

ADVAITIC PREFACE

“Like the worms in the cow dung, men, the moment the dung dries, are finished, however much progress they have made” (Sri Nisargadatta, *Seeds of Consciousness*, p. 67).

Why an Advaitic preface? Given that this work deals with the history of meditation methods, it seems appropriate to start with the Advaita Vedanta, for it is considered as one of the most ancient manifestations that, however, still keep their purity and vitality.

In this introduction, it is not intended to present a history of metaphysics in India in general¹, nor even one of its most complete, deep and effective creations, the Advaita Vedanta (ad-vaita= non-dual). Instead, some reflections on some texts of ancient masters like Sri Sankaracharya or contemporary representatives like Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj will rather be made.

Advaita Vedanta is neither a philosophy, nor a religion, nor a mixture of both; it is a metaphysical doctrine². Veda comes from *vid-*

¹ As an approach to Indian metaphysics, the work by René Guénon is still an obligatory reference: *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Hillsdale (NY), 2001; *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedanta*, Hillsdale (NY), 2001. It is useful as well: H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, London, 1952; and Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, Princeton, 2009.

² Several classic works have been used, like *Ribhu Gita*, Madrid, 2007 [English version, *The Song of Ribhu*, Santa Cruz (CA), 2000]; other works by ancient Advaita masters like the ones by Sri Sankaracharya, for example, *Dieciocho Tratados Advaita*, Madrid, 2011 (from now on, it will be referred to as Sri Sankaracharya, *18TA*) or by contemporary masters like Sri Ramana Maharshi, *Be as you are*, New York, 1985, (referred to as *BYA*); *Conversaciones con Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2 vols., Madrid, 2006 (referred to as *CRMI* and *CRMII*); Sri Nisargadatta, *Prior to Consciousness* (referred to as *PC*), *Seeds of Consciousness* (referred to as *SC*), Durham (NC), 1990; *I am That* (referred to as *IAT*), Durham (NC), 2012, *Yo*

“to see” (like *videre* in Latin) or “to know”, from where *vidyā* (knowledge, being *Vedanta* the end of knowledge) is derived, since such a knowledge consists in an “inner vision” of the oneness of the Being or, if preferred, of the non-duality of the Absolute that ends with the quest for knowledge. According to this, human individuality is but one state of the Being, out of an indefinite number of states, the addition of which does not equals the whole Being, since those states of existence an *illusory reflection* superimposed onto the Being. Only the Being is, whereas the states exist (*ex-stare*), that is, they are supported or vivified by the Being, which is the Only real one. The Only one is the One without a second, being the second a mere mirage. That said, the non-duality of the Absolute does not mean that we do not exist, but, more strictly, that we are not like we think we are. What really are we?

The Advaitin teaches that, when someone starts his quest for transcendental knowledge, he must examine the real purposes that lead him to it, in order to relinquish, if necessary, those prejudices or preconceived ideas that prove to be a real burden. One of the most common prejudices lies in believing that the metaphysical Way will grant advantages such as enlightenment, peace, powers, someone else’s recognition, knowledge (even though about himself), etc. to the seeker. In sum, he is seeking for something that comes from outside and may provide him with satisfactory experiences. Another common mistake takes place when someone falls victim to his own mirages. For example, from the moment when someone considers himself as a spiritual candidate or seeker (*sādhaka*), or even a comprehensor, he starts to indulge in autosuggestion, imposing and superimposing on others a particular conceptual image or model; “I must adopt this pose”, “I must not eat this”, “I must look like this”,

no sabía, Madrid, 2011; Michael James, *Happiness and the Art of Being*, 2012 (referred to as *HAB*); David Carse, *Perfecta brillante quietud, más allá del yo individual*, Madrid, 2009 [original English version: *Perfect brilliant stillness, beyond the individual self*, Saline (MI), 2006] (referred to as *PBQ*) and other texts that will be opportunely quoted.

“this is bad”, “this is good” and, in conclusion, “this is ignorant”, “I am the only one who is on the right path”, “I have the knowledge”. And so he lives on, strangled by the concepts he himself has created. Other of the most widespread mistakes is *voluntarism*. A voluntarist believes that “liberation” is the result of applying a specific method based on ascetic, devotional, meditative practices and intricate methods of pure lineages that will facilitate him to make his desires come true. Thus, for example, he will learn to control his breath and take it to some point of his body in order to briefly enter *Samādhi* and reach the certainty of being a fulfilled man. However, those who practice these or other techniques to go inside and outside of *Samādhi* or any other supraindividual state rarely understand that this is not the aim of the quest, and that such a temporary state does not necessarily involve true knowledge.

What is true knowledge? For the Advaitin, dual knowledge produces ignorance and suffering, whereas non-dual knowledge, which could strictly be considered as non-knowledge, is the only reliable one. An ancient Advaitic text explains that, since the world of knowledge is endless, it cannot provide true wisdom by itself because all knowledge implies duality, that is, a separation between knower and known; “If there is bondage, there is liberation; in the absence of bondage, there is no liberation. If there is death, there is birth; in the absence of birth, there is no death either. If there is ‘you’, there is ‘I’; if there is no ‘you’, there is no ‘I’. If there is ‘this’, there is ‘that’; in the absence of ‘that’, there is no ‘this’ either. If ‘it is there’ implies something not being there; ‘it is not there’ implies something being there. If there is an effect, there is some cause; in the absence of effect, there is no cause. If there is duality, there is [a concept of] non-duality; in the absence of duality, there is no [concept of] non-duality either. If there is something to be seen, a seer is also there; in the absence of anything to see, there is no seer at all either” (*Ribhu Gita*, p. 22). Reality is neither subjective nor objective, neither mind nor material, neither time nor space.

However, even though all these divisions are only creations of the human mind, it is true that there must be *something* or *somebody* that is here to witness them and that is not part of the mirage. To become aware of the problem is the first step to go out of the problem; “Just as the perceiver of a pot is ever distinctly different from the pot and can never be the pot, so too, you, the perceiver of your body, are distinct from your body and can never be the body... Similarly, be sure in yourself that you, the seer of the senses, are not the senses themselves, and ascertain that you are neither the mind, not the intellect, not the vital air” (Sri Sankaracharya, *18TA*, p. 73-76).

The paradox is that, though the metaphysical seeking lies in getting rid of *Māyā* (etymologically, “what is not”), the desire to escape from it is *Māyā* itself. If one understands that he is living a dream called “wakefulness” or “world” and that the quest is part of that dream, then he stops looking for exits or, at least, he stops his anxiety to seek. The idea itself of going beyond the dream is illusory because it is part of the dream. Sri Nisargadatta stated that the problem is not to be aware that one is dreaming, but to like some parts of the dream and reject others... We insist on resisting and fighting those parts of the dream and we even start a crusade to improve this dream we call world without considering that, maybe, the universe is not what needs to be improved, but only our way to look at it (*PC*, p. 3). If the knowledge about all we see is as false as a mirage (*Māyā*), for duality is both its cause and its consequence, it is deduced that true knowledge is the non-dual one, that is, the knowledge about the Self. This self-knowledge has a special flavor and scent that make it different from other supposed forms of indirect or mediate knowledge, since it is not based on the usual, dependent paradigm of a knower (mind), a known object and the action of knowing (thought). On the contrary, non-dual knowledge is direct and immediate because, since the subject is its object of knowledge, it disregards the thought in order to place itself in another domain of the Being. Some call it *Nous*,

others pure intellect, others attention or self-consciousness, others “I am”... *Be that as it may, it is a state, as superior or transcendental as one may want, but, after all, another state.* At this point, once again, it is to be noted the panic, not to say horror, that the Western seeker feels when he hears talking about overtaking, sublimating or “annihilating” the mind. He is so identified with his mind and its thoughts that it seems to him extraordinarily difficult to understand that it may be just one tool among others. He generally considers spiritual progress to be something like mind strengthening and the development of his parapsychological and mental powers. In line with this mistake, he embarks on a frantic race to hoard readings and experiences about the “transcendental”, which may provide him with enough intellectual “authority”.

