

# General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy

## Part 6 of 12

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Before proceeding to the discussion of the fourth Realization, there is a thought which I wish to suggest as an idea to be entertained and evaluated, but not claiming for it anything authoritative. This is the idea. Considering the Orient as being dedicated to the aesthetic component in things, both in the sense of the determinate aesthetic continuum and the indeterminate aesthetic continuum, as has been presented by Dr. Northrop, and as the West being oriented primarily to the theoretic determinate continuum, I wish to make this suggestion. It is typical of the Orient, both in the form of the Indian world and the Chinese world, that they go back to ancient sources to find that which has the greater authoritativeness. The Indian philosophers, typically, returned to the *Vedic* presentations and presented their points of view as, apparently, most truly representing the meaning of these cryptic representations, which are, admittedly, difficult for the modern mind to understand. And the same is said of the great indigenous Chinese philosophers, that they return to the ancient truths laid down in a prehistoric past. There thus is implied that the process of manifestation, or of evolution, has tended to obscure an ancient truth, and that, therefore, rebirth, re-strengthening of the motive and the current of thought is achieved by returning to the most ancient source possible.

In contrast, in the case of the theoretic component of the West, it would appear that the best and most comprehensive formulation has been the *latest* presentation in the evolving culture, that which is most modern—not in a loose sense, for a most modern manifestation in a loose and short time sense may be quite trivial. In this connection, a thought suggested by Spengler may be pertinent, namely, that cultures tend to be born, to rise rather rapidly to their zenith, and then decline over a long period. It would not be the latest in the sense of an old declining culture that would be most pertinent to the theoretic component, but that which was the final expression of the apex of one of these cultures. With that limitation, then, in the sense of the theoretic component, it is suggested that the most valuable, and that which most contains truth, would be the latest development, not the most ancient. It would then be implied that the union of the East and West is in a certain sense the union of that which is most ancient and original with that which is latest in the cultural development.

Now, let us proceed to the consideration of the fourth of the series of Realizations—the first of two which would appear to be transcendental, contrasting with the first three as being simply mental Realizations. There is so much to be said in connection with this fourth one, that I face the embarrassment of not knowing too readily where to begin. But perhaps this point is as important as any: it is the only one of the five Realizations which I actively sought. The others all came of themselves and I was surprised by their coming, but the fourth I definitely sought.

Typically, judging from the literature, it would appear that the reason for the search for a liberating Realization is usually a sense of the unsatisfactoriness, in one form or another, of the world as it is. In the case of Buddha, it was precipitated by the realization of ubiquitous suffering; and he went forth to find a solution—in his case, evidently, not merely a private solution, but a solution for humanity. As I have said before, this sense of unsatisfactoriness may take other forms: as the feeling of an ignorance or an *avidya*, or a perverse will in things. But one is led most commonly, it would seem, to the search because of a present unsatisfactoriness.

In my own case, this was not the initial motivation. Later, I had the experience of the *vairagya* with the world about for many reasons, but that was not so when I made my initial decision. At that time everything was going my way. I was moving in an academic community and happy in it and looked forward to an academic career as about the most desirable sort of career that was available. And all of the forces in my environment were boosting me on in that direction. The doors were open and the auspices were favorable. But I had become convinced, in the midst of the discussions of a seminar in metaphysics, that there was something lacking in our sources of knowledge; that there was a source neglected when we reduced our knowledge to sense perception or conceptual cognition. And, therefore, if one was to attain a fully adequate philosophy, he would have to determine whether the intimations of a third, or other sources, were valid; otherwise, the writing of a philosophy, its development, and so forth, would be a sort of meaningless work, for there would be a fundamental incompleteness in it. And this led to a step that involved the break with the academic world and a diving down into something like a valley of consciousness after having been upon a minor mountain top. There was a long period in which there was simply groping for a true definition of what the goal might be. In fact, it took a period of twenty-four years before there was a resolution, but most of this time was spent in a groping. When, finally, a certain definitiveness came in the search as to what that goal was, it did not take very long.

One who has made a study of the history of mysticism in the West and in the East will note one important difference. In general the mystical experiences of the West, which most frequently fall in the class of Christian mysticism, have been spontaneous; there has not been, in general, a systematic method for the awakening of this Consciousness. On the other hand, in the East, particularly in the case of India, there is reported an elaborate development of what is called yogic methodology, all of which is aimed at the awakening to an enlightening Consciousness of lesser or greater order. In fact, I have found among some Westerners a distaste for the idea of an actual effort directed towards the Awakening. There is a tendency in these cases to prefer purely spontaneous Awakening, if it should so happen.

