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CHAPTER 1

SHANKARA: *Tat tvam asi*

This chapter comprises three parts: Part I, entitled "Doctrine of the Transcendent Absolute," will be concerned with the principal conceptual aspects of the transcendent Absolute, the manner in which it can be defined, designated, or envisaged; this will involve discussion of the relationship between the "lesser" and the "greater" Absolute, and correlatively, between "Being" and that which transcends it. These considerations will serve as the analytical complement to the rest of the chapter which will deal with the spiritual attainment or "realization" of that transcendentally conceived Absolute.

Part II, "Spiritual Ascent," comprises six sections, dealing with stages along the path of transcendence, culminating in the attainment of "Liberation," *moksa* or *mukti*; these stages emerge as points of reference from the various writings of Shankara on the question of the "ultimate value" (*nihsreyasa*), referred to also as Enlightenment or simply Knowledge (*jñana*).

Part III, "Existential 'Return,'" will examine the most important aspects of the "return" to normal modes of awareness in the world of phenomena, aft er the experience of Liberation has been attained by the one now designated *jivan-mukta*—the soul liberated in this life.

The sources used for this chapter consist in translations from the works of Shankara; in selecting the books for this study, priority was given to those works which modern scholarship has established beyond doubt to have been written by Shankara: *Th e Th ousand Teachings* (*Upadesa Sahasri*)—his principal independent doctrinal treatise; translations from his commentaries on the Upanisads, Brahma Sutras and other scriptures, drawing in particular from the excellent and comprehensive set of translations by A.J. Alston in six volumes, *A Samkara Source-Book*. Other works such as *Self-Knowledge* (*Atma-bodha*) and *The Crest Jewel of Discrimination* (*Vivekachudamani*), attributed to Shankara by the Advaitin tradition—but not having the same degree of scholarly authentication—have also been used, insofar as these works form part of the "Shankarian" spiritual legacy within the tradition and, as such, warrant attention from an analysis such as this, which is concerned more with the doctrinal perspective associated with Shankara within Hinduism, than with the historical personage of that name.

For ease of reference, the following system will be used: the book from which the citation is taken will be indicated by a key word in the title, with the page or, where appropriate, the chapter and verse, following it. Full details of the titles are found in the bibliography.

Absolute: *Samkara on the Absolute*. Vol. I of *A Samkara Source-Book*, trans. A.J. Alston.
Atma-bodha (A): *Self-Knowledge* (*Atma-Bodha*), trans. Swami Nikhilananda.

Atma-bodha (B): *Atma-bodha*, trans. "Raphael."
Creation: *Samkara on the Creation*. Vol. II of *A Samkara Source-Book*, trans. A.J. Alston.
Discipleship: *Samkara on Discipleship*. Vol. V of *A Samkara Source-Book*, trans. A.J. Alston.
Enlightenment: *Samkara on Enlightenment*. Vol. VI of *A Samkara Source-Book*, trans. A.J. Alston.
Gita: *The Bhagavad Gita, with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, trans. Alladi Mahadeva Sastry.
Karika: *The Mandukyopanisad, with Gaudapada's Karika and Sankara's Commentary*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda.
Reality: *Direct Experience of Reality, Verses from Aparokshanubhuti*, trans. Hari Prasad Shastri.
Soul: *Samkara on the Soul*. Vol. III of *A Samkara Source-Book*, trans. A.J. Alston.
Upadesa (A): *The Thousand Teachings* (*Upadesa Sahasri*), trans. A.J. Alston.
Upadesa (B): *A Thousand Teachings—Upadesa Sahasri*, trans. Swami Jagadananda.
Vivekachudamani: *Vivekachudamani*, trans. Swami Madhavananda.

Part I: Doctrine of the Transcendent Absolute

1. Designations and Definitions of the Absolute

The first question that needs to be asked is whether the transcendent Absolute is in any way conceivable, in such a manner that one can speak of the "concept" thereof. If, as is maintained by Shankara, the Absolute is "That from which words fall back," that which ignorance (*avidya*) alone would attempt to define,[1] then what function is served by the variety of names by which the Absolute is referred to—*Brahman*, *Atman*, *Om*, *Turiya*?

Certainly, Shankara asserts that from the viewpoint of ignorance (*avidya*), the Absolute is inexplicable—*anirukta* (Absolute, 177). The attribution of "name and form" (*nama-rupa*) to the Absolute is, likewise, the result of ignorance. Name and form, like the erroneous conception of a snake in place of a rope, are destroyed when knowledge dawns; "hence the Absolute cannot be designated by any name, nor can it assume any form" (Absolute, 87).

Intrinsic knowledge of the Absolute can be acquired, but solely from the *paramarthika* perspective, that is, the viewpoint from the Absolute itself; while from the viewpoint of the relative, the *vyavaharika* perspective, the Absolute can only be viewed under the conditions of name and form. This distinction between the *paramarthika* and the *vyavaharika* perspectives is of the utmost importance, not just in respect of doctrinal formulations, but, as will be seen throughout this chapter, in respect of central ontological aspects of spiritual realization.

[1] Shankara cites this text many times; it appears both in the Taittiriya Upanisad, II.4 and in the Brhidaranyaka Upanisad, II.iii.6.

In answer to the question: is the Absolute Self designated by the name *Atman*, Shankara replies:

> No it is not. . . . When the word *Atman* is used . . . to denote the inmost Self (*PratyagAtman*) . . . its function is to deny that the body or any other empirically knowable factor is the Self and to designate what is left as real, even though it cannot be expressed in words (Absolute, 144).

This answer points to the apophatic nature of all designations and definitions concerning the Absolute; to "define" something in Hindu logic (as in Western logic) means primarily to mark it off from other objects, thus to isolate it; definition (*laksana*) is thus different from characterization (*visesana*), that is, positively identifying the attributes which characterize a particular object. Thus, to say that the Absolute "is defined as Reality, Knowledge, Infinity" (*Satyam-Jñanam-Anantam*), as it is in the Taittiriya Upanisad on which Shankara comments, means that the adjectives are "being used primarily not to characterize the Absolute positively but simply to mark it off from all else" (Absolute, 178).

Each element negates the non-transcendent dimensions that are implicit or conceivable in one or both of the other elements: to say that the Absolute is "Reality" means that its being "never fails," in contrast to the forms of things which, being modifications, are existent at one time, only to "fail" at some other time; since, however, this may imply that the Absolute is a non-conscious material cause, the term Knowledge is included in the definition and this serves to cancel any such false notion; and then, since Knowledge may be mistaken for an empirical attribute of the intellect, it too needs to be conditioned—*qua* definition—by the term Infinity, as this negates any possibility of that bifurcation into subject and object which constitutes the necessary condition for empirical knowledge. Infinity is said to "characterize the Absolute by negating finitude," whereas "the terms 'Reality' and 'Knowledge' characterize the Absolute (even if inadequately) by investing it with their own positive meanings" (Absolute, 182).

These "positive meanings" must still be understood from an apophatic viewpoint, in accordance with a central dialectical principle concerning knowledge of the Absolute, namely the double negation, *neti, neti*—"not thus, not thus."[2] Shankara illustrates this indirect manner of indicating the nature of the Absolute by means of a story about an idiot who was told that he was not a man; perturbed, he asked someone else the question: "What am I?" This person showed the idiot the classes of different beings, from minerals and plants upwards, explaining that he was none of them, and finally said: "So you are not anything that is not a man": "[T]he Veda proceeds in the same way as the one who showed the idiot that he was not a 'not-man.' It says 'not thus, not thus,' and says no more" (Absolute, 143).

[2] This text figures prominently in the Brhidaranyaka Upanisad, at II.iii.6, III.ix.26, IV.ii.4, and IV.iv.22. It should also be noted that we do not follow Alston's translation of *avidya* as "nescience," but rather use the more appropriate English word "ignorance."

For Shankara, communicable meaning is restricted within the following categories: genus, action, quality, and relation. Since the Absolute transcends these categories—it does not belong to any genus, performs no action, has no quality, and enters into no relation with "another" apart from itself—it "cannot be expressed by any word":

> [T]he Absolute is artificially referred to with the help of superimposed name, form, and action, and spoken of in exactly the way we refer to objects of perception. . . . But if the desire is to express the true nature of the Absolute, void of all external adjuncts and particularities, then it cannot be described by any positive means whatever. The only possible procedure then is to refer to it through a comprehensive denial of whatever positive characteristics have been attributed to it in previous teachings and to say "not thus, not thus" (Absolute, 141).

Because the Absolute is only indirectly designated by terms that must themselves be negated, it can take on, albeit extrinsically, other "definitions," the most important of these being the well known *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, which has been translated as "Being-Consciousness-Bliss," by Alston, who notes that although this definition is not found in any of the works deemed by modern scholarship to be undeniably by Shankara, it is found in the writings of Suresvara, his direct disciple (Absolute, 170), and figures prominently in two works attributed to Shankara by the tradition of Advaita Vedanta, namely *Atma-bodha* and *Vivekachudamani*.[3] Despite the fact that modern scholarship no longer regards these as authentic works of Shankara, they are so closely woven into the spiritual heritage of Shankara that any analysis of his perspective which fails to consider these works would be incomplete. Moreover, the term *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is so closely identified with his perspective that, in terms of the tradition of Advaita, one cannot pass lightly over this designation of the Absolute.

> That beyond which there is nothing . . . the inmost Self of all, free from differentiation . . . the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute (Vivekachudamani, 263).

> Realize that to be *Brahman* which is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, which is non-dual and infinite, eternal and One (Atma-bodha (A), 56).

The apophatic logic of the double negation must now be applied to the term. Firstly, to say *Sat*, Being or Reality, is to refer to That which is not non-being or nothingness, on the one hand; on the other hand, it designates transcendent Being, "that which is" as opposed to "things that are." *Chit*, or Consciousness, refers to That which is not non-conscious, on the one hand; and on the other, it designates transcendent Consciousness, as opposed to contents or objects of consciousness; and likewise *Ananda* refers to That which is not susceptible to suffering or deprivation, on the one hand; and on the other, it designates

[3] The translators of these works translate the formula as "Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute." This is a less satisfactory translation, for reasons that will be clear from the discussion on Being in the next section.

transcendent Bliss or Bliss as such, as opposed to such and such an experience of bliss; to Bliss which cannot not be, as opposed to blissful experience that is contingent on worldly circumstances.

In this application of the double negation, the first *neti* operates so as to negate the direct opposite of the term, thereby indicating in a relatively direct manner the intrinsic nature or quality intended by it; whilst the second *neti* acts as the denial of any commensurability with what appears, from the viewpoint of *avidya*, to be similar to that quality, thereby indicating indirectly the transcendent degree proper to the quality here in question. Therefore the first negation is intended to direct awareness towards these three internal "modes" of the Absolute, whilst the second negation eliminates any traces of relativity that may appear to pertain to these modes when conceived on the plane of differentiated existence; thus, while a relative subject has the property of empirical awareness and enjoys an object of experience that is blissful, the Absolute Subject is at once transcendent Being-Consciousness-Bliss, in absolute non-differentiation, indivisibility, and non-duality.

The notion of the Absolute as *Sat* will be discussed further in the next section, which deals with Being in more detail; at this point the concern is to probe further into the manner of indicating or designating provisionally the nature of the Absolute.

To say, then, that the Absolute is Being-Consciousness-Bliss gives some provisional idea of the nature of the Absolute even while indicating the incommensurability between that idea and the reality alluded to. It can readily be seen that the principal purpose of the negation is to eliminate those attributes that have been superimposed upon the Absolute; the superimposition (*adhyaropa*) itself is seen to be a necessary starting point for thought on the Absolute, since, by means of endowing it with concrete characteristics, awareness is oriented towards something which truly "is," however faulty may be the initial conception thereof. Only subsequently is this being revealed in its true light, divested of all limitative attributes. At first, the sacred texts speak of the "false form" of the Absolute, "set up by adjuncts and fancifully referred to as if it had knowable qualities, in the words, 'with hands and feet everywhere.' For there is the saying of those who know the tradition (*sampradaya-vid*), 'That which cannot be expressed is expressed through false attribution and subsequent denial (*adhyaropa-apavada*)'" (Absolute, 147-148).

All attributes and names of the Absolute, then, are so many symbols, with the character of an *upaya*, a "saving stratagem" or a provisional means of "conveying the symbolized" (Absolute, 145). When, for example, the Absolute is endowed with the attribute of spatial location, as when scripture refers to the "place" of *Brahman*, Shankara writes that the implicit purpose behind such an *upaya* can be formulated thus: "First let me put them on the right path, and then I will gradually be able to bring them round to the final truth afterwards" (Enlightenment, 22).

It is important at this point to dwell a little on the term *upadhi*, the "particular limiting adjunct." It refers to that through which any determinate name, form, attribute, or conception is applied to the Absolute; it is said to be "set up by

ignorance," because it depends upon an initial differentiation, and thus implicitly negates all that which is not encompassed by the particular adjunct in question; an adjunct which is thus to be clearly distinguished from the non-dual Reality.

Strictly speaking it is an illusory limitation superimposed on the object which it is supposed to reveal. It is therefore to be negated by *neti, neti*, in order to make possible the revelation of the real underlying substratum—that on which the superimposition takes place. The *upadhi*, according to one revealing etymology is "that which, standing near (*upa*) anything, imparts (*adhadati*) to it (the appearance of) its own qualities" (Creation, 3). This brings out clearly the distinction between the pure Absolute and all distinct attributes of the Absolute: the attribute as such is not only "other" than the object of the attribution, but it also "colors" that object according to the nature of the attribute; thus, anything that is objectively attributed to the Absolute is both a means of indicating the reality of the Absolute and simultaneously a veil over its true nature:

> In so far as the Self has an element of "this" (objective characteristic) it is different from itself, and a characteristic of itself. . . . It is as in the case of the man with the cow (Upadesa (A), II, 6.5).

The man who possesses a cow may be distinguished as "such and such, possessor of the cow," but the cow serves only to indicate the particular man in question, it does not define the man's essential nature: the man is utterly other than that possession which identifies him as a particular man. Analogously, no aspect of the Absolute that is definable and distinguishable in objective terms can be equated with the Absolute; the very act of positing a "this" involves an irreducible alterity: "this" is a distinguishing feature of the object to be known, and thus "other than" it. In reality, "nothing different from Me can exist so as to belong to Me" (Upadesa (A), II, 8.4).[4]

To speak of *Brahman* as possessing the attributes of "Lordship," such as omnipotence, justice, omniscience, and so on, is both true and false: true if what is in question is the "lower" or "lesser" Absolute, *Apara Brahman*, but false if it is the "higher" Absolute, *Para Brahman* (Enlightenment, 61-62); this same distinction is found expressed as *Brahma saguna* and *Brahma nirguna*, the first relating to the Absolute as endowed with qualities, the second relating to the Absolute insofar as it transcends all qualities. When the Absolute is spoken of as being the "performer of all actions" and as knowing all things, "we are speaking of it as associated with adjuncts. In its true state without adjuncts it is indescribable, partless, pure, and without empirical attributes" (Upadesa (A), II, 15.29).

It may be objected here that the Advaita principle is violated: there is one Absolute that is associated with relativity and another that is not. But this objection would be valid only if it were established that the Absolute undergoes real modification by virtue of its "association" with the adjuncts; only then

[4] This is Shankara "speaking" from the perspective of the Self, a mode of expression assuming the *paramarthika* perspective, and employed frequently by Shankara throughout his writings, doctrinal as well as exegetical.

would there be a fundamental dualism constituted by the adjunctless Absolute, on the one hand, and the Absolute associated with adjuncts, on the other. Such a dualism, however, is precluded for Shankara by the fact that no such modification takes place in reality, since the "association" in question is but an appearance, an illusory projection of the Real which cannot, *qua* illusion, constitute any element or "pole," such as could allow of an irreducible duo-dimensionality of the Absolute:

> [T]he Lordship, omniscience, and omnipotence of the Lord exist relative to the limitations and distinctions of ignorance only, and in reality there can be no practice of rulership or omniscience on the part of the Self, in which all distinctions remain eternally negated in knowledge (Creation, 66).

This does not deny the relative reality of the divine attributes themselves nor does it deny that the attributes do indeed pertain to the One Absolute; that the Absolute is the omnipotent Creator and the omniscient Witness is affirmed as a reality that is mediated through the *upadhi*s and received by all created beings. These attributes are the forms in which the One relates to the world, and for as long as worldly experience holds; what Shankara does deny is the ultimate metaphysical reality of this whole domain of relations and distinctions, "set up by ignorance": the One appears as many in relation to a world that is itself illusory. Thus:

> [N]on-duality which is the Supreme reality appears manifold through *Maya*, like the one moon appearing as many to one with defective eye-sight. . . . This manifold is not real, for *Atman* is without any part. . . . (It) cannot in any manner admit of distinction excepting through *Maya* (Karika, III, 19).

This *Maya-sakti*, or power of illusion, is the "seed of the production of the world" (Creation, 65); now the Lord, as *Brahma saguna* or *Apara Brahma* is at one and the same time the source of *Maya* and also included within it. Thus we have Shankara distinguishing the lesser Absolute by reference to its relationship with the *vasana*s, residual impressions deriving from past action:

> In so far as it consists of impressions arising from activity amongst the elements, it is omniscient and omnipotent and open to conception by the mind. Being here of the nature of action, its factors and results, it is the basis of all activity and experience (Absolute, 148-149).

This seems to make, not only the subjective conception of the Lord, but also its objective being, subject to the rhythms of samsaric existence; but this is only true "in so far as it consists of" *vasana*s: the truth is that the reality of the Lord is not exhausted by that dimension in which it participates in *samsara*; therefore its omniscience and omnipotence, while exercised in the world, also and necessarily transcend the world, even if it is to the "lesser" Absolute that these attributes, affirmed as such, pertain.

The reason for asserting that the Lord is both engaged within *Maya* and transcendent vis-à-vis *Maya* is twofold: firstly, as implied in the discussion

above, the Lord *qua* Creator is, intrinsically and by virtue of its essential substance, nothing other than the Absolute; it is the Absolute and nothing else that extrinsically takes on the appearance of relativity in order to rule over it, as Lord, precisely: "That which we designate as the Creator of the Universe *is the Absolute* . . ." (Creation, 7, emphasis added).

The second reason for saying that the Lord is both in *Maya* and transcendent vis-à-vis *Maya* is the following: the Lord is referred to as the "Inner Controller" of the Cosmos, and, more significantly, as the conscious agent responsible not just for purposefully creating the visible and invisible worlds, but also for distributing the "fruits" of all action, karmic and ritual; Shankara emphatically opposes the idea of the Purva-Mimamsakas that action carries the principle of the distribution of its fruit within itself, without any need for an external controlling agency. In a colorful, descriptive passage that reminds one of the teleological argument for the existence of God in scholastic theology, he asserts:

> This world could never have been fashioned even by the cleverest of human artificers. It includes gods, celestial musicians, . . . demons, departed spirits, goblins, and other strange beings. It includes the heavens, the sky and the earth, the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars, abodes and materials for the widest imaginable range of living beings. . . . It could only proceed under the control of one who knew the merit and demerit of all the experiencers in all their variety. Hence we conclude that it must have some conscious artificer, just as we do in the case of houses, palaces, chariots, couches, and the like (Creation, 49).

In other words, the Lord is not simply a subjective construct of the individual sunk in ignorance, even though it is only through ignorance that the Absolute is viewed in its *Apara* form. The Lord exists fully and really only as the Absolute, *nirguna*; but as *saguna*, He is also an objective reality vis-à-vis the world over which He rules, a reality which is conditioned extrinsically by this very relationship and thus by the "dream" which this world is. But this dream is not crudely equatable with the imagination of the individual: "The Self . . . Himself imagines Himself in Himself as having the distinctions to be described below (i.e., the cosmic elements)" (Creation, 223). Whatever the individual proceeds to imagine about the nature of the Absolute can only take place because, "First of all the Lord imagines the individual soul" (Creation, 225).

Further considerations on the relationships between the individual, the Lord, and the Self will be forthcoming in the next part of this chapter. At present, further elaboration on the distinction between the lesser and higher Absolute is necessary, and the following section addresses this question in the light of the mode of Being proper to the transcendent Absolute.

2. Being and Transcendence

> The Absolute is first known as Being when apprehended through the (provisional) notion of Being set up by its external adjuncts, and is afterwards known as (pure) Being in its capacity as the Self, void of external adjuncts. . . . It is only to one who has already apprehended it in the form of Being that the Self manifests in its true transcendent form (Absolute 130) [parentheses by the translator, Alston].

