

# Further Thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and the Vedanta with Special Reference to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo

Part 3 of 7

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Dr. Jung maintains that in the reconciliation between the four functions and the two attitudes, that often the only possible reconciliation is through an irrational factor. However, I am not so pessimistic as to think we cannot find a rational solution of the difference between these various philosophies; and in the case of universal realism versus universal illusionism, I believe that in addition to the interpretation given in the last part, there is another approach that is derived from a Realization.

In 1936 there was a series of three Realizations which occurred in the time range from July to September of that year. The first of these took a form which I finally formulated as: *appearance is inversely proportional to reality, or vice versa, reality is inversely proportional to appearance*. This is the basis of the *mandala* that appears in the opening portion of the book *The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object*. This was a sudden insight, as it seemed at the time, whereby it appeared that reality was there where the senses and the conceptual function reported nothing at all and that that which reported or affected the perceptual and conceptual consciousness was relatively only appearance; or in other terms, that which seemed void was actually substantial, and that which seemed to be something was actually an emptiness. Several years later, and in fact only a relatively short time ago, on a rereading of *The Voice of the Silence* one sentence stood out and that was to this effect: “. . . study the voidness of the seeming full, [and] the fullness of the seeming void.”<sup>1</sup> Although I had read this book several times, this sentence had never before stood out, but, it was a dead ringer for the Realization that led to that formulation: *substantiality is inversely proportional to ponderability, or, reality is inversely proportional to appearance*. What is involved here is this: that the approach of our consciousness to the world about, as it is naturally without any inversion in consciousness, gives us an apparent field of objects that normally we regard as real. Now, with an inversion in consciousness, it actually happens that the values here are reversed so that one has the sense of a substantial fullness where our ordinary approach gives us nothing at all, and *vice versa*, that which seems to be something appears to have the value of merely an emptiness.

Now, here we have a possible reconciling conception. But let us first look at that which happens in the state of Realization which tends to confirm the theory of illusionism. I shall first quote from the chapter on illusionism in *The Life Divine*, and then

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<sup>1</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co., Los Angeles, 1928), 61.

report my own experience in that connection. This quotation begins on p. 420 and continues near to the bottom of p. 421:

Illusionism unifies by elimination; it deprives all knowledge and experience, except the one supreme merger, of reality and significance.

But this debate belongs to the domain of the pure reason and the final test of truths of this order is not reason but spiritual illumination verified by abiding fact of spirit; a single decisive spiritual experience may undo a whole edifice of reasonings and conclusions erected by the logical intelligence. Here the theory of Illusionism is in occupation of a very solid ground; for, although it is in itself no more than a mental formulation, the experience it formulates into a philosophy accompanies a most powerful and apparently final spiritual realisation. It comes upon us with a great force of awakening to reality when the thought is stilled, when the mind withdraws from its constructions, when we pass into a pure selfhood void of all sense of individuality, empty of all cosmic contents: if the spiritualised mind then looks at individual and cosmos, they may well seem to it to be an illusion, a scheme of names and figures and movements falsely imposed on the sole reality of the Self-Existent. Or even the sense of self becomes inadequate; both knowledge and ignorance disappear into sheer Consciousness and consciousness is plunged into a trance of pure superconscious existence. Or even existence ends by becoming too limiting a name for that which abides solely for ever; there is only a timeless Eternal, a spaceless Infinite, the utterness of the Absolute, a nameless peace, an overwhelming single objectless Ecstasy. There can certainly be no doubt of the validity,—complete within itself,—of this experience; there can be no denial of the overwhelming decisive convincingness,—*ekatma-pratyaya-saram*,—with which this realisation seizes the consciousness of the spiritual seeker. But still all spiritual experience is experience of the Infinite and it takes a multitude of directions; some of them,—and not this alone,—are so close to the Divine and the Absolute, so penetrated with the reality of Its presence or with the ineffable peace and power of the liberation from all that is less than It, that they carry with them this overwhelming sense of finality complete and decisive. There are a hundred ways of approaching the Supreme Reality and, as is the nature of the way taken, so will be the nature of the ultimate experience by which one passes into That which is ineffable, That of which no report can be given to the mind or expressed by any utterance. All these definitive culminations may be regarded and penultimates of the one Ultimate; they are steps by which the soul crosses the limits of Mind into the Absolute. Is then this realisation of passing into a pure immobile self-existence or this Nirvana of the individual and the universe one among these penultimates, or is it itself the final and absolute realisation which is at the end of every journey and transcends and eliminates all lesser experience? It claims to stand behind and supersede, to sublimate and to eliminate every other knowledge; if that is really so, then its finality must be accepted as conclusive. But, against this pretension, it has been

