

# Tantra and Zen Buddhism

## Part 6 of 6

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This is a continuation of the discussion of Tantra and Zen yoga, which has developed into a much broader statement than that and has become a discussion of the contrast between that form of yoga which may be called “aesthetic” and another form which may be called “noetic.”

Just the other day I read a very startling statement which runs this way: “. . . by recovering his animal nature, man becomes God.” This is to be found in an article called “The Highest State of Consciousness” written by John White and said to be taken from a book that he has written. It is to be found in Volume 5, Number 1, 1972, of the journal called *Fields Within Fields Within Fields* and the quotation is to be found on p. 70. This statement in its bald and simple form does indeed give an inadequate impression of what is meant. In the article it is explained that this is a matter of man recapturing his primitive condition, but upon a superconscious level. So while it corresponds to animal consciousness, it is not as the animal knows the world around him, but as realized while in a superconscious state. The article in question is a sympathetic and competent discussion of states of consciousness that have been variously known as *satori*, *samadhi*, and Fundamental Realization. The treatment is so competent in general that I strongly suspect that it is much more than the work of sheer exoteric scholarship; in other words, the writer knows directly something, at least, of the consciousness concerning which he is writing. I find it on the whole a valuable article.

But now with respect to this statement, something is brought out that had been developing in my own consciousness in the study of Tantra and Zen Buddhism, and which may be manifest or underlie the form of mysticism known as Sufism. Already I have noted in an earlier portion of this series of tapes that man has a commonality with the animal order insofar as he is a sensuous being; that he diverges from the animal order insofar as he is a conceptual being. And I have insisted upon the point that man *qua* man is the conceptual entity rather than a simply more highly evolved animal. Now, return to animality when viewed from the cognitive level may be viewed as equivalent to a return to sensualistic cognition, and it is in that sense in which we are speaking. And since I was well aware that in dealing with sensation we’re dealing with that part of man which is common to the animal, therefore in a certain way we may say that returning to the accentuation of the sensuous or aesthetic factor man is really recovering his animal nature. The startling statement by the writer is that by this means man becomes God. This introduces a rich field of reflection. No doubt, there is much in the literature on the subject of yoga that does suggest that the aim of yoga is regression to the root, a return to that from which man came. A point that I shall make is that this is not the whole of the story, but it does appear to be true with respect to a large order of yogic orientation. We might call this “yoga by regression.” The suggested other

aspect of this whole subject might be reflected in a formula as follows: yoga by progression. This contrast I shall discuss at some length.

Very commonly, the call to the yogic search is a disgust with life and even a disgust with thought, and is thus an effort to escape from something that seems like a hopeless condition. If we return to the story of the Buddha when he made his first journey in a chariot outside of the city in which he had lived and had been protected by his father so that he should have no experience of suffering; and then on this journey forth from the city, he had the experience of seeing a beggar, a man deeply ill, and a corpse, and had the shock of seeing that suffering was present in that world outside his own protected sphere. This, it is said, aroused him to reflection and to a realization that suffering is the part of all creatures here, and that it was desirable to make a search for the resolution of the problem of suffering. Out of that, ultimately, there came the Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree after something like a seven years search, and then the Buddhist message that is oriented to Gautama Buddha took formulation during the period of a long and fruitful life.

But, in all of this, there's an emphasis of the fact of suffering as the cause for the search; and insofar as I am familiar with Buddhistic literature, the emphasis of this as the motivation for the search seems to be present everywhere. There seems to be a persistent avoidance of dealing with the problem of how the suffering arises. The Buddha's message seems to be purely pragmatic here, as in the case of a sick man, one would say the important thing is not what caused him to be sick, but how can he get well. I must admit that with the background of a Western training that was in part scientific, I cannot feel satisfied with such an attitude. I would ask the question, what leads to the illness or the suffering in the first place. To be sure, for the particular case, getting well or being relieved of suffering may be the important matter, but when one deals with a condition like illness or suffering, there is the larger interest of what causes it, with the hope that by knowing the cause of it, a resolution of the condition in a massive way may be effected. I frankly am not satisfied with a purely pragmatic solution that avoids the larger question. And I must say, also, that the problem of suffering occupied only a subordinate place in my own experience which led to the search for the Realization. It was more in the spirit of a search for a more adequate knowledge, a continuation of that interest that dominates in the academic community. I was much more impressed with Shankara's diagnosis of the wrongness in the world as due to ignorance, and then the presentation of the solution as being in the form of acquiring true knowledge. To be sure, the *avidya* or ignorance of Shankara is not the ignorance in our ordinary sense, nor is the knowledge which we acquire by ordinary methods the knowledge that cures the state of *avidya*. The knowledge that does this curing is *jnana*, or a spiritual knowledge—something very different from mere academic information or scientific formulation. It is more like a changing of the base of reference with respect to which one approaches the problems of life and thought rather than elaborating upon the base which is already assumed by empiric academic man. Nonetheless, it has a certain kinship to the search of the academic community, in that it is a seeking for knowledge in some sense.