One can understand more clearly the relativity of this "form of Being" in contradistinction to That which transcends it and which may be provisionally referred to as "Beyond-Being," by dialectically applying the tool of the double negation to this mode of thinking about the Absolute. Firstly, one cannot say that the "transcendent form" of the Absolute, *Brahma nirguna*, is deprived of being or reality: it is therefore "not nothing," this constituting the first *neti*. The second *neti* consists in the denial that it can be regarded as identical with Being when Being is conceived as the unmanifest Principle of all manifested beings.

Regarding the first negation, in terms of which *Brahma nirguna* must be seen as positively endowed with being, it should be noted that the positive attribution of being to the Self, however metaphysically inadequate this may be in the first instance, is the necessary prerequisite for grasping the Absolute in its "transcendent form" as Beyond-Being, this being an instance of the principle of *adhyaropa-apavada*, noted above.

The Absolute, then, must be understood to be real—and thus to "be"—even while it is divested of the relativity entailed by the attribution of Being to it, remembering that whatever is an attribute of the Absolute is not the Absolute, and that, by being attributed to it, Being necessarily constitutes an attribute of it. One now needs to understand more clearly the notion of the relativity of Being.

Commenting on the text "All this was *Sat* in the beginning," Shankara writes that the Being in question is

> . . . that which contains within it the seed or cause (of creation). . . . [T]he *Brahman* that is indicated by the words *Sat* and *Prana* is not the one who is free from its attribute of being the seed or cause of all beings. . . . [T]he Sruti also declares, "It is neither *Sat* nor *Asat* (non-being)." . . . [T]he Absolute *Brahman*, dissociated from its causal attribute, has been indicated in such Sruti passages as, "It is beyond the unmanifested, which is higher than the manifested." "He is causeless and is the substratum of the external (effect) and the internal (cause)" (Karika, I, 6[2]).

Sat can but be *Brahman* inasmuch as no element in the causal chain of being can be divorced from the one Reality, that of *Brahman*; but the converse does not hold: *Brahman* is not reducible to *Sat*. Only when associated with the "attribute of being the seed or cause of all beings" can one equate *Brahman* with Being; the same *Brahman*, when "dissociated from its causal attribute" is beyond the relativity of Being, also referred to here as the Unmanifest; this Unmanifest, though "higher than the manifested" is nonetheless a relativity as it is conditioned by the fact that it stands in a relationship of causality in relation to the domain of manifestation. To cause something to exist necessarily entails sharing with that thing a common attribute, namely, existence itself: "If the Self were affirmed to exist, such existence would be transient, as it would not be different in kind from the existence of a pot" (Absolute, 134).

This is why *Brahman* is declared to be neither Being nor non-Being: it is "beyond" Being, this term indicating in a paradoxical fashion that transcendent non-causal Reality which, encompassing all things by virtue of containing within itself the ultimate cause of all beings, is nonetheless not identifiable with

that cause or its effects, but stands unsullied by any "trace of the development of manifestation (*prapañcha-upasama*)."[5]

Another significant aspect of the relativity of Being lies in its relationship with action: "*Karya* or effect is that which is done . . . which has the characteristic of result. *Karana* or the cause, is that which acts, i.e., it is the state in which the effect remains latent" (Karika, I, 7[11]). Despite the fact that Being is immutable relative to its manifested effects, it is in turn the first "actor" insofar as it is the immediate cause of those things which are "done," that is, its manifested effects; Being is therefore tantamount to act, movement, change, hence to relativity, when considered in relation to the non-causal and non-acting "Beyond-Being," *Brahma nirguna*. Constituting the ontological basis for the process of cosmic deployment, Being is also the first, necessary step in the unfolding of *Maya-sakti*, the power of illusion that simultaneously manifests and veils the Real. Elsewhere, Shankara refers to Being "as associated with action" in contrast to the pure Absolute which is *nirbija-rupa*, the "seedless form," the seed in question being that of action (Soul, 161).

The spiritual dynamics by which the world is reduced to being "not other than *Brahman*" will be addressed in Part III; at this point, it is important to clarify the doctrinal perspective on the world as illusion, as corollary to the principle that the Absolute alone is real, and to expand on the question of what is meant by saying that the world is "unreal."

> Though it is experienced, and though it is serviceable in relativity, this world, which contradicts itself in successive moments is unreal like a dream (Reality, 56).

The fact of ordinary experience in the world is not denied; it does possess a degree of reality, albeit relative, but for which it would not be "serviceable"; this experience, however, is inextricably bound up with a world that is said to contradict itself in successive moments, by which is meant: it is continuously changing, perpetually in motion, each moment's particular concatenation of circumstances differing from, and thus "contradicting," that of the next moment. That which is of a permanently self-contradictory nature cannot be said to truly exist: as soon as existence is ascribed to "it" the entity in question has changed, "contradicting" itself, so undermining that (apparent) existence which formerly obtained; this process repeating itself indefinitely, it becomes absurd to talk of the real existence of such an entity.

Instead, the ontological status of worldly experience is likened to that of the dream-world: it appears to be real for as long as one is dreaming, but, upon awakening, it is grasped in its true nature as "appearance"; the dream-world dissolves and, from the perspective of the waking subject, never "was," in reality. Thus, this world with all its manifold contents appears to be real only from the *vyavaharika* perspective, which is itself proportioned to the relative degree of reality proper to the world, and this degree in turn is conditioned, on the one

[5] Mandukya Upanisad, sruti 7.

hand by *avidya*, and on the other, by the very finitude and finality of the world, which not only contradicts itself in successive moments but also comes to a definitive end: like a dream, the world is doomed to extinction, to "be" no more, and whatever is not existent at one time cannot be said to be truly existent at any other: "That which is non-existent at the beginning and in the end is necessarily so in the middle" (Karika, II, 6).

Two further angles of vision from which the world is grasped as illusory may now be explored: those opened up by the "rope-snake" and the "jar-clay" analogies. In Advaita Vedanta, the rope-snake analogy is one of the most frequently employed means of pointing to the exclusive reality of the Absolute, non-dual *Brahman* in contrast to the illusory nature of the manifold phenomena of the world.

> This manifold, being only a false imagination, like the snake in the rope, does not really exist. . . . The snake imagined in the rope . . . does not really exist and therefore does not disappear through correct understanding (Karika, II, 7[17]).

When a rope in the dark is mistaken for a snake, there is a real object that is present and an imagined object that is absent: the snake as such is absent, but "it" is present insofar as it is in truth a rope: that object to which the name and form of a snake are ascribed is in reality a rope. When the rope is perceived, no formerly existent entity, "snake," can be said to have ceased to exist: only the erroneous perception ceases, the illusion disappears; the substratum on which the conception of "snakehood" was imposed stands self-evident. Likewise, the world of multiplicity is an illusion, deriving from ignorance; it is superimposed upon the Absolute, veiling its true nature for so long as it, in the manner of an *upadhi*, imparts the quality of its own nature to that on which it is superimposed, whereas in reality it is that substratum that provides the ontological foundation for the superimposition, thus imparting to it whatever "reality" it can be said to possess; only when it is "seen through," can it be assimilated to its substance.[6] Thus: "the snake imagined in the rope is real when seen as the rope" (Karika, III, 29).

But to see through the world thus and grasp its substratum, one must first be able to distinguish the one from the other:

> [W]hen the rope and the snake for which it was formerly mistaken in the dark have once been distinguished, the snake disappears into the rope and . . . never again emerges (Soul, 167).

Discrimination between the world and *Brahman*, between the relative and the Absolute, between the phenomenal many and the transcendent One—this discrimination, despite being itself a mode of distinction, is the prerequisite for overcoming all distinction; for no sooner is the rope distinguished from the snake, than the snake "disappears into the rope," the superimposed image is

[6] It is useful to recall here the etymology of the word "substance": that which "stands below."

reduced to its substratum; the world is grasped as being "non-different" from *Brahman*, one understands that "all is *Atman*." These points will be elaborated further in Parts II and III, dealing with the realization of transcendence.

Another key image which is used to help in the understanding of the relation between the Real and the illusory is that of the jar-clay relationship; it should be noted, however, that such a relationship subsists, or appears to exist, only from the viewpoint of ignorance, the Real being devoid of relations, since there is no "other" to which it could possibly relate.

> When the true nature of clay is known, a jar does not exist apart from the clay (Karika, IV, 25).
>
> [E]very effect is unreal because it is not perceived as distinct from its cause (Gita, II, 16).

Because the effects are in truth not distinct from their cause, they cannot be real as effects, but can be called real exclusively insofar as they are that cause; the jar as such is a modification of clay in both nominal and existential terms, in other words, it is clay taking on a particular *nama-rupa*, name and form. One cannot perceive any jar without at the same time perceiving clay, so that the jar has no reality without clay; it possesses no distinct reality on its own account. It is this ultimate absence of distinction that establishes, in doctrinal terms at least, the illusory nature of the world considered in itself: whatever is distinct from the non-dual Absolute must be an illusion, since reality is the exclusive preserve of the Absolute. On the other hand, from an inclusive point of view, non-duality also means that the world, albeit multiple in appearance, must also be that same non-dual Reality, insofar as it is absolutely non-distinguishable from its substratum: in the measure that it is so distinguished, by means of *nama-rupa*, in that very measure it is illusory.

The final unifying vision consists in seeing all things "in" the transcendent One, and that One in all things; it is realized fully only by the *jivan-mukta*, the one "delivered in this life," "who sees Me . . . in all beings, and who sees Brahma the Creator and all other beings in Me" (Gita, VI, 30). It is to the realization of this vision, its requirements, modalities, and consequences, that Part II is addressed.

Part II: The Spiritual Ascent

This part of the chapter will address the process by which the consciousness within the *jivatman* (individual soul) realizes its true identity as *Brahman*, the realization of this identity constituting *mukti*, or *moksa*—"Liberation," the highest attainment possible to man in this world; this is the *Nihsreyasa*, the supreme value, upon realization of which, all that needs to be done has been done (*krta-krtya*).

Before examining the nature of this transcendent attainment, it is important to establish certain non-transcendent points of reference in order that one can

situate the transcendence *a contrario*, as it were; the understanding of what constitutes transcendent realization requires one to know what it is that is being transcended. This epistemological approach, proceeding on the assumption of an experiential ascent from the lower degrees of being and consciousness to the transcendent level, accords with the basic ontological structure envisioned by Shankara:

> All this world consists of a hierarchy of more and more subtle and comprehensive effects which stand as the material causes of whatever is grosser. And knowledge of this hierarchy leads to the notion of Being as its support (Absolute, 129).

Whatever is closer to the material pole is less subtle and comprehensive than its principial cause; and the closer this cause is to the summit of the hierarchy, the more consciousness and reality it possesses—the summit itself, the Absolute, being unconditioned Consciousness and Reality.

The process of realization can thus be analyzed in terms of a mirror-image of this ontology: what is objectively conceived as "higher" in the ontological chain of causality will be seen subjectively as "deeper" in the process of realization of the Self. However, Shankara does affirm that in principle no such ascent in stages is necessary for supreme realization. It can take place instantaneously on the basis of just one hearing of the sacred texts affirming the identity between the essence of the soul and the Absolute. For this reason one should begin with an examination of the role of Scripture in the realization of the Self and then proceed with an assessment of the hierarchical stages along the path to that realization. After the section on Scripture will come five sections dealing with: action, ritual, meditation, concentration, and Liberation.

1. The Role of Scripture

Given the fact that the Absolute is "that from which words fall back," it may seem strange to observe the importance Shankara gives to the part played by Scripture—a set of "words," at first sight—in relation to realization of the Absolute. Bearing in mind that for Shankara this realization consists in knowledge of the Absolute and nothing else—leaving aside for now the nature and ontological degree of that knowledge—the following assertion shows how central a role Shankara ascribes to Scripture: the Absolute, he says, "can only be known through the authority of Revelation" (Absolute, 146).

What this means is that not only does Scripture provide the only objective means for supplying valid doctrinal knowledge of the Absolute, but also that key sentences of Scripture have the capacity to impart immediate enlightenment, this being conditional upon the readiness of the hearer. In the view of the non-dualist, the primary purpose of the Veda is to "put an end to the distinctions imagined through ignorance" (Enlightenment, 96), this being the manner in which it can be said to "communicate" that which is strictly inexpressible. All the Upanisadic texts without exception are deemed to be concerned, directly or indirectly, with the establishment of one truth, namely, "That thou art" (*Tat tvam asi*); and the function of this cardinal text, in turn, is "to end the conviction

that one is the individual soul, competent for agency and empirical experience in the realm of illusory modifications" (Enlightenment, 110).

In answer to the question of how an abstract sentence, addressed to the mind, hence the not-self, could result in "concrete" Self-realization, Shankara says that, while it is true that all sentences regarding the "not-self" yield only abstract knowledge, "it is not so with sentences about the inmost Self, for there are exceptions, as in the case of the man who realized he was the tenth" (Upadesa (A), II, 18.202).

We shall see the relevance of this reference to the "tenth" in a moment. The impact of sentences affirming the Self is infinitely greater than that of any sentences relating to the not-self, because knowledge of the Self preexists any accidental vehicle by which this knowledge may be extrinsically communicated; this knowledge is one with the very being of the individual soul, who is in reality nothing but the indivisible Self; but it is a knowledge which has become hidden by the veil of individuality, and thus by the "mutual super-imposition of the Self and the not-self called ignorance" (Absolute, 95).

This mutual superimposition can be summed up as follows: first the Self is superimposed on the not-self, that is, the individual mind, senses, and body, so that this compound of relativities is falsely regarded as "myself"; then this compound is imposed on the Self, so that the unique and universal Subject is falsely regarded as having the objective characteristics of a particular individual and relative subject with a body and soul, resulting in an anthropomorphic conception of the Absolute.

The sentence affirming the true nature of the Self, by dispelling this mutual superimposition born of ignorance, awakens the *jiva* to his true identity as the Self, knowledge of which he is not so much taught as reminded. This is the meaning of the reference to the "tenth": the man who counted only nine others, and was perplexed because there were originally ten in the group, instantaneously realizes, upon being reminded, that he is himself the tenth.

Analogously, in the last analysis, it is preexisting knowledge of the Self that constitutes the basis for the revelatory power of Scripture; it is not the case that Scripture imparts or teaches a truth of which one is *a priori* ignorant. Thus one finds Shankara asserting:

> Indeed the Self is unknown (*aprasiddha*) to nobody. And the Scripture which is the final authority gains its authoritativeness regarding the Self as serving only to eliminate the super-imposition of the attributes alien to Him, but not as revealing what has been altogether unknown (Gita, II, 18).

If it is the true aim and transcendent function of Scripture to eliminate all false notions of alterity and differentiation, Shankara has to account for the existence of so many references in the texts to the different worlds in which rebirth takes place, according to degrees of merit and different kinds of ritual activity, all of which appears bound up with diversity, and thus with the non-self. If the Self is alone worthy of realization, and if all other aspirations are necessarily directed to transient states and "perishable regions," why does Scripture appear to encourage these aspirations?

The question is put by the disciple to the teacher in the first part of the *Upadesa Sahasri*, and the following answer is given:

> The Veda removes gradually the ignorance of him who does not know how to obtain what he desires and prevent what he does not desire. . . . Then afterwards it eradicates ignorance proper, which is vision of difference and which is the source of transmigratory life (Upadesa (A) I, 1.42).

What Shankara appears to be saying here is that the individual who is plunged in ignorance, seeking to avoid the painful and to enjoy the pleasurable, and doing so on the plane of outward manifestation—such a person would not be able to immediately grasp either the truth or the relevance of the doctrine of the Self. In seeking the desirable, however, he is in fact seeking the absolute bliss of the Self, and to the extent that he avoids the undesirable, he distances himself from the more painful illusions attendant upon identification with the not-self. Therefore Scripture, in the manner of an *upaya*, operates within a framework that is immediately intelligible for such an individual, and orients his mode of consciousness and being in an upward direction in such wise that the goal which was previously regarded as absolutely desirable in itself gradually comes to be seen as a stage on the path leading to the highest goal—realization of the Self.

This "gradual removal" of ignorance can thus be seen as a response to the need to compromise with the limited conceptions of the average individual, for whom the world and the ego appear as concrete and real, whilst the supra-individual, unconditioned Self appears as an abstraction. To invert this picture immediately—so Shankara seems implicitly to be saying—would be ineffective; rather, emphasis should in the first instance be placed upon a diverse conception of the posthumous states—reducible in fact to a duality, the desirable and undesirable—which, while illusory from the viewpoint of the Self, nonetheless corresponds to a lived reality for those bound by relativity.

It is therefore legitimate to speak of an ascending hierarchy of "degrees," within the realm of illusion, leading up to, and being finally consummated by, the reality of supreme Self-consciousness; the outward aspect of the degree in question being the particular "abode" within the heavenly pleroma, and its internal counterpart corresponding to the "weakening of ignorance" in such a manner that, as he approaches the inward reality of consciousness of the Self, the individual can figuratively be said to "enter" a more elevated world.

This application of eschatological doctrine to states of consciousness on the earthly plane does not deny the objective posthumous reality of these "abodes," but rather assimilates the principles in question according to the perspective implied by Shankara in the above quotation: "transmigration" is just as real now as it is after human death, being constituted by the very diversity of means and ends, in contrast to that which transcends all transmigratory existence, the immutable Self.

As seen above, such an evaluative framework in regard to Scripture is only partially founded upon the scriptural elements themselves; since the Self as one's immanent reality is already known "ontologically," even if obscured existentially, once this knowledge has been awoken, one is in a position to evaluate and

interpret Scripture on the basis of a recognition of those essential elements which accord with consciousness of the Self, realization of which constitutes the highest aim of Scripture.

It is clear from this that Scripture alone is not adduced in support of this evaluation of Scripture: rather, it is consciousness of the Self, the very source and end of Scripture, that sheds light both upon the direct references to the nature of the Self, and those indirect references, in which a diversity of means and ends are mentioned, apparently contradicting the unity of the Self, but which in reality have realization of the Self as the ultimate aim; and it is this aim or summit which confers value on all that which leads to it.

Turning now to focus more directly on the cardinal text, "That is the Absolute; That thou art," one hearing of this sentence, as mentioned earlier, is deemed sufficient in principle to enlighten the fully prepared disciple who is able to "attain immediate experience of the fact that his Self is the Absolute" (Enlightenment, 114). This "immediate experience" arises only in the case of those whose spiritual receptivity is perfect, such that there is no barrier either in the intelligence or the character that impedes the dawn of Self-realization or Liberation, *moksa*:

> [T]hose gifted persons who are not afflicted by any ignorance, doubt, or erroneous knowledge to obstruct the comprehension of the meaning of the words can have direct knowledge of the meaning of the sentence when it is heard only once (Enlightenment, 115-116).

Such disciples have the "immediate experience," and not just the conceptual understanding, that the word "That" refers to the transcendent Absolute, *Brahma nirguna*, which is designated provisionally as "the Real, Knowledge, the Infinite, . . . Consciousness, and Bliss" (Enlightenment, 114); and that the "thou" refers to the inmost Self "that which is distinguishable from all other elements in the empirical personality, from the body onward . . . discovered to be pure Consciousness" (Enlightenment, 115).

The sentence that expresses the real identity between the transcendentally conceived Absolute and the immanently realized Self is endowed with a realizatory power not simply because of its theurgic power, divine origin, and sacramental nature, but also because of the relationship between its meaning and the very being of the soul who hears it: it directly expresses the highest truth, which is consubstantial with the deepest ontological dimension of the *jiva*. Just as it was seen earlier that the Absolute comprises within itself the elements Being and Consciousness in an absolutely undifferentiated manner, each element being distinguishable from the other only on the plane of relativity, so these two elements of the soul are indistinguishable at its inmost center, and are bifurcated in appearance only at the surface, that is, at the level of its phenomenal mode of existence. The truth expressed by the sentence is thus one with the innermost identity of the soul, and has the power to actualize the virtual consciousness of this identity, for those souls in the requisite state of spiritual receptivity.

Since, however, the overwhelming majority of those seeking enlightenment do not have the capacity to realize the Self upon the first hearing of the text,

the question of the spiritual discipline required for enhancing receptivity to this realization assumes great importance. It is to this discipline that the analysis now proceeds, beginning with the realm of action.

2. Action

Realization of the Self is attained through knowledge, and this strictly implies the transcending of action and the realm within which it operates. One can identify an objective and a subjective reason for this being the case in Shankara's perspective. Objectively, action must be transcended because of the definitive conditions proper to its functioning, and subjectively, it must be transcended because it constitutes the dynamic by which ignorance is perpetuated through the vicious cycle of *karma*.