Against this kind of widespread attitudes of seeking for knowledge, the fiercest self-criticism is to be recommended. Firstly, it must be found out whether what is sought is a knowledge that, being acceptable for the mind, may be an object of appropriation and exhibition before others, so that they may recognize his superiority. In that case, he must understand that that kind of knowledge consists in no more than repeating what has previously been read or heard, and that mere erudition will only fill his mind with countless concepts that will reinforce his vanity. On the contrary, the metaphysical way it is not about *knowing*, but about *being*, it is not about strengthening the mind, but about transcending it so that it may not block another instrument that is considered to be superior: consciousness. It must be highlighted that, for the Advaitin, erudition itself does not affect the metaphysical Way if it is at the service of the quest for the Truth. This does not happen if it leads to the desire to be admired, if it feeds the mirage of duality, that is, the fact of supposing that there is “someone”, an individual identity, who “knows” and others who “do not know”.

Therefore, the progress through the Advaitic Way does not lie in hoarding knowledge and experiences, but in relinquishing or detaching oneself from everything that is considered to be a foreign attachment to the true nature of the Being (Spirit, Self, *Ātman*). Moreover, it is to be warned that, according to Advaita Vedanta, the organism we usually think we are, that is, the body-mind, is not but a brief, temporary attachment that is not the Self. Each body-mind organism has some latent conditionings that must be known, redirected and finally sublimated. In India, *such conditionings* or psychomental latencies are denominated *samskāras* or *vāsanās*, “impregnations” or “residues” that, like we would nowadays say, find their origin in the “genetic memory” and the cultural environment. As long as our *vāsanās* or latent desires are not weakened, the body-mind organism will go on wandering unfocused. If it is about the rider (our real nature) *breaking in* the horse (*vāsanās* of our body-mind) so that it may help him quickly reach his destination, what does breaking-in consist in? One thing seems clear; it does not consist in compelling or forcing anything. In India, the usual example given to illustrate this is the cow that escapes from the cowshed and goes grazing on the surrounding fields. If it is forced to stay at the cowshed, it will escape again, but if it is fed with good grass, it can finally be left free since it will only want to graze the fodder of the cowshed. Likewise, the mind that is used to paying attention to the external objects due to the force of the latent *vāsanās* that reveal themselves as thoughts, if adequately educated, will finally stop paying attention to *Māyā* and will focus on the Self.

I.- I AM NOT THE BODY

Where was “I” before being born? Where will “I” be in a hundred years? “That”, which remains unchanged and beyond the space-time conditions and beyond shape (the body) and individual names, is “I” (that is, “I” without “me”).

It is usually said that we are neither the body, nor the mind, nor the feelings, nor the desires, etc., but that reflection-negation (*neti, neti*) is all the same a conceptual process. Indeed, there is nothing bad in the idea “I am the body”, as long as it is understood that we are not only a body (or a mind) that has a name and was born in a certain date. It is simply to be understood that the one who erroneously takes this body as “me” is the mind, because “I” is an all-embracing, transcendental (transmental or supramental) reality that encompasses not only “me”, but also “you” and “it”, that is, All (and thus it is also Nothing).

The Advaitin usually answers the question “who am I?” with the metaphor of the bowl with water that is given back to the lake, or the one of the stream that flows back into the sea. Can anyone distinguish the water from the different rivers that flow into the sea? Likewise, how to distinguish that particle of “individual” consciousness that “me” consists of when it immerses itself in the total consciousness, which is “I” or “That”? Moreover, there is no difference between the water of the sea, the water of the lake, the water of the river or the tap water after all. All of them are water that carries salts and other mineral components or additions depending on the places it flows through. Therefore, as well as water has no separate parts, to think that one is separate from the Essential Source is but an ambition created by the ego.

For the Advaitin, the individual consciousness, considered as the sense “I am an individual or a soul imprisoned within the limits of a body”, is a distorted form of the pure awareness “I am” that aspires to prolong the “desire to be *someone*; someone separate, someone special; someone with his or her own story. The dream character is completely caught in this spinning of a personal web, building and maintaining the personal story, driven by that unknown, unexamined

wanting to assert and continually reconfirm the individual *self*" (David Carse, *PBQ*, p. 101).

In sum, for the Advaitin, it is not the individual who is conscious, but the Consciousness that takes countless shapes. However, we are so accustomed to consider ourselves as conscious bodies, that we may not conceive that it is the Consciousness that supports the bodies.

II.- I AM NOT THE MIND

It is stated, "Mind only is itself the pollution, always. Mind itself is marvelous magic. Mind itself is the great illusion. Mind is like the son of a barren woman. Mind itself is thought, and mind itself is egoity" (*Ribhu Gita*, p. 59). A paradox is found here again: although the Advaitin distrusts knowledge, he however states that it is the knowledge itself that can help us flee from the labyrinth of concepts, so that we may find out what or who we really are. Indeed, the mind is necessary for the daily life, but to try to understand metaphysics by means of concepts is like to try to find the horns of a hare: "The organs of knowledge, the senses, the group of organs of action, waking, dream, deep sleep, and any other such state are all like the horns of a hare. All bondage, all 'liberation', God, all time, and all instruction are all like the horns of a hare" (*Ribhu Gita*, p. 51). The seeker recreates so transcendental concepts such as God, karma, reincarnation, salvation, and thus he feels compelled to hold them, defend them and even impose them on someone else, living anxious to perpetuate them. Nonetheless, as the world (our world) is a mere projection of our thoughts, the question would rather be how to save such a world from ourselves. The main step lies in experimentally verifying that the mind is nothing but the thought "I", that is, that the mind and the ego are the same; "The mind is a bundle of thoughts. The thoughts arise because there is the thinker. The thinker is the ego.

The ego, if sought, will automatically vanish. The ego is the root-thought from which all other thoughts arise” (Sri Ramana Maharshi, *CRMI*, p. 442). At this point, one may wonder; what is above the mind? Or, using the Advaitic language, who observes the mind? Who witnesses the thoughts? Doubtlessly, the consciousness.

III.- BUT I AM NOT CONSCIOUSNESS

One of the most transcendental contributions of Indian mysticism is the *experience* of the consciousness-witness, that is, the consciousness free of psycho-mental and physical attachments and from their individual genetic and cultural conditionings. Whereas the consciousness is involved in the thoughts, the mind seems to have its own autonomy, but when we stop paying attention to all the thoughts, we just find out that the mind is not our ultimate reality: there is life beyond the mind. We all experience the fact of thinking; we can even witness thinking, that is, be aware that we are thinking. But we can go one step further *when we are aware that we are aware*. In that moment, a loop occurs that stops the mental flow and makes us remain in a state of self-consciousness or *pure awareness*. There are no thoughts or, should any remain, it is seen with an absolute disregard and neutrality. But we immediately realize as well our inability to remain stable in such a state, because thoughts require our attention. Well, that state of individual consciousness “it is me”, free from thoughts, is what, in religious terminology, is defined as “soul” and constitutes the door or preliminary toward the state of universal³ and unlimited consciousness “I am”, which is defined as “spirit”, “heart”, “the center of the soul” or “God”. And it is called God because such a consciousness “I am” is the original source where duality arises from, that is, God-world, Creator-Creation.

³ It is to be warned that universal consciousness is not collective consciousness. Whereas the former is the homogeneous, partless source, the latter, which is a creation of modern psychology, would imply an addition of parts that still keep their individuality.