Now, on the question of method, I was throughout these twenty-four years groping and stumbling. And in the end, this is probably as impressive as anything, in that the number of things, the number of steps, and forms of discipline that are characteristic of Eastern yogic practice which I did not employ, becomes particularly impressive. I did become acquainted with the *tantric* forms that are developed in *The Serpent Power* by Sir John Woodroffe, these involving very technical steps reaching from what is known as a physical discipline called *hatha* yoga, through a psychological discipline called *raja* yoga, through the development of *mantra* yoga, *laya* yoga, and *kundala* yoga. These

involve, in their sum total, a use of *asana*, or posture; *mudra*, certain closing of parts of the organism such as the fingers placed in certain positions; *mantra*, or the use of certain articulate sounds; *pranayama*, or the use of breath in a technical way. Although I experimented with some of this, no discernible positive results were attained. None of this apparently had any value for me; nor did ritual or ceremony. Now, I do not question but that these instrumentations have their value with the appropriately chosen individual and under competent guidance. But I merely make the point that these were not employed by me, and, therefore, were not in principle necessary for the type of Awakening which I ultimately realized. As Aurobindo has pointed out, there are a number of features in a discipline that may prove to be valuable aids, but most of them are not essential; they are only aids. Even, as he has pointed out, meditation is an aid, but not an essential means; and in my own case, formal meditation, involving the setting aside of certain hours, and taking certain postures, and disciplining the mind in a certain way, had no discernible affect upon the process. I did experiment with this, but I did not find it profitable. On the other hand, there has been more or less spontaneous meditation; that is, the entering into a meditative state, not by deliberate choice, but spontaneously; perhaps as the result of thought oriented in a transcendental direction.

On the other hand, I did give substantial attention to certain books that contain material which could only be derived by awakening of other avenues of cognition. For many years, I kept *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence* as companions. I made use of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Light on the Path*, and certain other texts of this sort. I was also associated through most of those years with persons who were oriented to the same material. There was a period when my wife and I went forth in the field of lecture work connected with such material to render it available to others who might be interested. What this may have done with respect to the awakening process is something that is not traceable, but there is no doubt that it helped to produce a favorable condition.

Toward the close of the twenty-four year period, I did come into contact with one whom I recognized as a Sage, but he specifically told me that he was not, and could not be, my personal guru. Now, it is important in the processes outlined in the Oriental literature that there should be a guru. As a rule, a personal guru plays an important part in the development of the new, or the breaking out of the new avenue of cognition. This is very clearly true, explicitly true, in the case of Sri Shankaracharya. It was explicitly true in the case of Sri Aurobindo. But it does not seem to have played a part in the inner Awakening of the Great Buddha. He seems to have been a true pioneer. Aurobindo himself acknowledges the importance of the office of the guru, but also makes the point that it is not in principle necessary, though it is usually a factor.

Through this one whom I recognized as a Sage, I was led to a certain knowledge of previous life; and, also, I was brought into a deeper valuation of one of the Indian philosophers, namely, Sri Shankaracharya. I found myself in instant rapport with the thinking of this philosopher. Many times in reading his texts, I have seemed to know what was coming before I reached that point. I sympathized completely with his approach, with his ideas, and found no difficulty whatsoever in applying his method of self-analysis. And, in fact, insofar as method is concerned in my own case, the heart of it lay in self-analysis and philosophic thought. The text which proved to be of greatest

value was that which has been made available to us by Paul Deussen in his *The System of the Vedanta*.

Now, we come to a problem which of late has made me wonder whether Paul Deussen has presented the thought of Shankara as the Indian world understood it; and, therefore, a question arises, whether I ever, in those days, understood the conceptions presented by Shankara as he understood them. Paul Deussen was said to have been a Kantian, and it is pretty clear that the Kantian thought is active in his interpretation of Shankara's commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*. In the light of what Northrop has brought out in the orientation of the East as contrasted to that of the West, it would appear that the Oriental orientation is primarily that of giving supreme place to sensuous or aesthetic presentation, and that there had not developed at that time what we know in the West as epistemological criticism. Kant, being the great representative of epistemological criticism, would seem to have influenced the thinking of Paul Deussen. And it may well have been true that an interpretation of Shankara in Western terms was produced that was not true to the meaning as originally given by Shankara himself. This is a point that has come up only with a rereading quite recently of Northrop's *The Meeting of East and West*. I have just come upon a certain statements in a book called *Buddhist Logic* by Stcherbatsky, and in this there is a certain confirmation of the possibility of such a misinterpretation. Note the following quotation with respect to a group of Indian systems:

All these systems of philosophy, however different they be in their ontology, had this feature in common, that their theory of cognition remained, generally speaking, in the phase of naive realism. Even Vedanta, notwithstanding all its spiritualistic monism, admitted, on the empirical plane, a realistic theory of the origin of our knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

End of that quotation which appears on p. 23. But turning to a more extended quotation beginning on p. 24, the point is brought out more explicitly:

The Indian Realists maintain that the external world is cognized by us in its genuine reality. There are no innate ideas and no *a priori* principles. Everything comes into the cognizing individual from without. All cognitions are experiences conducted by the apparatus of our senses into the cognizing Soul, where they are sifted, ordered and preserved as traces of former experiences. These dormant traces are capable under favorable circumstances of being aroused and of producing recollections, which being mixed up with new experiences create qualified percepts. Consciousness is pure consciousness, it does not contain any images, but it contemplates, or illumines, external reality directly, by the light of cognition. It sheds a pure light of consciousness upon objects lying in the ken. The sense of vision is a ray of light which reaches the object, seizes its form and communicates it to the cognizing Soul. There are no images lying between external reality and its cognition. Cognition is therefore not

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<sup>1</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), 23.

introspective, it does not apprehend images, but it apprehends external reality, reality itself. Self-consciousness is explained as an inferential cognition of the presence of knowledge in oneself or by a subsequent step in the act of perception. The structure of the external world corresponds adequately to what is found in our cognition and in the categories of our language. It consists of substances and sensible qualities which can be picked up by our sense faculties. The qualities are inherent in real substances. All motions are likewise realities *per se*, inherent in corresponding substances. Universals are also external realities, realities connected with particular things in which they reside by a special relation called Inherence. This relation of Inherence is hypostasized and is also a special external reality. All other relations are entered in the catalogue of Being under the head of qualities, but Inherence is a “meaning” which is nevertheless an external reality different from the things related. This makes together six categories of Being: Substances, Qualities, Motions, Universals, Particulars and Inherence, to which a seventh category has been added later on in the shape of “non-existence”, also a real “meaning” accessible to perception by the senses through a special contact.<sup>2</sup>

Here we find ourselves taken back in the theory of cognition to something very much akin to the theory of cognition of John Locke. With him you will remember that the mind was a blank tablet upon which the impressions of real things were placed, and that these impressions made up the sum total of all our knowledge. Later, the development in philosophy showed that this led to a complete skepticism which aroused to activity the thought of Immanuel Kant. And you will remember that Immanuel Kant opened the door to reliable knowledge through introducing an epistemological component carried by the cognizing individual, namely, the individual carried certain aesthetic forms and categories of the understanding which determined how the thing-in-itself would be cognized by us so that what we deal with is not relationships that apply externally and realistically to the supposed thing-in-itself, but relationships imposed by the cognizing subject upon that thing-in-itself, and all that we know in our ordinary cognition is the result of this imposition.

A question then arises: does this interpreting of the philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya in terms that may have been different from his own understanding have any effect on the qualitative makeup of the ultimate Realization? Is it, in fact, something other than precisely what Shankara meant by *Moksha*? This is a question that we will handle more at a later stage.

Now, we come to certain stages in the progress toward the Realization of August 7, 1936, that may be of particular significance. Earlier in that year, my wife and I were engaged in a lecture series in the city of Chicago, and during this time I had a very unusual experience, one unprecedented in anything I had known previously and not repeated since. Over a period of two or three weeks, though engaged in lecturing, I was enveloped in a sense of deep sleepiness. There was a wish to sleep all the time. Actually I

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

did not do so, but I slept much more than normally and, when awake, struggled with the heaviness of this imposed sleepiness. It lifted effectively only during periods of being actually upon the lecturers' platform. Shortly before the closing of this series, this inclination to sleep suddenly lifted with an inner thrill of expectation and a sense that now I knew how to achieve that which I sought. I knew where I could get the necessary aid, namely, in the philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya, especially as developed in *The System of the Vedanta* by Paul Deussen.

We returned to California, and for a time I worked underground, and this, too, may be of some significance, though it was not apparent to me at the time. But later I learned that in the Oriental techniques, the *sadhaka* is sometimes placed in an underground cave and even sealed in with food being passed to him by some aid from outside, possibly his guru; but, otherwise, he was left entirely alone for days on end in an underground condition. One might speculate about this. The birth symbolism occurs again and again in connection with the event of Awakening, in the sense of a Realization. One, himself, is impressed by the necessity of so viewing it. Is it then to be considered true that going underground symbolizes a reentering into the womb, as it were, preliminary to being reborn? This, at least, is an interesting speculative question.

And concerning the long period of sleepiness, a possible interpretation is suggested by the psychological writings of Dr. Carl G. Jung. At that time, I was not yet acquainted with Dr. Jung and his writings, but what is suggested after familiarity with Dr. Jung's thought is this: that a deep sleepiness is a state of profound introversion and corresponds to an animation of unconscious elements preliminary to their emergence as a new source of consciousness. These are just thoughts that I am throwing out as to a possible interpretation here. I make all of this material explicit because—<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This audio recording appears to be incomplete.