Now, that approach has a greater kinship to the interest of the one who is researching in some domain. There is a problem to be resolved. The problem may be difficult, but nonetheless, it is something that is fascinating, that even becomes more

fascinating because of its great difficulty. And the interest in a positive sense is aroused towards the attainment of a goal rather than the avoidance of an undesirable condition. I found ultimately that this approach did lead to a positive outcome that transcended far any expectation that I have in the beginning. I had become more conscious of the general suffering of humanity and all creatures, since that day of August 7, 1936, a suffering which in general did not touch me personally, but which did touch me sympathetically. I have become considerably disgusted with the way things have developed in our human society throughout all of its known history, and also disgusted with the battle we see in nature where one creature can survive only by frustrating another creature through imposing upon him death. I've become keenly aware of all that. But, the interest is not that of escape from a unpleasant felt condition, but rather the interest in the resolution of a problem. It's a research effort, and for that the question of how does it arise that suffering should be ubiquitous does become important in a practical sense, for it is to be presumed that if we know the causes that produce this condition, then we will be able to work out a resolution of the problems. And, furthermore, becoming familiar not only with the delightful sides of all that is, but even with the shadowy part of all that is, increases one's total awareness of what the all-in-all really is, and that is, I submit, an interest of overwelling importance.

I am well aware that correction of a wrongness in some sense is the predominant motive in the religions as we know them. William James, when he made his research for the Gifford Lectures which ultimately became the volume *Varieties of Religious Experience*, said that he found only two elements common to all religions: first, that there was a wrongness in the world, and second, an offering of a resolution of the wrongness.<sup>1</sup> Other features characteristic of specific religions were not characteristic of other religions. Some were God oriented, that is, oriented to some Supreme Being; others were oriented to a principle rather than to a being. But however they were oriented in this respect, they had in common the recognition of a wrongness and offered some resolution for that wrongness. Now, while it is true that I must admit this fact of wrongness—it is obvious all around us; nonetheless, I conceive the interest in the field of religion as going beyond that, that it still remains as an all consuming interest, in a purely positive sense, of development into ever greater and greater possibility, even in a condition where there is no longer any awareness of an overwhelming wrongness. And I think, on the whole, this is a more wholesome attitude towards religiosity. In other words, religion in the larger sense is not merely an extension of therapy. It is a fulfilling growth in its most valuable form. It is an expression of fundamental health, particularly in the spiritual and mental senses of the word.

Thus, one may approach the yogic search not driven by a feeling of wrongness, but essentially from a base of happiness in much the same spirit one may enter into a research in mathematics where thought may penetrate into zones not yet mastered by man. Only it is the greater search, the more difficult search, but involving the same essential enthusiasms that come to the seeking mathematician. Yoga may be sought by a motivation that is happy and not simply a motivation of escape. One may seek the goal because of a positive valuation of it, not because of a wish to get away from something

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<sup>1</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 508.

that is painful. No doubt, with most the pain is the whip that was necessary; but what I am saying is, it is not necessarily so. One may seek out of the fullness of his love for the yet not understood Eternal.

A fundamental thesis which I am developing in this series of tapes is that the yogic search need not be only by a regression to the sensuous or animal nature, but can be in the form of an advance through the conceptual being toward that which transcends the conceptual as well as the sensational; thus implying that there is more than one yogic pattern; implying that regression is not the only way but that it can be by a progression beyond conceptuality, and not in the direction of sensuality. This is very fundamental to the whole development in this series of tapes.