This fact explains that the name of the god Brahmā comes from *brahm-aham*, literally “I am”. Thus, the *mahāvākya* or “great saying” “I am *Brahman*” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10) precisely means, “I am I am”. This coincides with the secret name of God that appears revealed to Moses in Ex. 3:14: “I AM THAT I AM” (*EHYEH ASHER EHYEH*), whose importance can be inferred from the fact that it is the only one time when a name of God appears in the Bible written in capital letters, in Latin script languages, including English. Moreover, in the Gospel of Saint John and other passages of the Bible, it is said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn. 8:58), placing that “I am” at the end of the sentence in order to stress the meaning of “I am” intended by Jesus. Well then, this “I am” is not a thought; “I am” does not consist in thinking of “I am”.

That is why it is convenient to distinguish between the “I” as a pure Self, and the thought “I am”. One thing is to *experience* the self-consciousness or “I am” and another thing is to think “*I am*”. Up to a certain extent, they are two incompatible situations, since the self-consciousness “I am” overtakes or transcends the thought. In sum, the consciousness “I am” is not a thought, but a state from where the thoughts are observed.

IV.- THE “I AM” AS A WITNESS OR THE PARADOX OF THE METHOD

How to stop being the rat in the labyrinth? How to gain access into the heart (*hṛdaya*)? *Chāndogya Upanishad* (3.14.3) explains that the Being, the *Brahma* Awareness, is in the vital center of the human being, which is symbolically located in the smallest ventricle (*guhā*) of the heart (*hṛdaya*), though its true location does not depend on spatial conditions. Therefore, it is explained that *Ātman*, when adopting the domain of the individual existence, is *Jīvātma* (*jīva*=life, that is, the life of *Ātman*) and that it is subtler or “smaller” than a mustard

grain. But that small grain is bigger than the earth (domain of subtle manifestation), bigger than the sky (domain of informal manifestation) and bigger than all these worlds together (beyond all manifestation, since it is unconditioned).

Nonetheless, the universal Consciousness is apparently identified with an individual body, so that, as long as this identification remains, we will only think about doing good to that pseudo-personality. It is initially enough to understand, even though just intellectually, that one is neither in the body nor in the mind, yet present at both them, and that, therefore, as the individual consciousness is a false or illusory consciousness, by paying “attention” to that form of individual, limited consciousness that we feel to be “I”, we will end up finding that it is but a distorted reflection of the real, unlimited consciousness “I am”, which is God. Thus, once understood that all we see is just the performance of the universal Consciousness and that there can never be any individual entity, the problems of liberation, birth or death, and even the one of the doer who does something, disappear (Sri Nisargadatta, *PC*, p. 152). In fact, the mere intellectual understanding implies that one is already beyond. To accept that it all is a concept implies that the mere conceptual level has been overcome. However, we must not stop there, since the certainty is just a mental state. “That” is beyond the mind.

The Advaitin insists that the methods to stimulate or improve the concentration on the “I-am-ness” *are not directed to achieve anything*. Therefore, those approaches that urge us to broaden our “consciousness focus” or to grow spiritually, and that convert the *Ātman* into a mobile object under all kind of conditionings must be avoided, since they are false. Firstly, the Advaitin insists on something evident: we are not more or less Being or “spirit”, because *That* is not acquired; *we already are*.

In that case, what is meditative practice for? Advaita masters agree that no method can lead us to the truth or to the Self. At the most, the method may contribute to discipline the mind for a certain period. Sri Ramana taught that the realization of the Self does not admit a progress because, if it were something to be gained in the future, it would have the same possibility to be lost. The true aim of the practice is not then to make us be aware of the Being we already are, but to unmask who we are not, to *empty* or *relinquish* our genetic and cultural attachments (*vāsanās*). The paradox of all this is that the practice itself is no longer part of the “I am” and may become another bonding or *vāsanā*. That is why it is said that the practice can produce athletes or champions of bliss blinded because of their spiritual pride. And that is also why it is said that the aim of the practice finally lies in giving up and accepting that no effort gets you closer to That and thus that practice only works in the field of duality, which is the field of the “I am”.

Indeed, one of the most important certainties that arise after a restless meditative practice is to come to understand who is the one who seeks and what is sought. Quoting David Carse, “struggling is instinctive, and we think it helps, but actually it is itself the problem. The struggling, the seeking, is the sense of individual self trying to keep telling its story. There is nothing to seek. Separation is the illusion; there is nothing to be separate, nothing. There is only One, not-two, and That Is. All else is not” (*PBQ*, p. 110).

Therefore, up to which extent is not our seeking motivated by the need to experience supposed superior states of consciousness? Up to which extent does the practice of rituals, meditations, prayers... try to feed the ego? Real liberation starts by *accepting* that, as an individual, we are nothing and that, hence, the point of view of an individual doer is a mere suggestion or a mirage that continuously recreates the events of life, giving them an imaginary causality. The con-

clusion is that no effort leads to realization... though it does help to quiet the mind.

V.- GOAL OF THE MEDITATIVE PRACTICE

There are different methods and techniques proposing the *non-duality experience*, but they all agree in the need to quiet the mind and detach ourselves from the thoughts, so that the reality that lies beyond them may become evident.

The main method to experience the non-duality is meditation. Like Sri Nisargadatta said, “Meditation is a deliberate attempt to pierce into the higher states of consciousness and finally go beyond it” (*IAT*, p. 305). Advaita Vedanta prevents the seeker to worship meditation methods excessively. What should be an aid or prop for the beginner might become an unbeatable burden. When meditation is practiced, it is advisable to wonder, who meditates? The Self, the I, *Ātman*, does not need to meditate; it is the unsettled mind that embarks on that activity looking for emotions. Indeed, meditation helps the “unaware” layers of our psyche arise, accept and get over old memories and repressed frustrations providing a certain relief, preparing the basis to practice self-inquiry (Nisargadatta, *IAT*, p. 385). To understand these essential rules of game (*Līlā*) of *Māyā* helps us not keep false expectations when the desired results are not achieved.

Among the diverse ways to improve our attention, one of the easiest ones is the concentration on only one object. The aim of the meditator is to put his thoughts away and widen the space-time of his self-consciousness by means of sustained attention. However, since sustaining the attention is as difficult as trying to stop the smoke from an incense stick, the Indian thousands-year-old experience has developed certain techniques to improve the ability to sustain the attention on oneself; fasting (*yama*), body discipline (*āsana*), breath

rhythm (*prāṇāyāma*), sensory inhibition (*pratyāhāra*), concentration (*dharmā*, from the root *dhr*, “to keep tight”, meaning “focusing the thoughts on only one point” (*Yogasūtra*⁴ III, 1)), etc. Therefore, for example, the concentration on an only object (*ekāgratā*), either a physical object (the space between our eyebrows, the tip of our nose, a light source, etc.), or a thought (a metaphysical truth or a verse from a sacred text), or even God, has the goal to momentarily inhibit the activity of the senses (*indriya*), the activity of sub-consciousness (*saṃskāra*) and the activity of thoughts. By concentrating on or support only one thought, we facilitate the dispelling of the rest of the thoughts and, little by little, the mind becomes more attentive. Likewise, by means of the breath discipline or *prāṇāyāma*, the profane man stops breathing in an arrhythmic way and concentrates on a particular rhythm with notable psycho-mental effects (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad*, for example, 1.5.23)⁵. Similarly, the unceasing repetition of the name of God or sacred words (*mantra-japa*), for instance, AUM (*Maitrī Upanishad* 6.5 and 23), helps us control our mind, mainly if practiced with devotion and certainty. The four *mahāvākyas* or “great sayings”, contained in each one of the four Vedas, are especially worshiped in India. Rig-Veda *mahāvākya* is “*prajñānam brahma*”, that is, “pure awareness is *Brahman*” (*Aitareya Upanishad* 3.3); Yajur-Veda one is “*aham brahmāsmi*”, which means “I am *Brahman*” (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* 1.4.10); Sāma-Veda one is “*tat tvam asi*”, which means “you are that [*Brahman*]” (*Chāndogya Upanishad* 6.8.7), and Atharva-Veda one is “*ayam ātmā brahma*”, which means “this self is *Brahman*” (*Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* 2). On the other hand, with this and other techniques, many *sādhakas* expect to activate the *kuṇḍalinī*, the *chakras*, etc. in order to acquire powers or some kind of psychic or mental advantages. But all this is zero, nothing (Sri Nisargadatta, *SC*,

⁴ F. Tola and C. Dragonetti, *The Yogasūtras of Patañjali on Concentration of Mind*, Sanskrit text with translation into English, introduction and commentary, Delhi, 1987.

