Paul Brunton

A Bridge Between India and the West

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* * *

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It is with great satisfaction and relief that we are at long last able to bring to conclusion this translation which is now to be made available on the internet.

The original thesis, the work of seven long years, has so far been the only academic work on Paul Brunton. In it, I have attempted to to honor his pioneering contribution to

the emerging culture of East and West, while placing him against the backdrop of spiritual currents of his time, tracing his life through his Indian years, and examining the influence of traditional and Neo-Vedanta on his ideas. The picture of Paul Brunton and his work which emerges in this scholarly study cannot hope to do justice to the man or his vision of the philosophic life, which have been a source of inspiration for so many. Nevertheless, I hope that my work will be of some use to those interested in having a context for his writings.

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INTRODUCTION

> There is probably no more appropriate way to enter into the spirit of a seeker than to retrace the path leading to the source of his ideas and to recount the subjective facts that led to his discoveries.
>
> – Aniela Jaffé[1]

What I have tried to do here is to "retrace the path leading to the source" of Paul Brunton's ideas and to "recount the subjective facts that led to his discoveries," through a two-fold perspective where a survey of his life reveals how his ideas developed. I will examine the influence of India, of both its living masters and its traditional doctrines, particularly Advaita Vedanta, on the British writer Paul Brunton (1898-1981), author of eleven volumes published during his lifetime and sixteen volumes of *Notebooks* posthumously published.

My research led me successively to:

– Switzerland, where the author died in 1981. My inquiries led me to the municipal offices of Vevey, Montreux, and Lugano, as well as to Zurich where I met several individuals who knew Brunton well and who gave me both biographical and personal information.

– South India, where Brunton spent many years and studied with several teachers. I met with the daughter of one of them (the late Subrahmanya Iyer) and obtained copies of original correspondence from Brunton to Iyer dating from 1938-1940.

– The United States, where I did research in the archives of Wisdom's Goldenrod Center for Philosophic Study in Valois, N.Y., founded by friends and students of Paul Brunton. There I had access to Brunton's personal library, including the voluminous notes he took during his ten-year sojourn in India. These unedited notes constitute my main and most valuable source of information for the present work.

Paul Brunton was a mystic[2] and a philosopher,[3] as well as an esotericist. One or another of these aspects of his being came to prominence at various times during his life, which might thus be divided into four periods:

1. Adolescence and early twenties, when the mystical and esoteric aspects were most

[1] Aniela Jaffé, Introduction to C.G. Jung, *Ma vie* (tr. of his *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken* [English tr.: *Memories, dreams and reflections*]), Paris: Gallimard/Folio, 1973. Curiously, the paragraph containing this quote is missing from the English translation.

[2] Or better, a contemplative, if the word mystic implies union with a personal God.

[3] In the larger sense of visionary thinker.

visible (involvement with the Theosophical Society, etc.).

2. Early adulthood, where the mystic or contemplative found expression in his early works, *The Secret Path*, *The Inner Reality*, and *The Quest of the Overself* (a period marked by the influence of Ramana Maharshi).

3. Mature years, from age forty, during which (under the influence of pandit Subrahmanya Iyer, personal teacher of the Maharaja of Mysore) the mystic and esotericist aspects receded, and the philosopher emerged in his two major works, *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* and *The Wisdom of the Overself*.

4. Last years (the period of the *Notebooks*), where he was fully a philosopher, one whose outlook embraced mystical contemplation, while traces of the esotericist remained in the background.

In this work, I am mainly concerned with Brunton the philosopher, and to a lesser degree with Brunton the contemplative.

1. A Creative Independence

Paul Brunton's most characteristic trait was probably his individualistic temperament, an essential aspect of which was his strong need for independence. One notes his aristocratic need for privacy, his love of solitude, and his distance from the conventional herd (those unready to think for themselves). Like Emerson (a favorite author), he extolled "self-reliance."

He was thus a fiercely independent thinker, standing apart from all established schools and movements. His membership in the Theosophical Society constituted only a brief, youthful interlude in a life which otherwise remained on the margin of all organizations, even esoteric ones. Brunton justified his dislike of organizations in several ways: history shows that groups sooner or later degenerate into cliques, which in the end defend their own interests and survival above all. Moreover, the existence of rival groups perpetuates antagonisms, prejudices and hatred, all contrary to the ideals proclaimed by each. Freedom from ideological ties encourages impartiality and authenticity in the search for Truth. One who is brave enough to follow his quest alone, outside the protective fold of religious or spiritual circles, is free to go his own way, unconstrained by dogma. Brunton admits that while groups can help beginners, at a certain point they may hinder inner progress; thus an advanced mystic may feel no need to be part of a community. That was the case for Brunton himself, who was sensitive to the fact that "the Wind bloweth where it will." His definition of a sage could be applied to himself:

> He is a prophet without a church, a teacher without a school, a reformer without an

institution.[4]

This firm stand against organized groups does not merely reflect the author's individualism. It expresses as well his deep conviction that the Quest is an individual affair. He was fond of Emerson's remark, "Souls are not saved in bundles," and maintained that only *alone* can we find Truth, in the depths of our own innermost being, alone with the Alone:

> What chance has the individual spiritual educator to continue his work when public and government alike accept the false suggestion that only through large organized groups and recognized traditional institutions can people be correctly led? The end of such a trend can only be as it has been in the past—monopoly, dictatorial religion, centralized tyrannical power, heresy-hunting persecution, and the death of individualism, which means the death of truth. Jesus, Buddha, Spinoza were all individualists.[5]

Thus Brunton not only doubted the efficacy of organizations in the realm of the spiritual, but he as well found them to be potentially dangerous.

From this affirmation of independence two observations follow:

– The teachings Brunton proposes under the general term 'philosophy' find no exact correspondence in any one school of thought, whether orthodox (i.e. Advaita) or esoteric (i.e. Theosophy). Thus one can clearly state that despite his many allusions to Brahmanical or Hindu thought (i.e. his use of the terms *yoga*, *karma*, *non-duality*, and more rarely *Brahman*, *atman*, or *samadhi*), Brunton does not invoke exclusively the authority of Advaita Vedanta. It is nevertheless my intention in this study to examine the influence of Advaita on Brunton's thought.

– Brunton wrote for a public without affiliation: for individuals dissatisfied with the prevailing materialism who found no place in orthodox institutions.

2. Issues in the Present Work

> If this higher philosophy is to become more acceptable among the Western races, it will have to be formulated by members of those races themselves and presented in a modern, suitable form. It will be necessary to find inspired Western sources to whom we may turn for its interpretation and Truth instead of trying to depend on contemporary India.[6]

[4] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 4, 61.

[5] Ibid., XVI, 1, 4, 157.

[6] Ibid., X, 1, 127.

My purpose in this work is to determine whether and in what way Paul Brunton's works are a modern reformulation of Advaita Vedanta. We will identify in his writings ideas of Vedantic origin, touching briefly on elements drawn from other traditions or currents of thought. We will then examine how he adapted these ideas for Western readers, through his use of modern, non-Sanskrit terminology. It is here that the most intricate questions arise, notably relating to two crucial points of Brunton's teachings:

First, regarding his doctrine of mentalism: was it already stated in the classic Advaita texts, notably in Shankara; did it only appear in a later Vedantic school; or is it rather a wholly modern interpretation of the doctrine of *Maya*, unknown to classic and medieval Vedanta, and specific to a Westernized Neo-Vedanta?

Second, concerning his concept of the Overself: did he take it from the Vedantic *Atman*; is it the *Atman* in Western disguise; or is it a new concept? And how does he maintain the idea of a "higher individuality" which the concept of an Overself implies, while affirming at the same time a doctrine of non-duality?

We will pose another, more general question: is it possible to acculturate Vedanta to the West (in the sense that one says one acculturates Christianity in Africa and Asia)? And if so, what would be the conditions necessary for this to happen? This is an underlying issue in the present work, and will be addressed in its Conclusion. In this regard, one should keep in mind the following: giving Vedantic teachings to Westerners was not the way of Hindu tradition, which limited access to Vedic and Vedantic knowledge according to strict criteria of race, gender, and caste. Teachings were traditionally transmitted orally from master to disciple, and not through printed works. Thus the fact that Paul Brunton, a *mleccha*,[7] was accepted as a student by Hindu masters and encouraged to spread their philosophy in the West, already indicates that this was an instance of Neo-Vedanta, the reformulation of Vedantic tradition by progressive Hindus following their encounter with European culture and values.

This work is in two parts: Part I, "Genesis of a Quest," evokes the writer's early years against the backdrop of early twentieth-century currents of thought. Brunton's sojourns in India will then be surveyed in some detail.

Part II, "The Quest for Truth," examines Brunton's thought from the perspective of the history of ideas, as part of the spiritual and intellectual exchange between India and the West. In this regard we will look at Advaita's influence on his doctrine of mentalism (Chapter 4) and on his concept of the Overself (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 will examine Brunton's views on ethics and spiritual practice. Finally, in the Appendix, we will examine how Brunton viewed India and its influence on the West, as well as how he himself was received by India and the West. In the process, we will attempt to sort out the ways in which Paul Brunton, India, and the West influenced one another.