As regards the objective factor, an examination of the basis of action indicates that it consists in the triad of "knowledge-knower-known"; the knower in question is by definition the false self, the empirical ego, the agent setting in motion the intelligential and sensible instruments of knowledge, the knowledge registered by these instruments being thus wholly relative; the known is the object desired, to which the action is oriented. The "factors" of action are: the agent; the body; the organs; the vital energy; and the divine power over them (Discipleship, 3-8).

Action thus defined can in no wise result in transcendent knowledge; built into action is an insurmountable barrier to realization, a barrier constituted by the very prerequisites for action itself. It is evident from this summary that the category "action" covers more than simply physical movement; it is intimately related to cognition and it is this link which reveals the subjective dimension of the limitations of action: "Action is incompatible with metaphysical knowledge since it occurs to the accompaniment of ego-feeling" (Upadesa (A), II, 1.12).

According to Shankara, action fosters the twin-illusion that "I am the one doing the action" and "let this be mine"; the first entrenches the false idea that one's identity resides in the empirical agent, this being a manner of intensifying the superimposition of the Self onto the not-self, while the second, by ascribing to the Self empirical attributes, superimposes the not-self onto the Self, which is thus subject to qualifications, and is thereby reduced to the "lesser Absolute," or "Absolute with qualities," *Brahma saguna* as opposed to the Absolute that transcends all qualities, *Brahma nirguna*.

The Self, then, is not subject to modification; once the nature of the Self is understood, and is identified as one's own identity, the limitative notion of individual agency is eliminated once and for all; now, it is from the perspective of this realization that Shankara is able to relegate the whole realm of action to illusion: if Self-realization entails the transcending of action, then the renunciation of action must be a prerequisite for that realization:

> [H]ow can there be the notions "agent" and "enjoyer" again when once there is the realization "I am the real"? Therefore metaphysical knowledge cannot require or receive support from action (Upadesa (A), II, 1.20).

Since realization—which means in this context "making real" or effective the fact that "I am the real"—eliminates the basis on which the individual is bound

by the illusion of being an active agent, it naturally follows that action cannot be a means of realization; action cannot, in other words, lead to the attainment of a state that reveals action to be illusory; just as in the snake-rope image, one cannot attain to the knowledge of the reality of the rope by continuing to act on the basis of the fear of its being a snake.

Realization of the Self is described as "deliverance" or "liberation"; it must be stressed here that it is from the realm of *samsara*—of indefinite births, deaths, and rebirths—that the *jivan-mukta* is delivered, in this life. Samsaric existence is woven out of ignorance, the false identification with the body-mind complex; those who persist in this error, and who take their finite selves as well as the outside world to which these selves relate, as the sole reality, denying "the existence of a world beyond," are said to be "born again and again, and come again and again into my power, into the power of death":

> That is, they remain involved in the unbroken chain of suffering constituted by birth, death, and the other hardships of transmigratory existence. That is exactly the condition of the very great majority of the people (Discipleship, 11-12).

Transmigration is said to be beginningless, it cannot be said to have begun at any particular point in time because that point must have been the result of the fruition of the *karma* that preceded it, and so on; the fruits of *karma* in the form of merit and demerit are earned through action—taken in its widest sense, including cognition, as seen above—and this action *qua* bondage arises on the basis of the false identification with the body-mind complex.

> And this shows that the total cessation of transmigratory existence can only occur through devotion to the path of knowledge, associated with the renunciation of all action (Discipleship, 8).

It is only knowledge that liberates one from the chains of *samsara*, of conditioned existence, but the knowledge in question is of a completely different order from what is conventionally regarded as knowledge:

> A cognition of the mind is an act that can be referred to by a verb and is characterized by change. It is referred to metaphorically as "knowledge" because it ends with an apparent manifestation of knowledge as its result (Upadesa (A) I, 2.77).

In other words, no cognition, insofar as it can be characterized as an act, can be equated with real knowledge, but only with an apparent manifestation thereof; ignorance may be weakened by certain types of action, as will be seen below, but they cannot eradicate it, since ignorance is itself the result of previous merit and demerit arising out of action. To say "action" is thus to say "perpetuation of ignorance."

> Work leads to purification of the mind, not to perception of the Reality. The realization of Truth is brought about by discrimination and not by ten millions of acts (Vivekachudamani, 11).

Deliverance or Liberation cannot be reduced to being an effect of an act since action is a mode of conditioned existence: the freedom from conditioned

existence implied by Deliverance would then become dependent on a mode of that very level of existence for its own attainment.

The emphasis placed on the liberating power of transcendent knowledge by Shankara leads to the expression of certain antinomian ideas, the intention behind which is to establish, with the utmost rigor, the incommensurability between the realm of action—involving change, alterity, transience, and illusion—and the realization of the Self, immutable, non-dual, eternal, and unconditionally real. An example of this antinomianism is the following, from his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita:

> Even *dharma* is a sin—in the case of him who seeks liberation—inasmuch as it causes bondage (Gita, IV, 21).

The double qualification here is important: only for the *mumuksu*, the one seeking liberation, can *dharma* ever constitute a sin—and this, only in the measure that it causes bondage to action and not insofar as *dharma* is performed in a disinterested manner. Only in relation to the quest for the highest realization can any lesser goal be regarded as a sin.

There is a distinction here between those who perform their duty in a spirit of renunciation and those who do so in a spirit of attachment. But within the first category there is a further division: there is the one who renounces action because he "sees inaction in action," being disinterested in the whole realm of action, knowing it as illusion; this type of renunciate is "higher" in relation to the renunciate who

> offers all actions to Isvara in the faith that "I act for His sake". . . . The result of actions so done is only purity of mind and nothing else (Gita, V, 10).

This may be interpreted as follows: to act for the sake of the Lord, conceived as the "other" may be a selfless mode of action, but insofar as it is still invested with significance by the agent, and inasmuch as it is conditioned by its reference to the acting Lord, thus *Brahma saguna* and not the actionless *Brahma nirguna*—for these two reasons such action still pertains to the realm of the not-self. It may be "self-less," taking the relative ego as the self in question, but it still falls short of the requirements for the path of supreme Self-realization.

However, the attainment of "purity of mind," despite being the highest result of action, can also be said to constitute a prerequisite for pursuing the path of transcendence; therefore one must take into account that inward quality pertaining to outward action which leads to and cultivates purity of mind, namely virtue.

Shankara makes it abundantly clear that without virtue, liberating knowledge cannot be realized. The very first sutra of the *Atma-bodha* makes it clear that a high degree of virtue is the prerequisite even for receiving the doctrine of the Self: "This *Atmabodha* is being composed for those who, seeking Liberation, have been purified from evil by constant austerities and have reached calm and peacefulness" (Atma-bodha (B), 1). This emphasis upon virtue—being purified from evil—is repeated in the *Upadesa Sahasri*, where Shankara writes that the

knowledge of *Brahman* should only be given to "him whose mind has been pacified, who has controlled his senses and is freed from all defects, who has practiced the duties enjoined by the scriptures and is possessed of good qualities, who is always obedient to the teacher and aspires after Liberation and nothing else" (Upadesa (B), II, 16.72).

The essential virtues must already be present in the soul of the disciple, in some degree at least, as a prior condition for the teaching of the higher knowledge. But the teacher must continue to give, as part of the spiritual discipline, "sound instruction" on the central virtues, which are laid down at Bhagavad Gita, XIII, 7-12, and among which one can identify as essentially moral conditions, as opposed to intellectual conditions, the following: humility, modesty, innocence, patience, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control, detachment, absence of egoism, equanimity, and devotion to the Lord. Commenting on Krishna's phrase "this is declared to be knowledge" (where "this" refers to all the preceding qualities), Shankara writes:

> These attributes . . . are declared to be knowledge because they are conducive to knowledge. What is opposed to this—viz. pride, hypocrisy, cruelty, impatience, insincerity and the like—is ignorance, which should be known and avoided as tending to the perpetuation of *samsara* (Gita, XIII, 11).

One can see that for Shankara morality cannot be divorced from the highest truth, even if the two elements pertain to incommensurable orders of reality. Knowledge relating to the Self infinitely transcends the domain within which morality operates, that is, the outward world on the one hand, and the relative self, the *jivatman*, on the other; but there is nevertheless a crucial relationship between knowledge and virtue: not only is virtue a necessary condition for receiving doctrinal instruction, it is also described as a means to the attainment of knowledge: the teacher "should thoroughly impress upon the disciple qualities like humility, which are *the means of knowledge*" (Upadesa (B), I, 1.5, emphasis added).

The slightest trace of pride—attachment to the illusory ego—not only "perpetuates *samsara*," it is also a form of ignorance, vice being understood here not just as an evil in its own right, but also as a veil over the truth; pride is not simply immoral, it is also an intellectual dysfunction. The virtue of humility, on the other hand, is not exhausted by its purely moral dimension; it has in addition and above all a truly intellectual function. Humility can thus be understood as a moral quality which prefigures that total extinction of the individual that is entailed by realization of the Self; it is a manner of being that conforms with the highest truth, and which, for that very reason, enhances receptivity to it. Moreover, without humility, there is the ever-present danger that knowledge will be misappropriated by the individual, rather than serving to reveal the supra-individual Self:

> He who knows that the Consciousness of the Self never ceases to exist, and that It is never an agent, and also gives up the egoism that he is a Knower of *Brahman*, is a (real) Knower of the Self. Others are not so (Upadesa (B) II, 12.13).

In other words, true consciousness of the Self demands that the ego must not take pride in this knowledge, for the knowledge in question is thereby undermined by the very illusion which it is supposed to eradicate, namely, the ego as a self-subsistent entity; further, it is an absurdity for the ego to pride itself upon knowing "something," as it were outside itself, for then that very duality belies the claim to unitive consciousness; it is only the Self that knows itself. The highest attainment for the ego, in relation to the "experience" of the Self, is extinction in the very bosom of unitive consciousness (a subject to be addressed below). This extinction is prefigured in all the essential virtues, which are also regarded as, on the one hand, preparations and preconditions for this consciousness, and on the other hand, as guarantees that the doctrine will not lead to pride—the intensification of illusory existence apart from the Self—but will rather serve to loosen the hold of the ego upon consciousness and thus assist in the effective assimilation of liberating knowledge.

While humility thus clearly emerges as a key virtue in the pursuit of liberating knowledge, the other virtues mentioned are also indispensable; although Shankara does not elaborate on them individually, the intellectual perspective on pride and humility outlined above can be applied to the other virtues.

Even at this non-transcendent level of the soul, then, the question of "knowing" cannot be isolated from the dimension of "being," which on this level is identified with virtuous being. This may be seen as a reflection of the transcendent realization of the Self, in which pure Consciousness is indistinguishable from unconditioned Being. The soul's knowledge of the Truth must be accompanied by living the Truth, that is, according to impeccable virtue.

The positive aspect, then, of virtuous action is that it is not only an essential precondition for receiving the doctrine, but also a means of purifying the mind and thus preparing the way for the assimilation of liberating knowledge; but, being a means and not the end, it must be transcended. The next section examines the degree to which ritual assists in this process of transcendence.

3. Rites and Knowledge

Shankara gives a nuanced answer to the question of the relationship between the performance of rituals and the rise of liberating knowledge, an answer which is in essence the same as that given to the question of the nature and function of action and virtue. On the one hand, there is a disjuncture between ritual and knowledge, and from this point of view one seeking enlightenment must transcend both ritual activity and renounce the rewards proportioned thereto; on the other hand, one can only effect this transcendence insofar as one has attained that degree of receptivity which is required for the reception of the highest knowledge.

Taking first the latter point of view, Shankara asserts that the performance of ritual can be described as a "cause" of knowledge insofar as it "is instrumental in extinguishing that demerit arising out of past sins which obstructs knowledge of the Absolute" (Discipleship, 89). Ritual activity is said therefore to "co-operate" with the knowledge of the Absolute, but it is stressed that this function is contingent upon the discipline of "hearing the metaphysical texts of the

Upanisads, cogitating over them, and meditating on them persistently [*sravana-manana-nididhyasana*] along with faith, singleness of purpose, and other necessary psychological qualities" (Discipleship, 89).

The efficacy of this triple discipline of *sravana-manana-nididhyasana*, then, presupposes, on the one hand, faith, and on the other hand, "necessary psychological qualities" which can be understood as referring to the virtues noted in the previous section, and also to the traditional Vedantin series of virtues, known as the "six treasures" (*satsampatti*).[7]

It is important in this connection to underline Shankara's insistence on faith; without the correct relationship between the *jivatman* and *Isvara*, not only is enlightenment impossible, but all other virtues are also, from a realizatory point of view, invalidated. The soul must be fully aware of its existential subordination to the Lord, to whom is due an attitude of reverent devotion; after specifying that the highest knowledge should only be taught to him who is "devoted to the Lord," Shankara adds:

> The teaching should not be given to anyone who is not obedient or devoted, even if he be a man of self-discipline or intelligent. If a person feels resentment against the Lord, he should not receive the teaching, even if he has all the other virtues under the sun (Discipleship, 278-279).

The question of the ontological status of this devotion will be examined later, in the light of the discussion on Self-realization; it should be noted at this point, however, that the yearning for Deliverance which implies transcending the ontological limitations of the "lesser" Absolute, that is, the Lord, by no means negates faith and devotion to Him; rather, this faith in the Lord is stressed as an essential precondition for the integrity of the aspiration to transcend the Lord, whose limitation is apparent exclusively from the *paramarthika* point of view, that is, from the point of view bestowed by realization of *Brahma nirguna*. The aspiration that focuses on this "higher" Absolute thus coexists with devotion to the "lesser" Absolute: aspiration and devotion may pertain to incommensurable planes, but there is no contradiction between the two attitudes. Aspiration for the Self and devotion to the Lord are not only perfectly compatible, but each in fact enhances the other; and this in the very measure that it is grasped that the Lord is none other than the Self—there are not two Absolutes, but one, each dimension of which must be given its due if the soul as a whole—and not some abstracted element thereof—is to be integrated into the consciousness of the Absolute. Faith in the Lord and identity with the Self are thus in perfect harmony. Thus one finds Shankara, in the opening verse of his Thousand Teachings, explaining that his teaching is imparted for the sake of "those who deeply desire liberation *and* who are possessed of faith" (Upadesa, (A), I.1, emphasis added)

[7] These are traditionally given as: *sama*—calm (restraint of the mind); *dama*—self-control (restraint of the senses); *uparati*—self-settledness; *titiksa*—forbearance, fortitude, impassibility in adversity; *samadhana*—concentration; *sraddha*—faith (Atma-bodha (A), 43-45).

Moreover, faith has an intrinsically enlightening function. There is an intellective quality flowing from faith which conduces to the comprehension of metaphysical principles; commenting on why the teacher in the Chandogya Upanisad says, "Have faith," Shankara writes:

> When there is faith, the mind can be concentrated on the point one wishes to know about, and this enables one eventually to know it (Discipleship, 147).

When faith and the other conditions described above are thus present, the rituals can be regarded as "remote auxiliaries" to knowledge (*arad upakaraka*). They can be harnessed to the pursuit of knowledge by means of the gradual elimination of ignorance resulting from previous demerit; and they assist in the progressive purification of the mind, thus serving the function of "auxiliaries" to knowledge; but their aspect of "remoteness" must also be understood, and this leads to the first aspect of the relationship between ritual and knowledge distinguished above, that of disjuncture.

As seen earlier, even *dharma* is considered sinful insofar as it leads to bondage; this is to be understood in the light of the principle that everything but the supreme realization is a relativity and consequently a kind of evil in relation to it:

> When the Self has once been known, everything else is seen as evil (Discipleship, 62).

This being the case, one who yearns for Deliverance from *samsara* must cultivate a "disgust" for those higher worlds which are promised as the fruit of ritualistically earned merit (Discipleship, 70). If the intention of the individual is Liberation, then any inclination towards lesser goals—however elevated and desirable they may be in themselves—must be firmly eliminated, in order that all one's efforts and attention be focused on the highest aspiration; therefore, one must be detached from the rituals that are related to these non-transcendent rewards.

Although Shankara is not rigid regarding the necessity of outwardly renouncing and abstaining from all ritual action, it is clear that he regards this as the most appropriate way to proceed for one whose intention is realization of the Absolute. Just as it is proper for one desirous of the three "external worlds" (*bhur*, *bhuvah*, *svah*—this world, that of the ancestors, and that of heaven)[8] to perform rituals related to these worlds, so "those who want the Self as their world must definitely renounce the world as wandering monks. . . . [W]andering forth from one's house as a homeless monk (*parivrajya*), being the renunciation of all means to (ritualistic) action, is implicitly enjoined as part of the discipline" (Discipleship, 114, 115).

[8] This is also known as *svarga*, *satya-loka*, and *Brahma-loka*, which will be mentioned below as the heaven in which the *krama-mukta* resides prior to final reabsorption in the Self at the end of the cycle.

The fact that this renunciation is only implicitly enjoined means that it is not a *conditio sine qua non* for the discipline; in practice, it is most likely to have been what Shankara would insist upon, while admitting that householders performing rituals can also, exceptionally, pursue and realize Deliverance, instances of this being found in the Veda itself. As a rule, however, the true *mumuksu*, seeking Liberation in this life, is one who would "normally give up all connection with ritual whatever and any form of permanent residence, . . . wandering the earth as an ascetic with a single staff, a monk of the *paramahamsa* order" (Enlightenment, 31-32).

Having seen the limitations as well as the importance of action and ritual, we can address the next identifiable stage in the hierarchy of realization: meditation.

4. Meditation

According to Shankara, meditation involves "mental action" and "results from the free working of the human mind" (Enlightenment, 4). It combines will with thought, hence it can either be done or not be done, this contingency marking it off from Knowledge which is "not anything which can be done or not done" and which "is conditioned neither by a command nor by human will but by the nature of an already existent reality" (Enlightenment, 4-5).

Whilst meditation stems from, and is thus conditioned by, the relative subject, Knowledge of the Self is "conditioned by the nature of the Real and not by the action of the subject" (Enlightenment, 139). Nonetheless, the Veda is replete with injunctions to meditate on the Self; and Shankara explains this with reference to a tripartite division of the souls "treading the spiritual path": those of excellent, middling, and weak powers of intelligence; the injunctions to meditate relate only to the two lower categories. This implies that there must also be different types of meditation, as indeed there are; but given the complexity of the forms of meditation and their relationships with various elements of ritual and symbolism, and given also the fact that the intention here is to focus on transcendence, this complexity can be reduced in accordance with the meditative principles corresponding to two degrees of *mukti*: the first is deliverance in this life—which pertains to the *jivan-mukta*; and the second is "deferred" or gradual release—pertaining to the *krama-mukta*, who attains to union with *Brahma nirguna* only after death, at the end of the world-period, having been delivered from the samsaric realm of rebirth, and inhabiting, prior to final union, the Paradisal domain of *Brahma-loka*, the "place" of *Brahman*. This attainment is called "conditioned" immortality and constitutes the highest goal for those who have meditated on the Absolute as associated with finite form, in conjunction with the performance of all due Vedic rites.

This form of meditation in the context of the rites is called *upasana* and is to be distinguished from the higher type of meditation, called *dhyana*, by virtue of the fact that *dhyana* is not so much a meditation on the Absolute as "other"—conceived in the form of some attribute of the Absolute or of some particular deity—but is more of an assimilation of the individual to his true Self. Thus, Shankara defines *dhyana* as:

> [T]he withdrawal of the outward-going perception of the senses into the mind, and the one-pointed focusing of the mind on the source of its consciousness (Enlightenment, 137).

Before looking at the forms taken by this transcendent mode of meditation, it must first be situated in reference to the lower mode which it transcends.

In this lower mode the meditator takes an entity like the sun or lightning as a symbol of the Absolute and meditates thereupon. Shankara has to explain how this type of meditation is valuable, given the Vedic rule that only meditation on the Absolute yields fruit, and given the obvious fact that such finite entities are distinguishable from the Absolute. He resolves the paradox by saying that, while it is illegitimate to regard *Brahman* as identical with these finite objects, it is not illegitimate to regard them as identical with it, inasmuch as the lesser can be treated as if it were the higher, while the higher must never be treated as if it were the lower; "the charioteer may on certain occasions be treated like the king," but nothing good can come from "treating the king like the charioteer and thereby demeaning him" (Enlightenment, 13).

So, by meditating on the sun as if it were *Brahman*, one is superimposing the notion of *Brahman* onto the sun, which serves as its symbol; therefore the reward for such meditation is derived from that principle which is superimposed, the Absolute itself, and not from the limited properties of the object serving as the symbolic support for the Absolute:

> The Absolute is itself the object of meditation in these cases, to the extent that the idea of the Absolute has to be projected onto a symbol, as one projects the idea of Vishnu onto a stone image (Enlightenment, 15).

