lives immersed in the world like everybody else ... However, where other people are primarily aware of the diversity of things, he sees their essential unity".⁴³

The self-realized person is inconspicuous. As Lao-tzu says, “He does not show himself; therefore he is luminous. He puts himself in the background; therefore he becomes prominent. He does not take credit; therefore he is given credit. He does not insist on his personal interests; therefore his life is fulfilled”.⁴⁴ “Thus in a sense”, says Abhishiktānanda, “he is present everywhere, set free from all that formerly limited him”,⁴⁵ and is not to be identified with “any particular human or religious situation”. For the self-realized person “is not distinguished by any particular sign, just as Jesus gave no description of one who has risen from the dead”.⁴⁶

The self-realized person has the mind of a child—unself-conscious, spontaneous, utterly pure in its sincerity and genuineness, in immediate and honest contact with the realities it meets, unblocked and uncomplicated, free and fluid, possessing a sense for the right, the true, and the harmonious.⁴⁷

The self-realized person is present in the world as a valley of peace and a fountain of joy. There is a kind of gentle bubbling of happiness and kindly humor just under the surface all the time, because the person knows that at the root of being, in the secret place which is the place of the great secret, there is that Infinite Act of Love that makes every being to be, and that no matter how bad things may appear to be here on the surface, somehow, at the depth, all is well and all manner of thing is well.⁴⁸

- 1 Mahānārāyaṇa Upanishad 12.14. This version is a compound of one found in Abhishiktānanda, *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCK 1979), p.14, and *The Further Shore* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), p.ix.
- 2 Subtitle of the book *Ermîtes du Saccidānanda* (Paris: Castermann, 1956, OP, no English trans.), written jointly by Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin about the ashram.
- 3 See *The Secret of Arunāchala*, chap. 1. The first darshan took place on Jan. 24 and 25, 1949, the second six months later.
- 4 In addition to those cited in note 1, books available from Osage Monastery (Rt. 1, Box 384C, Sand Springs, OK 74063) are: *Prayer* (Delhi: ISPCK, first published 1967, revised in 1972 and 1975, reprinted 1979); *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, first published in French by Ed. du Seuil in 1965, Eng. ed. 1969, revised 1976 according to a copy prepared by the author and published by ISPCK; *Guru and Disciple* (combines *A Sage from the East*, first published in French by Ed. Presence in 1970, and *The Mountain of the Lord*, first published in 1966 by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore) London: SPCK, 1974; *Saccidānanda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (first published in French in 1965, revised and published in English in 1974 by ISPCK) is now out of print, but another printing may be expected.
- 5 *Secret*, pp. 8—9.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 7 *Guru*, pp. 29—30.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.92; cf. p.93.

- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.101.
- 12 From the root *guh*, to hide. cf. *gupta*, 'the hidden one', a name of Krishna, and the *guhya*—'secret', *guhvatara*—'more secret', *guhvatama*—'most secret', of the Bhagavad-Gītā. See Taittiriya Upan., 2.1: *nihitam guhāyām*, 'the cave (or secret place) of the heart'. See also *Further Shore*, p. 107 n.89.
- 13 *Guru*, p. 91.
- 14 *Hindu-Christian*, p. 119.
- 15 *Prayer*, p. 23. See also the indicated footnote, which gives parallel passages from the Rig-Veda, Kaṭha Upanishad, Hebrews, Revelations, Māṇḍūkya Upanishad, and Kaivalya Upanishad.
- 16 B. Bruteau, "Prayer and Identity", *Contemplative Review*, Spring, 1982.
- 17 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), p. 943.
- 18 Bhagavad-Gītā II. 58.
- 19 This is one way of putting what the Hindus call the 'sheaths' of the self. cf. *Hindu-Christian*, p. 61.
- 20 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, IX. 10, freely rendered, based on translations by Edward B. Pusey (New York: Modern Library, 1949), p. 188, and Michael Nagler (*The Little Lamp* Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 1983), p. 60.
- 21 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 35.
- 22 Available in various versions. The one quoted is from *The Medieval Mystics of England*, ed. Eric Colledge (New York: Scribner's, 1961), pp. 176, 167. In the William Johnston version, from Image Books (1973), the first passage is from chapter 9, p. 167, and the second from chapter 5, p. 158.
- 23 Cf. Matthew 6:22: RSV gives "sound", but the Greek word is *haplous*, meaning 'onefold, single, not compound or double, absolute'. See also Luke 9:62 for the "plough".
- 24 See *Saccidananda*, p.40: "How realize the self? — Whose self? — Mine. Who am I? — Look for it yourself. — I don't know how to set about it. — Who is this I that says: I don't know? — Something or somebody in me. — Who is he who says that? — However hard I try, I cannot succeed in catching this I. — Who cannot catch whom? Are there two 'I's' in you chasing each other? (after *Maharishi's Gospel*, 2, 1)".
 "I know not who I am', 'I know who I am';
 only fools can speak in such a way.
 To know oneself, must one make oneself *two*?
 Self-knowledge is the non-reflexive I,
 resplendent in its own uniqueness.
 (after *Ulladu Nārpadu*.)" Also p. 38: "Sensory and psychic experience flow on in a steady stream ... but as for me, I *am*. What am I? Who am I? There is no answer except the pure awareness that I *am*, transcending all thought. ... there is no need for me to strive in order to find this 'I am'. I am not an 'I' searching for itself. The Maharishi pointed this out very astutely when certain disciples sought by means of thought and reasoning to realize 'who they were', and thus engaged themselves in an endless mental pursuit of this elusive self. The search is endless because the self which is *thought* poses the problem of the self which *thinks*, and so on *ad infinitum*. All that a man has to do is simply allow himself to be grasped by this light which springs up from within, but itself cannot be grasped". Cf. *Guru*, pp. 101—2: the self see the self by the self.
- 25 *Hindu-Christian*, p. 97. Cf. p. 100, "God and the world are *not two*", and the following argument; also p. 98: "...dualistic presupposition which assumes that God and man can be added together. But Advaita means precisely this: neither God alone, nor the creature alone, nor God plus the creature, but an indefinable non-duality which transcends at once all separation and all confusion".