[7] Sanskrit for foreigner or barbarian, generally with a pejorative connotation.

PART I: GENESIS OF A QUEST

CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE TO A QUEST

In this chapter we will attempt to outline how the Westernization or modernization of Vedanta was achieved, in part by the Hindus themselves following the long period of reciprocal influences between India and the West. We will then review Paul Brunton's early life, prior to his Indian experience, and look at the ways he was influenced by Theosophy and the New Science. Finally, we will attempt to place him among spiritual seekers of his time who attempted to bridge East and West.

1.1 India and the West

One could not begin to sum up here the long history of reciprocal influences which resulted from India's encounter with the West.[8] Western Orientalists, notably the pioneers of modern British Indology, Sir William Jones (1746-1794), Sir Charles Wilkins (1750-1836), and Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), had studied Indian thought and culture with enthusiasm, paving the way for later spiritual explorers whose lives, thought, and work would be directly influenced by all that their erudite predecessors had patiently brought to light. While scholars set out to discover the soul of India, merchants, engineers, administrators, and Christian missionaries attempted to imprint Western traits upon this soul. India, for its part, accepted railroads, tribunals, and British schools, while preferring to keep its soul Hindu, allowing Christianity only a marginal success. Christian influence was felt more importantly in the reinterpretation of Hindu tradition brought about by the Neo-Hindu movement, which we will discuss briefly here.[9]

The principal creators of the movement came from Bengal. Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), founder of the reformed Hindu sect Brahmo Samaj, was the "father" of the cultural and ideological rapprochement between India and the English:

> He was the first Indian who realized the great good which the country would reap from its connection with Britain and from the leaven of Christianity. But he realized to the full that no real blessing could come to India by the mere adoption of Western things unchanged. India, he said, would inevitably remain Indian. No gift from the outside could be of any real value except in so far as it was naturalized.[10]

[8] C.f. W. Halfbass'excellent study, *India and Europe*, N.Y., 1988.

[9] Here we will simply mention a number of well-known historical landmarks indispensable to understanding Neo-Hinduism. In Chapter 3 we will present a more detailed study of its ideas as presented to Brunton by Subrahmanya Iyer.

[10] Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movement in India*, New Delhi, 1977, p. 30.

This remarkable man seemed to have pioneered the acculturation of Christianity in India, as well as pioneering Neo-Hinduism—Hinduism re-conceived, re-evaluated and reformed in light of the impact of the West. What is said about him in the above quote could apply as well, *mutatis mutandis*, to Paul Brunton. Brunton believed that the West would remain itself, and that neither Vedanta nor other Asian doctrines would be presentable to a wider world without being reformulated.

Thanks to one of Ram Mohan Roy's successors, the Bengali Brahmin Keshab Chandra Sen (entered Brahmo-Samaj in 1857; d. 1902), three new elements were introduced to Hinduism, directly or indirectly due to the presence of Christian churches in India: a missionary spirit, a spirit of social and humanitarian service, and a religious universalism.

This last came not from Christian missionaries (who were at that time quite far from it) but from the influence of another Bengali Brahmin, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Having practiced Hindu, Christian, and Moslem *sadhanas*, Ramakrishna found at the end of his quest that they led to the same divine revelation under different names. Sen borrowed this idea from Ramakrishna, whom he had met in Calcutta in 1875: all the great religions are true, because all lead to the same Truth. Keshab embodied this idea in the Church of the New Dispensation, which he founded in 1881 with the aim of replacing the Brahmo-Samaj. In fact, his new faith was a sort of syncretism, adopting as its emblem "an extraordinary symbol made up of the Hindu trident, the Christian cross and the Crescent of Islam."[11]

But another Indian institution was destined to exemplify these three features of Neo-Hinduism throughout the world, an organization which would itself become the symbol and spearhead of the movement: the Ramakrishna Mission, personified in its celebrated founder, Swami Vivekananda. Henceforth the new Hinduism would loudly proclaim its proselytism (through Vivekananda's voyages to the West, the founding of ashrams in many countries, translations of Hindu scriptures etc.), its philanthropic activities (schools, dispensaries, charitable institutions), and its universalism, later adopted by the Neo-Vedantins (of whom Radhakrishnan is the most representative and best known): there is only one Reality to be known, the same for all seekers, but the ways to it are many. Advaita Vedanta, the Royal Path, in its vision of a non-dual Absolute, includes and transcends all other doctrines with their more specific and subordinate points of view.

1.2 Early Years

Paul Brunton, whose real name was Raphael Hurst, was born in London on

[11] Ibid., p. 56.

November 27, 1898, the son of Jewish parents who had emigrated to England from Eastern Europe. We know almost nothing of his childhood, except that his mother died of tuberculosis when he was thirteen, and that his father subsequently remarried.

Perhaps the early passing of his mother contributed to the already sensitive child's inclination towards the supernatural and spiritual. This much is certain: in the months following her death, he became more and more introverted, and at age sixteen he was having his first spiritual experiences:

> "Before I reached the threshold of manhood and after six months of unwavering daily practice of meditation and eighteen months of burning aspiration for the Spiritual Self, I underwent a series of mystical ecstasies. During them I attained a kind of elementary consciousness of it. If anyone could imagine a consciousness which does not objectify anything but remains in its own native purity, a happiness beyond which it is impossible to go, and a self which is unvaryingly one and the same, he would have the correct idea of the Overself...."
>
> The glamour and freshness of [Brunton's] mystical ecstasies subsided within three or four weeks and vanished. But the awareness kindled by them remained for three years.[12]

These experiences further increased his sensitivity. The adolescent felt a widening chasm between himself and his prosaic surroundings, and he decided to end his life. Still, his curiosity about death itself and what lay on the other side led him to search for all sorts of doctrines at the British Museum Library. Thus his projected suicide, first indefinitely postponed, was finally cancelled.

It was likely soon after that Raphael Hurst decided to join the Theosophical Society. We have a picture of these youthful years in a novel by Michael Juste, one of Brunton's co-disciples at the Society.[13] Young Raphael appears in this book in the character of David, a pale and slender youth, a dreamer "inclined towards mysticism." It was a bohemian period of his life, and London was the place to be:

> One thing that amazed me was the number of small societies teaching occultism and mysticism, most of them being offshoots of Theosophy. Modern Rosicrucianism, Buddhism and Gnosticism, Christian mysticism and Indian Yoga, all found plenty of exponents.[14]

The young Hurst and his companions led a life of poverty; they were carefree and impractical idealists. At one point Raphael and Michael launched themselves into a brief bookstore career. Unfortunately, their shop was in a neighborhood that few visited, and the business failed within a few months. During this period, the future Paul Brunton

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[12] From *Paul Brunton: a Personal View*, by Kenneth Thurston Hurst, Burdett, N.Y., 1989, pp. 42-43.

[13] Michael Juste, *The White Brother: an Occult Autobiography*, London, 1927.

[14] Ibid., p. 54.

developed his innate gift of occult powers:

> I developed in little time powers of mediumship, in particular clairvoyance and clairaudience, and thus obtained the best kind of proof in the existence of a psychic world, in other words by personal experience, without having recourse to professional mediums. After I had completely established the truth of the afterlife for myself, I turned toward the study of Theosophy and I belonged to the Theosophical Society. I am aware of what I learned there in the course of this second phase; but at the end of two years I left the Society. I felt that the adepts who had presided over its foundation were now retired, abandoning the society to its own devices. But it was Theosophy which gave me my first introduction to Oriental thought....[15]

After his break with the Theosophical Society, young Hurst frequented other groups and esoteric circles,[16] belonging for a short time to the Spiritualist Society of Great Britain. During this time, alongside the unsuccessful bookstore venture, he became a free-lance journalist, writing under different pseudonyms, notably for the *Occult Review*. His first publication, at age twenty one, seems to have been a poem, "Along the Mystic Road," which appeared in November 1919 under the name Raphael Meriden.

In November 1921 he published an article under his real name, "The Occult Value of the Scientific Attitude," followed in May 1922 by "The Two Faces of Man," where he examined various types of mysticism and occultism. These articles reveal much about Brunton himself. On the one hand, he considered himself both an esotericist drawn to mysteries and occult sciences, and a spiritual aspirant seeking mystical union with the divine. In addition, the scientific method with its precision appealed to him, and we see him already attempting to reconcile science and spirituality.

Further articles appeared in the same journal. "Beyond the Cup of Youth," published in March 1928 under the name Raphael Delmonte, is a flowery and allegorical text in which the author seems to bid fond farewell to a youth spent in mystical reveries (he was then thirty years old). "With a Southern Indian Tantrist," in the July 1932 issue under the name Brunton Paul, relates an incident from his first tour of India. "Crowley's Magick," appearing in November of that year, this time under the definitive pen-name Paul Brunton, is a review of Aleister Crowley's book, *Magick in Theory and Practice*.[17] Brunton here mocks the author for his vanity and love of provocation, and he wonders if

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[15] Excerpt from an article in *The London Forum*, ca. 1930.

