

Reflections on *Living with the Himalayan Masters*

Part 2 of 2

Franklin Merrell-Wolff

February 1978

Let us now turn to another question, namely, that of the reality of the deity which is referred to frequently in this text, and is assumed, as it is in another book called the *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Here is a very fundamental question, and one of primary importance.

In the history of the religion and of the depth-oriented philosophies there is a basic reference to a fundamental Supreme Principle, or group of principles, that are variously understood and have the most important meaning in either the religion or the depth philosophies. This Supreme Principle is variously understood. In most religions it is regarded as personal, as being a kind of entity. It is known by various names and these we may consider as follows: in the Christian religion it is called *God*, conceived of as personal and as different from the universe; it is thus called theistic, not pantheistic. And the same seems to be true of the other religions that belong to the ben-Israel group. Thus with the Judaic religion, it is known as *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*. With the Moslems, it is known as *Allah*. Departing from this group, it is known in the Zoroastrian religion as *Ahura Mazda*. And, generally, in Hinduism, as far as I know it, it is known as *Brahman* or *Parabrahman*. In Buddhism, one finds different references. In one form or school of Buddhism, it is called *Alaya Vijnana*, which could be translated as Root Consciousness. It is implied in the supreme Buddhist word the *Dharma*, the Good Law. In Buddhism, it is treated, apparently, as essentially an impersonal principle, and properly speaking is not to be regarded as the same as *God*. It is not reducible to the same meaning that the Christian gives to the word *God*. Now, the conception of *Brahman*, as employed by Shankara, is in part a philosophic principle, but he also refers to it, at least as appears in the translations, as He, not simply It or That, which implies a personal element. With Sri Aurobindo, the conception of personality in the Supreme Principle is very evident indeed. He regards it as personal-impersonal, but accentuates the personal aspect; whereas, in many other forms of Indian philosophy, the impersonal aspect is rated as standing above the personal. Now, in both the *Living with the Himalayan Masters* and the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, the primary relationship by the writers was to *Brahman*, but this seems to have been translated in both cases for the Western understanding by the term 'God'.

Now, the question arises, is the meaning implied by the term '*Brahman*' the same as the meaning implied by the term God in the Western world? There is much evidence that the two terms have incommensurable meanings. To be sure, in both cases they are words oriented to the Supreme Principle, but *Brahman* is conceived as something realizable and the philosophic statement is a presentation based upon that Realization. In contrast, the God concept in the West is primarily a theological speculative concept, and there is an important difference between the meanings implied by these two terms. I submit that *Brahman* is not translatable as the Western conception implied by the term

God, and that therefore employing the term God produces a different meaning to the Western reader than the term *Brahman* does to the Eastern devotee or philosopher.

This subject is dealt with in the tenth of *The Mahatma Letters*, a letter written by the one known to us as Koot Hoomi.¹ It is a scathing critique of religion and the God concept. Nonetheless, in that letter it is stated that the concept *Parabrahman* [*Parabrahm*] is totally different in its meaning from the conception of God.² It is affirmed, and to a degree documented, that religion has been the source of two-thirds of the evil in the world, and it is not too difficult to see how a case supporting this position could be built up.³ Consider the conception of blood sacrifice where animals and humans were sacrificed, literally killed in one way or another, sometimes in a way that was simply monstrous as in the case of the Aztec and Mayan human sacrifice, the burning of masses of individuals in the worship of Moloch at Carthage and with the Phoenicians elsewhere, and consider the cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition and other persecutions by the Christians, one could build a strong case to support the conception that evil has been introduced by religion in a peculiarly obnoxious form. But, the author of this letter says that the monastic practices, and the ritualistic practices, and the general discipline of Tibetan Buddhism is not religion. I presume it would be called part of a philosophy. But this implies that the author is using the term ‘religion’ in a narrower sense than I, for one, employ it. I would call the practices of Tibetan Buddhism as religious for the reason that it involves an orientation to the Supreme Principle, for I conceive religion in the

¹ A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 52-59.

² *Ibid.*, 52:

Our doctrine knows no compromises. It either affirms or denies, for it never teaches but that which it knows to be the truth. Therefore, we deny God both as philosophers and as Buddhists. We know there are planetary and other spiritual lives, and we know there is in our system no such thing as God, either personal or impersonal. Parabrahm is not a God, but absolute immutable law, and Iswar is the effect of Avidya and Maya, ignorance based upon the great delusion. The word “God” was invented to designate the unknown cause of those effects which man has either admired or dreaded without understanding them, and since we claim and that we are able to prove what we claim—*i.e.* the knowledge of that cause and causes—we are in a position to maintain there is no God or Gods behind them.