claimed that it is possible to travel beyond by a greater negation or a greater affirmation,—to extinguish self in Non-Being or to pass through the double experience of cosmic consciousness and Nirvana of world-consciousness in the One Existence to a greater Divine Union and Unity which holds both these realisations in its vast integral Reality. It is said that beyond the duality and the non-duality there is That in which both are held together and find their truth in a Truth which is beyond them. A consummating experience which proceeds by the exceeding and elimination of all other possible but lesser experiences is, as a step towards the Absolute, admissible. A supreme experience which affirms and includes the truth of all spiritual experience, gives to each its own absolute, integralises all knowledge and experience in a supreme reality, might be the one step farther that is at once a largest illuminating and transforming Truth of all things and a highest infinite Transcendence. The Brahman, the supreme Reality, is That which being known all is known; but in the illusionist solution it is That, which being known, all becomes unreal and an incomprehensible mystery: in this other experience, the Reality being known, all assumes its true significance, its truth to the Eternal and Absolute.<sup>2</sup>

Here it is acknowledged and affirmed that there are Realizations which support the conception of a complete illusionism; but it is also here maintained that there are other paths that do not follow this particular pattern, and that, indeed, there is a more comprehensive Realization which embraces both of these. It is not formulated in terms that indicate that the writer has had this experience, for he refers to it as something that is said, but I think there can be no doubt that, indeed, Sri Aurobindo has had such an integrating experience.

Now, as to my own experience in this connection, in the Realization of August 7 and in those days where I frequently returned to that level, there was a time when I had the distinct experience that all of the relative universe, all of the domain of relative or subject-object consciousness, was unreal, was totally irrelevant, and it began to disappear and even, as has been pointed out in Indian logic, it not only ceased to be but ceased to ever have been. I found myself starting to forget even the experiences that I had had; but this process I was able to stop quite easily. But I wonder if I had not stopped it, would there ever have been a return to relative consciousness? How would it be possible to return to that of which you had lost all memory? It's a question to which I do not know the answer. Thus, there is indeed an experience in the spiritual sense that confirms the illusionist philosophy.

But now if I go to my later experience in September of 1936 which I called the High Indifference, this is the notable fact: it seemed to be a movement outward relative from that state which had been induced on August 7 to a position that was neutral with respect to the extraverted and introverted consciousness. Here, there seemed to be a neutral base from which, on one side, one was aware of the universe of objects and, on

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<sup>2</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, *The Life Divine*, vol. 28 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 469-470.

the other side, *Nirvana*. And in its way, this too confirms the view that illusionism is not the whole story, though it is in terms that are different from those formulated by Sri Aurobindo. And so I, too, would agree that illusionism is not the final word.

Now let us return to the discussion of that Realization formulated as: *reality is inversely proportional to appearance*. Assuming that an individual is in the state of ordinary relative or subject-object consciousness, but with his eyes closed, he finally opens his eyes and there appears before him a mountain, rocks, trees, buildings, and various other objects. His tendency is, in that case, to say: there is something, there is a real existing object, something upon which I can place dependence. This is our normal state. We tend to affirm reality in these objects. Now, the meaning of the formula *reality is inversely proportional to ponderability* would be that of a rejection of the idea that reality exists in the object out there before my visual consciousness. On the contrary, the formula implies that that which makes an impact upon my consciousness, whether visual or otherwise, is evidence of an absence of reality. At the same time, it is realized that surrounding these objects there is something that seems empty, namely, that which we call "space." Neglecting the fact that the sky to us appears seeable because of a certain blue color, a fact produced by the effects of our atmosphere, there we see surrounding all objects that which would seem to us as a sheer voidness. Now, the formula would affirm that that seeming voidness is actually a fullness. But there is a certain relationship between the apparent objects and the seeming voidness of space. The objects are contained, apparently, in the space. Let us think, then, of the space as a sort of mold or matrix containing the object. The figure here is taken from the use of molds in our arts. We may build a mold into which we pour metal. Let us call the form that is revealed when the mold is broken, the core. That core corresponds to the object of our ordinary, direct perception. The mold corresponds to the apparent voidness of space. The formula, then, would affirm that the core is merely appearance in varying degree but that the mold is the reality. Our ordinary interest is in the core, but for the purpose of Realization, Liberation, and Enlightenment, the focus should be shifted to the mold. That is part of the meaning of the formula. But the formula also implies that there is a certain interrelationship between the core and the mold. We may call that relationship one of inversion. The mold is the inverse of the core; a point that I think is quite obvious. Now, taking it in its deeper sense, the statement implies that it is possible to attain the real from the core by an inversion in consciousness.