[16] "England, contrary to popular opinion, has given much to the esoteric: initiates do not take refuge only in Scotland, and London does not shelter only empiricists…. Astrology was English in the nineteenth century with Alan Leo; magic was English in the twentieth century with Aleister Crowley." – Pierre Riffard, *L'Esoterisme*, Laffont, 1990, p. 883.

[17] "This man is probably the greatest and most disturbing, perhaps the only magician of the twentieth century in the Western world" – K. Seligmann, in Riffard, op. cit., p. 883.

Crowley, figurehead of the new English magic, should be considered a true magician, a fool, or a charlatan of genius.

Brunton understood the allure of the occult, and he overcame its temptations through great personal effort. A frequenter of Theosophic and spiritualist circles, he had cultivated and trained his psychic powers. Then he heard an inner warning:

> He had to choose between the sensational and the true albeit less spectacular avenue of solid spiritual practice. If he chose to continue developing his occult powers he could perhaps become a renowned psychic, but it would be with the understanding that this path was not the true spiritual path. Thus he had to choose. He knew his decision would be a weighty one. And he agonized over it. The temptation to continue his occult practices was strong, but he knew he had to leave the occult and devote himself to the true spiritual path. He told me that once he had made this decision his occult powers left him and he was no longer able to indulge in them.[18]

In his posthumous *Notebooks* are numerous unequivocal condemnations of occultism as being incompatible with the true spiritual path:

> What did Jesus mean when he rebuked those who sought to enter the kingdom of Heaven like thieves breaking in over a wall? He meant that they were trying to enter without giving up the ego, without denuding their consciousness of its rule. Who are these robbers? They are the seekers of occult power.[19]

The young Brunton was influenced by two strong personalities who were also his first spiritual teachers. The first of these, Allan Bennett, was a British chemist who became a Buddhist monk in Burma under the name Ananda Metteya, returning to England on the eve of the First World War (he died in 1923). In a 1934 article in *The London Forum*, Brunton wrote of him:

> I was fortunate enough to become a close friend of the Bhikku Ananda Metteya, who was undoubtedly the first great authority on Buddhism to step out of the cloistered retreat of an Eastern monastery and to come to Western shores. He taught me something of the inner side of his faith; he initiated me into the Buddhist methods of meditation; and he provided an unforgettable lesson in ethics by the beauty of his own personality. He lived the doctrine of love for all beings to its fullest extent; none was exempt from the sweep of his compassion.[20]

The second influential person was a certain Mr. Thurston, an American painter living in London, portrayed in Michael Juste's novel as the character Brother M. Until his

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[18] Hurst, op. cit., p. 47.

[19] *Notebooks*, VIII, 4, 148.

[20] Ibid., p. 57.

death in the mid-twenties, he would occupy an important place in the life of the young Brunton. Thurston wrote *The Dayspring of Youth*, published posthumously in 1933,[21] and from which the excerpt below could well have been written by Brunton himself:

> Man is a prisoner within the atmosphere of this world, but his Higher Self awaits the time when he will release himself from bondage and return to it. This union can be accomplished if the student will but aspire and bring into activity those dormant properties of matter within him of which he has been unaware.[22]

Among other early influences, the esoteric novel *Zanoni* of Edward Bulwer Lytton[23] seems to have particularly fascinated the heady and imaginative student:

> How it opened a new and eerie world for me...! It gave me dark brooding ambitions. I, too, would take the path of the Rosicrucian neophyte and strive to fling aside the heavy curtain which hides the occult spheres from mortal gaze.[24]

And also:

> Youth to me was a perpetual quest, but I find the maturing ones of today incurious of any higher adventures than are afforded by cocktail bars and tennis courts. I remember how I was attracted to the literary portrayals of certain characters whom I felt must exist in real life, and whom I longed to meet. Was Zanoni a mere creature of the quill of Bulwer Lytton? Did not his prototype exist somewhere in unrecorded history, if not in the author's own experience?[25]

Such was the idealistic and dreamy youth of the future Paul Brunton, who married in 1922. He had met Karen Tottrup in the milieu of young bohemian post-war London. An only son, Kenneth Thurston Hurst, was born of this union which lasted six years. It was subsequently as a solitary and free man that he would set out, at age thirty-two, on the great Quest which would take him to India from 1930 to 1947, interrupted by stays in Europe and the United States. Later on, he would recognize that his early life had been unbalanced, too far from practical realities and too easily given to pipe dreams. One

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[21] According to Hurst, op. cit., Thurston had also translated and annotated *Le Comte de Gabalis*, an occult classic (perhaps a Rosicrucian novel acc. to Riffard, op. cit., p. 969) written in 1652 by l'Abbé N. de Montfaucon de Villars.

[22] Hurst, op. cit., p. 60.

[23] Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), Member of Parliament, defender of radicalism, buried in Westminster Abbey, author of *The Last Days of Pompei*, was also a Rosicrucian, author of *Zanoni* (1844), founder of the Fratres Lucis, and Master of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia." (after Riffard, op. cit., p. 825.)

[24] *Notebooks*, VIII, 6, 202.

[25] Ibid., VIII, 3, 130.

might wonder if the emphasis on balance and moderation in his later writings was not due to this valuable autobiographical lesson. In any case, a turning point in the life of the youthful dreamer arrived with new family responsibilities and the necessity of earning a living:

> The world insisted on a confrontation; its hard lessons had to be learned, my own fears and weaknesses exposed, intellect and practicality developed, science revalued for what it was worth, and the understanding why industry and materialism were growing to ever-greater power gotten.[26]

The practice of journalism would help Brunton gain more maturity and psychological stability:

> ... We bless those earlier days which were spent in editorial work. For all editors tend to develop a touch of cynicism, to price everything but to value nothing. Thus they are less easily fooled than most people, and less easily fool themselves. They will not so readily evade unpleasant facts nor avoid unpleasant deductions based on these facts. And they understand, too, that if we find in the world people of different mentalities, there are accordingly different views to suit them.[27]

In fact, in his late twenties, Brunton founded a journal that seems as down-to-earth as all his previous activity had been idealistic and often fanciful. One might see in this curious episode without sequel either an effort to balance a too-dreamy temperament through deliberately practical activity, or a pragmatic approach to spirituality which strikes a European reader as typically Anglo-Saxon.

It was called *Success Magazine*, and it was designed for ambitious young men who dreamed, not of discovering other worlds, but of finding fame and fortune in this one. Brunton wrote almost all the articles, under pseudonyms, and devoted many pages to interviews with leaders of industry, the press, and finance. But, as humorously recounted by Kenneth Hurst,[28] the high-sounding magazine did not survive long, for it began at a most unfavorable moment—in 1929! The following year, Brunton embarked on his first tour of India: a new period in his life had begun.

1.3 Theosophy

We will not recount here the already well-known history of the Theosophical Society, founded in New York in 1875 by Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. Instead

[26] Ibid., VIII, 3, 55.

[27] Ibid., VIII, 4, 133.

[28] Hurst, op. cit., p. 68.

we will try to define the influence of this movement on Brunton, and precisely its place in the genesis of his quest.

One would need to be reminded today that for spiritual seekers in many countries at the turn of the century, Theosophy was considered a somewhat necessary step in the journey, in particular for those born in the last quarter of the ninteenth century. Its influence was felt in America, Europe, India, and equally in Russia, not surprisingly, as Blavatsky was herself Russian.[29]

The Theosophical Society also played a significant role in the Hindu revival, as well as in the Indian nationalist awakening which followed. Gandhi first read the *Bhagavad Gita* in Sir Edwin Arnold's translation, during a student stay in London, at the prompting of two Theosophists. They presented him to Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant at a Theosophical Lodge, but he declined to join. Nevertheless, his encounter with Theosophy cured him of an inferiority complex in regard to Hinduism:

> I recall having read, at the brothers' insistence, Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy*. This book stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition.[30]

Pandit Subrahmanya Iyer, one of Brunton's main Indian teachers, was in his own words "a keen theosophist." Earlier in his life he had been a regular reader of Blavatsky's books, and was "several years in the clutches of Annie Besant."

Brunton himself was a member of the Theosophical Society for two years (most likely 1918-1920, in any case just after the First World War)[31] before taking his distance from it.

We can judge his profound knowledge of the occult by the size of the *Notebooks* volume devoted to the subject (Volume XI: *The Sensitives*). Being himself prone to mediumship, during his early youth he explored psychic and paranormal phenomena such as hypnotism, spiritualism etc. In his *Notebooks*, he admits to youthful errors, drawn as he was to the experiences and powers promised by occultism. In the 1940s, he publicly repudiated certain passages of *A Search in Secret Egypt*[32] in which the search for Truth

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[29] Blavatsky wrote in English, however, and it was left to Helena Roerich, wife of Nicholas Roerich, to translate *The Secret Doctrine* into Russian. Theosophical ideas were passionately studied in the intellectual circles of pre-revolutionary St. Petersburg, affecting poets such as Aleksandr Blok, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Andrei Biely. Nicholas Roerich was influenced by Theosophy though he never was a member.

[30] M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography: the Story of My Experiments with Truth. Boston, 1957.