⁵ Breath rhythm and breath retention also have an important role in Taoism (*taixi* among others) and Islamic mysticism (for example, when reciting the *Dhikr*).

p. 110), since, as Sri Ramana explains, the powers called parapsychological provide no peace or happiness, but, on the contrary, will make us completely miserable; “Moreover, what are these powers for? The would-be occultist (*siddha*) desires to display the *siddhis* (powers) so that others may appreciate him. He seeks appreciation and, if it is not forthcoming, he will not be happy. There must be others to appreciate him. He may even find another possessor of higher powers. That will cause jealousy and breed unhappiness” (*CRMI*, p. 37). It is quite clear that the non-duality experience cannot be based on assumptions that accept duality; “I want powers to be admired”. But, who is there but Brahma? Who wants powers but the ego? The *sādhaka* must refuse those “magical mirages”, “only desirable to the ignorant ones”.

In any case, these techniques, even though they produce only a temporary immersion of the mind, help us experience the joy of dwelling in the state of consciousness free from thoughts and therefore feed the mind, so that it may go on practicing self-nullification.

VI.- MEDITATION ON “I AM”

One of the main revelations of the meditative practice is that, when we attend to external objects, our attention takes the form of “thoughts”, “but, when we attend to our ‘essential being’, our attention remains as being” (M. James, *HAB*, p. 170). Indeed, this fact must not be a “thinking” of ourselves, but an attending to “I am” that will cause the mind to unroll like a sock until we can realize the amazing fact that our thought stops and remains in the state of only being. Whereas, in conventional meditation, an object to meditate on is required, in the “I am” meditation, there is only a subject without an object. Or, if preferred, the subject makes himself his object of observation until he gradually experiences that there is no subject or object, but only impersonal observation.

The starting point is our verification that we are-exist or, in other words, our sense of *aware presence*. Meditation is no more and no less than paying attention to that sense of presence that is blocked by a curtain of thoughts. “Meditation is to reject all experience and be in the experienceless state” (Sri Nisargadatta, *SC*, p. 194). It is important to insist that the attention to that *sense of oneself* must be paid in a patient, calm way, avoiding any exertion or violence. It is attention without tension. In this sense, any physical or intellectual effort is always a body-mind one. True meditation, like true awareness, is always effortless. Therefore, it is not about fighting against the thoughts, but about not paying attention to them. To face them would be like to expect to put fire out with gasoline; when fought, they are given life. It is simply enough to realize, each time with greater frequency, that whatever happens happens because “I am”. We do not need to stop thinking, but just stop being interested in thoughts. And this is only achieved by experiencing that we are a consciousness that is beyond, witnessing thoughts. The detachment from the external objects, that is, the thoughts, provides us with the strength and certainty needed to go through the *metaphysical way*. When asked, is the thought “I am God” helpful? Ramana answered it was not, because “‘I AM THAT I AM’. ‘I am’ is God, not thinking ‘I am God’. Realize ‘I am’ and do not think ‘I am’. ‘Know I am God’, it is said, and not ‘Think I am God’” (Sri Ramana Maharshi *CRMI*, p. 105).

How to sustain the attention on “I am” effortlessly? Sri Ramana recommended sustaining or recovering the attention by unceasingly inquiring, *to whom?* “If other thoughts rise, one should... inquire ‘to whom did they rise?’. What does it matter however many thoughts rise? At the very moment that each thought rises, if one vigilantly inquires ‘to whom did this rise?’, it will be known ‘to me’. If one then inquires ‘who am I?’, that is, if we turn our attention to ourselves and keep it firmly and carefully fixed on our essential self-

conscious being in order to discover what this ‘I’ really is, the mind will turn back to its source and, since we refrain from paying attention to it, the thought which had risen will also subside” (*Who am I?* 11)⁶.

Advaita Vedanta states that, being the Self (Spirit) the only existing reality, the individual “I” that we believe we are is an erroneous entity that assumes a false identity when appropriating the objects. As “I” is but another thought (it is actually the first thought), when other thoughts rise, the thought “I” appropriates them and assumes that “I think”, “I do”, “I want”, etc., recreating a personal story made of appropriations of memories and expectations. But, since there is really no individual “I” that can exist independently from the objects, should we separate the subject “I” from the objects, as the thought “I” cannot exist without objects, then the individual “I” will vanish, giving way to the Self (the Being).

Ramana explained that the best method to isolate the “I” was the self-inquiry. Of course, he did not discredit the various previous techniques of concentration or meditation. But always keeping in mind that, as all of them remain in the subject-object duality, they must be given up in a certain moment of the practice, since “meditation requires an object to meditate upon, whereas there is only the subject without the object in self-inquiry (*vichāra*)” (*BYA*, p. 78).

How is self-inquiry (*vichāra*) practiced and what does it consist in? The reader may find the best exposition of such method in the second part of the systematized compilation of Sri Ramana’s teachings published under the title of *Be as you are*. There, it is explained

⁶ From this point of view, when Jesus Christ states “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (Jn. 14:6), this sentence can be interpreted in the sense that “The spirit ‘I am’ is the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the spirit ‘I am’, which is the Father or source of all things, but by this same spirit” (M. James, *HAB*, p. 30). That is, “I am *is* the way, the truth, and the life”.

that the self-inquirer has to pay attention to his sense of being as long as possible. In order to avoid constant distractions caused by thoughts, Sri Ramana proposed a simple auxiliary method that consisted in inquiring “to whom did this thought rise?” as many times as necessary in order to focus our attention on the sense “I”; “What does it matter however many thoughts rise? At the very moment that each thought rises, if one vigilantly inquires ‘To whom did this rise?’, it will be known ‘to me’. If one then inquires ‘who am I?’, the mind will turn back to its source [the Self] and the thought which had risen will also subside... If you are vigilant and make a stern effort to reject every thought when it rises, you will soon find that you are going deeper and deeper into your own inner Self. At that level it is not necessary to make an effort to reject thoughts” (*BYA*, p. 85-86).

It is possible that, during the first few moments of practice, the attention to the sense “I” takes the form of a mental activity where attention is focused on the thought “I”, but gradually, the thoughts will ease up until they give way to the experience of thoughtless self-inquiry, that is, to a natural, effortless consciousness of being, since *vichāra* is not an intellectual activity, but, on the contrary, a method to transcend or isolate the mind and recover the original peace or purity. As Sri Ramana stated, the great sayings, such as “I am Brahman [*aham brahmāsmi*]”, were not meant for “thinking ‘I am Brahman’”, since *Aham* [‘I’] is known to everyone. Brahman abides as *aham* in every one. Find out the ‘I’. The ‘I’ is already Brahman. You need not think so. Simply find out the ‘I’ and all will be well” (*BYA*, p. 109).

And this easy method of self-inquiry is compatible with the daily duties, since “the life of action need not be renounced. If you meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work... As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and

objects gradually changes. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord..." (BYA, p. 87-88).

Let us explain this process with more detail.

VII.- TIME AS AN APPROPRIATION OF OBJECTS

Our conception of time is quantitative; we believe that time is the measure of reality, so we suppose that the longer something lasts or remains, the more real it is. And when the object is unstable, as long as we project our feelings or expectations on it, a part of us seems to die after the objects disappear. The truth is that the universe and everything that is subject to the becoming cannot be real. If it were real, that is, if it were immutable, it would remain perfect and identical to itself and, in that very moment, it would disappear. That is why Plato stated that our life is a succession of instants of consciousness, *of which no two are the same*; that is, *a man is never the same man from one moment to the next*. But "it is only because the changes that take place in any brief period are usually small that we mistake the incessant process for an actual being"⁷. Therefore, it is illogical to affirm that something *is* if that something never remains, but finds itself in constant change, that is, it seems to be *being*. What Is can never stop Being, it never changes. (Plato, *Symposium* 207d, *Phaedo* 78d).