Now, in presenting this matter the method must involve that which we may call personal confession or introspective material. This takes the place of laboratory determination in ordinary exoteric research. The experimentation in the laboratory gives a datum which is the basis of subsequent theoretical development. That method is not applicable in this case because here we are dealing with a subjective subject matter which is inaccessible to the laboratory methodology. To be sure, laboratory methodology may determine that there are certain electrical phenomena connected with states of consciousness by the use of an encephalograph, but that is irrelevant with respect to the meaningful content of a state of consciousness. Meaningful content can be given only by a report of the individual who is aware of that content. It is admitted that from the standpoint of well developed scientific methodology this method has the defect that the original material is not observable by different individuals. It must be assumed that the individual who is giving a report is competent and honest, and the only way it can be checked, so far as I know, is by comparison with reports by other individuals or by one himself going through the yogic development until he himself knows immediately. One is sensitive about making such reports because it is something like a psychical self-vivisection conducted by oneself, and one rather recoils from doing this. However, I know of no way of presenting the basic data except by such a report; otherwise, a philosophic statement is simply something like a speculative construct without any basis to support it. I shall therefore report a certain feature in the imperience of 1936 which I do not remember having spoken of elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The search was started by an epistemological problem which arose this way: if there is a truth in that which is reported from the Orient, and by the Greek mystics, and by the Christian mystics, then it is something not reducible to sense perception or conceptuality alone, but requires something more. And it was born upon my mind that if one is to build an adequate philosophy it must be determined whether there is some other door of cognition, for if there is such another door of cognition, any philosophic statement based alone upon sense perception and conceptual conception<sup>3</sup> must be incomplete. That problem is what originated the search in my case. It was not a disgust

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<sup>2</sup> For the definition of 'imperience', see audio recordings "General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy," part 10, and "On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement." In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, "The third function therefore gives you imperience, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous."

<sup>3</sup> Wolff probably meant to say, ". . . conceptual cognition . . ."

with life or with the world of thought as I knew it in the university. It was simply a problem of an epistemological sort. That implies that disgust alone is not an absolute essential for originating the search.

Now, in my own academic background, the primary field of study had been pure mathematics supplemented by psychology and philosophy. I had had something that is evidently very rare in mathematical experience even among those for whom mathematics is a professional field, and that is the experience of mathematical beauty. It's hardly describable. It has a certain kinship with the imperience I knew in 1936, but not so comprehensive as that. But it was an experience of beauty so sweeping and strong that it transcended any experience I have ever known of aesthetic beauty; that is, the beauty of nature, the beauty of art—sensory in every case—never reached this intensity of value. But this sense of beauty can be experienced only at a very strong level of concentration. Perhaps because of this, there is a hidden sense in which the yogic search was a kind of mathematical research. But this needs some explanation. As one advances through the mathematical experience, he starts with relatively simply conceptions that are related rather strongly to sensible images. His first counting is setting up a one-to-one reciprocal correlation between the fingers and other objects. This stage is very sensuous, very dependent upon the image. But as he advances, he moves through stage after stage after stage of deeper and deeper abstraction until in the most advanced forms of mathematical thinking, all aid from the imagination or the image and all aid from sensuous-like intuition no longer exists and the thought moves on a basis of pure conceptuality. At this level the thought is very difficult, but it is possible. Almost all, if not all, of our other conceptual thinking has aid from the image, has aid from sensuous-like intuition.

Now, certain individuals reach out far in this domain. Thought here is very difficult, but every individual, no matter how able, comes to his ultimate limit. Let us now suppose that one continues in the direction indicated by this mathematical development beyond all formal statement; and that means beyond all mathematics that can be formulated. Mathematics has two sides—the form and the meaning. Now, continuing in the sense of the meaning beyond the farthest reach of form can lead to that which transcends the conceptual order; and for this I have originated the term the 'introceptual' order. And here consciousness emerges with all of those rich values that have been reported again and again by the mystics and the yogis.

The breakthrough on August 7, 1936, was the result of the fabrication of a conceptual key. That afternoon I had been reading in Paul Deussen's *System of the Vedanta*, which is an exposition of the philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya, and I was dealing with that particular section on the subject of Liberation. And reflecting upon the matter afterwards, it suddenly dawned on me that that which I was seeking, namely, the true Self, is never an object before consciousness in every sense; and furthermore, that I am already That and therefore there is nothing to be attained. And at that moment I gave up the search. But also at that moment the Door opened and all of the wealth revealed by that opening poured forth upon me. Now, the point to note here is the key was conceptual. There was no breath culture; there was no use of posture; there was no use of *mantram*; there was no use of any aesthetic or sensuous aid—just the discovery of the right conception and the application of it as a key. I ceased the search at that moment. Now, it is true there was a later Realization, namely, the one which I called the High

Indifference, but I did not seek for that. I did not know that such a state existed. It simply walked in on me, as it were, and it was highly welcome. And it also revolutionized certain fundamentals in my philosophic orientation, thereby proving that the conceptions which come out of the state are not merely the conceptions that are taken into the state, as some have maintained; but, on the contrary, proving that such a state can be the source of a philosophic knowledge. This is very important.