[31] My search at the London Theosophic Society for the exact dates of Brunton's membership was unsuccessful.

[32] *Secret Egypt* is beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on the Indian influence on Brunton.

was sacrificed to a love of mystery and the sensational. The *Notebooks* present a clear warning: occultism is inferior to mysticism, because it distracts one from the real goal. Nevertheless, it might suit natures too egotistical or intellectual to embrace the bare simplicity of *moksa* (spiritual liberation):

> The higher and lower teachings are like oil and water. They cannot be mixed together and one day you will have to make your choice between them if you wish to progress and not to remain stagnating.[33]

We will now look at Brunton's overall opinion of the Society, before examining more precisely his position in relation to Theosophy, all as stated in an unedited, undated essay, "Theosophy," most likely written in the 1940s.[34]

Brunton's assessment of the Society was on the whole sympathetic and constructive. He did not hide his admiration and respect for the controversial Mme Blavatsky, but he was also aware of her weaknesses:

> The larger world has yet to do her justice and recognize that she was a genius.... Notwithstanding this, I must also regret the faults in her character, the exaggerations in her writings and the lack of supporting evidence for her claims.

Brunton felt that the founding of the Society had been a positive sign, manifesting a wave of authentic spirituality. The ideas it sought to spread had been "the most valuable teaching given to humanity" in the nineteenth century. Yet for all its importance at that time, Theosophy seemed to Brunton obsolete and fated to decline. Having lost its spiritual vitality, the Society had become just another sect among others, beset by rifts and menaced by disintegration. Its historical value remained in its popularization of Eastern teachings hitherto unknown outside limited circles.[35] The new knowledge had a two-fold importance, weakening scientific materialism and promoting tolerance towards world religions.

Yet in Brunton's view, the germs of the Society's spiritual degeneration had been there from its inception, due to certain errors in emphasis by Mme Blavatsky herself. Brunton mentioned two: an excessive passion for mystery, and a preoccupation with "dark forces" pushed to an obsession (all the talk about black magicians and their shadowy brotherhoods etc.). On top of this, an open enrollment policy tended to attract too many seekers of miracles and the sensational. This explained for Brunton, at least in part, the Society's decline after the death of its founder. There was a lesson for him in all

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[33] *Notebooks*, XI, 3, 101.

[34] "Theosophy," an unpublished article by Brunton found in the Brunton Archive at Wisdom's Goldenrod.

[35] We have already seen earlier the value of the Theosophic Society for Indians, among them Gandhi and Iyer.

of this: the state in which the Society found itself after half a century[36] dissuaded him from ever founding an organization himself. Its failure was obvious: its tendencies had become exactly opposite to its original aims:

> The Theosophical Society, which was to emancipate mankind from all narrow sects, has itself become one of the narrowest of sects. The movement which was to acknowledge no Papacy itself possesses one of the strictest Papacies in the religious world,

emphasized Brunton, noting the collapse of Theosophy's idea of Universal Brotherhood. As for the notion of a White Brotherhood, living in Tibet in some mysterious way, and from whom Blavatsky would receive messages, this was in Brunton's words a "romantic fiction." He underscored the absence of proofs for the existence of her secret conclave of Mahatmas. Yet he did not entirely rule out the possibility that Blavatsky was able to benefit from the teachings of unknown and remarkable Masters. One thing remained clear to him: our true spiritual center is to be found within ourselves, and not in a secret land, whether Tibet or India.

Here is how Brunton situated himself in relation to the Society. He wrote:

> Were theosophists more flexibly minded, they might see that I am trying to carry forward H.P.B.'s work to the next higher level, but to carry it forward in my own way for she made many mistakes.

Similarities first appeared at the level of method: Mme Blavatsky revealed her doctrine progressively (and also only in part) so as not to shock an unprepared public. Brunton unfolded his exposition of mentalism progressively, partly for the same reason, partly because his own understanding was still evolving. His audience was more or less the same as hers:

> We are following a trail taken earlier by H.P.B. herself. She wrote, "We aim at raising the educated classes because through them the masses will be raised too."

Regarding their teachings, we may note some points of convergence and divergence. Brunton quotes from Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* to confirm at least three points of his own teaching: 1. Sages should "serve"[37] and not "hide themselves away" in solitude. 2. Authentic sages are extremely rare. 3. The pursuit of Truth is the highest of aims. To these points we can add their shared emphasis on the doctrines of transmigration and karmic retribution.[38]

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[36] 7. Prof. Ernest Wood, for twenty years the Secretary of the Society's Adyar branch, admitted privately to Brunton in 1940, "The Theosophical Society is dead; it has no future."

[37] An important Neo-Hindu idea, reflecting the influence of Western missionaries and Theosophists.

[38] See Ch. 4.2 below for more about Theosophy's influence on Brunton's views of karma and evolution.

Finally:

> Blavatsky was well acquainted with mentalism. Indeed how could she not be so, seeing she had studied in the best esoteric school in Tibet, the Yogacara, who make mentalism an essential tenet of their doctrine? ... If she did not mention mentalism in her public teaching, it was because materialistic science had, as a first step, to be led from belief in matter to belief in energy.

On the whole, Blavatsky's belief in energy as the ultimate reality would become an intermediate position between nineteenth-century science's materialism and Brunton's view of ultimate reality as Mind. He saw no fundamental disagreement between the energic and mentalist points of view; one was just more advanced than the other. Twentieth-century science had produced new discoveries which permitted the reformulation of ultimate Truth from a higher point of view:

> H.P.B. gave out the truth all the same, only it was truth seen from the lower standpoint, viz. that which splits the world into two co-existing realities, spirit and matter. This standpoint is called Sankhya here in India. The next higher standpoint (which I have taken) annihilates the division of spirit and matter by uniting both in Mind, the essence of which, when investigated ... will be shown to be the Overself.

As for divergences, one could suggest two: in terms of teachings, Theosophy's weak development of the metaphysical, and the emphasis it placed on an emotional mysticism, tended in Brunton's view to produce elated, unbalanced people. Brunton himself advocated a philosophic discipline which subordinated the emotions to reason, as a prerequisite to rational metaphysical enquiry.

In terms of spiritual practice, Blavatsky according to Brunton "set up [an] ascetic ideal in a world where external renunciation is quite out of tune," thus frequently producing impractical dreamers unadapted to modern life. Brunton considered the renunciate ideal impractical for modern seekers, and sought to propose one more compatible with life in the world. We will return later to this point.

1.4 The New Science

The work of the physicists Jeans, Eddington, Planck, and Heisenberg (more than Einstein, who refused to draw philosophic conclusions from his theory of relativity), became the vehicle for a new vision of the world which greatly influenced the generation which came of age in the 1930s. The insurmountable gap which had been felt to exist between science and religion up to that time had troubled many. Rom Landau, witnessing the arrival of the New Science, described the exultation many felt on hearing certain revolutionary theories expounded for the first time:

> Science has begun to admit that the world of the spirit and the world of matter are not two antipodes.... A leading British astronomer, Sir James Jeans, confessed that the scientific conception of the universe in the past was mistaken, and that the borderline between the objective world, as it is manifested in nature, and the subjective one, as it expresses itself through the mind, hardly exists. In [a 1934 address at Cornell University], he said: "The Nature we study does not consist so much of something we perceive as of our perceptions, it is not the object ... but the relation itself. There is, in fact, no clear-cut division between the subject and object." Twenty years earlier, such a statement would have been sheer heresy. Likewise, a search for the Ultimate Reality that we usually call "God," a search along both intellectual and unorthodox lines, need not be regarded as either heresy or sacrilege.[39]

And moreover:

> Equally startling are the pronouncements of Sir A. Eddington.... He asserts that "the nature of all reality is spiritual." Sir Arthur represents an entirely new spirit in science, for he confesses "that the scientist has a much more mystic conception of the external world than he had in the last century.[40]

Interestingly, Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe* was assigned reading in the philosophy courses taught by Subrahmanya Iyer[41] to the monks of Mysore's Ramakrishna Ashram.

Paul Brunton himself sought the authority of eminent scientists in support of mentalism. His writings were full of citations from the great physicists, and he observed:

> When a mystic like Brunton writes strongly in advocacy of a revolutionary doctrine like mentalism, it is only a negligible few who are likely to be convinced that it is a true doctrine. But when a first-class scientist like Sir James Jeans writes even mildly in advocacy of it in his authoritative books, many will begin to sit up and take notice. For the name of Brunton means little today whereas the name of Jeans must be regarded with respect.[42]

In fact, Jeans himself used the word *mentalism* in his *Physics and Philosophy*, from which such passages as the following two probably influenced Brunton:

> All this shows is that the waves cannot have any material or real existence apart from ourselves. They are not constituents of nature, but only of our efforts to understand nature....[43]

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[39] Rom Landau, *God is My Adventure*, London, 1935, p. 9.

[40] Op. cit., p.224.

[41] See Ch. 3 below.

[42] *Notebooks*, VIII, 4, 8.

[43] Sir James Jeans, *Physics and Philosophy*, 1942 (repr. N.Y : Dover, 1981); extracts were found in a collection of various articles bound by Brunton, now in the Archive at Wisdom's Goldenrod.