- 26 cf. Galatians 2:20.
- 27 John 10:14–15. Cf. *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, ed. G.D. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1949), Vol. II, p. 1253–54: “God will not remain outside us. He will be within our mind itself, and there we shall see him. The nearest approximation to such knowledge on earth is our knowledge of ourselves. We know ourselves because we are ourselves; we are present to ourselves in our innermost being. Hence Holy Scripture uses this knowledge as a means of comparison: ‘Then I shall know even as I am known’. We must not, therefore, imagine God in the Beatific Vision as some outside Object to look at, but as dwelling within the very essence of our soul, and thus being perceived from within by direct contact”. Cf. also St. Thomas Aquinas: “Visio illa, qua Deum per essentiam videbimus, est eadem cum visione qua Deus se videt”. “That vision, by which we will see God through (his) essence, is the same as the vision by which God sees himself”. *Summa Theologiae*, Supp. q. 92, a. 1, ad 2.
- 28 “The experience of Jesus includes the advaitic experience, but ... compels us to admit the existence in man of something even deeper still”. Saccidānanda, pp. 82–83. Also p. 108: “The Spirit has led him from the advaita of Being into the inner communion of the Trinity, has brought him to the secret place of the Source, the very bosom of the Father; and there, at the heart of Being, he has finally discovered his own divine sonship”.
- 29 “Insight and Manifestation”, *Contemplative Review*, Fall 1983, section Complex or Trinitarian Non-Dualism. Also “Humanity in the Image of the Trinitarian God”, *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1979, reprinted in *Neo-Feminism and Communion Consciousness* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima).
- 30 “For the Greek the primary datum is not nature but person, throbbing with life, communicable life. Each Divine Person is irresistibly drawn, by the very constitution of His being, to the other two. Branded in the very depths of each one of them is a necessary outward impulse, a centrifugal force, urging Him to give Himself fully to the other two, to pour Himself out into the divine receptacle of the other two. It is a ‘reciprocal irruption’, or unceasing circulation of life. Thus, each Person being necessarily in the other two, unity is achieved not so much on account of the unicity of a single passive nature but rather because of this irresistible impulse in each Person, which mightily draws them to one another”. Article on “Circumincession”, by A.M. Bermejo, in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). The expression ‘reciprocal irruption’ is from Cyril of Alexandria.
- Cf. Abhishiktānanda: “As long as he looks upon God as ‘another’ in the sense in which his neighbour is other to him, as long as for him Jesus too is ‘another’, and he sees the divine Persons also as ‘other’ both to him and among themselves, he has not begun to understand anything either of himself or of God”. *Hindu-Christian*, p. 93.
- 31 John 15:15.
- 32 Thomas Merton says: “Since our inmost ‘I’ is the perfect image of God, then when this ‘I’ awakens, he finds within himself the Presence of Him Whose image he is. And, by a paradox beyond all human expression, God and the soul seem to have but one single ‘I’. They are (by divine grace) as though one single person. They breathe and live and act as one. ‘Neither’ of the ‘two’ is seen as object”. “The Inner experience: Notes on Contemplation (1)”, *Cistercian Studies XVIII* (1983) 15. Cf. Abhishiktānanda, *Prayer*, p. 84: “My own *I*... is a participation (and not an outward projection) of the *I* of God”.
- See also *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, p. 1254: “We shall know him, and therefore, says the Scripture, ‘we shall be like unto him’. Our life will be in conscious contact with his, and his life will, as it were, overflow into ours and pervade us through and through, and thus we shall know him”.
- 33 Cf. John 3:6: “What is born of the Spirit is spirit”. Cf. Romans 8:16 and 1