When meditation takes a particular deity for object, the aim is to identify with that deity to the point where one's own identity is extinguished in and by that of the deity, the result of which is a conviction of one's identity with the deity, a conviction "as powerful as one's (previous) conviction of identity with one's individual personality" (Enlightenment, 8).

However exalted such a state may be, it cannot be of a fully transcendent order, given the fact that whatever deity be in question, it is, as such, distinct from the Self, identity with which alone constitutes unconditional transcendence.

It is important to note that it is on this, the "indirect" path of Deliverance, involving identification with the deities, that superhuman powers arise, whereas on the direct path, that of the *jivan-mukta*, involving nothing but identification with the Self, they do not (Enlightenment, 65-66).

In the case of the one who realizes identity with the Lord, certain powers do arise, such as making oneself minute in form, or projecting oneself into several bodies; such a person is said to "attain to the Lord of the mind" thus becoming "lord of speech, lord of hearing, lord of understanding" (Enlightenment, 67). Now, it is important that Shankara clearly distinguishes the individual soul from the personal Lord: the identification in question is by no means a complete identity of essence, but rather an attainment of a transient nature, in contrast

to the realization of the Self as one's "true transcendent state" (*kaivalya*). This is clear from the following assertion:

> [T]he Lord of all minds is He who was ordained before them (individual souls), the Lord, and the soul attains to Him (Enlightenment, 67).

Not only is the relativity of the "attainment" of the Lord evident here in the light of the ontological priority accorded to the Lord in relation to individual souls, it is also underlined by the fact that both entities involved are themselves relative: the soul is "ordained" after the Lord has been "ordained"—the Lord's ontological precedence notwithstanding, it, too, is a relativity as it is subordinated to That which is not "ordained" and which is the ultimate source of all ordainment, namely *Brahma nirguna*.

The impossibility of an unconditional identity between the individual and the Lord is proven not just by this ontological distinction, but also by the fact that, whatever superhuman powers the individual may acquire by virtue of his identification with the Lord, these never include the powers of "creation, maintenance, and dissolution of the universe": "Only the Supreme Lord has the right to govern the universe . . ." (Enlightenment, 66-67).

As seen in Part I, one of the key distinguishing features of *Brahma nirguna* is *prapañcha-upasama*—its being without any trace of the development of manifestation. This means that whenever there is consideration of divine attributes relating to manifestation, it is always the lesser Absolute that is in question; and the only relationship that the individual can have with the lesser Absolute or the Lord, is existential subordination, even, as seen in the above quotation, when the individual is said to have "attained" to the Lord: the unconditional omnipotence of the Lord infinitely surpasses the acquired powers of the individual who must therefore remain in an immutable position of inferiority in relation to the Lord.

There is thus always and inescapably a distinction between the soul and the Lord, even in the very bosom of this exalted state of identity; and it is this very distinction—implying alterity, duality, and thus illusion—that situates the metaphysical relativity of this attainment in contrast with the realization of the Self. Furthermore, any object that is to be "attained" is, by that very token, radically other than the subject in question, who therefore can never fully "become" it; whereas the Self is said to be unattainable precisely because it is *nitya-siddha*—the "eternally true fact," thus, ever-attained, never non-attained:

> When there is a difference between a meditator and that on which he meditates, the meditator may change into the object of his meditation. But no action on one's own Self is possible or necessary in order to change into one's own Self. . . . If it were thought that anything were needed to become one's own Self, it would not be one's true Self that one was aiming at (Upadesa (A), II, 15.14).

The difference here being emphasized is that between meditation on an object conceived as "other," and concentration on the Subject, grasped as one's Self. The

latter entails an experience of infinitude proper to one's own inmost being, while the former entails only a change of degree within the framework of the finite, an upward and inward transformation in the direction of the Real, but always falling short thereof, and thus constituting but a change of state within the realm of *Maya*.

One of the ways in which this kind of meditation can be transcended is by adopting Shankara's apophatic discipline; this is like a reflection, within the realm of spiritual practice, of his doctrinal perspective on the transcendence of the Absolute. Rather than this or that object determining the orientation of consciousness, each and every object that is susceptible of determinate conception is eliminated by the double negation, *neti, neti*. This is a key component of *vichara*, the way of enquiry, discernment.

> By a process of negation of all conditionings through the axiom "not this, not this" come to understand . . . the oneness of the individual soul with the Supreme Self (Atma-bodha (B), 30).

It should be strongly emphasized here that the individual soul itself is to be eliminated by the negation before identity with the Self can be realized; this is because it, too, constitutes, on the plane of its separative manifestation, a conditioning or an "object," as it will be described below, before the unique reality of the Subject. The *neti* is here applied subjectively: one negates that which one is not.

This process of negation perforce operates on a limited and conditioned plane of being inasmuch as it presupposes determinate properties susceptible of negation; this means that negation is tied to relativity, and has no meaning or function at the transcendent level of the Self which is unconditioned Being, or as seen earlier, "Beyond" Being:

> Because the Self cannot be negated, it is that which remains after the practice of saying *neti neti* to all else. It is directly apprehended through the practice of saying "I am not this, I am not this." The ego-notion arises from the notion that the Self is a "this" (Absolute, 152).

All trace of "this" must be discarded; that is, the non-dual Self as infinite Subject must be shorn of all objectively determinate qualities in order that it may be "directly apprehended"; in the very measure that the Self is regarded as an object, the ego-notion binds the consciousness of the individual soul to the limited dimensions proper to the ego: attribution of objective alterity to the Self inescapably entails imprisonment within the subjective particularity of the ego. The *neti, neti* is to operate, then, in such wise as to negate the ego, which must be radically objectivized: instead of being the source of limited subjectivity—hence bondage—it must be regarded as an insignificant and ultimately unreal modification of the Self, from the perspective of which it is an outward object:

> The Self Itself is not qualified by an arm which has been cut off and thrown away. . . . The ego, the object portion, is also like the part of the body cut off. . . . As it is not the Self, the object portion in the consciousness "I" should be renounced by the wise. As

> It was mixed with egoism previously, the remaining (non-object) portion is implied by the word "I" in the sentence, "I am *Brahman*" (Upadesa (B), II, 6.1, 4, 6).

Just as an arm is non-conscious and exists for the sake of a conscious agent, so the ego is, relative to the Self, non-conscious and exists only by virtue of the illumination it receives from the consciousness of the Self; when the ego-notion is once fully and effectively eliminated through spiritual discrimination and methodic negation, "The immediate experience that ensues is the Supreme Self" (Upadesa (A), II, 5.5).

This "immediate experience"—*anubhava*—in terms of which the transcendent Absolute is "known" to be one's own true Self, constitutes the veritable summit of spiritual experience, an experience that is not "of" the Self, but, as seen in the last quotation, *it is the Self*; this means that there is no question of a subject, an object, and an experience linking the one to the other; the word "experience" is thus employed elliptically, the intention being to underline the disjuncture between a mere mental, and thus outward, knowledge of the reality of the Self, on the one hand, and the plenary realization of infinite Selfhood, on the other. In this "experience," further aspects of which will be treated below, there can be no dichotomy between knowledge and being; rather, a complete identification between the two is realized, so that each is absolutely the other; it is only within the matrix of the ego that the two elements can subsist as distinct poles.

This *via negativa* is one way which Shankara proposes as a means of transcending the limitations of the lower forms of meditation, arriving thereby at the supreme realization. But this negative path is not the only transcendent mode of meditation; there is also the higher form of meditation, *dhyana*, mentioned earlier, in which consciousness is focused in a positive way, not on something extrinsic, but on the very source of consciousness itself; and there is also that form of positive meditation or, more accurately, concentration upon and invocation of the highest symbolic expression of the Absolute, the holy syllable *Om*. The following section deals with these transcendent forms of meditation.

5. Concentration and Interiorization

(i) *OM*

In Part I of the chapter emphasis was put on the transcendence of the Absolute in relation to all names referring to it; at this point it is necessary to stress the complementary dimension of immanence, in terms of which the pure Absolute is present not only in all that exists, but more importantly, from the point of view of method, in the name which sacramentally designates it. When dealing with the spiritual discipline by means of which the Absolute is realized, it is this operative dimension, deriving from the aspect of immanence, that takes precedence over the doctrinal comprehension of the aspect of transcendence, it being understood that the latter is an essential condition for engaging with the former.

This shift of emphasis must not, however, compromise the principle of *advaita*: the transcendent is at the same time the immanent, and vice versa; there is but

one Absolute in question, the different aspects of which are distinguishable only from the viewpoint of the relative, whether the perspective be of a doctrinal nature or, as now, of an operative or "realizational" order.

In this context, the name which is considered most appropriate for the purposes of unitive concentration is *Om*. Shankara writes, in conformity with Scripture, that everything is *Om*: the world, the Vedas, even the Absolute itself.

Regarding the first of these three, the things that make up the world are reducible to the names that designate them, which in turn are modalities of the primordial "sound-universal," the material cause of sound; and this in turn is a modification of *Om* (Creation, 143-145).

Regarding the identity between *Om* and the Vedas:

> This *Om* is the Veda because whatever has to be known is known through this *Om*, which is thus the Veda. On this *Om* depends the Vedahood even of the other Veda! This *Om* being something so magnificent, it should definitely be adopted as an instrument of approach to the Absolute (Enlightenment, 161).

The word *Om* is regarded as both a name of the Absolute and as an "instrument of approach" to it; this is for two reasons: the name is regarded as identical to the Absolute, and it also contains a liberating "grace."

Turning to the first, the name is identified with the named: it is not just a reference to *Brahma saguna*, which is regarded as susceptible of determinate conception and thus designation as the "lesser" Absolute, but is seen as identical with *Brahma nirguna*, which is not so regarded. Though *Brahman* and *Atman* are names of the Absolute, Shankara says that *Om* is the name which "fits closest," thus rendering it the "chief instrument in the apprehension of the Absolute" (Enlightenment, 159-160). Going further, Shankara asserts that "even the Absolute in its highest form is the syllable *Om*" (Creation, 144).

The Absolute can be conceived as truly "existent" or real, even if the true nature of that reality is strictly ungraspable by the mind; and it is that nature which is realized by means of methodic concentration on the name, which, on the one hand, designates that which is conceivable, but which on the other, cannot exhaustively encapsulate within its own nature *qua* name, the nature of the named. In other words there is a relationship of inner identity between the name and the named, by virtue of which the former leads to the latter; but there is also a relationship of difference, failing which one could not make the conceptual distinction between the two. Thus one finds Shankara writing:

> And the purpose of knowing the identity of the name and the named is to enable oneself to dismiss name and named altogether and realize the Absolute, which is quite different from either (Creation, 144).

That the Absolute is "different" from the name is clearly discernible, but the question may be asked: how is it different from the named? Two answers may be proposed: first, the identity of the name and the named can be conceived in terms of a transcendent essence which surpasses both of these elements taken distinctively as correlates; this identity, then, is That which, in its intrinsic reality

cannot be designated either as "name" or as "named," both of which imply, *a priori*, an object, hence something "quite different" from the Absolute.

Second, to say that the name is the named means: the symbol is not other than the symbolized; but insofar as the symbolized, the named, is viewed as the counterpart to its symbol, a particular form, it is endowed with a degree of relativity, viz., the relativity of constituting one pole in a dualistic relationship, name-named: both the name and the named are *Brahman*, but *Brahman* transcends that trace of relativity entailed by the very opposition that is conceivable between the two elements. It should be stressed that this opposition, or mutual conditioning, exists only in respect of that external "conceivable" dimension in which the difference between the two is manifest: the name as such is finite and formal inasmuch as it is determinate, while the named is infinite and supra-formal in its essential non-determinable reality. It is precisely because this extrinsic opposition is subordinated to the intrinsic identity between the name and the named, that the emphasis, in the first instance—that of methodic concentration on the name—is placed on the inner reality that the name is the named; only upon realization of the Absolute can one "dismiss name and named altogether," doing so on account of the dimension of extrinsic relativity pertaining to the relationship between the two, a relationship which can be conceived by the intellect, even though the dimension of metaphysical identity takes precedence over that of conceivable distinctiveness, this identity pertaining to what is strictly inconceivable, even while being realizable.

Turning now to examine "grace," the second of the reasons proposed above for why *Om* is considered the best instrument of approach to the Absolute, one is struck by an apparent contradiction. It is said by Shankara that: "The syllable *Om* is the most distinctive and intimate name for the supreme Self. When it is used, the Self tends to pour out grace" (Enlightenment, 161).

It is further specified that, despite the fact that the unconditioned Absolute cannot be indicated by sound, when the syllable *Om* is in question there is a major difference from all other sounds: "When it is meditated on as the Absolute with deep reverence, the latter manifests 'grace' and reveals itself to the meditator. This is so in the case of the unconditioned Absolute and it also holds true of the conditioned Absolute" (Enlightenment, 170).

One may ask here: how can the unconditioned Absolute manifest "grace," when it is expressly stated that any relationship with manifestation pertains only to the conditioned Absolute? The "actionless" Self, it would seem, cannot manifest grace or anything at all, on pain of becoming "lesser" (*apara*).

To resolve this problem one must have recourse to the principle of the identity between the name and the named: just as the outwardly finite nature of the name does not nullify the fact that in its inward reality it is nothing but the infinite nature of the named, in the same way, the extrinsically relative operation of grace—which presupposes two relativities: a recipient and a benefactor—does not nullify the fact that the origin and consummation of the operation is absolute, inasmuch as the supreme Self is revealed thereby.

In other words, both the element of grace and the Lord presupposed by its very "activity," can be assimilated to the Self inasmuch as the Lord cannot be

other than the Self, even though, from a different angle, the Self transcends the limitations of the Lord. It is also important to bear in mind that, even if the immediate source of grace be the lesser Absolute—or the Lord—the Self as the higher Absolute is the "eternally-known fact" (*nitya-siddha*), and so requires only the elimination of ignorance to be "known" as such. Thus, there is no contradiction between saying, on the one hand, that grace relates in the first instance to the lesser Absolute, and on the other, that the higher Absolute stands self-revealed upon the elimination of ignorance, an elimination brought about by the grace of the Lord which is present in and actualized by the name *Om*.

This line of interpretation accords with the point made earlier: an essential condition for even receiving, let alone realizing, the doctrine of the Self is faith in the Lord: one cannot bypass the Lord in a spirit of what Shankara called "resentment," in an effort to realize the Self that transcends the Lord. Furthermore, this spiritual discipline of meditation on *Om* will be fruitless unless it be accomplished in the framework of the essential virtues, including therein all the rules of ascetic life (Enlightenment, 169).

The supra-personal Self is thus realized through concentration on *Om*, only on the basis of the following eminently "personal" conditions: the grace of the "personal" Lord on the one hand, and the faith and virtue of the individual person, on the other, however paradoxical this may appear, given the fact that both these "persons" are rendered illusory before the unique reality of the Self that is to be realized. This shows, again, the importance of understanding the distinction between the *paramarthika* and the *vyavaharika* perspectives: from the point of view of relativity—the human starting-point of the process of realization—relative conditions must be fulfilled; from the absolute viewpoint, as will be seen below, such conditions presupposing alterity are illusory.

(ii) Interiorization and the Intellect

The other higher form of meditation that we need to examine is that found in the context of *adhyatma-yoga*, a *yoga* or spiritual discipline that is centered on *Atman*.[9] This form of meditation is in fact a discipline of interiorizing concentration, having no "thing" as object of meditation other than the very source of consciousness itself. This interiorization involves a progressive "dissolution" or reabsorption of the outward faculties of knowledge within the inner faculties; these faculties, in turn, are to be dissolved into the highest—which is at the same time the inmost—principle of consciousness.

In order fully to appreciate the principle underlying this method, it is necessary to situate these faculties of knowledge in their hierarchical context, focusing in particular on the intellect (*buddhi*), and to show how these differentiated faculties can be reconciled with the existence of one sole consciousness, that of the Self—the oneness of consciousness constituting a key postulate of the Advaita perspective.

[9] This is not to be confused with the *raja-yoga* of Patanjali, which is subjected to a rigorous critique by Shankara.

The hierarchy of the cognitive faculties is ordered according to interiority: any given faculty is "higher" in the measure that it is more "inward"; thus one finds the intellect at the top, because it is most inward:

> The intellect (*buddhi*) receives a reflection of the light of the Self as pure consciousness first, since it is transparent and stands in immediate proximity to the Self. . . . Consciousness next illumines the lower mind (*manas*) as the next inmost principle, mediately through its contact with the intellect. Next it illumines the sense organs mediately through its contact with the mind, and next the body through its contact with the sense-organs (Soul, 54).

It is thus the unique light of the consciousness of the Self that is refracted through successive degrees of relative awareness, having first been reflected in the intellect. Thus, all awareness, from bodily to sensible, mental, and intelligible, is at one and the same time both the absolute consciousness of the Self—in its essential nature—and also relative knowledge, in the measure that it is identified with its particular faculty, that which determines its mode of refraction:

> The knowledge produced by an evidence does not differ in its essential nature whether one calls it eternal or transitory. Knowledge (even though) produced by an evidence, is nothing other than knowledge (Upadesa (B) I, 2.103).

In response to the objection that knowledge cannot be regarded simultaneously as the result of evidences and of a changeless, eternal, and self-evident nature, Shankara replies:

> It is a result in a secondary sense: though changeless and eternal, It is noticed in the presence of mental modifications called sense-perceptions, etc., as they are instrumental in making It manifest. It appears to be transitory, as mental modifications called sense-perceptions . . . are so (Upadesa (B), I, 2.108).

Both knowledge arrived at by discursive thought and knowledge derived from sense-impressions are seen as pertaining to knowledge or Consciousness as such—even if vehicled by means which are transitory; since the "mental modifications" are transient, the knowledge acquired by their means appears to take on the same nature; to say that the light of pure Consciousness is "noticed" in the presence of the modifications means simply that the modifications cannot function except in the light of Consciousness: it is "noticed" in their presence because they cannot be alienated from its presence:

> Just as in the presence of sunlight, colors such as red, etc., are manifested in a jewel, so all objects are seen in the intellect in My Presence. All things are, therefore, illumined by Me like sun-light (Upadesa (B), II, 7.4).

Just as inert objects require illumination from some external luminous source in order to be perceived, so the mental modifications require the light of the Self in order to perceive external or internal phenomena: without this light of the Self, the "jewel" of the intellect will not contain the different colors.

The absoluteness of supreme Knowledge thus implies that it necessarily comprises all relative knowledge, without becoming relativized by this internal dimension of its own immutable nature; any relative form of knowledge must therefore be subsumed by the very principle by which it operates if it is to be assimilated to what Shankara above calls its "essential nature." The intrinsic value of all forms of knowledge thus derives ultimately from the extent to which they contribute to an awareness of this "essential nature," which is one with supreme Self-consciousness; this transcendent Knowledge is therefore "in-tended"—even if this be unconscious—by all lower level cognitions, which can thus be assimilated to the ultimately "in-tended" object.

It should be noted that the intellect in Shankara's perspective is not only regarded as the key faculty for apprehending transcendent realities, it is also seen as the source of suffering for the individual; in other words, it is in relation to the intellect that one can speak either of liberation or bondage, occupying as it does a position intermediary between the unconditioned Self and the empirical ego; whether the intellective consciousness experiences the one or the other depends upon its fundamental orientation, and therefore upon its content: outward manifestation or inward principle.

To turn first to the negative aspect of the intellect, Shankara writes:

> Attachment, desire, pleasure, and sorrow, etc. arise with the presence of *buddhi*; in deep sleep, when the *buddhi* is not in existence, they too disappear; therefore they belong to the *buddhi* and not to the Self (Atma-bodha (B), 23).

If the intellect identifies itself exclusively with external phenomena, it will experience the corresponding instability of successive, determinate, subjective states—which can be characterized as "suffering," despite the mention of "pleasure" in the above quotation, since whatever pleasure may be experienced is of a transient rather than eternal nature. Suffering is thus equated with delusion, the false attribution of reality to manifested phenomena, which then imprison the intellect within their own limitations: "Bondage is nothing but a delusion of the intellect; the removal of this delusion is liberation" (Upadesa (B) II, 16.59).

Penetrating deeper into the source of this delusion, Shankara asserts that it resides in the belief that the intellect is itself conscious, whereas in reality it is but the medium through which the pure consciousness of the Self is refracted, acquiring its capacity of illumination exclusively from that source: "Just as a man looks upon his body placed in the sun as having the property of light in it, so, he looks upon the intellect pervaded by the reflection of Pure Consciousness as the Self" (Upadesa (B), II, 12.1).