³ *Ibid.*, 57-58:

I will point out the greatest, the chief cause of nearly two thirds of the evils that pursue humanity ever since that cause became a power. It is religion under whatever form and in whatever nation. It is the sacerdotal caste, the priesthood and the churches; it is in those illusions than man looks upon as sacred, that he has to search out the source of that multitude of evils which is the great curse of humanity and that almost overwhelms mankind. Ignorance created Gods and cunning took advantage of the opportunity. Look at India and look at Christendom and Islam, at Judaism and Fetichism, it is priestly imposture that rendered these Gods so terrible to man; it is religion that makes of him the selfish bigot, the fanatic that hates all mankind out of his own sect without rendering him any better or more moral for it. It is belief in God and Gods that makes two-thirds of humanity the slaves of a handful of those who deceive them under the false pretense of saving them. Is not man ever ready to commit any kind of evil if told that his God or Gods demand the crime—voluntary victim of an illusionary God, the abject slave of his crafty ministers?

etymological sense of binding back, namely, a uniting of the diversified individual consciousness with the Supreme Principle however it may be conceived or however it may be in reality. This, thus, is a question of how terms should be employed. I do not quite understand the limitation that Koot Hoomi imposes upon the term 'religion', but the statement there given is a scathing critique. But one fact does appear as reasonably certain, namely, that the authors of the *Autobiography of a Yogi* and the author of the *Living with the Himalayan Masters*, and the author of the "Tenth Letter," all three accept *Brahman*, or *Parabrahman*.

In the "Tenth Letter" the author presents the picture of the theological conception of God which holds generally in Christianity as one of an entity which is infinite and wholly spiritual. The author goes on to say, such a conceived entity is not a possibility as a real existence. In other words, for an entity to exist there must be connected with the spiritual aspects the element of substance or matter in some sense. The substance may be quite subtle so that it would not produce an appearance which is cognizable by the gross physical senses, nonetheless, it would have a kind of material *upadhi*. There are entities affirmed as real in this letter that are very high above the level attained by man. They are there called *Dhyan Chohans*. They are the result of evolutionary development involving the passage through the stage that is human and the graduating from that stage into a higher order of being. It is affirmed that these are governing entities over inner nature, and that they are protectors and guiders of the evolution of man. Clearly if such beings were in any degree sensed by man, they would appear to him as gods. There are, thus, principles in nature recognized by the writer of the "Tenth Letter" that are transcendent with respect to the degree of development represented by humanity, but they are not to be regarded as the Root Source from which all comes. They are guiding powers, continuers in the evolution. For the authors of the *Letters*, the Buddhas and the *Bodhisattvas* are fully recognized as real entities. And note here, the meaning of the *Bodhisattva* is that of one who has renounced the return to *Moksha* or *Nirvana* in order to remain with humanity and guide the human evolution. Thus there is sufficient ground for the experiencing of that which would appear to one as a Transcendental Other; but, neither the Buddhas, the *Bodhisattvas*, or even the *Dhyan Chohans* are the Root Principle underlying the all that is.

As one reviews the religious or depth philosophical orientations that have existed or exist in the world, one finds that the interpretation of the Root Principle varies quite widely. There is, for instance, first the theistic idea, namely, that the Root Principle is a divine being that stands apart from the cosmos, from all the existence that is apparent to us here, but is the cause of its existence. It is the conception of an extra-cosmic God, and this seems to be characteristic of the ben-Israel orientations generally. Second, there is the view that the divinity is coextensive with the whole cosmos, not something apart from the cosmos, but identical with the cosmos itself. The author of the "Tenth Letter" noted this point of view, which is one presented by Spinoza in his *Ethics*, and said it was a tolerable position, but nonetheless not adequate. There is, third, the view known as panentheism, the idea that the divinity is not merely coextensive with the universe, but also stands apart from it. It is represented in the statement found in the *Bhagavad Gita* to this effect, where Krishna says, "I produce this universe from an infinitesimal part of

myself and yet remain apart.”⁴ And finally, there is the position that seems to be the standpoint of Buddhism, that the ultimate is definitely *nontheistic*; and connected with this is the position known as *Anatman*, namely, that the ultimate is not to be viewed as either a self or a god.