If, however, we judge the appearance, or the core, as reality, as it appears, in fact, then we have produced a *maya*. Notice here that a *maya* arises only at the point where the individual exercises judgment. For a non-judging consciousness there would be no *maya* and no truth, but only sheer factuality. On the other hand, if one takes the appearance, or the core, as his starting point for the inversion of his consciousness, then he attains the real. The implication, then, is this: that the objects before our consciousness in the ordinary sense, the appearance or the core, can be a means to the attainment of the real, or they can be judged in such a way that they have the effect of being a mere illusion.

Thus I would say the formula here presented is an integration of both illusionism and universal realism. The world about is real if the orientation is to the matrix which contains the core; it is unreal if the orientation is to the core alone. What is that which is the universal matrix in the apparent world? I think, quite obviously, it is simply space. At night when the stars are shining, we perceive a number of bright objects in the sky

surrounded by an apparent void which we call space. Those objects seem to be a multitude—some three thousand or so that we can see with the naked eye, but many billions when we use our sophisticated instruments for observation. It would give the impression of an essential and irreducible multiplicity; but, they all rest in space and space is one. The space, then, would stand as the universal matrix in which all sidereal bodies abide. Thus, if we take the whole sidereal universe with its apparent objects and from it inverse our consciousness, we get, not *multiplicity*, but *unity*. The disconnected multiplicity of many sidereal bodies, through inversion, becomes transformed into the unity of the supporting space.

Now, while this is space taken in its ordinary sense, think of Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject, or Field Consciousness, as the inner, underlying space which supports all cognitions whatsoever. If we orient ourselves to the cognitions, whether perceptual or conceptual, we are caught in a *maya*. If from them we turn to the pure matrix, which is Field Consciousness, we have reality, and that reality is one, not many, whereas the appearance was many. I've already noted the fact that there is a certain parallel between this conception and the statement in *The Voice of the Silence* which says, “. . . study the voidness of the seeming full, [and] the fullness of the seeming void,” but the latter statement carries the impression of one single step from that which is entirely void to that which is entirely full. The formulation which I have given adds to this a principle that seems to be peculiar to Western development, namely, the conceptions of the continuum and of limits. These two conceptions are fundamentally mathematical. They began in their first manifestation with Archimedes who, however, lacked the algebraic technique for the handling of these conceptions; they became fully born in the hands of Sir Isaac Newton and Leibniz. To suggest what we mean by the conception of limits, let's take the simple converging series which runs this way:  $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \frac{1}{16}$  and so on. We can prove that the sum of all of these elements can never be greater than 2 and that it cannot reach the value of 2 by any finite number of steps. It requires, to reach the total value of 2, an infinite number of steps. Two, therefore, is the limiting sum. It approaches ever closer and closer to that sum, but never actually reaches it by a finite number of steps. What I'm implying in the formula, *reality is inversely proportional to appearance*, is that the state of absolute voidness, on one hand, and of absolute reality, on the other, are limiting conceptions, that in between we have a mixture of relative reality and of relative appearance.

To suggest how this can be, consider the matter which we conceive material objects to be composed. In general, the view is that this matter is made up of atoms which consist of nuclei and electrons rotating in some manner about the nuclei and that the spaces between the nucleus and the electron is on the order of the relative spaces between the sun and the planets. So, actually, in any given atom there is much more of space than there is of material substance. The atoms are formed into molecules and the molecules formed into larger bodies with other spaces in between. The sensible object, thus, is composed of a very little of our primary matter, as we conceive it, and a great deal of space. Thus, any object, as it appears to us, is both space and matter. Insofar as it is space, it is real; insofar as it is matter, it is only appearance.