And in conclusion:

> What remains is in any case very different from the full-blooded matter and the forbidding materialism of the Victorian scientist. His objective and material universe is proved to consist of little more than constructs of our own minds. In this and in other ways, modern physics has moved in the direction of mentalism.[44]

1.5 Independent Spiritual Seekers

1.5.1 Adventurers of the Spirit

> I have left my monastery to come here not just as a research scholar or even as an author.... I come as a pilgrim who is anxious to obtain not just information, not just "facts" about other monastic traditions, but to drink from ancient sources of monastic vision and experience. I seek not only to learn more (quantitatively) about religion and about monastic life, but to become a better and more enlightened monk (qualitatively) myself.[45]

It might seem curious that this declaration by an American Trappist monk could be used to illustrate the way of spiritual independence. However, Thomas Merton, in the manner of the French Benedictines Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux,[46] claimed the right to go beyond the bounds of his own tradition in order to deepen his spiritual experience. The following statement could have been made by a lay person, even by Brunton himself:

> So I ask you to do me just this one favor of considering me not as a figure representing any institution, but as a statusless person. And so I stand among you as one who offers a small message of hope, that first, there are always people who dare to seek on the margin of society, who are not dependent on social acceptance, not dependent on social routine, and prefer a kind of free-floating existence under a state of risk. And ... if they are faithful to heir own calling ... to their own message from God, communication on the deepest level is possible.[47]

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[44] We will discuss this further in Ch. 4.1c.

[45] Thomas Merton, *Asian Journal*, Appendix 3: "The Monastic Experience and the Dialogue Between East and West"; Merton was the celebrated author of many books, among them *Zen, Tao and Nirvana* and *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

[46] We will here not speak of them, nor of Alexandra David-Neel. We have chosen to focus on Anglo-American seekers (or on Indians in the Anglo-Saxon orbit such as Krishnamurti), and among them, those who travelled or lived for a long while in India—with the exception of Guénon, a figure so important in France that we felt it necessary to compare him with Brunton.

[47] Merton, “Thomas Merton's View of Monasticism”, an informal talk delivered in Calcutta, Oct. 1968.

Both of Merton's remarks could apply to several generations of "Adventurers of the Spirit" or "Pilgrims of the Absolute," individuals for whom a lively interest in scholarship remained secondary to a spiritual quest involving their whole being. If Brunton's case seems particularly interesting to us due to his lengthy and profound stay at the Source itself (i.e. his privileged connections with Indian teachers and a philosopher-king that were all-in-all remarkable), he was nevertheless not unique, but rather representative of a whole trend. A generation born in the1860s had paved the way for his. Strongly influenced by Theosophy, those earlier spiritual pioneers nevertheless insisted on retaining their freedom of movement. Their originality, independence, and strength of character, qualities which allowed such spiritual explorers as Sir Francis Younghusband, Nicolas Roerich, and Alexandra David-Neel[48] to rise above sectarianism to reach a spirit of universal sympathy, were again found in Brunton and others of his generation such as Arthur Osborne, Christopher Isherwood, Alan Watts, Thomas Merton, and Rom Landau.[49]

The figure closest to Brunton in temperament and destiny, was undoubtedly the British writer Arthur Osborne (1906-1970). Educated at Oxford, with the promise of a brilliant university career, he was disappointed by the general lack of interest in spirituality which he found in intellectual circles, and he "intuitively rejected research as a sterile use to which to put one's years of life."

His need for a spiritual path found no satisfaction in Oxford's atmosphere of dry erudition, nor in the indifference of a local clergy which seemed more attuned to social activity than to the mystic Quest:

> Here were young men receiving the best education their country had to offer ... not even knowing that there was a goal to life, that there were paths leading to it, and that men had trod these paths and left records of their ascent. One of my friends took Sanskrit for his degree, and he also, during his years of study was never let into the secret that there is anything of spiritual interest in Sanskrit literature.[50]

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[48] Younghusband, Roerich, and David-Neel maintained a passionate love for India and Tibet, and spent a great part of their lives there as both explorers and mystics—adventurers in the highest sense of the word. All were for a time close to the Theosophical movement, but none adopted its label.

[49] Christopher Isherwood, English novelist, settled in California on the eve of World War II, as did Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley. Like them, he became interested in Vedanta through the Los Angeles Ramakrishna Mission, having rejected in turn Puritanism and Marxism. Alan Watts, a fellow English emigré in California, had also rejected Puritanism and had also discovered Asia in the West through readings and encounters.

[50] This quote and the following are from "Oxford Rejected," Ch. 4 of Osborne's autobiography, published in *The Mountain Path*, v. 23:3 (July 1986).

This malaise caused Osborne to adopt a severely critical attitude towards contemporary life, one also characteristic of the young Brunton despite their different surroundings. They shared the same existential dissatisfaction as well as the same need of a spiritual goal (with a path and a guide):

> The modern civilization uses men as instruments whether they be laborers or scholars. Education is in closed compartments. Just as a workman tends his own machine without consideration for his own development, so a scholar contributes his fragment of research totally alien to wisdom or self-knowledge. It is not true that society is greater than a man. An anthill is greater than the single ant that composes it, but man has a divinity in his nature which potentially contains and transcends this whole world; and a society which denies this by treating men as instruments, providing no means for their spiritual development, is eating out its own vitals. Traditionally it has always been held that the search for Truth or Knowledge is sacred and requires no motive or justification, that it is a fit end to which to devote one's life. That is true, but it refers to knowledge of direct or indirect spiritual import, knowledge which gradually illumines or transforms the seeker. The accumulation of mere factual knowledge is a parody.

One notices the resemblance to Merton. And in fact the salient trait common to all these Adventurers of the Spirit seems to be their claim to a knowledge other than the purely intellectual or practical one offered by Western society in their time.

Osborne was ripe for falling under the influence of René Guénon, which happened some time after he left Oxford. Guénon's *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* made a strong impression on him; "his uneasiness and dissatisfaction disappeared when he realized that life had sense after all."[51] Having become an eager reader of Guénon, Osborne corresponded with him while translating into English his *Crisis of the Modern World*. Osborne then left with his wife for Thailand, where he taught at the University of Bangkok. Interned by the Japanese, it was not until after the war (fifteen years after Brunton's encounter with Ramana) that he went to Tiruvannamalai, where he settled for the rest of his life.[52] He became a faithful disciple of Ramana Maharshi, whose works he edited and annotated.[53] After the Maharshi's death, he remained at the Ramana Ashram until his own death in 1970.[54] An ardent advocate of the study of comparative religion (to further mutual understanding and world

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[51] "Arthur Osborne," by his wife Lucia, in *The Mountain Path*, v. 7:4 (October 1970).

[52] Though he did spend some years in Calcutta as director of a college.

[53] *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, London, 1959.

[54] In 1964, Osborne founded the ashram's monthly review, *The Mountain Path* (named after the sacred mountain Arunachala, symbol of the Guru, Siva, and the formless Absolute). Among his published works are *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*, a study of Sai Baba of Shirdi, and many studies of Ramana Maharshi.

peace), Osborne saw religions as "different structures ... established on the same substratum of truth, or else ... different paths leading to the same mountain top."[55] In his view, which would certainly have been seconded by Brunton,

> A religion which could produce a St. Francis or a Meister Eckhart is a true religion whether its doctrine seems acceptable to me or not. It is also true of a religion which can produce a Ramakrishna or a Ramana Maharshi.

We will now turn to the life of Sir Francis Younghusband: a personal friend of Brunton's, he was prominent in the public eye as a mediator of East and West. At the turn of the twentieth century, he was already a true Adventurer of the Spirit; one in whose wake Osborne and Brunton would follow.

1.5.2 Sir Francis Younghusband

In 1934, Sir Francis wrote a laudatory preface to *A Search in Secret India*, the work which would establish Brunton's reputation. Later on Brunton would write:

> Sir F. Younghusband—so distinguished as an authority on India—would not have lent his name, as writer of the Foreword to my book, if he thought I had composed an imaginary account. Even if he had nothing more, he had ample proofs in the large number of still unpublished photographs which he examined in London one afternoon at the Traveler's Club. But I am glad to feel that I enjoy his confidence on other and deeper grounds.[56]

In Brunton's writings, Sir Francis is mentioned many times, always with warmth and respect, while in turn, Younghusband did not hesitate to confide in Brunton intimate episodes of his spiritual life.[57]

Sir Francis Younghusband was born in 1863 in Murree, a mountain station on the northwest frontier of the British Raj. His ancestors served in the military in India for many generations, and the Victorian education which he received inculcated a respect for religion, duty, and the family tradition of service to the Crown, as well as control of the emotions, strength of character, and a virile independence. After finishing his studies at Sandhurst, he was appointed lieutenant at Meerut, but he soon found that his true vocation was to be an explorer. He was dispatched in reconnaissance of a territory on the

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[55] This quote and the following are from an article in *The Mountain Path* (January 1969).

[56] *The Quest of the Overself*, ch. 1, p.16.