I do not consist of time. Our Real Nature does not consist of time. If we formed part of the temporal becoming, we could not realize its apparent movement the same way we do not notice the speed of a plane or vehicle when we are inside them. This means that it is because the observer is not part of time that we are aware of the becoming. That is, time is a state of existence; it is being held, wit-

⁷ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Meaning of Death", in *Metaphysics*, ed. by Roger Lipsey, Princeton, 1977, p. 426.

nessed or experienced by someone. From the physical or *phenomenic* point of view, it seems that we are time, that we were born and that we will die. But, metaphysically, that is, as a Being, we are neither past nor future because we are not subject to temporal or spatial conditionings. We are pure atemporality that is expressed in the always present *Now*.

1.- There is no past but the memories from the present.

The past does not exist as a succession of events that are recorded and petrified somewhere. It is only a theoretical construction that lacks an independent existence, that is, that needs someone to remember it. It only exists as an accumulation of different impressions recorded in the memory. In effect, the past is only a thinking modality that we call *memory*. Memories, as a personal biography, are thoughts in which I have recorded experiences that basically consist of desires (memories of pleasure) and fears (memories of sufferings).

Past facts are not archived anywhere, even in the human brain, following a chronological order. It is the mind that, when recalling them from the now, sorts the memories sequentially, giving them a particular sense. Continuity is thus another fiction created by the memory. Therefore, every succession of events is just an arbitrary, fragmented selection of thoughts with which the mind builds an apparently logical chain of memories to which it attributes a certain causality. Time is sequential, intemporality is simultaneous. Balsekar explained this with the example of the thousands of frames of a huge movie shown on a large wall hundreds of feet wide. Whereas pure awareness can witness all the frames simultaneously from its just perspective, perceiving their essential oneness, the speculative mind needs to approach the wall in order to see the frames, so that, unable to perceive them all, it will imagine and recreate sequences or stories to which it will attribute a temporal connection or a logical argument, depending on the visual itineraries carried out in the different

frames. But that sense or causal link is merely fictional or arbitrary, because it is only in the observer's mind.

To the individual, the personal memories that form his small story give him a false feeling of continuity. Thus, the past provides us with the sense of identity and the future gives us the hope of a certain personal realization. But we do not actually exist in the past; we just exist in the now, so it is the memory that configures the individual's personality. Or, in other words, without the memories of the past and without the expectations of the future, the individual is nullified, because the "I" is so as far as it has a past and a future. Outside the common temporal field, the sense of identity is suspended.

In conclusion, the sense of the "I" cannot remain in the "now" because, in the present, there is no sense of appropriation of memories or expectations.

When the memories are collectivized or socialized, they are called general History, local history, histories of all sorts. Such *Histories* are but a subjective connection between certain events. Even the so-called remains or documents of archeological value are so as far as we think and value them in the *now*, that is, we interpret and use them with the mental or ideological categories of the present. The past is an artificial construction built from the present. Every History is always presentist.

2.- There is no future but the expectations from the present.

The thought can only be born and spread along time. Its main activity consists in imagining projects and planning objectives. Its essence is the tomorrow. It spreads its strategy and activity expecting to get results in the tomorrow. However, the future is an imagined present. The future is a thought by means of which a person guides his activities or expectations realized in the now, expecting to get re-

sults. But the future only exists in the mind because, when that supposed future comes, it will always be now. In fact, a great deal of nowadays man's frustrations is caused by his obsession to avoid living the present and keep the mind concerned about an imaginary future, that is, living with the hope to get results tomorrow. That is precisely a fertile field for the ego, because aims and goals need time to be achieved and provide the speculative mind with the opportunity to design its plans, enjoy its projects, develop their execution and obtain satisfaction after achieving them. However, the concept "future" is just a strategy of reaffirmation of the mind in order to avoid facing the present because it knows it must give control to the pure awareness there. It knows that desires, expectations, projects, etc. cannot survive in the present because they need time to be achieved. This way, many people live autosuggested by a continuous expectation with the idea of being improved in the future. But that imaginary future never comes, is never enough or never remains because it is a mere concept invented by the mind, as impossible to reach as the horizon. No one has ever reached the horizon; thus, between projects and hopes, life seems to turn its back and slip out over and over again.

In short, the past is "now" a memory; it is an experience that takes place because it is recalled in the present in order to provide us with a sense of identity opposite the rest of the world. And the future is a thought as well, arisen in the "now" about a present that has not yet "come", on which we pin our hope to obtain happiness. Therefore, as the future never comes (because the mind needs the idea of "future" in order to survive), happiness will never be achieved either.

3.- *What is the now?*

"Now is the favorable time" (2 Cor. 6:2). Time is experienced as a past or a future because the *speculative mind* is identified with the thoughts (memories and expectations) of the imagined character that

tries to find usefulness, pleasure or sense in external objects. On the contrary, when the mind is placed in the present and pays attention to itself, that is, when there is consciousness of being conscious or, in other words, when it realizes it is thinking, and it does with a sustained intensity, it becomes pure awareness. Actually, one of the biggest discoveries or revelations in the *history* of spirituality is the discovery that the “ego” cannot survive in the now. The present voids the sense of appropriation. In such a state of consciousness that pays attention to itself, as the flow of thoughts is stopped, the ego is left with neither food nor borders to refer experiences to; there is no “I” that may appropriate anything. As there is no identification with the thoughts, there is neither attachment to the past in the form of memories, nor sense of future in the form of expectations. A clean, natural consciousness remains: a vision that witnesses things without projecting the ego’s desires and ambitions on them. In conclusion, when there is no sense of appropriation of things, time is abolished and the sequences of continuity, with which the mind identifies itself or builds a character, cease. When the hoarding mind is absent, that is, when we stop identifying ourselves with the flow of thoughts, we access a sort of atemporality. That is why it is said that the *Now* is a door to eternity. But eternity, rather than a chronological magnitude, that is, an undefined or unlimited temporal duration, must be understood as an intemporal condition. The true “Now” is not an instant in time but an access door to the immutable Being, not conditioned by time. Therefore, for the Advaitin, true immortality is not eternal life, but the *realization* that one has never been born, since only what has never been born can never die⁸.

What is not the Now? “The Now that flows away makes time, the Now that stands still makes eternity” (Boethius, *De Trinitate*). The dual nature of the mind has imaginarily divided time in two opposite directions: the past and the present. But it has also imagined

⁸ The concept of *eviternity* (what has been born but will never die) regarding soul is a forced way to combine theology and metaphysics.

the opposite of time itself: the eternal present. And when conceiving or imagining that eternal present, it is automatically changed into another mental construction: a thought. That is, when the present is conceived as an idea, it is introduced into the past, and stops being *now*. Thus, here is one of the mind's subtlest maneuvers to keep on hoarding experiences and maintaining control over the character it believes it plays. When noticing that there is no "I" who appropriates the experiences in the *Now*, the mind designs a subordinate model of the present in which it imagines grandiloquent concepts such as "non-mind", "dissolution of the ego", "Paradise", "personal realization", etc., which serve as substitutes. But it is not the same to think about the *Now* and to Be in the *Now*, since only then is there no appropriation of thoughts. It is not about an already-thought *Now*, but about a *Now* without thought.

On the other hand, the present is a door to Reality, but it is not a means to achieve a goal. We would make a mistake if we converted the present into another mental object, that is, into a chronological stage within a temporal sequence that is to be concluded in the *future* realization of an individual. In that case, the "now" would not be other than a mere thought created to satisfy the ego. It is to be considered that there is no sense of appropriation in the *Now*. If there are expectations, aims, desires... there is "ego". If there is "ego", there is no *Now*.