Now, the important point here as to methodology is that the right conception was the key to a consciousness transcending conceptuality and far transcending sensuality. Comparison of the state realized with states reported in different sources such as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and the *Cosmic Consciousness* of Maurice Bucke, and in reports elsewhere, there is this in common, that it brings fundamental assurance with respect to the most important metaphysical problems, such as those listed by Kant, namely, God, freedom, and immortality. But it did not agree with all the reports, for in a predominate number of the reports there is an experience of sensible light. There was no such experience in my case. There was no development of the direct action of the sense mind, but there was another kind of development.

Now, this leads to the implication that the content of a state of Realization is not necessarily identical with the content of a state of Realization of someone else; but rather, that while it has certain features in common, so that one who has had such an imperience has a sympathetic understanding with another who has it, yet there are variables. And because there walked into my consciousness a state which I did not know existed, the possibility was brought to my attention that there may not be any final Realization, but that there may be indeed an ascending series of Realizations, and that from our present perspective we can place no limit upon this series. It may be finite, but also it may be unlimited or infinite. Concerning that, I am unable to say anything.

What I have just reported here as a personal introspective confession is not by any means unique, although I have not found a near duplication in any of the Oriental sources including the ben-Israel group of religious experiences. However, if one studies the mystical forms that were developed by certain outstanding Greeks, one will find the essential parallel. I call your attention to the names of Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, and the Neoplatonists generally. Here the mathematical element is notable. Pythagoras, who perhaps more than any other individual represents the Western spirit in contrast to the Oriental spirit, was in fact in his own right a major mathematician. He was also a mystic and a philosopher. Plato was a mystic by his own confession in his *Seventh Letter*, and he said, "God geometrizes." And the Neoplatonists have typically oriented to a mathematical basis. In fact, Vaughan, in his *Hours with the Mystics*, quotes Novalis, a German mystic, as saying the mathematician is the, ". . . enthusiast *par excellence*."<sup>4</sup> Now, the word 'enthusiast' is taken from a Greek word which means God possessed or God inspired. And I would have you, therefore, note that here we have something that stands in contrast in the strongest way with the forms of yoga which I have called

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Alfred Vaughan, *Hours with the Mystics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 349:

He declares the genuine mathematician the enthusiast *par excellence*—mathematics is the life of the gods—it is religion—it is virtual omniscience. Mathematical books are to be read devoutly, as the word of God.

*aesthetic*. In those forms, there is a considerable use of sensuous derived methods: the use of plastic art; of music; of drama in the form of ritual, ceremony, and rite; of use of visualization, which is of course in sensuous terms; of the use of body, which a sensuously existing entity. All of this plays the part of an aid, which, however, in the contrasting *noetic* yoga is replaced by a corresponding use of mathematics.

Now, if I draw your attention to a certain thesis made by Northrop in his very interesting volume called *The Meeting of East and West*, he has there said that it is typical of the Orient to be oriented to the *aesthetic continuum*—first to the *determinate aesthetic continuum*, and from that reaching to the *indeterminate aesthetic continuum*, which is equivalent to yogic Realization. He contrasted that attitude of the Orient to the Western attitude which he said was an orientation to the *theoretic continuum*, but in the *determinate* form. What I am suggesting is that there is also, though not so well developed, a potential orientation to an *indeterminate aesthetic continuum*,<sup>5</sup> which would be the typically Western *qua* Western form of yoga—as of today not nearly so developed or practiced as the Oriental form, but which carries the potential of equal possibility of development. And it is toward this development that I personally am specifically oriented. In this, mathematics plays a role as an aid analogous to that which aesthetic means plays with respect to the aesthetic form of yoga.

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<sup>5</sup> Wolff clearly meant to say, “. . . indeterminate theoretic continuum . . .”