If the individual intellect is falsely taken to be the conscious Self, then the resultant mode of awareness will of necessity be determined by outward phenomena and their subjective counterparts, experienced in the form of multiple attachment. Thus, a kind of symbiotic relationship can be seen to subsist whereby the intellect appears to illumine forms, and these in turn feed the delusion of the intellect that it is the consciousness which illumines them, such consciousness possessing in reality a secondary and derivative nature, assuming the character of the forms it illumines: "[J]ust as light, the revealer, assumes the

forms of the objects revealed by it, so the intellect looks like all things inasmuch as it reveals them" (Upadesa (B), II, 14.4). Whereas, as seen above, the intellect itself receives its light from the Self.

Turning now to its positive aspect, the intellect occupies a privileged position in relation to the Self, because it receives the light of pure consciousness in a more integral manner than any other modality of the Self:

> (Although) all-pervading, the Self does not shine in everything: It shines only in the intellect, like a reflection in a clear (mirror) (Atma-bodha (B), 17).

The mirror analogy is particularly revealing when considered in connection with the reflection of the sun in water:

> The Self which has for Its adjuncts the intellect and the vital force is reflected in the modifications of the intellect and in the senses like the sun reflected in water. The Self is free and pure by nature (Upadesa (B), II, 14.33).

While the light of the sun is uninterrupted, pure, and constant, its reflected image in the water—the reflection of the Self in the intellect—is subject to distortion, the "moving" water serving as a vivid image of the intellect distracted and deluded by changing configurations of subjective states and external phenomena. However, if the intellect can be stilled, and concentrated on its source, then it will faithfully reflect the Self. If, on the one hand, the reflection is not the object reflected, on the other hand, it cannot be said to possess any reality apart from that of the same object; in this respect it is identical with the object.

This view of the immanence of the object in the reflection thereof contains an important key for understanding the methodic or operative import of the discipline of interiorizing concentration central to *adhyatma-yoga*. While, as seen above, it is the immanence of the Self in the intellect which is accentuated in the domain of method, this stress is legitimate only in the measure that, conceptually, one has grasped the transcendence of the Self in relation to the intellect. Taking the dimension of transcendence first, Shankara writes:

> An ignorant person mistakes the intellect with the reflection of Pure Consciousness in it for the Self, when there is the reflection of the Self in the intellect like that of a face in a mirror (Upadesa (B), II, 12.6).

On the other hand, the essential identity between the reflection—that which is the "content" of the faculty of the intellect—and the Self is affirmed in accordance with the dimension of immanence:

> Just as the reflection of a face which makes a mirror appear like it is the face itself, so, the reflection of the Self in the mirror of the ego making it appear like the Self (is the Self). So the meaning of the sentence "I am *Brahman*" is reasonable. . . . It is only in this way and in no other that one knows that one is *Brahman*. Otherwise the teaching "Thou art That" becomes useless in the absence of a medium (Upadesa (B), II, 18.109-110).

In other words, the Self is seen to transcend the faculty of the intellect, in one respect, even though, in another respect, it constitutes the immanent reality of the intellect, directly reflected therein when the faculty is oriented towards its

luminous source and inward principle, and indirectly reflected in, or "noticed in the presence of," the mental modifications which assimilate manifested phenomena, inasmuch as these modifications can only function in the light of the Self.

It is important here to note the difference between the lower mind (*manas*), and the intellect or the higher mind (*buddhi*):

> What belong to the lower mind and the higher mind are thought and knowledge respectively (Soul, 44).

"Thought" can be identified with the individual as such—it is pure Consciousness particularized—whereas knowledge pertains to that Consciousness in itself.

From another angle Shankara says that the different names given to this "inner organ" are the result of the quality of awareness in question; this inner organ "is called mind (*manas*) when doubt, etc., are in play but intellect (*buddhi*) when fixed determination etc. arise" (Soul, 29).

This determination can be equated with firm aspiration and one-pointed concentration; the intellect, the point of contact between the vertical ray of the Self and the horizontal plane of the ego, is thus true to its properly transcendent function only when oriented towards its source, and is relativized in the measure that it allows itself to be determined by the discursive mind, that to which individual thought and its inescapable concomitant, doubt, pertain.

To the extent that the individual mind appropriates the light of the intellect and harnesses its luminous capacity to the pursuit of determinate, relative, and individual aims, then the same consciousness which, in its essential nature, is at one with the Self, acquires the appearance of transience; it becomes falsely regarded as an appendage of the mind, and therefore beneath the individual ego which directs it, instead of being seen as that faculty by means of which alone individuality is transcended. It is thus that one can see the compatibility between, on the one hand, Shankara's assertion that "bondage is nothing other than a delusion of the intellect," and on the other hand, that the Self "shines only in the intellect."

Turning now to the process by which consciousness is to be interiorized according to the spiritual discipline of *adhyatma-yoga*, this is based on the progressive "dissolution" of outward modes of consciousness. The means of effecting this dissolution is abstention: by stilling the functions of the outward faculties, these faculties are absorbed into their subtle cause, which, being itself the relatively gross effect of an anterior and interior subtler cause, must likewise be stilled so as to become reabsorbed within its cause. This process culminates finally in the realization of "the Self that is pure peace," called by Shankara "the highest possible summit of human experience" (Enlightenment, 86).

This process of spiritual ascent is described as follows: all sense-activities are to be dissolved in the mind (*manas*); the mind dissolves into its "luminous principle," the intellect (*buddhi*); the intellect is then to be dissolved within the *Hiranyagarbha*, identified with the universal intellect, the "first-born," and this

in turn is to be dissolved into the Absolute, "the true Self, that is pure peace, void of all distinctions, without modifications, existent within all" (Enlightenment, 85).

The operative principle here is that abstention from all exteriorizing tendencies of consciousness, from sensible to intelligible, constitutes what might be called the "shadow" of positive, one-pointed concentration on the inmost source of consciousness; it is only because the light of pure Consciousness runs through all these faculties, like a luminous axis, that abstention from exteriorizing thought, together with concentration on the source of awareness, eventually culminates in the realization of pure Consciousness. Thus it can be said that this consciousness, whilst being the immanent or inmost substance of all modes of awareness, is also the "highest" or transcendent mode of consciousness, in accordance with the previously noted identity between the dimensions of height and depth.

Having realized one's true "oneself" as the Self of all, there can be no question of abstention, just as earlier it was seen that the *neti, neti* ceases to operate at the highest level, the Self not being susceptible to negation. Furthermore, there is no longer any question, at this stage, of an individual agent capable either of abstention or action, as the consciousness of the *jivatman* has now been fully and indistinguishably identified with That on which concentrated consciousness was formerly focused, its own inner principle; this is the consummation of the spiritual ascent by means of concentration and is the highest instance of the following universal principle: "Whatever a man thinks of steadfastly and with unshakeable conviction that he soon becomes" (Reality, 140).

It should be clear that the very realization, by means of the intellect, of this transcendent mode of consciousness necessarily implies the transcending of the intellect itself, considered in its relation with the individual; the very "success" of the intellect in reflecting the Self must involve the disappearance of the intellect as a faculty or medium of consciousness:

> The intellect knew the non-existence of the supreme *Brahman* before the discrimination between the Self and the non-Self. But after the discrimination, there is no individual self different from *Brahman*, nor the intellect itself (Upadesa (B), II, 7.6).

In other words, there can no longer be awareness of the intellect as an entity apart from that which it reflects; the consciousness of the individual must be completely dissolved into Consciousness as such—only then can it be properly characterized as transcendent, unitive, and infinite, all other forms of consciousness being limited, extrinsically, by duality and therefore finitude and relativity. Such Consciousness is synonymous with *mukti* or *moksa*; the next section will examine the meaning of this Liberation, or Deliverance.

6. *Moksa*

(i) Bliss and States of Consciousness

In relation to the unitive state, or the consummation of the discipline of interiorizing concentration, the question of bliss or ecstasy acquires considerable importance. As seen earlier, since *Brahman* has been provisionally designated as

Sat-Chit-Ananda, realization of identity with *Brahman* must entail bliss as an inseparable concomitant. However, Shankara firmly establishes the transcendent status of this bliss by rejecting all empirical "experience" of bliss that may arise on the meditative path.

First of all, it must be understood that all experience of joy in the world is the result of "a fragment of the Bliss of the Absolute"; this bliss, in essence, is eternal and infinite, but in the measure that ignorance predominates over knowledge, it becomes subject to the appearance of transience and limitation. Nonetheless, worldly joy, which "only blossoms when the inner and outer conditions for it are present," does offer some provisional idea of the "utter joy and beatitude" that comes to the *jivan-mukta*. The intensity of the experience of beatitude increases in proportion to the elimination of ignorance, such that one rises in knowledge and happiness, "until the bliss of *Hiranyagarbha* is reached at the top of the scale. But when the distinction set up by ignorance between subject and object has been abolished through knowledge, then what remains is the natural infinite Bliss alone, one without a second" (Absolute, 223-224).

Tying this in to the interiorization process described above, it could be said that as one approaches the Self, the five "sheaths" (*kosas*) in which the Self is apparently enwrapped, are transcended, surpassed—but in the dimension of inner depth: the *kosas*, made up of the material body, vital breath, mind, knowledge,[10] and finally bliss, are so many relativities, each standing as the subtle, inner principle of what is more outward and gross than it, while being itself the outward effect of what is more inward and subtle than it. It can thus be seen that the macrocosmic principle of *Hiranyagarbha* corresponds outwardly or in "height" to the "bliss-sheath," or "bliss-self," inwardly and in "depth"; both represent the penultimate stage of bliss, the first being transcended by *Brahman*, and the second by the unconditioned *Atman*, identity between these two constituting transcendent realization, and in consequence, the highest bliss. However great may be the bliss experienced at the penultimate stage, it must not be mistaken for the bliss of the Self:

> But the Absolute is superior to the bliss-self which, if one compares it with the concrete realization of the Absolute, the final reality, is something that is seen to increase by stages (Soul, 40).

There is no common measure between an experience of bliss that can be increased or decreased by contingent circumstances, and that bliss which is infinite, immutable, and thus not subject to such modifications; human language cannot adequately express the transcendent nature of this beatitude: Shankara calls it "unutterable joy" (Absolute, 226). The question arises, however: how is one to discriminate between an intense experience of bliss and the bliss that is entailed by realization of the Self?

[10] This is *vijñanamaya-kosa*, referring to discursive or distinctive knowledge as opposed to pure *jñana*, or *chit*, the undifferentiated essence of knowledge or consciousness as such.

The answer to this is forthcoming in a passage where Shankara describes the state of the Yogi who is "on the point of acquiring" the unitive experience of *samadhi*:

> [G]reat joy comes to him, but he should not pause to savor it. He should not develop attachment for it. He should practice intellectual discrimination and avoid all desires and constantly revolve in his mind the idea that whatever joy comes to him is a fantasy of ignorance and quite unreal. . . . That is, he should reduce all to pure Being, to Consciousness in its true form (Enlightenment, 92).

Lest this intellectual "reduction" of joyful experience to Being and Consciousness be misconstrued as something contrary to joy, it should be stressed that it is the relative experience of joy that is to be transcended, and this, for the sake of that infinite joy which is inseparable from realization of pure Being, "Consciousness in its true form," the Self.

In his commentary on Gaudapada's *Karika*, from which the translator took the above quotation, Shankara comments on this highest bliss:

> It is all peace . . . liberation. It is indescribable . . . for it is totally different from all objects. This ultimate bliss is directly realized by the Yogis. It is unborn because it is not produced like anything resulting from empirical perceptions (Karika, III, 47).

This extract helps to locate the lower form of bliss, that which *is* experienced: it is an "object," distinct from the subject that has the "experience" of it; this lower form of bliss is "born," or produced like an "empirical perception," again implying an irreducible duality, and hence is "a fantasy of ignorance and quite unreal." One sees the importance of the maintenance of discrimination even in these higher states of spiritual experience: the aspirant is not to be allowed the luxury of becoming attached to the experience of bliss, for upon full realization, there will be a complete identity with that bliss which is the very essence of the Self; that bliss will no longer be the object of the experience of the individual subject, but will be inseparable from the very being of the universal—and unique—Subject, the Self. Thus, to say that one has an "experience" of the Real is, strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms: to say "experience" is immediately to set up a distinction between subject and object, a distinction which has no place in the Real; to "experience" the Real is thus to remain distinct from it, while to be identified absolutely with the Real is true realization.

It is because of this absence of any experience involving individual agency and empirical content that Shankara uses, as a point of reference for understanding the nature of realized consciousness, the state of deep sleep. In the Mandukya Upanisad, the states of wake, dream, and dreamless sleep are posited as principles of spiritual states, being identified respectively with *vaisvanara* ("common to all men"), *taijasa* ("composed of light"), and *prajña* ("undifferentiated wisdom"). Of the three, it is the state of deep sleep that most closely approximates the nature of the consciousness proper to *Atman*. Shankara demonstrates the similarity between the two apparently different states of consciousness by showing that

in deep sleep one enjoys a state which is a prefiguration of permanent, unitive consciousness; in contrast, the consciousness ordinarily experienced by the ego in the waking or dream state is ever-changing and dualistic, subject to the separative distinction between knowing subject and object known. Consciousness that is linked with the changing world of phenomenal existence is thus contrasted with consciousness that is at one with transcendent and immutable Being. Thus, the waking and dream states, the teacher tells his disciple,

> are not your own nature inasmuch as they are non-persistent like clothes and other things. For what is one's own nature is never seen to cease to persist while one is persisting. But waking and dream cease to persist while Pure Consciousness, the Self, persisting in deep sleep, whatever is non-persisting (at that time) is either destroyed or negated inasmuch as adventitious things, never the properties of one's own nature, are found to possess these characteristics (Upadesa (B), I, 2.89).

To the obvious objection that in deep sleep one is conscious of nothing, Shankara replies that pure, eternal, and transcendent consciousness is of an entirely self-evident nature, requiring no extraneous object to "prove" its nature or existence to itself; therefore, being conscious of nothing is in reality being conscious of "no thing" apart from the very nature of consciousness itself:

> The Consciousness owing to whose presence you deny (things in deep sleep) by saying "I was conscious of nothing" is the Knowledge, the Consciousness which is your Self. As It never ceases to exist, Its eternal immutability is self-evident and does not depend on any evidence; for an object of knowledge different from the self-evident knower depends on evidence in order to be known (Upadesa (B), I, 2.93).

To be conscious of nothing does not negate consciousness; rather, it is an affirmation of unconditioned consciousness, unsullied by contingent content, although, as will be seen shortly, to be conscious of nothing does not on its own suffice to attain to pure Consciousness.

Shankara goes on to compare consciousness to the sun: just as the sun does not depend on any object for its light, but rather illumines those objects such as stones, which are non-luminous, so consciousness cannot require any non-conscious object to provide evidence for its existence, since it constitutes that very "evidence" or "evident-ness" by means of which the non-conscious object is grasped aright. It is in its light that other things are seen; it is not seen on account of other things.

Shankara elsewhere describes what takes place in the deep sleep state by means of the mirror analogy, which will figure prominently in the discussion below: when the mirror is taken away, "the reflection of the man that it contained goes back to the man himself":

> And in the same way, when the mind and the other senses cease to function in dreamless sleep, the supreme deity that has entered the mind, as the individual soul, in the form of a reflection of consciousness . . . returns to its own nature, abandoning its form as the soul (Soul, 130).

However, one does not attain realization simply by falling into dreamless sleep; this state is what might be called an unconscious mode of deliverance from limited consciousness, and is thus somewhat similar to the lower form of enstasis, called *sambija samadhi*, that is, a state of consciousness which transcends ordinary modes of awareness but which nonetheless retains intact the "seeds" of ignorance.[11]

To have a state of consciousness wherein the mental functions have been suspended, and the mind is free of content, is by no means to be simplistically identified as a state of realization of the Self; what the two states of deep sleep and *sambija samadhi* have in common is that, although the state of absolute indistinction proper to the Self has been attained,

> because wrong knowledge has not been altogether eradicated, when one awakens from dreamless sleep or from deep meditative concentration (*samadhi*), there are distinctions just as before (Soul, 138-139).

On the other hand, when there has been an "awakening" to the Real, the stilling of the mind that may be experienced as a "state" is an effect of that awakening, which burns up all the seeds of ignorance in the fire of knowledge:

> In dreamless sleep it (the mind) is swallowed up in the darkness and delusion of ignorance. It is dissolved into seed-form, retaining the latent impressions of evil and activity. In its stilled state, on the other hand, the seeds of ignorance, evil, and activity have been burnt in the fire of the awakening to the sole reality of the Self (Soul, 139-140).

One has to distinguish, then, between an apparently "stilled" state of mind that in fact contains the seeds of ignorance and thus remains distinct from transcendent realization, and a properly "stilled" state in which, the Self having been realized, there are no such seeds; it should be stressed that it is the "awakening to the sole reality of the Self" that constitutes the criterion of realization, and not any phenomenally defined state of the mind—a point to which we will return below.

The metaphysical awakening here in question is to be strictly distinguished from the ordinary state of wake, one of the three relative conditions of consciousness. Shankara in fact defines all but this transcendent "wakefulness" as a form of sleep: "Sleep, defined as 'not-being-awake-to-reality' is present in the mental modifications of waking and dream" (Soul, 151).

The positive aspect of deep sleep as an undifferentiated state of consciousness is distinct from this negative aspect of sleep, defined in terms of not being awake to reality; but this negative aspect is also present, implicitly, or in "seed" form, within the state of deep sleep, since the man ignorant of the Real remains such upon returning to the normal state of wake. Thus the deep sleep state is likened to an "indiscriminate mass":

[11] This is contrasted with *nirbija samadhi*, "seedless" enstasis, identified also with *nirvikalpa samadhi*, which will be examined further below.

> [W]ith all its differentiations intact, (it) becomes an undifferentiated unity like the day swallowed up by the darkness of night (Soul, 151).

This may be related to the degree of Being, in contrast with what was designated as "Beyond-Being" in Part I of this chapter. In deep sleep, a *de facto* union is consummated with "Being-as-associated-with-seeds-of-action," so that the emergence from that state into dream or wake constitutes the fruition of the karmic seeds that had remained intact during deep sleep. Full realization of the Self, on the other hand, pertains to the domain of Beyond-Being, or *Turiya*, the "Fourth," beyond the three states of wake, dream, and deep sleep. Therefore this *Turiya* is not to be identified as a particular state, one among four, but is the Reality which is only apparently modified by the three illusory states that are superimposed on it. It is realized neither through cognition nor through the simple cessation of cognition, but rather, through a flash of spiritual intuition which, it must be stressed, cannot in any way be reduced to or equated with mental cognition. That which is intuited as the transcendent Reality is grasped, once and for all, as one's true Self; and a concomitant of this realized identity is omniscience:

> That which has finally to be known through spiritual intuition is . . . the final reality, called the Fourth, the Self as metaphysical principle, non-dual, unborn. . . . When this occurs, that man of great intellect, being now himself the Self, attains to omniscience here in this very world (Soul, 168-169).

It should be noted that the meaning of the "omniscience" in question is clarified by Shankara immediately: the consciousness of the delivered one "transcends all empirical knowledge," therefore it is a form of supra-empirical knowledge "which never leaves him." Omniscience, then, is not to be equated with an exhaustive knowledge, within the domain of manifestation, of the data pertaining to all empirically knowable phenomena; rather, it is knowledge of a completely different order, grasping all things in their transcendent source, wherein they abide in undifferentiated form, exalted above any "trace of the development of manifestation" (*prapañcha-upasama*); it is precisely because this knowledge is supra-empirical that it "never leaves him," that is, it is not susceptible to cancellation like an empirical datum that is at one time present to consciousness and at another time absent.

This spiritual intuition that attains to the "omniscience" of the Self, and thus constitutes realization of the Self, is also called *pramana*, authoritative cognition, which must not be confused with individual, non-authoritative cognition or thought in the ordinary sense; it is also referred to as *anubhava*—direct or immediate experience. In the light of the above considerations on "experience" and "thought," the provisional and approximate nature of these designations will be clear.

Turning first to *pramana*, it is said by Shankara that, with its rise, all plurality is eliminated instantaneously, this extinction of differentiation being the shadow, as it were, of the inclusive plenitude of the simple, undifferentiated Self. The *pramana* that negates the notion that the Self really undergoes the three

successive states of wake, dream, and deep sleep, also has the result that "one simultaneously achieves the cessation of the notion of plurality in the Self" (Soul, 155).