The present must not be mixed up with its contents; sight must not be mixed up with witnessed objects, the same way the frames of the huge film must not be mixed up with the screen.

4.- Time is ego.

Mind and time are inseparable because the action of knowing involves a mental movement, that is, the shifting of thought through time. Thought needs to shift through time in order to spread out. For

explanatory purposes only, Sri Ramesh Balsekar used to distinguish between the *thinking* or *speculative mind*, which moves within a *productive* or *rational time* (in the sense that it just analyzes as it seeks for its “ration”) and the *working mind*, which moves within an *inert time*.

The *hoarding* or *speculative mind*, the egoist “I”, cannot remain in the present. It needs time (that is, the past and the future) in order to move and appropriate objects. There is an individual consciousness in the present, but there is no sense of appropriation because the mind does not have enough space-time to identify itself with the objects. Or, in other words, if the time strip of the consciousness is narrowed, then the “ego” is weakened and ends up dying. The *speculative mind* moves within a *productive time* in which every action expects a result, whose benefits are to be taken. Two are the characteristic elements of the *thinking mind*: there is a sense of the becoming of time, and there is a sense of appropriation of objects. Thus, the thought “I” strives to hoard objects, design projects, achieve goals that provide it with a stable happiness. But, since the objects are mutable, the pleasure they provide is ephemeral, fact that causes an insatiable desire to hoard objects. Therefore, this escape forward will only cause negative emotions, since, if it believes to be winning the race, its ambition, arrogance, pride and vanity will increase; but, if it believes to be losing, it will feel full of envy, anxiety and frustration.

On the contrary, the *working mind* acts from the *Now*, which means that, when recalling memories, imagining future situations or planning projects, it does it with no sense of appropriation. The *working mind* deals with the situations without an added component of passion; it observes the events as mere occurrences, and not as problems. It does not torment itself trying to study pros and cons, nor does it get distressed by the results even before performing the action. In sum, the working mind is not pre-occupied, but occupied with the issues. It is the natural, basic mind. It establishes relation-

ships with the objects with no sense of appropriation. Consequently, the goals, as well as the result of its actions, are not products of ambition, fear, greed, etc. Therefore, for example, before the sight of a large green meadow, whereas the *working mind* can feel the peace and beauty of the place without issuing any judgment or comparison, the *speculative mind* will imaginarily take over the field and design its house in the middle or calculate how much profit it would make if able to sell it once divided and urbanized. Whereas the *working mind* would go for a walk through the forest, feeling the oneness of the apparent plurality, the *thinking mind* would see no more than timber to be felled and sold. For the *speculative mind*, the relationship with people and things is always selfish because it is conditioned by the profit they can provide.

5.- *How to break free from the chains of time?*

To Advaita Vedanta, the taming of time seems to be simple; it is enough to break free from the sense of appropriation. However, it may seem paradoxical to talk about breaking free from the time-ego because that would precisely imply a process... in time. Could we perhaps break free from the time-ego using what precisely feeds it, that is, the time itself? The idea itself that “I have to know myself” or that “I have to realize myself” is confusing, since it implies that I am not realized *now*. Should that realization be progressive, that is, subject to time, it is not true, because the authentic Realization cannot change or be subject to time. Consequently, the so-called “spiritual realization” is outside the temporal dimension. From the metaphysical point of view, no one can acquire, achieve or realize anything that he does not already have by nature and that is inherent in himself. But the mind wants processes, goals, experiences and comparisons between yours and mine with which to establish imaginary borders and reaffirm its sense of identity. The mind flees from vertical time, that is, from the present, because it depends on horizontal or chronological time, on the feeling of continuity of the events, in or-

der to maintain the mirage that there is an individual being who progresses in time by means of hoarding experiences and who competes against other individuals for being more or different from them.

It might be supposed that the abolition of time equals its stopping. However, how to stop anything that does not exist but as a thought? What has an objective existence can be stopped, but time lacks an objective existence. Actually, the suppression of time is just a concept of the mind, which immediately builds its polar opposite. Against Time, it proposes atemporality (eternity). And maybe that is the key. If time is a modality of mental activity dedicated to external objects, its abolition or transcendence implies the mind's inwardness by means of what is known as meditation or attention to the present. It is about facilitating the detachment from the past and the future, about shortening the ego's attention span to the past and the future, by means of an increasing, gradual attention to the *Now*. In sum, it is about Being, about replacing the "I was" or "I will be" with the present form, that is, "I am".

On the other hand, words such as "liberation", "realization", "happiness", etc. are concepts produced by the mind in order to stay active and feel useful. The mind, when identifying itself with a particular sequence of events, recreates or builds a character. That character believes to be subject to temporal and spatial conditionings, and thus he believes that he was born, that he will die and that he urgently needs to make the most of his time in order to hoard experiences that may make him happy. However, he is aware that nothing in this world is permanent and that he cannot retain the happy moments. Just after a moment of joy, time sinks him into a desperate quest for pleasant experiences that may bring his lost happiness back. Therefore, man aspires to a happiness that he can never retain, fact that causes him impotence, distress and unease, that is, suffering. Thus, days go by in the middle of a frustrating duality between pleasure and suffering. All man's ills can be defined in time coordi-

nates; fear is a form of refusal of the future; remorse or guilt is a chain to negative memories; anxiety is an obsession with the future; nostalgia is the attachment to pleasant memories.

As the ancients warned, time is a region of duality; you cannot bathe twice in the same river; everything flows, nothing stands still. Man lives caught in a time loop woven just from thoughts. Those thoughts are dual: the past as a memory, and the future as an anticipation. This way, man, while keeping the hope to achieve happiness in the future, just delays the solution to his problem because the future does not exist, but only the *now* exists. It is to be insisted that the future is but a mirage, created by the mind, which prevents us from remaining in the present. If one believes that the future will free him from the past, the solution will only move further away, since time will not free us from time. Just the present frees us from the past and the future.

The Advaitin teaches how to dwell in the present. But remaining in the present is not a kind of mental escapism; it is not about fleeing from family or work responsibilities; it is not a way to look “away” or hide our head like an ostrich to evade problems. On the contrary, there is no worse escapism than fleeing from the present on the pretext of a better future. Actually, the continuous quest for aims and projects for future is usually a way to escape from the past or to avoid facing the present moment. And the mind avoids the *Now* by resorting to the comfortable daydream of waiting, since to wait is to deny the present. The ostrich hides its head precisely because it fears the future. The Advaitin does not praise the idle, relaxed life, nor does he condemn the attitude of planning projects and achieving goals. They are unavoidable and even necessary to simplify and make daily life easier. On the contrary, what he suggests is the need not to add a pre-occupation to the normal, daily occupation. It is about not adding more confusion to the already existing disturb-

ances, about not overimposing more suffering upon the unavoidable pain.

In sum, the liberation from the chains of time, the “conquest of immortality”, is achieved when ceases the sense of appropriation of objects, of all objects including that imaginary character (the body-mind organism) that daily plays a role in our name. Ultimately, the abolition of time implies breaking free from the idea that the past gives us an identity, that is, from the erroneous assumption that the “I” has a personal story made of memories. And it also implies breaking free from the idea that the future contains the hope to achieve happiness.

VIII.- THE INSUBSTANTIALITY OF THE “I”

The Advaitin warns: *That* which we define as universal Consciousness, “I am”, “God”, “Brahma”, is a temporary, impermanent state that is being witnessed. Or, in other words, that Consciousness is part of Duality: “Whatever experiences you have in meditation are confined to the realm of consciousness. Consciousness is born and it will go. You are prior to it” (Sri Nisargadatta, *SC*, p. 101). The state “I am” is but that, just a “state” of the Being, something that is being experienced and that will sooner or later disappear. Certainly, as Sri Nisargadatta stated, “bringing the mind to the feeling ‘I am’ merely helps in turning the mind away from everything else” but, even “I am” is something contingent. (*IAT*, p. 230, and also Sri Muruganar, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 716). Beyond the mind is the state “I am”, free from thoughts, but beyond “I am” is the I am free from “I am” (Sri Nisargadatta, *PC*, p. 123).