[57] For example, there was the mystical experience Younghusband had near Lhasa after the success of his mission in Tibet. More mysterious yet, was a meeting he had in the Gobi Desert with a strange Mongolian who powerfully influenced his spirit without saying a word. Brunton would later encounter the same man in Cambodia.

borders of the Empire. Some time later he was sent on a six-month mission to Manchuria. The region was rich in unexploited natural resources, and the Russians, the great rivals of the British on the Asian continent, looked to Manchuria with interest—two valuable reasons to send an emissary. Several months later, a double feat unique in the annals of exploration (crossing both the Gobi Desert and the Himalayas by a then unknown pass, the March of Muztagh) made Younghusband famous in the Anglo-Indian world. In addition, the prolonged solitude he experienced in nature strongly heightened his inner mystic propensities:

> In the great stillness of the night the calm composure of the stars made me feel that I belonged quite as much to them as to this earth. We all seemed one together—my men and I, and the spotless mountains, and the radiant stars.

While living in the principality of Indore during the years 1902-03, Younghusband familiarized himself with Hindu philosophic and religious literature. Nanak Chand, Prime Minister of the Royal Council of Indore and a confirmed Vedantin, initiated him into the philosophy of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Thus prepared on all fronts by long years of contact with the multiple realities of India, Francis Younghusband experienced, at the age of forty, the most exalted adventure of his life: the expedition to Tibet.[58] The observations of Sir Francis concerning the average Lama clergy anticipate those of Roerich and David-Neel: he found them to be degenerate, ignorant, and tyrannical, wanting at all cost to maintain their own despotism by keeping the country closed to Westerners. The mission to Tibet twice won Younghusband knighthood: in 1904, he received the title of Knight Commander of the Order of the Star of India; in 1917, King GeorgeV bestowed on him the superior title of the British Raj, Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire. It was there, in September 1904, that one of his most profound mystical experiences took place, recounted in his own words thirty four years later. He was far from Lhasa, alone in the mountains, when suddenly:

> I was beside myself with untellable joy. The whole world was ablaze with the same ineffable bliss that was burning within me. I felt in touch with the flaming heart of the world.... Joy is the ultimate ground of being; it is what counts in the long run, and what is most worth cultivating in higher and higher degrees till the last summit of perfection is reached and the Kingdom of Heaven is won.

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[58] As related by Younghusband in his *India and Tibet*, this diplomatic-military mission, on which he was sent by Viceroy Lord Curzon himself, established diplomatic and commercial relations between England and the government of Lhasa. The treaty signed with the Tibetans, after serious difficulties, opened a new era in Tibetan-European relations:

"The real opening of Tibet to the white races took place in 1903 when Lord Curzon dispatched a mission to Tibet under Colonel Younghusband.... But for it, none of us who followed later could have gone and worked in Tibet." – Sir Charles Bell, who headed the second British mission to Lhasa in 1920.

Between the two wars, Sir Francis gave his attention to India's future, and wrote *Dawn in India*, which began to prepare the English public for the inevitable changes to come. His political position (close to Brunton's and that of certain neo-Hindu Anglophiles) was clear: Pax Britannica had been, all in all, incontestably beneficial for India.[59] Conscious that a premature departure by the British would be detrimental to India because of the risk of civil war, he nevertheless upheld India's right to decide its own destiny. He felt that the two cultures could enrich each other, each bringing something the other lacked, forming an alliance the political framework of which would have to be determined: "British practicality and Indian idealism are compatible and complementary."

In 1937, Sir Francis visited India after an absence of eighteen years. That same year, he organized a second World Congress of Faiths[60] at Oxford, following the first one held in London a year earlier.[61] Their aim was more to promote mutual understanding than to amalgamate all religions into one. A Congress pamphlet grandly proclaimed:

> The World Congress of Faiths is an inter-religious movement concerned with the awakening and strengthening of spiritual values, and provides a meeting place where all men and women of faith may, in fellowship, learn to understand one another's religion, where the seeker of Truth may find guidance, and where all may strive to realize the fundamental principles common to all the great spiritual teaching, transcending outward forms. The World Congress of Faiths aims to break down the barriers of exclusion and to build bridges between the faiths....

Among the bridge builders one could include Younghusband, Osborne, Merton, and Brunton himself.[62]

The essence of Younghusband's spirtual outlook can be found in his *Life in the Stars* (1927) and *The Living Universe* (1933).[63] After his death in 1942, the London *Observer*

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[59] Younghusband nevertheless criticized the British for their lack of understanding of, or sympathy for, Indian customs and values.

[60] The idea grew out of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, where Vivekananda gave his famous speech. After that, sessions of an International Congress of the History of Religions were held in Paris (1900), Basel (1904), Oxford (1908), Leyden (1912), and again Paris (1924).

[61] For the 1936 Congress, Sir Francis secured the participation of Radhakrishnan for Hinduism, D.T. Suzuki for Zen Buddhism, and Nicholas Berdiaev for Eastern Christianity.

[62] German novelist John Knittel said of *A Search in Secret India*, "In this book, a bridge has been built."

[63] The fundamental theme of these volumes is that the entire universe is spirit. Matter is but another name for energy, that is, spirit, manifesting itself in various degrees, from inorganic matter to human consciousness. A point which is interesting for us here is his insistence on the unique character of the human personality (shown by the Christian influence which persisted despite divergent beliefs) which is not, at the time of a mystical experience, absorbed into the impersonal, non-dual Spirit (which would be the

stated:

> Indeed, his was a stereoscopic vision, which embraced the best of the Orient and the Occident. Although a good Christian he appreciated, nay reverenced, the spirit of Asia. He held that the soul of Hinduism and Buddhism was at one with the heart of Christianity. He was thus a real reconciler. He believed that the more intensely spiritual we became, the more quickly we would meet and mingle and broaden out into a happy brotherhood of man. This conviction led to the founding of the World Congress of Faiths, which owes practically everything to him. Sir Francis was sure ... that a new Renaissance was upon us. This is the marriage of East and West.

1.5.3 Guénon, Krishnamurti, and Brunton

Among the seekers and spiritual figures of the past century, there were some, such as Gandhi, Lanza del Vasto,[64] and René Guénon, who rejected modernity altogether. A more progressive and original approach was taken by Krishnamurti, who rebelled against the weight of the past, and thus of tradition, from which he wished to find freedom. Finally, a third way, Brunton's, sought to reconcile tradition and modernity in a creative synthesis.

The incisive intelligence of René Guénon,[65] his penetrating critique of the causes of the modern world's degeneration, and the impulse he gave to Traditional Studies in France, have been widely recognized. Yet Guénon during his lifetime readily posed as an authority on Indian Civilization, when in fact his travel experience was limited to the Islamic Near East (he died in Cairo in 1951). Moreover, his prejudice against the modern West influenced his view of the East.

By contrast, Paul Brunton had actually *lived* for a decade in the British Raj, in all sorts of surroundings. He had this to say about Guénon, after having first praised his metaphysical astuteness:

> The East which he pictures in this book is not accurately represented. The process of

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case in the Advaitic experience).

[64] Lanza del Vasto was an Italian aristocrat, b. 1901, author of *Le Pelerinage aux Sources*. On his return from India, he founded a community in the South of France, a kind of secular monastic order leading a primitive life in complete autarky. He and Brunton both spent 1937 in India: Del Vasto was with Gandhi, while Brunton was with Subrahmanya Iyer, who taught him Advaita Vedanta. Lanza del Vasto became an apostle of non-violence; he was an anti-modernist who wished to adapt Gandhism to Europe.

[65] Guénon recognized Brunton as an "awakener of souls." In a 1935 review of *Secret India* in *Le voile d'Isis*, he stated, "This book ... surely is worth more, in itself, than many other more pretentious volumes, and is able to awaken a sympathy for the Orient in its readers, and, in a few of them, an interest of a deeper sort."

> Westernization and modernization which is today going on throughout the Orient is not merely skin deep, as he asserts, nor confined to a small minority of the younger generation whom he dismisses so contemptuously. On the contrary, it is a process which is penetrating deeply into the outlook and external life of the majority of the population. It is something which has come to stay because it is not as repugnant to the Easterner as Guénon asserts.[66] On this last point, Guénon might be correct; but *Hermit* was an early work, written before Brunton's meeting with Subrahmanya Iyer. Owing to his extreme point of view and limited experience, Guénon is unable to form a scientifically correct estimate of the inner and outer development through which the Oriental is passing.[67]

Guénon, for example, vehemently criticized "Westernized Vedanta," in particular that of Vivekananda—as well as attempts to present Vedanta from the perspective of modern science. Many of his criticisms were justified; still, he tended to reject the good with the bad, combining them all under the term "modern deviations."

It came to this: was Advaita Vedanta *only* a cultural tradition limited by time and place; or did it *also* carry a universal message capable of taking root in a larger cultural sphere? For Neo-Vedantins such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, and Radhakrishnan, as well as for Brunton, it was undeniably Vedanta's universal message which was most important. In fact, that is why they sought to bring it up to date. For Guénon, by contrast, a narrow traditional orthodoxy was the most important thing, and thus it was absolutely necessary to "adhere completely to a well-defined tradition ... true membership, with all it implies, including the ritual practice of this tradition."[68] Only after this could one ascend to the Primordial Tradition, the essence of all particular traditions.