It is on the instantaneity of the realization that attention should focus here; as seen above, the notion of "awakening" is much emphasized, and Shankara likens the state of identification with the individual psycho-physical complex to a bad dream, from which one awakens upon the establishment of one's true identity as the Self:

> Just as all the pain pertaining to a dream ceases on waking, so the notion that one's Self is the sufferer ceases for ever through the knowledge that one is the inmost Self (Upadesa (A), II, 18.193).

One should recall in this connection the snake-rope image: the change in perception that results from correct discrimination of the rope in the dark is instant: suddenly the "snake" is no more and the rope is grasped not only as truly present, but as having been there all along, as that which was mistaken for the snake. Likewise, the story of the man who was himself the "tenth" but had forgotten to count himself: upon being told of this simple fact, the realization that ensues is immediate. These examples assist in the comprehension of that instantaneous enlightenment attained by the disciple of "high intellect" upon the first hearing of the words *tat tvam asi*, "That thou art." In the present context, the receptivity of the disciple, having been enhanced by the different stages of the discipline, is precipitated in a moment's plenary awareness of the Self. It is realization in a "blessed moment" (Vivekachudamani, 479).

(ii) *Samadhi* and Liberation

Given this emphasis on the "momentary" nature of the enlightenment experience, it will appear surprising to see Shankara positing as a *conditio sine qua non* for realization of the Self, the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*:

> By the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* the truth of *Brahman* is clearly and definitely realized, but not otherwise (Vivekachudamani, 365).

Insofar as this type of *samadhi* consists in a particular psycho-physical state wherein breathing is stilled, consciousness of the outer world is suspended, and all mental functions cease for the duration of the state, it cannot be regarded as a prerequisite for liberating knowledge; this is because, among other reasons, such knowledge can arise spontaneously, as noted earlier, in the case of the highest class of aspirant, without any need for meditation, let alone the consummation of meditation which *samadhi* constitutes. Rather, in the light of Shankara's repeated insistence that it is knowledge, alone, which liberates, one is compelled to interpret the above statement on *samadhi* in the sense indicated by the following comment of Shankara on Gaudapada's assertion that *Atman* is attainable by "concentrated understanding," this being another meaning of *samadhi*:

> The *Atman* is denoted by the word "*samadhi*" as it can be realized only by the knowledge arising out of the deepest concentration (Karika, III, 37).

In other words, within the framework of a spiritual discipline centered on the practice of interiorizing concentration, *samadhi*, understood as the deepest mode of concentration, is the prerequisite for the rise of liberating knowledge; but this by no means denies the possibility of the same knowledge arising, outside this framework, without the experience of *samadhi*, defined as a particular psycho-physical state; one example seen already is the case of the highest aspirants, to whom Shankara does not attribute the need for any discipline whatsoever, other than the hearing of the sacred texts which identify the essence of the *jivatman* with the Absolute.

Insofar as *samadhi*, like deep sleep, constitutes a break in the continuity of the illusory notions identifying the Self with the non-self, it can indeed be said to extinguish *samsara*, albeit temporarily; if the *samadhi* in question be preceded, accompanied, or consummated by effective knowledge of the Self, then it is qualified as *nirbija* or *nirvikalpa*; but it is this knowledge and not the state that is the *conditio sine qua non* for transcendent realization. Since, as seen above, the "awakening" is a flash of spiritual intuition, it cannot depend on any particular state situated in the phenomenal matrices of time, space, and the other existential categories, since this whole framework arises only on a plane that is rendered illusory by the awakening in question.

Applying Shankara's metaphysical criteria to the question of *samadhi* as prerequisite for the highest realization, the following observations may be proffered: realization of the Self, being im-mediate, strictly speaking transcends time, arriving like a flash of all-illuminating light: the question of how much time is spent in that state of enlightenment is immaterial; whether or not one has a "state" of *samadhi* lasting hours or minutes is of no consequence; if importance is given to such a question, this would be to judge the eternal and supra-phenomenal in terms of temporality and phenomenality: the transcending of relativity cannot depend on relative conditions for its realization.

Even to say that the flash of intuition takes place in a "moment" or an "instant" is, strictly speaking, inaccurate, for these notions are still related to duration, which is unreal from the viewpoint of the Absolute: what is revealed in that "moment" is that there was no "time" when the Self was not immutably and infinitely itself, above and beyond time—and all other conditions for phenomenal existence.

From the viewpoint of the individual, however, it is possible to "locate" in temporal and spatial terms, the experience of enlightenment, even if the content of the enlightenment or the "authoritative cognition," extinguishes forever all notion of individual experience and its existential concomitants, just as correct perception of the rope extinguishes definitively the false perception of the snake. To clarify the distinction between the state of *samadhi* and the moment of "immediate experience" (*anubhava*) wherein the Self is realized through "spiritual intuition," the following point may be considered. *Samadhi* as a particular state is a break in the continuity of the samsaric dream which *may*

yield knowledge of the Real, while *anubhava* does not require as precondition any phenomenal break in the dream, since the dream and its apparent continuity are known to be illusory; one cannot require a "break" in the unreal in order for the Real to be attained, for, from the standpoint of the Self, such a break is of the same nature as that which is "broken": both pertain to the level of the non-self, as there can be no break in the Self, no lack of continuity, or change of state. Upon enlightenment the unreal is transcended inasmuch as its phenomenality is "seen through"; the unreal is not necessarily "seen through" simply by a phenomenal break in its continuity such as is constituted by a loss of consciousness of the outer world.

All this is not to say that ordinary perception persists in the moment of enlightenment: all particular contents of consciousness are necessarily absent in respect of their distinctive nature, while being no less necessarily present in their undifferentiated essence, that is, in the all-inclusive nature of pure consciousness:

> [I]n the realm of enlightenment, the particularized consciousness associated with sight and the other sense-faculties does not exist (Soul, 60).

> On enlightenment, perception and the other empirical means of knowledge cease. . . . [T]he Veda itself disappears on enlightenment (Soul, 78).

The Veda is said to "disappear" insofar as it consists in objective data which require an individual mind to assimilate them: this mode of cognition and the duality presupposed by it are no longer operative in the moment of enlightenment. The point here to be emphasized is that the moment of Liberation, of positive realization of the Self, excludes phenomenal awareness because all distinctions born of ignorance are eliminated through knowledge: it is not because of the exclusion of phenomenal awareness that transcendent realization is attained; rather, it is because of this very realization that phenomenal awareness "disappears."

The next question that arises is: what is it that actually experiences Liberation, given the fact that the Self is ever-free by nature, and the human ego is revealed as illusory? This and the allied question of what the individual as such can know of the content of liberation will now be addressed.

(iii) Individual Experience and Knowledge of Liberation

It has been seen that Liberation transcends the realm wherein experience, defined in relation to individual agency and object of experience, has any meaning: what, then, can constitute the agent in the experience of Liberation? Likewise: Liberation strictly precludes individual modes of cognition; what, then, can the individual as such know of the "experience" of Liberation?

The two questions are closely related, as they impinge on the subtle relationship between the consciousness of the Self and that of the human ego, a relationship that is both real and illusory, depending on the angle of vision.

The simple and, metaphysically, most rigorous answer to the first question is that nobody or nothing experiences Liberation but an illusion: the Self,

being eternally free by nature cannot "experience" anything other than what it immutably is; and anything other than the Self is by definition illusory in the measure that it is distinct from the Self. However, from the viewpoint of the *jivatman* within the realm of illusion, the experience of Liberation is not only "not unreal" but is the very means by which the absolute reality of the Self is realized as one's own true being, and this realization is always accompanied by absolute consciousness and absolute bliss.

Therefore there is a certain relative reality that pertains to the world of illusion for one situated in that world—just as there is a certain reality to the dream for as long as one is dreaming; and the flight from this relative reality to absolute reality is the "experience" of Liberation. It is thus legitimate to speak of the "experience" of Liberation from the unreal to the Real, but only from the viewpoint of the individual, and however paradoxical this may be, given the immutability of the Real.

It is not, however, permissible to speak of the individual ego as having been liberated:

> It is not to the ego as agent that the experience of liberation falls, for freedom from pleasure and pain is impossible in the case of the ego as agent (Discipleship, 208).

The ego is ever bound by nature, its very existence as such presupposing the realm of relativity from which Liberation is attained; it experiences only the oscillations of contingent existence—here summed up in the phrase "pleasure and pain," implying thereby that whatever pleasure may be experienced by the ego is always susceptible to negation by its contrary, whereas the bliss of the Self, being infinite, cannot be limited, let alone annulled, by anything save illusion.

The ego, then, is an illusory superimposition which cannot "become" the Self, just as the snake cannot "become" the rope. However, it is also true that the ego is non-different from the Self: the snake, in reality, is the rope, it does not become it. Shankara affirms that while the ego is non-different from the Self, the Self is not non-different from the ego; this non-reciprocal relationship, called *tadatmya* (Upadesa (A), II, 18.81), can also be expressed by saying that the drop is water but water is not the drop: the Self infinitely transcends the ego, but whatever reality the ego possesses can only be that of the Self, which is alone real.

This principle of *tadatmya* highlights the fact that the ego cannot experience Liberation; the ego has two incommensurable dimensions: one, eternally free, deriving from its identity with—or "non-difference" from—the Self; in its other dimension it is eternally bound, insofar as it is distinct from the Self, this resulting necessarily from the fact that the Self is not non-different from the ego. Thus there can be no possible relation between these two dimensions, and if there is no relation, there can be no movement or "flight" from the one to the other, and thus no Liberation.

The possibility of Liberation rests not on relationship, but on identity: the identity between the essence of the ego and that of the Self; this is likened to

the identity between the space enclosed in a jar and space in its unlimited extension:

> As, when a jar is broken, the space enclosed by it becomes palpably the limitless space, so when the apparent limitations are destroyed, the knower of *Brahman* verily becomes *Brahman* Itself (Vivekachudamani, 565).

Otherwise put, it is the consciousness that is immanent within the ego that is one with the consciousness of the Self:

> [C]onsciousness is not different in the individual soul and the Lord, just as heat is identical in fire and sparks (Soul, 69).

One sees again the principle of *tadatmya*: the spark is not the fire, but the heat of the spark cannot be conceived as something other than that of the fire whence the spark springs. This analogy is referred to elsewhere in relation to the knowledge by which *Brahman* is "known":

> The knowledge of which *Brahman* is the object is non-different from *Brahman* as is the heat from the fire. The essence of the Self, which is the object of knowledge, verily knows itself by means of unborn knowledge, which is of the very nature of *Atman* (Karika, III, 33).

This establishes that from the highest point of view—the *paramarthika* perspective—the Self is both subject and object of knowledge, in that its immutable Self-knowledge is inseparable from its very being, as heat is inseparable from the fire whence it radiates; for the individual who comes to "know" the Self through spiritual intuition, this knowledge is in truth identical with that very knowledge by means of which the Self knows itself; thus it is also "unborn," that is, of an order which transcends individual thought, which is "born" or relative. When it is said, therefore, that the individual "knows" the Self this can only mean that the Self knows itself by means of that transcendent knowledge with which the individual's consciousness has become indistinguishably merged; it can only be on the basis of the identity between the consciousness of the individual and the consciousness of the Self that the former is able to participate in this transcendent knowledge and be "liberated" from the illusory cage of individuality.

This identity between the consciousness of the ego and that of the Self is still problematic, however, from the point of view of Liberation: for identity is not "relationship": there must be something "other" to take cognizance of or "realize" the identity in question, in other words, to experience Liberation.

Could it then be said that it is the intellect, vehicle of knowledge for the individual, that experiences Liberation? Earlier it was noted that both Liberation and bondage pertain to the intellect, but this must be interpreted according to the fact that the intellect is a faculty and not an agent. When it was said that suffering depended upon the existence of the intellect, it is clear that it is the individual ego that is the agent of this suffering and not the intellect as such. In the present context, the intellect may well be the instrument by means of which Liberation is attained, but cannot be the agent that experiences Liberation.

The answer given by Shankara to this problem can be extrapolated from his concept of *abhasa*, the theory of the "reflection of consciousness." It is the existence of a reflection of the consciousness of the Self in the ego that accounts for the fact that the word "thou" (*tvam*) in the sentence "that thou art" designates the ego directly and the Self indirectly; that it pertains directly to the ego is clear, but it can only relate implicitly to the Self because the Self is reflected in the ego which is directly addressed (Upadesa (A), II, 18.50).

To the extent that Liberation is actually experienced as such, it must pertain to this reflection of consciousness which is like a bridge connecting the ego and the Self, as will be seen shortly. But it must first be understood that this reflection is unreal.

According to Shankara there is, on the analogy of a face reflected in a mirror "a Self, a reflection thereof, and a receptacle for that reflection," but he adds immediately that the reflection is "unreal" (Upadesa (A), II, 18.43).

The reflection of consciousness that returns to its source, as seen earlier, is the graphic way in which the moment of enlightenment was described; the ego, constituting the mirror in this analogy, is extinguished, and it is this which accounts for the fact that the reflection ceases to be a reflection and can only be "found" as the very face itself. For this reason Shankara affirms the unreality of the reflection. The reflection is a property neither of the mirror nor of the face: "[I]f it were a property of either of them, it would persist in one or other of them when the two were parted" (Upadesa (A), II, 18.37).

The reflection ceases to exist in the mirror when the face and the mirror are parted; likewise it ceases to exist "in" the face for it is no longer distinguishable *qua* reflection, from the face. It is thus a reality that is contingent upon the confrontation of the face and a mirror, possessing no intrinsic reality on its own account; hence it is "unreal" in itself.

To the extent, however, that it is endowed with an apparent reality, it is this reflection of consciousness that is the transmigrant (insofar as the illusory realm of *samsara* is concerned) and also the agent in the experience of enlightenment or Liberation: when the mirror of the ego is operative as such, the reflection of consciousness in the intellect and other cognitive faculties will register and experience the varied contents of the samsaric realm; but when, by means of the interiorizing discipline of concentration described above, this reflection is redirected to the object it reflects, and the plane of the ego is surpassed and thus abandoned, the result is that the reflected ray of consciousness is no longer distinguishable from the Self whence it was projected; the "moment" in which the reflection returns to its source is the moment of Liberation, and it is this reflection which "experiences" Liberation, insofar as it can be said that any agent has experience of it.

But can one speak convincingly of a reflection—with its impersonal connotation—actually being an agent in the enlightenment/Liberation experience? On the one hand the answer must be yes, and on the other, no. It is yes, firstly, by default: no other entity can possibly be the agent, neither the eternally bound ego nor the eternally free Self. Secondly, since the Self is infinite subjectivity, a reflection of the Self *can* be regarded as possessing the property

of finite, but nonetheless relatively real, subjectivity. The positive aspect of the reflection of consciousness consists, then, in the fact that it possesses a degree of subjectivity; the negative aspect derives from two factors: the reflection is distinct from its source, and, on the analogy of terrestrial reflection, also constitutes an inversion with respect to the object reflected. This negative aspect, then, consists in the fact that the degree of subjectivity proper to the reflection will be finite, and therefore, from the transcendent perspective alone, illusory. But it is this very limitation which allows of the possibility of experiencing anything at all; therefore the reflection can legitimately be accorded the status of agency in the experience of Liberation.

But the answer is also no, in that the illusory nature of the experience of Liberation itself renders illusory the agent of that experience:

> Bondage and Liberation, which are conjured up by *Maya*, do not really exist in the *Atman*, one's Reality, as the appearance and exit of the snake do not abide in the rope, which suffers no change (Vivekachudamani, 569).

The paradox of the metaphysical unreality of Liberation coexisting with the personal experience of Liberation can only be resolved through an understanding of the angles of vision bearing upon this experience. From the viewpoint of ignorance, Liberation is not simply real, but is said to constitute the only experience which is ultimately worth striving for, and is indeed the only experience that is authentic, in the last analysis: the "immediate experience" (*anubhava*) that one is the Self is, alone, real:

> And all other experience is false. . . . [W]e do not admit the existence of any experience apart from that (*anubhava*) (Absolute, 159).

From the viewpoint of the Self, however, the experience of Liberation is illusory, as it can only be the immutable and unfailing reality of the Self that is true reality. In other words, that which is revealed through Liberation is real; but, in the light of that very Reality, Liberation as a particular experience appears unreal.

Another key reason why the Liberation experience must be regarded as illusory is that the very experience presupposes both the state of ignorance—that from which Liberation is attained—and the state of knowledge, into which finite consciousness is reabsorbed; since ignorance is itself of an illusory nature, the experience of Liberation which implies this illusion must itself partake of the same nature, *qua* experience, even if that transcendent reality, grasped in depth as one's own being, could not have been realized as such without the occurrence of this experience. Shankara writes that the Self is inexplicable (*anirukta*) from the vantage point of ignorance (Absolute, 177); at this point one could add that the experience of Liberation—both real and illusory—is likewise inexplicable from the vantage point of logical analysis. Just as it is spiritual intuition that produces enlightenment, so a degree of intuition is necessary for the unenlightened even to comprehend the process of enlightenment.

These considerations lead to the second question posited above: what is it that the individual as such can know of the liberating moment of enlightenment?

The answer to this question again involves the "reflection" theory.

First of all, if the "fruit" of Liberation is said to accrue to the Self, as it is in the Advaitin tradition, the individual can have no knowledge whatsoever of that transcendence of the bounds of individuality which Liberation implies. But Shankara understands such a notion as figurative only:

> [B]ecause the two active causes of the fruit of liberation—the preliminary mental activity and the ensuing cognition in its empirical aspect—are not of the nature of the fruit, it is but right to attribute it to the Immutable, just as victory is fitly attributed to a king (Upadesa (A), II, 18.108).

The cognition that one is the Self thus has an empirical aspect and a supra-empirical aspect; there is no common measure between the first, which is proper to the individual, and the second, which pertains to realization of the Self which transcends the individual; therefore, the "fruit" of Liberation cannot be said to accrue to the individual, and must by default accrue to the Self. On the other hand, the Self, being actionless and immutable, cannot in truth receive any such fruit, so the attribution is figurative only: although his servants actually fought and won the battle, the victory is "fitly attributed to the king" who did no fighting.

This means that, despite the impossibility of the individual having a complete cognitive awareness of Liberation, he nonetheless, as a *jivan-mukta*, is the immediate beneficiary of the Liberation in question; furthermore, inasmuch as something of the Self—its reflected consciousness, precisely—must pervade the cognitions of the individual for these to be endowed with any consciousness whatsoever, it is this same reflection of consciousness that can know, to some degree, what was revealed in the liberating experience. This principle is clearly formulated in the following:

> [W]hen the mind, which is not itself conscious, shines with reflected consciousness, its ideas shine with reflected consciousness too, as the sparks emerging from a burning iron shine like the fire within it (Upadesa (A), II, 18.83).

Something of the transcendent can be known by the mind, without that knowledge encompassing the content of the realization of transcendence, just as sparks are something of the fire, and can convey something of its nature, without ever being able to encompass the full nature of the fire. This analogy helps one to understand the state of mind of one who has experienced Liberation and attempts to describe it. Shankara writes of the bewilderment that coexists with liberating knowledge, by describing the state of the disciple who, having been instructed in the highest Truth, realizes it "at a blessed moment" and then speaks as follows:

> My mind has vanished, and all its activities have melted, by realizing the identity of the Self and *Brahman*; I do not know either this or not-this; nor what or how much the boundless Bliss is! (Vivekachudamani, 481).

The dimension of subjectivity in question here can only be the empirical mind, reflecting on what was revealed in the moment of realization: in that moment, all activities of the mind had melted; outside that moment, in the framework of the mental functions, it cannot gauge the bliss of that state. The mind is aware, now, that in that state it had "vanished"; it is also mysteriously aware of its own illusory nature *qua* mind, since only that which was realized in such a state is fully real, and is one's own true being. The reflection of consciousness in the intellect is the locus of actual consciousness in these thoughts, but as it is identifying with its source, and no longer with the plane of its refraction—that is, the mind—it can see the mind as absolutely "other." Because of the positive aspect of the reflection, the mind can know that boundless Bliss was attained, and that this pertained to the immutably real Self, but it also knows that, *qua* mind, it cannot measure or truly encompass that Bliss in its fullness, this incapacity deriving from the negative aspect of reflected consciousness, that is, the finitude attendant upon the reflection insofar as it is an inversion: the finite cannot know and still less be, the infinite.

This is why Shankara says that only he "knows" the Absolute who gives up the notion that he is a "knower of the Absolute," adding:

> [T]he mind's discriminating cognition, "I am the knower, unknowable, pure, eternally liberated," is itself transitory, from the very fact that it is an object (Upadesa (A) II, 12.14).