As *Nirvāṇa* and *Samādhi* imply a loss of individuality, the persistence of the “I” and the Realization are incompatible. As the Realization is a supraindividual “state”, if the “I” (the identification with a

body-mind) remains, peace or “enlightenment” will not happen. Patañjali defined the state of *dhyāna* (expression from which the word *Zen* is ultimately derived) as “a current of unified thought” (*Yogasūtra* III, 2) sustained long enough as to “penetrate” beyond the veil of the mind and remain in the state of consciousness free of thoughts. *Samādhi* expresses another indescribable “experience” or “state” in which the differences between *subject* and *object* are transcended. For most people, such a state might only be experienced shortly or at certain intervals [*manolaya*]⁹. Only a minority pointed by the Grace will make that state a *mansion*, that is, a permanent situation [*manonasa*] (Sri Ramana Maharshi, *BYA*, p. 94).

Consequently, the so-called “spiritual awakening” can be a mirage of the consciousness if such a Realization implies the duality of a subject who seeks to realize something, or a realized subject, and a non-realized subject. And it is not to be forgotten that, as the so-called “Realization”, “Enlightenment” or “Understanding” is neither a process nor an experience that may take place in the space-time, if we see that idea through to the bitter end, we will come to the conclusion that the idea of “Liberation” or “Bliss” itself is just an exclusive concept of the world of consciousness. There is no “Liberation” or “Realization beyond Consciousness, because there is no room for a difference between an “enlightened” being and a “non-enlightened” one in the Oneness. Some Advaita masters teach that “we all are realized” beyond Consciousness, statement that equals saying that “nobody is realized”, since There is no room for distinctions. When this idea is accepted, it is finally understood that there was never anything to seek or find, since there was nothing lost. No one needs to reach the Absolute or get to the Being, because we al-

⁹ Advaita masters advise against the Way to those meditators who only look for the trance experience, since the spiritual practices such as meditation try to eliminate the psycho-mental and cultural tendencies of man (*vāsanās*), and not to momentarily suspend them as long as the meditative practice lasts. They also advise against the use of certain narcotics, since the result will not be peace or liberation, but drug addiction.

ready are what we try to find. Not to see it is just another mirage created by the mind.

In sum, there are not realized individuals, since, as the so-called Realization, Liberation or Gnosis is supraindividual, what characterizes such an *event* is the absence of the sense of individuality itself. There are not liberated individuals because “the Realized one” has stopped considering himself an individual, has understood and verified not only that there are neither individuals with consciousness nor Consciousness to be manifested by individuals (Nisargadatta, *IAT*, p. 218), but that there is Nothing, a mere illusion or mirage. That is why the awakening is the realization that there is no one who may awake. In sum, as far as the “Realization” involves an overcoming of individuality, there cannot be an “I” who may reclaim that “state”. To affirm, “I am realized” is a contradiction in terms, since “Liberation” is a “supraindividual” state beyond the “I”. And that is precisely why, in such a transpersonal state, there is no room to talk about experience of God or experience of Consciousness.

IX.- WHAT IS THERE BEYOND CONSCIOUSNESS?

Who witnesses the Consciousness? We erroneously suppose that the Consciousness is the final state or the non-state beyond all conditioned states, in which the consciousness is observing the consciousness. The truth is that “I am”, the “spirit”, “God”... is not the Supreme Reality because it is time-bound (Sri Nisargadatta, *SC*, 19). On the contrary, the “I am-ness” is part of the universal mirage. Nonetheless, it is to be understood that this is not a form of pantheism or immanentism, because, although God is in all things, things are not God. Brahma contains and penetrates the manifestation, but is different from it, since “all beings are in me but I am not in them... My being is the maintainer of all beings but I am not part of them” (*Bhagavad Gita* 9.4-5). Certainly, it is stated that the God who can

call Himself God is not a true God, though He were attributed with omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, since we would still be in the dual world of concepts: there is God because there is Creation; without Creation, there is no God. Well... however, what is there beyond duality? What or who was there before Creation? ...

Consciousness is the desire to “be” that wants to last longer. Its quality is the desire to live and keep on creating the suitable conditions to continue its activity in the world. Actually, the supposedly highest happiness (*sat-chit-ānanda*) is a form of superior happiness that, however, is not permanent; it is just a state of consciousness. *Sat-chit-ānanda*, being-consciousness-bliss, is actually a *state* of happiness that, however, is still a “state” subject to the space-time, that is, it is being held or witnessed by “someone” as long as there is a body available for the Only Consciousness. Consequently, the so-called Realization has nothing to do with Consciousness, no matter how much Unique or Universal it may be. It rather looks like a neutral state without quality or shape, a state of non-mind, where the supposed individuality is permanently zero, Nothing (Sri Nisargadatta, *Beyond Freedom*, Mumbai, 2007, p. 49).

Therefore, Advaita Vedanta answers the question: is there a higher reality than consciousness? Yes. Beyond consciousness, there is *Parabrahman*, the Absolute. But, as the Absolute is beyond all experience, it cannot be conceived or explained by the mind; “The Absolute cannot be experienced. It is not an objective affair. Any manifestation, any functioning, any witnessing, can only take place in duality. There has to be a subject and an object, they are two, but they are not two, they are two ends of the same thing” (Sri Nisargadatta, *PC*, p. 81). Or, in words of Chinese esoterism, “The Tao that can be spoken of is not the true Tao” (*Tao Te Ching*, 1).

In order to solve this conceptual problem, the Advaitin distinguishes between *consciousness* and *awareness*. *Consciousness* be-

longs to the world of duality and thus to the “ego”. All aspiration to self-consciousness is but a refined modality of the desire to obtain something, and it is therefore a subtle dodge of the ego. Consciousness is, ultimately, consciousness of duality, whereas there is no duality in *awareness*. On the contrary, when the mind or “ego” is absent, the *awareness* takes place. It is a state of non-duality in which there is no one conscious. It is the original state before consciousness appeared. Nevertheless, who is aware in the awareness? To state, “I am aware” implies that “I am aware of experiencing that I am aware”, which is a contradiction, for there is no “I” in *Awareness*. Certainly, in order to *be aware*, there has to be *someone* and *something* to be aware of and, therefore, we are still in the world of duality: witnesser-witnessed-witnessing.

However, lacking a better expression, the word “Awareness” is conventionally used to refer to the Supreme State, the original state, without a beginning or an end, immutable and causeless. Such a “state” is called *Parabrahman*, beyond Brahma or beyond “I am”. As a pedagogical concession, some wise men have defined the natural state of non-dual awareness or self-knowledge as the “fourth state” (*turīya*) in order to highlight that it is beyond the three ordinary states of waking, dream and deep sleep. Thus, *turīya* is that which witnesses the three states. However, it might be wondered, who witnesses *turīya*? The mind can imagine another higher witness that transcends the fourth state (*turiyatita*, literally, beyond the fourth). But such conceptualizations, which the mind likes so much, are endless because, following that path, there will always be a higher level of awareness. And the truth is that calling it the state without states, the state beyond the states or the fourth state (*turīya*) does not stop being absurd, since, strictly speaking, as it is earlier or higher than the mind, it cannot be described or experienced; one can only *be* It. As Sri Nisargadatta clarifies, one cannot even *be* It in this state, because it is rather a state that *is not* (Sri Nisargadatta, *PC*, p. 32).