But he
re a paradox appeared: Guénon repeated that of all traditions, it was Hinduism—and in particular, Advaita Vedanta—"that derives most directly from the Primordial Tradition." Moreover it was to Advaita that he devoted most of his penetrating studies. In one passage he criticized the

> vague 'idealistic' sympathy which makes certain Westerners declare themselves Hindus or Buddhists without knowing very well what it means, and, in any case, never dreaming of

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[66] Not surprisingly, Guénon for his part was shocked by Brunton's acceptance of progress and the West. In a 1937 review of Brunton's *Hermit in the Himalayas*, he wrote:
"What is perhaps most curious in this book is the contradiction one constantly feels between certain of the author's aspirations and his willingness to remain in spite of everything "a 20th-century man" (and we could add "a Westerner"). He resolves this contradiction for better or worse by creating his own conception of yoga, one which he himself qualifies as "heterodox," and limits his spiritual ambitions to achieving a state of inner calm and equilibrium, in itself assuredly remarkable, but still far from a true metaphysical realization!" – reprinted in *Etudes sur l'Hindouisme*, Paris: Editions Traditionnelles, 1983.

[67] *Notebook*s, 10, I, 95.

[68] *Etudes sur l'Hindouisme*, Chapter: "Sanatana Dharma," p. 116.

obtaining a true affiliation and aligning themselves with these traditions.[69]

Yet in the traditional view, only born Hindus could receive the Vedic or Vedantic Revelation. Thus, by an irony of fate, Guénon, who so admired the orthodox Brahmins, had no chance to become one himself. But he *could* have been accepted by the Neo-Vedantins whose progressive ideas he himself rejected! Faced with the impossibility of joining the orthodoxy to which he had given so much of his energies, Guénon in the end converted to Islam! This leads us to the following observation:

Vedanta as a particular orthodox tradition closed to outsiders has been of limited interest to the world at large, remaining an object of study for scholars and philosophers. On the other hand, its essential truths could appeal to those Western or Westernized seekers too estranged from the Judeo-Christian tradition to find their spiritual roots there. If it were truly universal, it would not lose its essence in being reformulated or adapted to suit varying circumstances. But that would mean allowing a place for change or progress in one's picture of the world, and this Guénon could not do.

In denying that the decadent West had anything to offer to a perennially pure Orient,[70] Guénon rejected the inevitable unfolding of history. Seeing truth exclusively in a return to Tradition, he denied the evolution of sensibilities and human needs, which have always demanded a renewal of spiritual and philosophic truths. The Neo-Vedantic view, and Brunton's, was that the traditional East and modern West could complete and balance each other. In fact, Brunton's true originality lies in the fact that he takes evolution into account. If for Guénon, bringing Tradition up to date is unthinkable, for Brunton, it is necessary as a matter of survival. He thus offers a "third way" to those not drawn to materialism or traditional religions.

In sharp opposition to the traditionalism of Guénon is the iconoclasm of J. Krishnamurti. It was his wish to make a clean sweep of the past in order to arrive in the eternal Here and Now. There are interesting parallels in the lives of Krishnamurti and Brunton. The two were contemporaries (Krishnamurti was older by three years); they met several times; and their destinies were similar in that each would be chosen by Providence to present a teaching bridging East and West.

Krishnamurti, in childhood, was "recognized" by H.W. Leadbeater, then head of the Theosophical Society, as an incarnation of the "Christ-Messiah"—the coming World Teacher. As a result he was taken in hand by them, educated, and then invested with a mission. Brunton's experience at the Court of Mysore was similar in some respects, but

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[69] Ibid.

[70] It was incredibly naïve, even hypocritical of Guénon, to systematically denigrate the modern world (he probably did not shun modern hygiene, medicine, means of communication, etc.), while exalting traditional cultures which also had their "shadow side" (c.f. the Hindu temples which lived off prostitution). Guénon's thought, brilliant as it was, is extreme, bordering on the fanatical, as well as lacking in realism.

here the roles were reversed: a Westerner was welcomed by Indians, and it was they who invested him with a mission. His mentor Iyer confided to him in 1937:

> The late Maharaja of Mysore was so anxious to spread the philosophy of Advaita that he once said to me: "Here is Paul Brunton. He has a great gift with his pen and an aptitude for mysticism and philosophy. Let us keep him here in Mysore to study Advaita and then make it known to the West."[71]

Certainly the two missions would, at first, appear incommensurate: in Krishnamurti's case it was a matter of a World Teacher saving the world; in Brunton's it was only a matter of transmitting a teaching. Yet in both cases a shift occurred between the initially proposed mission and its concrete realization by the invested person: Krishnamurti, at the age of thirty-five, severed all ties with Theosophical organizations, and renounced the role they chose for him in order to promote his own original and iconoclastic spiritual teaching. Paul Brunton never severed the connection with his masters in Mysore, though he later distanced himself from the dry intellectualism of Iyer. But Brunton's teaching is a creative reformulation of Neo-Vedanta in his own modern language, in which one also discerns, to a lesser extent, the influences of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, Christian esotericism, and Theosophy. Both Brunton and Krishnamurti present an original spiritual discourse containing both Eastern and Western elements, intended above all for a world-wide audience, but also reaching a good part of the Indian public.

In their teachings we see certain similarities: rejection of organizations, especially religious ones; rejection of the exterior signs of religion; reliance on an "Inner Teacher" over any outer one. Both refused either to become gurus or have disciples.[72] Both were and wanted to remain outsiders, without label, and rejected all appurtenances and traditional orthodoxies. Both encouraged us to be 'in the world, but not of it.'

The metaphysical content of their teachings is the same: the ego is but a bundle of memories and desires, i.e. ultimately, thoughts. Thoughts, being impermanent, changing, and always conditioned by the past, are powerless to attain the Real, which by its very nature—infinite, incommensurable, unconditioned—escapes them. Ultimate Truth is rather to be found in silence, thought renouncing itself. We must live in the here and now. The two express this point a bit differently: for Krishnamurti, one must let go of yesterday and all that has passed, and be reborn at each moment. Brunton uses a more mystical language: we must find the Void which resides as a tiny divine atom in the heart of each of us, beneath the surface of our personality—the sacred Void, which is Plenitude, Peace, and our true home. And though the world daily demands our participation, it is sufficient to respond with a part of our being, while our most intimate feelings remain identified with this secret atom of the Void. In this way, our deepest "I"

[71] Notes by Brunton, Archive at Wisdom's Goldenrod.

[72] Brunton was more discreet and unassuming, preferring private interviews to contact with crowds.

rests perpetually immersed in Absolute Peace.

While their ultimate message might be essentially the same, important differences nevertheless separate the two. If both, unlike Guénon, became sages outside orthodox traditions, it was only Krishnamurti who rejected all traditions.

In this respect, Krishnamurti's teaching seems essentially negative, a potent but bitter medicine for those imprisoned by institutional cults. He breaks the student's bonds, but then leads him to a vast desert where he abandons him. The ultimate state of consciousness he describes is that of the traditional sage or fully enlightened being, but he does not show us the process leading to the realization of this state. He describes marvelously the goal, but does not indicate the steps to be taken: his recurring phrases "unified consciousness" and "let go" are not a roadmap.[73] What Krishnamurti describes to perfection is the awakening to Reality—the realization that pure Consciousness alone *is*, that the perpetually fluctuating and evanescent contents of the mind derive from *it*. This awakening effectively happens in an instant. But in order for the lightning flash to take place, resulting in a firm and unshakable certitude, a long labor is necessary, which he seems to underestimate. "Truth is a pathless land" is his answer.

Brunton's teaching appears more positive. For him, the ways to Truth are many; what is important is not to so restrict ourselves to one path that we imagine that all the others are false. Thus if Guénon demands that we follow one particular traditional path, and if Krishnamurti asks us to abandon all paths, Brunton invites us to take an independent way, the fruit of his adaptation and synthesis of several traditions (among which, according to us, Advaita is primary).

A pragmatist, Paul Brunton is always aware of the effort needed to reach the goal. He recommends following two parallel paths: the *Short Path*—a mystical path of identification with the Divine Overself—and the *Long Path*—an ascetic path in which the disciplining of senses and mind gradually wears down the ego and leads to the success of the Short Path:

> Thus, the actual finding of Truth, which is the same as Nirvana, Self-Knowledge, Liberation, is really a work of brief duration—perhaps a matter of minutes—whereas the preparation and

[73] Krishnamurti asks us to "see" our condition clearly, and thus achieve the leap into the Absolute, the Unconditioned, liberating us once and for all from the prison of the ego. He seems to have forgotten that we are creatures of desire, attached to a vicious cycle of pleasure and pain. Its cessation comes for most of us only at the end of a long process of inner work, over one or more lifetimes. Indeed, pleasure and pain are not entirely culturally conditioned; animals too seek pleasure and try to avoid pain. These tendencies (= *vasanas*, unconscious tendencies surviving in seed form from one incarnation to the next, animating creatures as if they were puppets; their complete elimination is generally the outcome of a very long discipline) are inborn, whether embedded in our genetic code or inherited from previous lives. To expect a radical detachment from our tendencies by an instantaneous metamorphosis seems a bit utopian despite rare instances of sudden grace.

equipment of oneself to find it must take many incarnations.