Here again one sees the empirical aspect of the liberating cognition being distinguished rigorously from that which is realized through supra-empirical or spiritual intuition. Both the mind and its cognitions are "objects," that is, they are outward and non-conscious when considered in relation to the supreme Subject or Witness. To directly experience the Witness in an indescribable *anubhava* is truly to be the Witness, but the mental affirmation of the knowledge that this Witness is one's true reality is but a transitory and extrinsic modality—an "object," precisely—of the uninterrupted consciousness of the Witness.

The *jivan-mukta*, then, is not so much a "knower of the Absolute": he is one in whom the identity of being and knowledge has been realized, and this at a degree which strictly precludes his own finite individuality, and, with it, all cognitions that are conditioned by that individuality.

These considerations show that all of Shankara's statements affirming his identity with the Self are to be understood as ellipses: they omit to indicate the ontological degree of the "I" in question, and, as affirmations, they are always transcended by what they affirm. In this light, one can appreciate what Shankara means when he writes, in apparent contrast to the above quotations, that the Absolute "can be apprehended by a modification of the mind as the Witness of the mind, distinct from it" (Discipleship, 195-196).

The kind of "apprehension" here is quite different from direct, unmediated knowledge of the Absolute; rather, it must refer to the individual's awareness of an inner Witness, totally other than itself, and yet more truly "its Self" than that modification by means of which the awareness in question is mediated. Since the Self cannot be the object of the mind, the nature of the awareness in question

here is totally different from that which pertains to ordinary objects susceptible of determinate conception; the mind can be aware of the existence of the inner Witness, but can never know, exhaustively, that Witness:

> The lower empirical vision, itself an object for the Seer, cannot aspire to see the Seer who sees it (Discipleship, 198).

The Self is said to be "known" when the *jivan-mukta* has realized that his true Self "alone truly exists"; he also knows that, as the Self cannot be known by anything but itself, it is unknowable: "[H]ence it is 'known' and 'unknowable' without there being the slightest contradiction" (Absolute, 125-126).

The *jivan-mukta* is thus not only the one who, by transcending the bounds of his own individuality, has realized and "known" the Self, but he also knows, as a necessary concomitant of this very realization, that he as an individual cannot know the Knower of knowledge:

> He only is a knower of the Self who is aware of himself as unbroken light, void of agency, and who has lost the feeling, "I am the Absolute" (Absolute, 159).

> Those who think "I am the Absolute and I am also the one who undergoes individual experiences" are ruined both by their knowledge and by their action (Upadesa (A), II, 11.8).

The feeling or cognition, "I am the Absolute" must be freed from its association with relativity; the *jivan-mukta* no longer has this thought because the very conditions that define the thought as such—individual agency, empirical cognition, fundamental dualism and hence alterity—contradict the reality that one's true—supra-individual—being is the Absolute.

On the other hand, there can—and must—be something more profound than a "thought" or "feeling" that one is the Absolute; the *jivan-mukta* has an absolute certitude not only that he is nothing but the Absolute, but also that he is animating an individual existence, without there being the slightest contradiction:

> For if a person . . . has the conviction in his own heart that he has direct knowledge of the Absolute and is also supporting a physical body at the same time, how can anyone else cause him to deviate from that conviction? (Enlightenment, 228).

The "knower" of the Absolute has a conviction in depth—the "heart"—that he is simultaneously the Absolute—hence a non-agent—and the animator of the body—hence an agent; the first aspect of the conviction pertains to the vantage point of the Real and the second, to that of the illusory. There are two subjectivities only when the point of view—and thus the domain—of cosmic illusion is assumed; in reality there is but one Subject, void of agency and thus of individual experiences. One again observes the importance of the distinction between the *paramarthika* and *vyavaharika* perspectives.

The existence of this conviction by no means contradicts the point that one cannot have the "thought" or "feeling" that one is the Absolute: to think that one is in reality the Absolute and the individual at the same time is to be conceptually

and existentially bound by a contradiction pure and simple; thus one is "ruined" in terms of both "knowledge" and "action." But to have the conviction in the heart, not a thought of the mind, that one's true Self is the Absolute, while one's empirical experiences pertain to the non-self—such a conviction is both authentic and unshakeable in the measure that realization is direct and total, rather than simply mental and fragmentary. It is a question of realizing in depth that which appears on the surface as a paradox; a paradox which, insofar as it is viewed from the mental plane alone—and hence from the viewpoint of ignorance—is nothing but a contradiction. This further underlines the difference between a mental cognition and the plenary realization of the content of that cognition; as such, the cognition itself remains always a determinate conception, and hence a limitation, of the nature of ignorance, and must in its turn be transcended.

These considerations may be aptly drawn to a close by referring to Shankara's criticism of those who "dabble" in metaphysics, mistaking their purely mental comprehension of the highest truths for realization thereof:

> Those alone are free from the bondage of transmigration who, attaining *Samadhi*, have merged the objective world, the sense organs, the mind, nay the very ego in the *Atman* . . . and none else, who but dabble in second-hand talks (Vivekachudamani, 356).

(iv) Grace and Realization

A final question remains to be considered in regard to the "ascent": how can one explain the attainment or realization of transcendence by the individual, when the individual is of a strictly non-transcendent nature? In other words: how can the efforts of the individual—meditation, concentration, and so on—have as result a supra-individual attainment? How is it that such efforts are not vitiated in advance by the non-transcendent source of those efforts?

The answer to these questions is implicit in the preceding section: just as it is the Self alone that can know the Self, so the efforts of the individual which apparently result in enlightenment are in reality derived not from the individual but from the transcendent source of the individuality, the Self.

No hard and fast distinction between individual effort and supra-individual or divine "grace" is tenable, given that the Lord is described by Shankara as the "source" of the individual's intelligence which in turn directs the effort of the will. Thus:

> [L]iberation of the soul can come only through knowledge proceeding from His grace (*anugraha*) (Soul, 67).

Earlier it was seen that in the invocation of *Om*, realization of the Self occurs as a result of the grace of the Lord, immanent within the syllable, being attracted by the invocation and revealing the Self to the invoker; this underlying principle can be seen at work not just in regard to invocation but in all paths of realization. Thus, whenever Shankara appears to attribute enlightenment to the conscious efforts of the aspirant, to his receptivity, "high intellect," or powers of concentration, it must not be forgotten that, insofar as all of these factors

are governed by the intelligence, and this in turn is derived from the Self, all efforts made by the individual are in fact modes of grace emanating first and foremost from the Self. When these efforts meet with success, a further grace is involved: for insofar as concentration, meditation, and invocation are still actions of the individual—despite being simultaneously modes of the supra-individual grace whence they stem—they cannot on their own account result in anything that transcends the individuality; hence the final consummation of these efforts is always a grace from the Self, a grace that is attracted by the efforts in question, but which is by no means reducible to them. Thus the realization of identity between the individual and *Brahman* is said by Shankara to be attained "through the grace of the Supreme Lord in the case of one or two perfect souls only, those who meditate on the Lord and who make great efforts to throw off their ignorance" (Soul, 75-76).

This grace is elsewhere referred to as the *Sakti* or dynamic power proper to *Brahman*, which is identical with *Brahman* itself, as "Sakti cannot be distinct from the one in whom it inheres" (Gita, XIV, 27).

The relationship between devotion to knowledge and realization through grace is expressed by Shankara in the following image:

> I am like fire: just as fire does not ward off cold from those who are at a distance, and wards it off from those who go near it, so I bestow My grace on My devotees, not on others (Gita, IX, 29).[12]

The aspirant must then do all that is in his power to approach the "fire" of liberating knowledge, knowing all the while that his vision of the fire—that is, his theoretical awareness that this knowledge is liberating—as well as his capacity to approach it—that is, the will by which his efforts are galvanized in the spiritual discipline—are in truth so many effects of grace; they prefigure that final grace which is incommensurable with the efforts that apparently led to or resulted in realization: if the individual in the above image can in one sense be said to have "approached" the fire by means of his own efforts, he cannot in any sense be said to have generated the heat of the fire that "wards off" the cold, the transcendent knowledge, that is, which burns up ignorance.

The individual, then, participates in the process whereby knowledge of the Self is attained and identity with the Self is realized; but that mode of participation is precluded by the final consummation of the process which, being of a strictly supra-individual nature, can no longer fall within the domain of the individual, and therefore can only be referred to as a "grace."

Part III: Existential "Return"

This final part of the chapter deals with the "return" of the *jivan-mukta* to the world of phenomena, that is, to the existential domain, that of outward being,

[12] This is Shankara "speaking" again from the perspective of the Self, in his commentary on the Bhagavad Gita.

after having realized the Self, at the supra-ontological degree, "Beyond-Being."

Discussion will center on four key elements that emerge from the writings of Shankara on the state of awareness and being proper to the one who has attained liberation in this life.

The four elements are: the view of the mind in the light of the supra-mental realization; the ontological status of the world in the light of the realized vision of "all is *Brahman*"; the significance of residual *karma* for the *jivan-mukta*; and the question of whether the *jivan-mukta* is susceptible to suffering.

1. The Mind

A key distinction between transcendent realization of the Self and a transitory state of apparent union with the Self such as is experienced in the lower form of *samadhi*, is that outside this state, the individual feels that the return to "normal" consciousness entails a loss of consciousness of identity with and as the Self; whereas in full realization of the Self, such a "return" does not entail a definitive rupture of this consciousness, as the non-dual nature of the Real is known—in depth—to persist even while the individual is apparently engaged in the world of duality. Thus, even while the mind is perceiving phenomena, the knowledge of the One that has been realized ensures that neither the objective world of phenomena outwardly perceived, nor the subjective locus of phenomenal awareness—the perceiving mind—can veil the true nature of the Self which is the only reality underlying both poles of illusion. Regarding the lower Yogi, who may have transitory moments of what appears to be union, Shankara writes:

> When his mind is concentrated he sometimes thinks he is happy and one with the Self. He declares, "Oh, I am now one with the essence of Truth." When he falls from this state, he declares, "Oh, I am now fallen from the knowledge of the Self" (Karika, II, 38).

The true knower of the Self, however, never experiences such a fall:

> As it is impossible for *Atman* to deviate from its own nature, the consciousness that "I am Brahman" never leaves him. He never loses the consciousness regarding the essence of the Self (Karika, II, 38).

The fluctuating states of mind no longer affect the consciousness of the Self, now the realized locus of awareness for the *jivan-mukta*, even after the enlightenment "experience"; that consciousness is independent of the mind, persisting as its underlying reality, in which light the mind itself loses its opacity, that is, its aspect of limitation or not-self. This means that the mind is "seen through" insofar as it is distinct from the Self, or else it is grasped as the Self in respect of the awareness which it refracts; the important point is that this understanding of the mind as a limitation, an "object," or not-self, can take place not only from the perspective of the supra-individual Self, realized in a flash in the enlightenment experience, but also persists even in the framework of multiplicity: the viewpoint of the Self, in other words, is somehow maintained even while the not-self, that is, the limited mind, is operative.

One way of understanding this subtle point is to recall the distinction made earlier between the certitude proper to the heart, and thinking proper to the mind. The consciousness that one is the Self can only pertain to the Self, but the mind has indirect access to this consciousness in the sense that it may register the reflection of this consciousness that resides in the heart: thus one can explain the paradox that the mind can be understood as an object even while the mind is functioning as subject. Even after the supra-mental moment of realization, then, the mind is viewed from the vantage point of the Self, the content of that realization: having realized identity with and as the Self, transcending the mind, the *jivan-mukta* continues to identify with the Self—and its vantage point—even when the mind is functioning, because he intuits—with the "heart," thus the core of his being—that the mind, along with the world proportioned to it, is of a dream-like nature. It is from this point of view that one can appreciate how it is that Shankara engages in a conversation with his own mind, in his *Thousand Teachings*:

> O my mind . . . thou art of the nature of non-existence. . . . The real cannot be destroyed and neither can the unreal be born. Thou art both born and destroyed. Therefore thou art non-existent (Upadesa (A) II, 19.8).

Even though such a statement and the idea it expresses are mediated by the mind, their source cannot be located in the mind itself; Shankara is able to make of his own mind a medium for the expression of a truth which renders illusory that very mind; and this is only conceivable in the light of a realized locus of consciousness that is of a strictly transcendent and necessarily supra-mental order.

It should be noted that, while the *jivan-mukta* possesses the supra-mental vantage point continuously, it is the mark of the lower class of Yogis that they need to subject the mind to various disciplines in order to arrive at the same vantage point; and then, as seen above, this perspective is attained only momentarily, or for as long as the particular "state" of identity lasts. For such Yogis, the mind is incorrectly seen, on the one hand, as something separate from, but related to, the Self—when the mind is functioning normally—and on the other hand, as one with the Self only in the supra-phenomenal state wherein it is extinguished *qua* mind.

On the other hand, knowledge of the Self having once been realized, the true knowers of the Self depend on no further mechanical efforts of the mind in order to acquire identity with the Self, as they "spontaneously enjoy, as quite natural to them, fearlessness and eternal peace, known as freedom." This is contrasted with those other Yogis "who are also traversing the path, but who possess inferior or middling understanding, and who look upon the mind as separate from but related to *Atman*" (Karika, III, 40).

The *jivan-mukta*, then, knows that the mind—whether in or out of the state of *samadhi*—cannot be described as "separate from but related to *Atman*"; rather, the mind is understood to be either an illusion or the Self. Insofar as it is viewed in its aspect of limitation or modification of consciousness, and thus as an entity distinct from the Self, it is illusory; but insofar as it is viewed in respect of the

consciousness of the Self which is refracted by it, the mind is seen to be not other than its real substratum, the Self which imparts to the superimposition constituted by the mind its very capacity for consciousness:

> As the snake imagined in the rope is real when seen as the rope, so also the mind, from the standpoint of the knowledge of the ultimate Reality, is seen to be identical with *Atman* (Karika, III, 29).

In other words, only when the mind is seen through to its substratum—when the snake is grasped as the rope—can it be assimilated to *Atman*. The mind is *Atman* only in respect of its transparency, and not in respect of the particular attributes that characterize it as mind; that is, the mind/snake is only "real" when it is understood to be an illusion and hence "seen through," to reveal rather than veil its real substratum.

These points will be seen to apply also, in certain key respects, to the question of the ontological status of the world from the viewpoint of the *jivan-mukta*.

2. "All is *Brahman*"

Despite the unreality or "non-existence" of the mind in respect of its separative affirmation, the positive aspect of the mind—deriving from the fact that its awareness cannot be other than that of the Self—allows for the continued consciousness of the Self even while the multiple phenomena of the world are being cognitively registered. This is possible since those phenomena in turn are reducible to their ontological substratum, the Self. In other words there are two key factors involved in the realization of the vision "all is *Brahman*": a subjective factor, centering on the immanence of the Self in all cognitions, and an objective factor relating to the ontological root of the world in the Self.

Taking first the subjective factor:

> The Self, which takes all mental ideas for its object, illumines all cognitions. . . . It is revealed by the cognitions as that which is non-different in each. There is no other way to have knowledge of the inmost Self but this (Discipleship, 205).

There is no other way, that is, within the framework of the world and in respect of the functioning of the cognitive faculties; this, in contrast to the unmediated knowledge of the Self that is realized on the plane that transcends mental cognition. Insofar as the knower of the Self is conditioned—albeit in appearance only—by the adjunct of individuality, and is engaged in the multiple perceptions of the phenomenal domain, he can only know—or rather, intuit—the Self as that light by means of which, and in which, all cognitions stand illumined: he knows the Self, not by means of cognition, but "*through* every cognition" (Discipleship, 204, emphasis added).

That is, the principle of cognition, pure awareness, is not veiled by the multiple specific instances of cognition springing therefrom; rather, that principle is grasped, with the "spiritual" intuition and thus supra-cognitively, through each and every cognition; for these cognitions have now lost their ability to veil the Self and instead, for the *jivan-mukta*, reveal the Self, becoming transparent to

the light of their source, the light by which they subsist, "that which is non-different in each."

Turning now to the objective side: the world of phenomena is itself grasped as *Brahman*, insofar as it cannot exist apart from its material cause, which is *Brahman*; the example given by Shankara to illustrate this point is the relationship between clay in itself and pots, buckets, plates, etc., made out of clay: "The truth is there is only clay" (Creation, 39-40).

Another illustration is the image of water: foam, ripples, waves, and bubbles are distinct from each other, while remaining in reality nothing but transient modifications of water, and thus reducible in principle to it. Thus:

> [T]he experiencer and the objects of his experience need not be mutually identical though they remain non-different from the Absolute (Creation, 39).

To reconcile this view of the positive ontological root of the world in *Brahman* as its material cause, with the view of the world as illusory, based on the rope-snake image, it could be said that the rope stands as the "material cause" of the snake exclusively from the vantage point established by the initial perception of the snake. In other words, the snake can only be said to have a material cause in the framework of the illusion that accords to it an apparent reality; in actual fact it does not exist, and thus any material cause of the non-existent must likewise share in that non-existence. *Brahman* is "cause" only in relation to an "effect," which, for its part, is reducible to illusion; in itself *Brahman* is, as seen in Part I of this chapter, not conditioned by the fact of standing in a causal relationship with anything whatsoever. This is why Shankara, following Gaudapada, is so strict in upholding the theory that there is in reality no creation (Karika I, 6[7]). According to the theory of *ajati*, the creation is akin to a magician's trick: he appears to climb a rope, disappear, fall in fragments to the ground, reassemble, and climb up the rope again; but in reality he never leaves the ground.[13]

Another useful image that reconciles the two apparently contradictory views of the world is that of the torch making circles of fire in the air: one imagines that there are real circles of fire when in fact only the torch exists, just as one imagines the world of multiplicity when in truth non-duality is alone real (Upadesa (A), II, 19.10).

However, in order to accord fully with Shankara's perspective, this analogy must be qualified by the principle of *tadatmya*: the world *qua* effect has the nature of its material cause, *Brahman*, but *Brahman* does not have the nature of its effect, the world. The immanence of *Brahman* in the world by no means diminishes the transcendence of *Brahman* above the world. In other words, although *Brahman* in a certain sense imparts to the world its ontological substance, this does not mean that the world, in its existential multiplicity, can be crudely equated with *Brahman*:

[13] This does not prevent Shankara from proffering a theistic interpretation of creation as seen earlier; without an understanding of the distinction between the *paramarthika* and *vyavaharika* perspectives, such metaphysical suppleness would appear to be nothing more than a contradiction pure and simple.

> [N]on-duality which is the Supreme Reality appears manifold through *Maya*. . . . This manifold is not real. . . . [T]he changeless *Atman* which is without part cannot admit of distinction excepting through *Maya* (Karika, III, 19).

The unreality of the manifold does not negate the empirical perceptions that are proportioned thereto, even in the case of the *jivan-mukta*; he continues to perceive multiple phenomena, but is not deluded into attributing to the objects of his perception any final ontological status:

> The enlightened one, having thus beheld that attributeless One . . . who no longer beholds the attributes of the world, does not fall into delusion, being relieved of the fault of taking his perceptions for real (Upadesa (A), II, 19.26).

There is here an important distinction between beholding the attributes of the world and the perceiving of the world: the *jivan-mukta* will continue to perceive things in the world but he will not behold them as attributes of the world; that is, having once known the non-dual Self transcending all attributes, it becomes impossible to ascribe attributes—in an ultimate manner—to any object whatsoever: "attribute" or quality loses its distinctive character, and is sublimated as an undifferentiable element of the non-dual Subject. To "see *Brahman* everywhere," then, comes to mean, not that the objects of one's perceptions in the world are distinctively grasped as *Brahman*—this would mean that *Brahman* consisted in parts—rather, it refers to the capacity to reduce all objects to their pure ontological substance, to the Subject, that is, which imparts to them their very capacity for apparent existence; to the Subject which has been realized as the very Self of the *jivan-mukta*. This reduction, then, far from equating empirical perceptions on the plane of phenomena with *Brahman*, on the contrary, allows of the continuous vision of *Brahman* exclusively on the basis of the negation of the final reality of these perceptions; thus, the *jivan-mukta* does not fall into the delusion of taking "his perceptions for real." This point is succinctly made by Shankara: "negate the world and know it" (Reality, 64).

In this light one understands better what Shankara means when he says that the enlightened man "though seeing duality, does not see it" (Enlightenment, 146): he sees duality in one respect, but does not see it in another; he sees, that is to say, nothing but *Brahman*; for such a man "all is *Brahman*":

> All this universe . . . is nothing but Brahman; there is nothing besides Brahman. . . . Are the pitcher, jug, jar, etc. known to be distinct from the clay of which they are composed? (Vivekachudamani, 391).