Now, we have two radically separated forms of conceived objects—one very dense and the other very tenuous. The very dense one, the most dense known to us, is what is called a nuclear sun. A nuclear sun is one such that if we start with a mass of

matter equal to that of our sun and have it contract to the point where it is an object only a few kilometers across, say ten or twelve, it would be a nuclear sun. The mass, or weight, would remain the same, but the volume would be vastly different. It has been stated in an article in a recent number of *The Scientific American*, an article written by a nuclear physicist, that the idea of the concentration here could be suggested in the following way. If all the matter of the human beings living upon the earth today, involving a figure of some three and one-half billion individuals, were compressed so that it was only of the size of a raindrop, yet having the same mass and weight as the total matter of these human beings, that would be the density of a nuclear sun. Now, the theorem, *reality is inversely proportional to appearance*, implies that here we have minimum reality, not maximum, as one would ordinarily think, but minimum reality. At the other extreme, of a relatively ideal conception of an entity, we have the *Dharmakaya*. And here, to get an idea of what this is like, I'll make a quotation from certain footnotes on page 96 of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. We shall introduce, here, two Tibetan terms as follows: *rig-pa* and *shes-rig*. In this footnote, it says:

*Rig-pa* meaning 'consciousness' as distinct from the knowing faculty by which it cognizes or knows itself to be. Ordinarily, *rig-pa* and *shes-rig* are synonymous; but in an abstruse philosophical treatise, as herein, *rig-pa* refers to the consciousness in its purest and most spiritual (i.e. supramundane) aspect, and *shes rig* to the consciousness in that grosser aspect, not purely spiritual, whereby cognizance of phenomena is present.<sup>3</sup>

and then in a lower footnote number 3, it states:

From the union of the two states of mind, or consciousness, implied by the two terms, *rig-pa* and *shes-rig*, and symbolized by the All-Good Father and the All-Good Mother, is born the state of the *Dharma-Kaya*, the state of Perfect Enlightenment, Buddhahood. The *Dharma-Kaya*, ('Body of Truth') symbolizes the purest and the highest state of being, a state of supramundane consciousness, devoid of all mental limitations or obscurations which arise from the contact of the primordial consciousness with matter.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have a very tenuous or ideal object, and the theorem affirms that in this case appearance is minimal and reality maximal. The two conceptions, then, of a nuclear sun and of the *Dharmakaya* may stand as, approximately at least, as limiting values in the formula.

We may also apply this theorem to the Buddhistic conceptions of *Sangsara* and *Nirvana*. Ordinarily, as these conceptions are handled in the literature, one gets the impression that the *sadhaka* is either in *Sangsara* or in *Nirvana*, exclusively one or the other, but not both. The formula would challenge this interpretation; and it is suggested here, that we may be in the presence of a profounder understanding. Instead of viewing

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<sup>3</sup> W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 96.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

*Nirvana* and *Sangsara* as states of consciousness that are forever separated radically from each other, we could have this other conception that there is a progressive or continuous interrelationship between the two reaching from a condition as limiting where the consciousness is wholly *sangsaric* to the other pole where the consciousness is wholly *nirvanic* but an intermediate zone in which there is a blending of the two with that portion nearest the absolute *sangsaric* state being most *sangsaric* and progressing throughout movement toward the other pole becomes progressively more and more *nirvanic* until one reaches the limiting value of a pure *nirvanic* state of consciousness. The *sangsaric* state corresponds to what we call *phenomenalistic* consciousness, the *nirvanic* to *non-phenomenalistic* consciousness—a consciousness that is not loaded with forms.

One theory of the wrongness in the world is that the *sangsaric* state has become so largely a pure *sangsaric* state that humanity is unable to solve its problems, but that by an introduction of *nirvanic* consciousness into the *sangsaric* the problems that here seem so impossible would become resolvable. In support of this idea is the Realization of the High Indifference in which there was a perfectly neutral position with respect to the *nirvanic* on one side and the *sangsaric* on the other; in other words, a level of consciousness embracing both values. We have, then, the possibility of viewing our total domain of being as, potentially at least, an intermixture between these two qualities of consciousness.

If, as seems likely, we must abandon illusionism as the one and only and ultimate metaphysical interpretation of the nature of manifestation, yet there remains the consideration of it as carrying a possible pragmatic truth. In this sense, of being something that works, it has a more definite value, for, considering the psychological effect of the view that the whole world about, that all of the actions and so forth that make up what we call life, is only an illusion, we have a very great devaluation of this whole world about, of the whole *sangsaric* experience. And a devaluation of that grandeur and exclusiveness has a powerful force for breaking the attachments that stand as the great barriers to the process of yogic Realization, for it arouses in one, in the *sadhaka*, a large *vairagya*, or disgust with life in the world; and thus loosening the attachments to the world, combined with an aspiration and effort toward the state of Fundamental Realization, the yoga becomes greatly increased in its effectiveness.