If there is neither anything to be witnessed nor anyone who witnesses, nor anyone who claims or assumes any action, do experiences stop being there? No. Awareness becomes a state where the presence or absence of the experience seems to be recorded, but, as there is no “one” who assumes the action of experiencing, every action becomes impersonal. Going deeper into the differences between consciousness and awareness, Sri Nisargadatta explains, “there can be no consciousness without awareness, but there can be awareness without consciousness (as in deep sleep). Awareness is absolute, consciousness is relative. Consciousness is partial and changeful, awareness is total, changeless, calm and silent. Awareness is not of time. Time exists in consciousness only. *Parabrahman* has no beginning and no end, whereas this consciousness is time-bound: it has a beginning and an end. The Absolute, the Awareness, is the supporting principle for the consciousness” (Sri Nisargadatta, *IAT*, p. 29).

Awareness is not achieved with effort or attention, because that would imply a movement at the level of the mind. At the most, we may think that we are practicing the fact of witnessing; in that case, it is the mind that thinks that it is witnessing... but then, we will have fallen into *Māyā*'s clutches again.

That being said, the seasoned Vedantin knows that, no matter how much sharpened are the concepts, these cannot stretch enough as to clearly define the topic that is being discussed. Strictly speaking, the concept “Awareness” is but a pedagogic concession to facilitate the comprehension of something impossible to experience and that does not reflect, even by a long shot, the real Nature of the Being. In fact, rather than “Awareness”, our authentic Reality would be more strictly defined as “Absence”, considering that *Nothing* is not inert.

X.- THE “EXPERIENCE” OF AWARENESS IS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE NOTHING.

Some people have a quite odd concept of what an enlightened, “realized” or wise man really is, which may be explained by the proliferation of false “masters” and impostor “gurus” who take advantage of the good faith of naïve seekers. It is deplorable to watch the show of those false prophets, truly ego-saurs, who only seek to feed their own mirage by means of adulation. The fact that they require the worship to individuality is itself a clear evidence of their hypocrisy. Firstly, it is to be pointed out that a *jnani* (comprehensor of the real nature) does not boast, since, if he is beyond duality, before which other individuals could he brag?

What is a *jnani*? Whereas the common individual is identified with the body-mind and is happy or unhappy as the daily events change, the *jnani* just witnesses unbiasedly without being individually interested in what happens. Whereas the world of the ordinary humankind is made of dreams and nothing stands still, the world of the *jnani* is real and nothing changes. For the *jnani*, the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep are *all of them* a mere dream. The *Sāmadhi* itself is but a kind of dream. The *Ribhu Gita* explains, “Of just one nature, the Self in peace, devoid of thoughts of anything being separate, such a one who does not, in the least, have anything, is called a *jīvanmukta* (freed in life). All this is none of mine. I have no merit. I have no demerit. I have no body. I have nothing auspicious. I have nothing to see. There is no lineage for me, no race for me, and no knowledge for me. There is no existence for me. There is no birth for me. There is no aging for me. There is no fame for me, and no philosophy for me. No old age exists for me. No childhood exists for me. No death exists for me” (*Ribhu Gita*, ch. 8). With such a description, it can be understood that the “experience” of awareness may be compared with the experience of the Nothing. Nevertheless, whereas in the Western thought, terms such as “emptiness” and “nothing”

have a negative nature, in the Eastern thought, they show a positive dimension. That is because of the *anthropological* point of view adopted in the West, that is, that man is considered to be the center of the universe, whereas, in the East, the *metaphysical* point of view is adopted; Creation and creatures are appearances within the Only Reality; the isolated, independent “I” not only does not exist, but also not to understand such a mirage causes great frustrations. From this viewpoint, the Eastern emptiness or nothing (even though a transcendental concept of “nothing” also exists in certain Western monastic orders) is defined as the absence of an “ego” or “I” that is experienceable like something real and that claims the authorship of its actions. That is to say, for the individual mind, whose nature is built on the appropriation of personal memories and expectations for the future that may provide it with a comfortable, false feeling of personal identity, any supraindividual or transpersonal state in which the experience cannot be referred to an individual is considered as Emptiness or Nothing. What is more, without memories or projects for the future, deprived the mind of its food, it should theoretically end up dying of starvation. For the individual, the Nothing is the death... but the death of the “ego”. However, is the Emptiness or the Nothing the ultimate Reality? More clearly, do I consist of emptiness? Obviously, no. Emptiness is witnessed¹⁰. But it will still be a game of concepts if it is not accepted that *Awareness* is, more strictly speaking, *Absence*.

The attachment to a name and a form is what feeds fear. But, after a process of detachment, I am nothing, and the nothing has no fear. On the contrary, who is attached to everything is afraid of the Nothing because he fears losing his world made of appropriation and because, when something touches the Nothing, it becomes nothing. The “nothing” scares because there is still “someone” who can be

¹⁰ Likewise, Buddhism talks about “emptiness” or “nothing” (*śūnyatā*), considered as *non-mind* (*mu-shu*) or *non-I* (*mu-ga*), similar to Taoist *non-action* (*wú wéi*), as a mental state free or empty of thoughts.

scared. But the truth is that “Nothing exists at any time. Neither does ‘only one’ nor ‘this’ exist. There is nothing inside, nothing outside; there is nothing at all. There is no duality either. There is no creation. There is nothing to be seen, no knowledge, no separate body, nothing like a comprehensor, no transmigration” (*Ribhu Gita*, ch. 8). Without “ego”, the “nothing” becomes “Everything”.

XI.- A DAILY “EXPERIENCE” OF THE NOTHING; THE DEEP SLEEP

The deep sleep is, in Advaita Vedanta, a state with an enormous pedagogic value. Of course, such a state is not separable from the fact of sleeping. On the contrary, during innumerable moments of the day (waking state), consciousness becomes self-absorbed and the sense of individuality shortly disappears. It is the case, for example, of situations such as walking, listening to music, cooking, etc., in which our inwardness sometimes takes us to a state of peace, uninterrupted by any thought, that we leave when we recover the sense of individuality. Actually, the deep sleep while awake (or waking during deep sleep) is considered as the state of the wise or realized man (*jnani*) because it makes compatible the consciousness of the waking state with the stillness of the deep sleep, or even beyond waking (*atijagrat*) and beyond deep sleep (*atisushupti*) (Sri Ramana Maharshi, *CRMII*, p. 337). It is obvious that I am not conscious of my body or the world during deep sleep, but I cannot affirm that I cease to exist. Therefore, I can conclude that there is no individual or consciousness “I am” in deep sleep (M. James, *HAB*, p. 93). Therefore, as a gap in memory is not necessarily a gap in consciousness, deep sleep may consist in a state of supraindividual consciousness (or rather, *awareness*) in which we disappear as individuals and feel free of memories. Nevertheless, as we are what supports and, at the same time, what is beyond the three states, this means that the Self does not consist of consciousness. In fact, no one can deny that we keep

on being or existing during deep sleep even though that form of individual consciousness that knows objects may not exist that way in that state. Although we stop having memories in the deep sleep state, however, we keep on being-existing and we can even affirm that, after waking from deep sleep, despite having no memories about it, we however experience the peace and relief of having slept deeply and of having known nothing while asleep; “In deep sleep, all beings are united with Brahman and enjoy bliss. That supreme bliss can be enjoyed forever when a person realizes his identity with Brahman” (Sri Sankaracharya, *18TA*, p. 118-119). There is thus a continuity of the Being through all the three states, though there is no continuity of the individual or the objects (M. James, *HAB*, p. 190).

In conclusion, as René Guénon explained, our true nature is that Fourth “state without states” (*turīya* or *chaturtha*), pure and immaculate, homogeneous, identical to itself, uncontainable (because it contains all), immutable (because it is not acting), unthinkable (because it takes no shape) and indescribable (because it has no particular attribute or characteristic).

Only That, *Ātman*, the Self, is who supports and goes through the states like a thread that strings the beads of a collar. We are not the states, but the ones who witness and give life and breath to the states.

You are *That* (*Tat tvam asi*).