Is an integration of these religious and philosophical orientations possible? In a conversation with Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, he pointed out to me that the effort of Sufism was to bring about a sort of integration between the different religious orientations, that this intermarriage of the religions had been carried out to a point, that it had more or less integrated the points of view of Moslemism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Southern Buddhism. He told me that so far the integration had not included the Northern or Mahayana form of Buddhism. I know that in a certain sense this effort has been successful, but, so far as I can see, not completely so. It may be said to have made progress in an integration of the religious feeling, but has not, in my opinion, succeeded in bringing about a philosophic integration. There are real difficulties here, and while the effort is to be praised—and that it has been attempted by others such as J. William Lloyd in his *Dawn Thought*⁵—because such integration would tend to eliminate religious conflict involving many grievous wars, nonetheless, the difficulties involved in the integration of some of these conceptions are so great that I doubt that they can ever be achieved in any philosophy. It would appear that there are errors here, real errors. However, in my experience a degree of integration has been possible as between the position of Shankara and that of Buddhism.

As one reads the philosophy of Shankara he finds two references to *Brahman* in which a statement of its nature is indicated: one is, “*Brahman*, the One without a second,” and the second is, “*Brahman*, whose nature is bliss.” In my initial orientation to the latter statement, I interpreted it as meaning that the Realization of *Brahman* is bliss. But if one studies more deeply into this statement, he notes the fact that the statement is, “whose nature is bliss.” In other words, whose *Shakti* is bliss. Now, the experience of this bliss is rather overpowering and one is inclined to view it as an ultimate state, but reflection upon the word ‘nature’ or ‘*Shakti*’ gives us another meaning, namely, that when one has reached this stage of inconceivable bliss, he has not reached the ultimate. No doubt it is a state in which one can persist and that one can withdraw into it, but it would seem that this is less than full identification with *Brahman*.

In support of this point, I direct your attention to the doctrine of the *Koshas* by Patanjali. It is said that there are five *Koshas*: corresponding to the gross body, the *Pranamaya Kosha* or the vital body; the *Manomaya Kosha* or the sense mind sheath; the *Buddhimaya Kosha* or the intellectual mind sheath; and finally the *Anandamaya Kosha*. The state of bliss, thus, is referred to as a sheath and the word *maya* appears in it. *Maya* implies a kind of illusion or a representation of the mother principle in nature, in the universe. Does it not suggest that when one attains this inconceivable bliss, he has not

⁴ *The Bhagavad-Gita (The Book of Devotion) Dialogue between Krishna, Lord of Devotion, and Arjuna, Prince of India* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1947), 76: “I established this whole universe with a single portion of myself, and remain separate.”

⁵ J. William Lloyd, *Dawn-Thought, On the Reconciliation: A Volume of Pantheistic Impressions and Glimpses of Larger Religion* (Wellesley Hills, Mass.: Maugus Press, 1900).

achieved the final step? But he has achieved a state of a most desirable sort, and of a sort that could be intriguing to such a degree that he fails to go on to the end.

I suggest to the hearer that he turn to the third section of *The Voice of the Silence*, the section called “The Seven Portals” and read it thoughtfully. In this there is a great emphasis of the need to renounce the attained state of bliss in order that he may serve in the redemption of all creatures, namely, renounce the bliss which flows, as it there says, from *Sumeru*, to renounce it as a private enjoyment and instead make of himself a channel whereby it may flow out for the benefit of all creatures.⁶ In other words, here we learn of a second class of renunciants. The first class of renunciants were those who renounced the world, and who, as a result of that renunciation and appropriate effort, attained the state of inconceivable bliss; and what he attains here renders the renunciation that he has made a matter of small moment. He finds that he has only renounced a liability and attained a supreme value. But the second renunciation calls for the foregoing of a personal individual enjoyment of that supreme value so that he may bring it to the experience of all creatures, the end being envisaged not simply as the redemption of single individuals, but the ultimate redemption of all creatures. This is an exceedingly difficult renunciation to effect, for it seems to be the foregoing of the supreme treasure, but the step is possible.

Now, he who takes this step may find that the statement in this third section of *The Voice of the Silence* to the effect that he foregoes the supreme treasure for unnumbered *kalpas* is but a blind; and he may come unto a far greater Realization. But this Realization is not one of inconceivable bliss, it is rather one of a neutral state lying between the pairs of opposites which consist of bliss on one side and the pain of the *sangsaric* existence upon the other with the capacity to move either way. This then would be in conformity with the statement of certain Buddhist *sutras* to the effect that it is possible to attain the non-fixed *Nirvana*, a state in which there is not the withdrawal from the universe of objects, or the evolution, or the *Sangsara*, into a shut-in *Nirvana*, but a state in which one may move either way and may bring something of that supernal delight to the starving multitudes.