It may be answered that there is no distinction between these objects in respect of their fundamental substance, but the objects are distinct both from each other and from clay in respect of their name and form. To "see" non-distinction means, then, not to pretend that the distinctions born of *nama-rupa* are empirically unreal, but rather that they are metaphysically unreal; it implies the capacity to grasp the ultimately unreal nature of the entire sphere within which such empirical distinctions exist.

To sum up this discussion: to see a clay cup is to see an apparent modification of clay; to see the world is to see an apparent modification of the Self; the modification will reveal that substance which it apparently modifies, but only in the measure that its accidental properties—making for its empirical distinctiveness—are rendered transparent, thus revealing rather than veiling its underlying substance.

Finally it should be emphasized that this capacity for "seeing through" things arises, not from any dialectical or purely conceptual operations, but flows from, and indeed is partly constitutive of, realization of the Self: having once "beheld that attributeless One," the *jivan-mukta* is no longer deluded by the phenomenal limitations of his own perceptions, but rather "sees through" the objects of his perception by means of a spiritual vision which necessarily transcends the domain of ordinary perception; this vision of the One in the world can be regarded as a fruit of the vision of the One beyond the world, bearing in mind Shankara's understanding of such a vision:

> [H]aving seen the Supreme Reality, . . . [the aspirant] thinks "I am myself That"; that is to say, his perception of sensuous objects becomes seedless, has lost all germ of evil (Gita, II, 59).

This "germ of evil" is the karmic seed of ignorance that is "burnt up" in the fire of knowledge of the Self; but the fact that the *jivan-mukta* persists as an individual means that some *karma* must remain. This question is addressed in the following section, in the light of the relationship between the *jivan-mukta* and action in general.

3. Action and *Prarabdha Karma*

Although the *jivan-mukta* acts, he is said to be actionless. This is because he acts in a manner proper to the one who has transcended the three cosmic tendencies, the *guna*s, thus earning the title *Trigunatita* (Gita, XIV, 25).

This means that he may indeed act, but such action has no binding effect, no further karmic "fruit"; such action that may be performed, ritual or otherwise, is done either for the sake of setting an example to others, or else it consists exclusively in that action necessary for the physical maintenance of the body. But, always, it is action that is not performed for the sake of the fruits of the action; it is always detached action:

> For want of egoism these actions do not pollute Me . . . nor have I a desire for the fruits of these actions (Gita, IV, 14).

Though expressed by Krishna, through the paraphrase of Shankara, this attitude pertains to the *jivan-mukta*. It was seen earlier that detachment from action and its results was posited as a *sine qua non* for progress along the path of transcendence; at this point it should be observed that detachment is not so much a quality to be cultivated as it is an effect or constitutive element of plenary realization; that is, detachment is something which cannot but arise as a direct consequence of Liberation. Indeed it could even be said that perfect

detachment can *only* be attained as an effect of Liberation, and will perforce remain imperfect or virtual—as opposed to actual—until Liberation is attained: for while the abstemious man finds that he is detached from objects, he will not be fully detached from desire for those objects until realization of the Self is attained:

> Objects withdraw from an abstinent man, but not the taste. On seeing the Supreme, his taste, too, ceases (Bhagavad Gita, II, 59).

Another way of putting this is that there can be no desires left in the soul of one whose every desire is satisfied; and this is what happens—precisely and exclusively—when the Self is realized:

> How does one become free from desires? By realizing them; but this can only be achieved when one's desire is for the Self alone. . . . Only that which is thought of as other than oneself can be an object of desire, and in the case of the enlightened man . . . no such thing exists (Enlightenment, 207).

The *jivan-mukta*, then, knows that all possible desire is eternally consummated in his own true Self; there is then nothing existent that could constitute an object of desire; and when no such object exists, no action rooted in desire can take place; hence it is said that the *jivan-mukta* acts while being actionless.

His actions do not cling to him, they no longer give rise to karmic forces (*vasana*s, *samskara*s) which generate further samsaric action, as the inner nexus between action and desire has been eliminated, that nexus which consists of ignorance.

But Shankara introduces a nuance into this picture by saying that there is a stock of *karma*, called *prarabdha*, that is not burnt up in the fire of knowledge, but which gives forth its fruit, even though the *jivan-mukta* is not bound to the samsaric realm by this fruit; nor is his realization contradicted by this fructification of past action. In response to the question: what actions are "burnt in the fire of knowledge," Shankara replies, specifying the following three types of action: all acts committed in the present birth, prior to the enlightenment of the *jivan-mukta*; all acts committed in the life of the *jivan-mukta* subsequent to his enlightenment; and all acts committed in all past births—except the *prarabdha-karma*, that is, the particular portion of karmic "fruit," taken from the total stock of accumulated *karma* that is responsible for initiating the present life of the individual (Discipleship, 277).

The total stock of *karma*, called *samcita-karma*, consists in the accumulated merit/demerit of all past action, the fruits of which have not begun to manifest; in contrast to the *prarabdha-karma*, which, having begun to fructify, must continue to do so until this particular causal mass is exhausted. It is only because of this unexhausted portion of *karma* that the bodily existence of the *jivan-mukta* is maintained subsequent to Liberation:

> Final peace comes at the fall of the body. If it were not for the distinction between action the effects of which have begun to fructify, and action the effects of

> which have not . . . all action without exception would be destroyed by knowledge of the Absolute. And in that case there would be nothing further that could sustain the empirical existence of the enlightened man, and he would enter the final peace forthwith (Enlightenment, 227).

It is the continuing fructification of the *prarabdha-karma* which accounts not just for the fact of the continued empirical existence of the *jivan-mukta*, but also for the fact that he continues to act; to this extent he will then appear to be bound by his previous actions, but one must stress the word "appear": for, unlike the unenlightened man, the *jivan-mukta* acts out his *karma* in the full knowledge that this "acting out" no longer entails further *karma* to which he is bound, but simply exhausts that karmic stock that gave rise to his present birth. He thus sees such action that flows from him as pertaining to the not-self, and hence of an illusory character. Thus, his action is "apparent" in contrast to the reality of the action of the unenlightened man: "reality" here pertaining not to the ontological degree of the action in question, but to the subjective experience of bondage to action that is felt by the unenlightened man.

A useful image of this unspent *karma* is given by Shankara: that of the potter's wheel which revolves for some time even after the cessation of the action that set it in motion: "Hence one has to wait until the energy of the action is exhausted" (Enlightenment, 227). The very fact of the experience of enlightenment implies a prior state of ignorance, which in turn can only be the fruit of past action:

> [T]he rise of knowledge presupposes a fund of action, the effects of which have begun to manifest (Enlightenment, 227).

Enlightenment, though not constituting a change of state from the viewpoint of the Self, is a change of state from the perspective of the empirical subject, who is the embodiment of the *prarabdha-karma* that must be exhausted. It is important to emphasize here that though the "final peace" is only attained at the death of the body when this karmic force is spent, this peace is known by the *jivan-mukta* to be the eternally real and immutably omnipresent peace that can never be absent, but only appear such: just as his own actions pertain to the level of appearances only, so too is the non-attainment of the "final peace" but an appearance. Thus, the capacity to see through the mirage of action and alterity, even while empirically engaged in that mirage, is a central distinguishing feature of the *jivan-mukta*.

However, there is an important qualification to this on-going vision of the Self: even if in principle the *jivan-mukta* cannot fall prey to illusion, in practice he may be subject to a certain momentary loss of total knowledge, and this, by virtue of the particular nature of his *prarabdha-karma*, which "will overpower the knowledge of the Real that you have, and produce its results. Totally unobstructed metaphysical knowledge will finally supervene when the merit and demerit that produced the body come to an end" (Upadesa (A), II, 4.3).

It may be objected that if "final peace" and "unobstructed knowledge" come only upon physical death, it is incorrect to speak of either Liberation or omniscience as attainable in this life. This objection can be answered by Shankara's assertion

that those who have realized the Self "are not associated with the suspicion of a defect, as they do not identify themselves with the psycho-physical complex" (Enlightenment, 283).

In other words: it is always possible that the *jivan-mukta* may err in the world as a result of his *prarabdha-karma*, but such error will always be superficial and insignificant, therefore in no wise detracting from the actual knowledge of the Self fully realized—this realization pertaining to a transpersonal depth to which the individual psycho-physical complex has no access. It is precisely his awareness of the illusory nature of the psycho-physical complex that not only renders him immune from false identification with that complex, but also ensures that any errors arising within that complex cannot significantly modify or relativize his state of realization. Thus, Shankara says that the *jivan-mukta* who may find his knowledge of the Real temporarily overcome by the effects of his *prarabdha-karma* is like one who "inexplicably loses his sense of direction momentarily, although really in possession of it" (Enlightenment, 221).

The *jivan-mukta*, then, is simultaneously the agent experiencing the effects of unspent *karma* and the one "liberated in life" from the bondage of all *karma*. The paradox is resolvable only in the light of the understanding that, for the *jivan-mukta*, the realm of empirical experience is illusory whilst the liberation attained pertains to a Reality that can be contradicted in appearance only; thus, for such a one, "the existence of *prarabdha* work is meaningless, like the question of a man who has awakened from sleep having any connection with the objects seen in the dream-state" (Vivekachudamani, 454).

From this quotation can be inferred both the possibility of the enduring influence of illusion and the transcendence of the consequences flowing from that possibility: having awoken from a dream, one may continue to dwell upon the objects of which one was dreaming—and thus in some sense be "connected" to those objects—even while knowing that there can be no objective connection between oneself and those non-existent objects. Thus, while the "existence" of *prarabdha* is "meaningless" for the *jivan-mukta*—that is, it is devoid of real substance—its effects will still be experienced on the empirical plane proper to them; the point here is that those effects are transcended by the very knowledge of their illusory nature: in this respect the *jivan-mukta* is like the one who acts in a dream while knowing that it is a dream. Inversely, he is also like the one in deep sleep—the state of virtual Self-realization to which all have access—wherein the differentiated world is absent, except that for him, this absence is sustained even in the very bosom of its apparent manifestation. Thus he is one who "acts" but is "actionless."

To sum up: it is the very disjuncture between the individual as such and the Self—stemming from the fact that, though the self is non-different from the Self, the Self is not non-different from the self—which explains the possibility of the *jivan-mukta* being subject to the unfolding of unspent karmic energy, and, with it, the susceptibility to momentary breaks in the continuity of his consciousness of the Self: insofar as the *jivan-mukta* remains a *jiva*, a relative being, this susceptibility is a contingent possibility, but insofar as his essential defining quality is *mukti*, and thus the Self, there is no question of being affected

by the vicissitudes of outward existence; any susceptibility to contingency can only relate to that which is itself a contingency, the ego which is "ever bound." It is not the ego or the empirical self that can be said to have realized transcendence: only the Self can know the Self—it is this immutable Self-knowledge that the *jivan-mukta* realizes, and this, at a transpersonal depth to which the relativities attendant upon the outward existence of the relative self have no access.

The *jivan-mukta*, then, maintains an attitude of indifference towards the fruits of his *prarabdha-karma*, that is, his empirical experience in the world. It remains to be seen whether this indifference operates even in relation to that most intense kind of human experience: pain and suffering.

4. Suffering and the *Jivan-Mukta*

The key to understanding Shankara's position on suffering is the notion of objectivity. This may seem surprising, given the degree of emphasis on the subjective nature of the Self; but in fact the two aspects, transcendent subjectivity and radical objectivity, go hand in hand: as seen earlier, to realize the Self as true subject is also and necessarily to regard the ego and all its adjuncts as "objects"; it is thus to be perfectly objective with regard to the not-self, a perspective which is possible only from the vantage point of the Self, or, derivatively, from that of the reflection of the Self in the individual.

What is most important to note here is that the awareness of the *jivan-mukta* participates in that transcendent perspective even in the context of empirical existence, and is not identified with that perspective only in the supra-empirical moment of enlightenment: rather, a certain awareness of that which is revealed as one's true Self is maintained even outside the moment of revelation, which thus becomes no longer momentary, but permanent; and, in line with the considerations noted above, such an awareness may be termed a "reflection" of the consciousness of the Self within the individual, and thus an awareness surpassing the limitations of the individual.

In the measure that identification with the Self is ceaseless, pain and suffering will be seen to pertain to something "other," that is, to the not-self. This, as will be seen, does not negate the reality of suffering on its own plane, but it does negate the possibility that the Self is subject to suffering, and it is this awareness, along with the full identification with the Self whence flows this operative—in contrast to merely theoretical—awareness, that makes it possible to say, elliptically, that in the experience of suffering, the *jivan-mukta* does not suffer.

The degree of objectivity attained in relation to one's own body as a result of realizing the true locus of subjectivity, is neatly summed up by Shankara thus:

> Just as one does not identify oneself with the body of another, so does one not identify oneself with one's own body after vision of the Supreme (Upadesa (A), II, 16.73).

Just as the unenlightened person possesses a concrete sense of identification with his own body and a correspondingly concrete non-identification with the body of anyone else, so the *jivan-mukta* fully and effectively identifies himself with the Self, this identification entailing, inversely, the concrete non-identification with

his own body, now correctly grasped as composed of the very stuff of ignorance. The subjective experience of pain flows from the absence of this knowledge:

> [E]xperience of pain is not real in the highest sense. . . . The soul experiences the pain arising from cuts and burns in its body through identifying itself with them in error. And it experiences the pains of sons and friends and the like in the same way through identifying itself with them (Soul, 71).

The individual's identification with the body-mind complex prior to enlightenment is likened by Shankara to the false notion, on the part of one who wears ear-rings, that his essential defining characteristic is to wear ear-rings; when the ear-rings are once removed, "the notion 'I am the one with the ear-rings' is permanently cancelled" (Upadesa (A), II, 18.161). Likewise, the false self-identification with the individual body-mind complex is permanently effaced through the realization that one is the Self.

What is "permanently cancelled" in the above illustration is the idea that the nature of the individual is essentially defined by the wearing of ear-rings; but this does not preclude the wearing of ear-rings. Analogously, the realized individual will no longer be under the sway of the idea that his true Self suffers, but this does not preclude the existence, and thus objective experience, of suffering in the framework of the individuality.

In another place, Shankara compares the experience of pain in the dream-state to the experience of pain by the individual in the world:

> [W]hen the dream is over the pain is regarded as non-existent now and as being unreal before. For pain and error, once cancelled, do not assert themselves again (Enlightenment, 129).

The *jivan-mukta*, then, having "awoken" to reality, knows—even whilst witnessing the experience of suffering on the part of his own individual being—that it is only an outer empirical "envelope" of his own true Self that is suffering. In terms of the dream analogy, it would be like one who, dreaming that pain is being inflicted upon him, knows that he is dreaming and thus, even while "experiencing" pain in the dream, is aware that the recipient of the painful experience is but a projection of his own imagination: the pain is then not negated on its own level, but it is that very level, along with the sense of agency proportioned to it, that will be concretely grasped as an illusory superimposition on the substratum of the Self, which is immutable beatitude.

However, given the fact that it is possible for the *prarabdha-karma* to operate so as to "overcome the knowledge of the Real," it is necessary to qualify the above points with a *de jure* clause: in principle, the *jivan-mukta* will be capable of transcending all suffering by means of his identification with the Self, while in practice it is possible that such and such an experience of pain, as fruit of the *prarabdha-karma*, will result in the temporary eclipse of knowledge of the Self, and thus in the consequent feeling that "I am the sufferer."

In other words, the notion and the feeling that one is the agent in the experience of suffering is precluded only to the extent that knowledge of the Self is uninterrupted; if this knowledge is susceptible to any momentary lapse, in that measure there will be the possibility of the reemergence of the notion and feeling that one is the sufferer. This important qualification of the immunity from suffering, though not articulated as such by Shankara, is nonetheless implicit in some of his statements, of which the following may be taken as an example:

> Where there is but the one perfectly pure consciousness without a second, there the Mahatmas experience no grief or delusion (Upadesa (A), II, 10.12).

"There" may be taken as referring to the "realm of enlightenment" wherein, as seen in Part II of this chapter, no empirical perceptions exist, as there is no empirical agent; in principle, this is just as much the case within the realm of empirical existence, inasmuch as, once known to be illusory "there," the realm of apparent existence is "cancelled" even "here," that is, in the very bosom of the illusion itself. This is the case in principle and in the very measure that consciousness of the Self remains uninterrupted; but, just as it has been seen that "unobstructed knowledge" and the "final peace" come only with the exhaustion of the *prarabdha karma* and bodily death, so, while still living, the *jivan-mukta* will remain subject in practice to the unfolding of this unspent karmic force, which carries with it the possibility of a momentary lapse of knowledge, and consequently the subjective experience of "grief."

However, it must be stressed, finally, that such an experience does not disprove or qualify the state of transcendent realization attained by the *jivan-mukta*; for the realization in question pertains in the last analysis to the "realm of enlightenment" wherein there is no question of being subject to the vicissitudes of outward existence. It is the in-depth realization, the "making real" of that domain of the Self, that constitutes Liberation or the transcendent attainment, in "this life"; neither the cessation of the objective existence of that relative "life," nor the absolute immunity from suffering, constitute conditions of transcendent realization.

5. Devotion

> Even great gods like Brahmà and Indra are pitiable beings in the eyes of that knower of the Self (Upadesa (A), II, 14.27).[14]

It may be thought that personal devotion to a personal God would be precluded by the knowledge that both elements of such a relationship are, in the very

[14] It should be noted that the "Brahmà" in question here (male gender) is not *Brahma nirguna* or *saguna*, but one of the "Triple Manifestations" (*Trimurti*) of *Isvara*; it thus occupies an ontological degree which is beneath that of *Isvara*, the Lord.

measure of their distinctive affirmation, unreal and thus "pitiable beings." Anything that can be distinguished from the Self is relative and therefore illusory and "pitiable." But in fact this consciousness by no means entails any diminution in the devotion of the individual to the Lord, and this is for two identifiable reasons: firstly because the Lord, as "lesser" (*apara*) Absolute, is not other than the "higher" (*para*) Absolute, in respect of essential identity, even while being distinguishable from the higher Absolute in respect of ontological determination; secondly, because the individual as such is infinitely surpassed by the Lord, to whom an attitude of humble adoration is consequently due, and this, not only as a prerequisite for adopting the path which transcends the Lord as lesser Absolute, but also even after that transcendence has been realized.

The concluding salutation of Shankara's commentary on Gaudapada's *Karika* is addressed to *Brahman* and then to his own Master: "I bow to that Brahman, destroyer of all fear for those who take shelter under It. . . . I prostrate to the feet of that Great Teacher, the most adored among the adorable . . ." (Karika, IV, conclusion).

This attitude of devotion and humility on the part of the *jivan-mukta* is explained by Shankara in the comment preceding the above, by referring to the possibility of "saluting" that knowledge which liberates:

> Having attained this knowledge which is free from multiplicity, having become one with it, we salute it. Though this absolute knowledge cannot be subjected to any relative treatment, yet we view it from the relative standpoint and adore it to the best of our ability (Karika, IV, 100).

This "view" from relativity persists, then, even while being inwardly transcended by the "view" of the Self; but the very fact that the individual continues to exist as such, in the domain of relativity, necessarily entails humble devotion to all that which ontologically or spiritually surpasses him. The devotion offered to *Brahman* is *a priori* addressed to the "lesser" Absolute: the "higher" cannot "be subjected to any relative treatment," since *Brahma nirguna* has no possible relationship with the manifested world; nonetheless, this devotion is implicitly directed to the higher aspect of *Brahman* which in fact constitutes whatever reality the "lesser" aspect may be said to possess.

Transcendent realization, then, does not entail the ontological elevation of the individual above the personal God, the "lesser" Absolute: on the contrary, only when there is awareness of the fact that the individual as such is an illusion, an "object" which can be "cut off like an arm and thrown away"—only then has consciousness been liberated from its illusory limitations, rejoining its immanent and immutable source which is the Self.

As an individual, then, the *jivan-mukta* remains outwardly subject to all that which surpasses him in the ascending hierarchy of Being; this is expressed not just in the reverence noted above, but in the many devotional hymns attributed to Shankara. However, in fulfilling those obligations attendant upon his provisional ontological situation, the *jivan-mukta* at one and the same time sees the illusory nature of the entire plane on which dualistic relationships exist, and also knows concretely that in his very essence—in that Essence to which "his" consciousness

in fact "belongs"—he "is" That which is intended by all relationships, actions, thoughts, modes of being, happiness, and consciousness, that which bestows upon them all their value and ultimate significance, the supreme Self "which has no second."

"Shankara: Tat Tvam asi"

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