- Corinthians 2:10.
- 34 Cf. I John 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us".
Cf. 4:19: "We love, because he first loved us".
- 35 Cf. John 14:10 and 20: "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you".
Abhishiktānanda says: "His *I* can no longer be in opposition to any other *I*—'No one is different from or other than myself' (Nārādaparivrajakopaniṣad 4.38) His awakened *I*, piercing like a laser beam, now lights up to its very depths the 'I' that is uttered by any conscious being". *Further Shore*, p. 19.
- 36 Cf. Matthew 25:40.
- 37 *Saccidananda*, p.63.
- 38 *Prayer*, p. 33.
- 39 Abhishiktānanda: "The (self-realized person) will do whatever his companions and colleagues do—only he will do it perfectly. Freed from the limitations of human selfishness and anxiety, in all that he does he will be in a pre-eminent way the instrument of the spirit. He will have a marvellous detachment from everything, because, if the Absolute is present in everything that happens, equally it is not limited to any one thing. If his vocation leads him to the service of his brothers, for example, the poor, the lepers, or the underprivileged, he will give himself completely to each one of them, totally forgetful of himself; for in each of these needy and unfortunate people he discerns the whole mystery of the Presence". *Hindu-Christian*, p. 64.
- 40 Cf. Colossians 1:16—17: "...in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together".
- 41 I Corinthians 15:28. Śrī Ramakrishna distinguished between those who attain the non-dual experience and stop there, and those who, after attaining the highest unitive experience, come back to the phenomenal world, seeing it in an entirely new light, permeated through and through with the supreme Spirit: "The *Jñāni* gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realise Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the *Vijñāni*, who is more intimately acquainted with Brahman, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as Brahman, through the eliminating process of 'not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The *Vijñāni* sees that the Reality which is Nirguna, without attributes, is also Saguna, with attributes". *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 30.
- 42 Abhishiktānanda, following Ramana, calls this the *sahaja* state, that which is the 'inborn' natural state of the human being. (Cf. the Taoist term *tzu-jan*, 'nature', meaning the spontaneous, that which is so of itself—i.e. a harmony which arises in the mutual interaction of all beings if not interfered with by arbitrary external and artificial means. Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, New York: Pantheon, 1957, pp. 42—44). It is, he says, "to be contrasted not only with the life of division, ...and self-delusion when a man lives ... at the surface of himself, but also with the so-called *ecstatic* state when the (spiritual aspirant) is totally absorbed within and has not yet recovered the 'world' in the light of the atman". *Saccidananda*, p. 39; cf. p. 37.
- 43 *Guru*, p. 96.
- 44 Cf. the Tao Te Ching, 7 and 22. In Abhishiktānanda's words, "Now that he has discovered the true center of himself in that very principle from which the world itself originates, his 'personal' interests henceforth coincide wholly with the divine plan, according to the Lord's will for the world and everything in it". *Hindu-Christian*, p. 63.

- 45 *Ibid.*
46 *Further Shore*, p. 39.
47 Chuang-tzu says: "The baby looks at things all day without squinting and staring; this is because his eyes are not focused on any particular object. He goes without knowing where he is going, and stops without knowing what he is doing. he merges himself with the surroundings and goes along with them". *Chuang-tzu*, 23.
48 Julian of Norwich. *Showings*, The Thirteenth Revelation, the twenty-seventh chapter. In the Paulist Press version (*Classics of Western Spirituality*), p. 225.

God as Mother: a necessary debate

Deborah F. Middleton

The report recently published by a study group for the Church of Scotland¹ on the Motherhood of God for discussion at the Church's General Assembly caused quite a stir in the popular press, and this reaction, no doubt, had a part to play in setting the atmosphere for the reception of the report at the Assembly itself. However, that there should be such a reaction would seem to reflect the patriarchal nature of the society we live in rather than a resurgence of religious fervour, since I would doubt that the feelings of horror and ridicule expressed came in each case from a devout church-goer.

Despite the trivialisation of the report by the popular press and its subsequent dismissal by the General Assembly, this reaction as a whole should be welcomed by theologians and believers alike, and those who produced the report should not be upset by it, because confrontation and controversy are at the heart of the Christian gospel and the tradition of the Church. From the beginning the preaching of the gospel encountered intransigence and resistance to change. St. Paul himself expressed anguish at the seemingly impossible task of preaching the concept of a crucified God, 'the scandal of the cross', which he describes as, 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to gentiles' (I Cor. 1:23). But without that leap into new territory the Christian message would have died with the first apostles. This does not mean that the Church must change for change's sake, but only that it is through confrontation with new concepts that we are forced to study and reflect on our present position. If that position is found to be irrelevant or alienating then change should take place.

Thus attention paid to the subject of the Motherhood of God by the media tells us that the mood of this debate, in the true tradition of Christian theology, would be controversial and divisive. The Church