Now, what I am suggesting is that the Realization of this neutral state is the authentic Realization of *Brahman* rather than of *the nature of Brahman*, and at this point

⁶ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (Pasadena, Calif.: Theosophical University Press, 1946), 66-67:

Would'st thou thus dam the waters born on Sumeru? Shalt thou divert the stream for thine own sake, or send it back to its prime source along the crests of cycles?

If thou would'st have that stream of hard-earn'd knowledge, of Wisdom heaven-born, remain sweet running waters, thou should'st not leave it to become a stagnant pond.

Know, if of Amitabha, the “Boundless Age”, thou would'st become co-worker, then must thou shed the light acquired, like to the Bodhisattvas twain, upon the span of all three worlds.

Know that the stream of superhuman knowledge and the Deva-Wisdom thou hast won, must, from thyself, the channel of Alaya be poured forth into another bed.

Know, O Narjol, thou of the Secret Path, its pure fresh waters must be used to sweeter make the Ocean's bitter waves—that mighty sea of sorrow formed of the tears of men.

Brahman becomes identical with the *Alaya Vijnana* of the Buddhists and we have an integration of Vedanta with Buddhism.

Let us now consider the logic of this position. The non-dualistic position has been at times regarded as, in effect, a swallowing up of the negative pole in the pairs of opposites by the positive pole. This has been done in different ways: one is, for instance, to call evil as a kind of good, as for instance in the words of J. William Lloyd that, “Evil is good, but good is better.”⁷ This is a one-sided position. It is a kind of denial of the reality of the despised member of the pairs of opposites and the assertion that the preferred member is all that there truly is. Or it may take the form of simple denial, that the negative aspect of the pairs of opposites is a non-existence and that the positive pair is the only existence, namely, that good in one form or another is all that there is and the evil or non-good is simply non-existent. This is not really logical. The truth of the matter is that the negative members of the pairs of opposites have equal reality with the positive members of the pairs of opposites. The non-dualistic position is one that is neutral with respect to these pairs. It is not more oriented to the north, for instance, than it is to the south, but rather to that position which is neutral with respect to these two. This applies throughout all pairs of opposites, not alone to those pairs of opposites with respect to which we have no strong feeling. It is just as true that evil exists as well as good as to say that north exists as well as south, or that delight exists as well as pain. Both members of every pair of opposites have equal reality value. This is a statement of the law of equilibrium—the most fundamental aspect of the law.

The neutral position is, thus, the position that has truly transcended the pairs of opposites. It is the state in which there is neither good or evil, neither delight or pain, neither north or south, or any other pair of opposites. It is thus true that the truly non-dual position has no distinctive character that falls within the conception of the pairs of opposites, but is the blend, as it were, of every pair. We may call it the zero state, and represent those qualities which we call positive as extending on one side of this neutral state and the negative upon the other. The neutral state includes both, as it were, in a veiled way. And we may illustrate how this veiled representation can be made explicit. The reciprocal of zero is infinity, thus, one who stands in the neutral state which is realized as a zero state can, through an enantiodromia, realize the infinite. The step here may be presented in mathematical terms by interpreting the enantiodromia as a process of reciprocation. Here I enter a footnote. By the word reciprocation I mean taking the reciprocal of any entity. In general terms, if we consider a number n , the reciprocal is $1/n$. Thus the reciprocal of zero is $1/0$, which equals infinity. The state of zero, thus, represents the state of all-inclusion, though in a hidden way. It is the state of ultimate balance, and this gives a very logical representation of the whole process. What this all implies is that the state of inconceivable delight is not the ultimate goal. It is no more than the penultimate goal. Beyond that lies the state of—*that is truly neutral between the pairs of opposites, a state which is that of neither pain nor bliss, but implies the capacity to move either way.*

One question that arises in my mind is this: to what extent are those who withdraw from the world to devote their time to a *samadhi*-oriented meditation devoted

⁷ Lloyd, *Dawn-Thought*, 30: “Evil is good, but the good is better.”

to a kind of spiritual hedonism, a living in a state of supernal enjoyment as an end in itself? And to what extent do they take this step as part of a preparation for a larger life in the service of the human whole, or even a service aiming at the good of all creatures? Those who take this course as an end in itself would be classified in Buddhism as the *Pratyeka* Buddhas, and the others who view it simply as a step for the reaching out to the good of the whole would be classified as the Buddhas of Compassion.

I know that it is possible for a human being to have a Realization, either breaking forth spontaneously or as the result of the employment of the appropriate means for the individual, that involves an experience, or rather “imperience,” of a transcendental Other that will prove to be for him the greatest of all possible Realizations.⁸ But what is the nature of this Other and the nature of this experience or imperience? In its raw immediacy, it describes a relationship of the utmost value. It may involve the meeting with an Other with respect to which he gives the highest possible valuation, and will himself experience of being himself valued by That; that it will induce in him not only an experience of a vast delight, but also a profound assurance that all is well, a sense that takes from him all concern about his own mortality, and involves the sense of great preciousness, of moving upon sacred ground. And here he has assurance transcending any assurance that may be attained in outer life, even that which comes from mathematical proof—and of all the certainties which we know in this world below there is no certainty greater than that of mathematical proof. Thus, for instance, I know that e raised to the πi power equals -1 because I have gone through the proof and understood it, and I know it with far greater certainty than I know concerning the certainty of any judgment based upon a sensuous presentation; but, nonetheless, this higher assurance transcends that of mathematical proof. But this is true unequivocally so long as I speak

⁸ See the audio recording “On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement” for a definition of ‘imperience’:

At the time when I was in Harvard, I had aimed at an academic career in the field of philosophy and everything was moving favorably in that direction. But this question became so important that it resulted in my abandonment of that plan and started a search for this possible third organ of cognition. That was, in effect, the yogic search. It resulted in 24 years of groping; but ultimately I found the aids that were necessary and there was a successful outcome on August 7, 1936. The answer to my satisfaction was that there is at least a third organ of cognition that is not reducible to sense perception and conceptual cognition. I invented a name for this third organ calling it *introception*. And another word, which was contributed by someone else, applies to this: that the content from this source is akin to experience in the sense that it is immediate, but is not experience such as comes through the senses, therefore, the term is offered of *imperience*. 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. It is not conceptual, in the sense that it is not a logically determined form of cognition, but an immediate form. Logically determined cognitions belong to the field known as mediate knowledge—all of mathematics, all of science, all of that which belongs to our common discourse, all of philosophic formulation is in conceptual terms and is therefore mediate knowledge which has the great advantage that it is communicable; whereas, the immediate knowledge of experience or sense perception, in its immediacy, is not communicable, and the same is true of the introceptual knowledge, or imperience, that being immediate it is not directly communicable.

not and do not attempt to interpret what I have realized. One knows that all is well behind the veil of outer appearance.

Now, when one speaks or interprets, he finds that nothing that can be represented either by symbol or by word can exactly represent the experience itself. The unequivocal assurance applies to the experience. It does not apply to the interpretation of the experience. One also recognizes that there are other individuals in the world, both Eastern and Western, who have in greater or lesser degree had similar imperiences, although the interpretation that comes forth varies in many respects. It is evident that if one has been nurtured on a given religious orientation or on the basis of a certain philosophic development, he will tend to interpret in those terms. This means that the external interpretation is not an unequivocal true representation of the inner Realization. The purity of the Realization is contaminated the moment one speaks.

Is this transcendental Other *God, Yahweh, Allah, Ahura Mazda, Brahman*, or the *Alaya Vijnana*? The answer which the realizer tends to give appears to be conditioned by his earlier religious or philosophic training. If we take the term 'God', in the psychological sense as meaning simply the Supreme Value, yes, it is that; but the Realization in its purity, uncontaminated, does not vindicate a theological or philosophical definition as may have existed in the consciousness of the realizer previously.

Maurice Bucke, in his *Cosmic Consciousness*, presented a study of this imperience and seemed to find a number of features that were held more or less in common with all human instances of the Realization. Among these was one involving a sense of immortality. Now, this could be interpreted in a way that is entirely valid and also in a way that is not justified. I know that the worry or concern about mortality vanishes, that there is assurance of transcendence of that mortality, but it rests in the fact that one finds himself identical with Consciousness that *contains* time rather than being *conditioned* by time. Now, this is not true of our ordinary empiric consciousness that exists in the embodied form in this objective world. This consciousness is conditioned by time. Therefore, that deep imperience does not justify the conclusion that the restricted empiric consciousness of the embodied individual exists through eternity. It simply means that the transcendent Consciousness with which the realizer finds himself identical and which contains time is unconditioned by time. The empiric manifestation with which the entity is identified could be quite mortal in its limitations as that empiric entity. But, that becomes during the state of Realization a very small matter. It might well be that one could extend that empiric consciousness for a much greater time than the span of a normal life, but there is no assurance of an immortality for it. The immortality, or the transcendence of mortality, applies to the Consciousness which contains time. And here one could produce a misinterpretation of the assurance which is realized in the luminous state.

What one knows unequivocally from the Realization is that all is well within, but the struggle on this outer plane of life is real. There are problems here which may be resolved and which may fail to be resolved. There are issues in which one may be a winner, but also may know defeat. But despite all this, within is the unbreakable security of eternity.