The practice of the two paths will be examined in more detail in Chapter 6 of this work.

Chapter 2: THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE

2.1 The Three Journeys

In 1930, after two years of intensive study in London at the library of the Secretary of State for India, Paul Brunton embarked for Bombay, setting out on his first grand voyage in search of yogis and sages. After stays in Bombay and Poona, he went down across the Deccan to Madras, where he stayed for some time. In the same month, he had two important meetings in South India: with Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram and Ramana Maharshi.

After a brief sojourn with the Maharshi, Brunton returned to Calcutta by train. A travelling companion gave him the address of Master Mahasaya, one of the first disciples of Ramakrishna, and Brunton went to see him following his arrival at the capital of Bengal. The aura of serenity which emanated from the aged master made a strong impression on him; Mayasaya prefigured the much more powerful figure of Ramana. Brunton then went to Benares where he stayed for some time. Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj, Director of the Benares State College of Sanskrit, brought him to his own guru, the miracle worker Vishudananda, who performed several feats of magic before Brunton's astonished eyes, reviving a dead sparrow which fluttered for a few minutes before finally passing away. Back in Benares he met the astrologer Sudei Babu, who gave him the following prophecy: "The world will become your home. You shall travel far and wide, yet always you will carry a pen and do your writing work." The astrologer offered to teach Brunton the "yoga of Brahma Chinta," reputedly of Tibetan origin. Brunton gave up the idea of including this practice in *A Search in Secret India*, feeling it too foreign to the Western mentality, but he did mention it there briefly with a warning:

> It is neither right nor necessary for the average European to take up the practice of a method which is fit only for jungle retreats or mountain monasteries, and which might even prove dangerous. Insanity lies around the corner for Western amateurs who dabble in such practices.[74]

This lucid remark would be repeated in various ways many times in his writings. Brunton never "went native"; he never erroneously believed that one could entirely adopt a way of life and thinking rooted in a culture so remote in time and space. In spite of his attraction to India, at first colored by romanticism, the pragmatist in him always kept him from falling into Utopian dreams.

Brunton continued his wanderings across North India, visiting Lucknow and Agra, and discovering the model colony of Dayalbagh near Agra. Then he went to Nasik, on the road to Bombay, and stayed with Meher Baba, a "Messiah" whom he had met on his arrival in India. Brunton had initially promised to stay with him an entire month;

[74] *A Search in Secret India*, p. 217, footnote.

however, it did not take him long to diagnose in the person of Meher Baba a mystic close to paranoia.

Without tarrying further, Brunton resumed his journey, this time by car and with an Indian chauffeur, as his health had begun to suffer as a result of the long months of travel in often Spartan conditions. He wandered throughout western India without a clear goal, until an uncanny meeting precipitated his return to Bombay: in a small village, a wandering yogi named Chandi Das foretold the following three things: 1. He should return to Bombay if he wished to fulfill his quest. 2. On his return to the West, he would contract a serious illness. 3. He would return twice more to India; these returns would be due to karmic ties with a sage who even now waited for him somewhere on Indian soil. Brunton listened, incredulous, to these three prophecies (which all came true); nevertheless he left for Bombay.

There he experienced a period of great confusion. His physical weakness worsened due to depression. In his extreme weariness, it seemed to him that his quest had been fruitless, that nothing remained for him but to return to Europe empty-handed. Suddenly two unexpected events took place, one inner, the other outer. An inner voice urged him to reexamine all the episodes of his quest. From the many persons he had met, a sole figure emerged clearly and persistently—that of Ramana Maharshi. Brunton realized that it was Ramana who had most strongly and deeply impressed him. An intense inner struggle followed: should he return to the Maharshi? But the return ticket to Europe had already been bought, and Brunton was now physically weak and emotionally drained. Moreover, the sage was living in the South, far from Bombay, from where the ships sailed for Europe. At last, the inner voice convinced him, and he decided to cancel his return to England and rejoin the Maharshi. By a strange coincidence, he received a letter from a disciple of the sage (an unaddressed letter which had been following him across the entire subcontinent) encouraging him to return. Taking this as a favorable omen, Brunton left for Tiruvannamalai.

His second stay with Ramana in 1931[75] lasted several weeks. This decisive encounter would confirm the mystical experiences he had already had his youth. In *Secret India*, however, it was rather presented as a spiritual turning point. Why this alteration in a book so autobiographical and intimate? Perhaps in order to allow the reader to more easily identify with the author. Throughout his quest, Brunton as narrator revealed a two-sided persona: there was the skeptic with a sharply critical mind, and the romantic with a taste for adventure. A large portion of the public could relate to this. And in fact, *Secret India* had an immediate success and made its author known throughout a large part of the world.

Brunton's stay in Tiruvannamalai was the spiritual high point of his initial journey to

[75] described in *Secret India*, Chapter 16, "In a Jungle Hermitage."

India, in spite of the author's deteriorating physical condition. Unfortunately, a telegram forced him to return to England for financial and professional reasons.

On returning to London, his condition worsened, and the fever contracted in India lasted intermittently almost another two years. Between attacks of fever, he divided his time between his studies—frequenting the libraries of the State Secretary of India, the Royal Asiatic Society, and the Oriental Section of the British Museum—and his work as a correspondent for the *Madras Sunday Times*. It was also during this time (1932-33) that he wrote *A Search in Secret India*. For this purpose, he retreated to an old village in Buckinghamshire, where each Sunday he joined a Quaker community[76] which met to debate theological and metaphysical questions. The book was published in 1934.

After a stay in Egypt that lasted several months, Brunton left in 1935 on his second voyage to India. He spent the winter with Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai and within a few weeks wrote the brief but forceful volume *A Message from Arunachala*. Published in 1936, it shocked numerous readers by the severity of its condemnation of contemporary mores.

In January 1936 Brunton left for Pithapuram (in northeastern India, on the Indian Ocean), hoping to meet Venkatarathnam Naidu, the head of the Brahmo Samaj, a reformed Hindu sect whose principles and practices Brunton wanted to study. He spent time with the local Maharaja as well, and wrote a very favorable article on him which was published by the newspaper *The Leader* in September 1936. I n March he gave a lecture in Chidambaram, South India.

The four months of summer 1936 were devoted to a unique experience: a retreat in complete solitude in the heart of the Himalayas. In fact, Brunton wished to go to Tibet and made many attempts, entirely fruitless, in this direction. Certain official high-level relations existed between the English and the Tibetans, dating from the British military operations of 1904; however, Tibet remained fiercely indrawn, and denied access to all foreigners other than official representatives of the Empire. Brunton would make the same appeal, without success, to the Viceroy of India. Being a loyal subject, he resigned himself to the outcome, and refused a tempting offer from a yogi friend who proposed that Brunton disguise himself as a beggar and clandestinely accompany him into Tibet (as Alexandra David-Neel had done). Instead, Brunton contented himself to linger in the small Himalayan kingdom of Tehri-Garwal, which suited his purpose by its isolation, its calm and the grandiose beauty of its countryside. His self-imposed task could be summed up in three words: *to be still*. Remaining in silence, he plunged into deep, profound meditation. He kept a journal, published in 1937 as *A Hermit in the Himalayas*.

[76] For which he always felt an affinity. Quaker communities remain, along with Catholic monasteries, according to Alan Watts, among the last refuges of authentic Christian spirituality. – Watts, *Beyond Theology*, N.Y., 1973, p. 83.

Brunton was then invited to the court of Mysore by its Maharaja, who had read his books and wished to meet him. He spent the winter and spring of 1937 in Mysore, frequenting there the seminars on Vedantic philosophy given to the Ramakrishna monks by pandit Subrahmanya Iyer, the Maharaja's guru.

On July 17, 1937, Brunton embarked aboard the P&O Liner Maloja and arrived at his destination of Marseille on the 30th. He was in the company of Swami Siddheswarananda—a friend and fellow student from the Mysore ashram—and their master Subrahmanya Iyer. On July 31 the three went to Paris, where the Ninth International Congress of Philosophy opened on the 1st of August. It was organized by the University of Paris and held at the Sorbonne, for the Tricentennial of Descartes; Subrahmanya Iyer was the only delegate from India. Brunton spent some time in Europe, notably in Switzerland. He needed peaceful surroundings in order to write his first big spiritual work, *The Quest of the Overself*. The first draft had been written at the mountain retreat of Mount Kemmangandi, graciously put at his disposal by the Maharaja. Not surprisingly and moreover significantly, the work was dedicated to his royal patron. *The Quest* is Brunton's first comprehensive work, in that it presents clear, well constructed ideas, though it does not attain the profundity or the breadth of *The Wisdom of the Overself*. Seven years after his first arrival in India, and perhaps more than twenty years after his first mystical experiences, Brunton's philosophic wisdom had deepened and matured.

Brunton passed the winter of 1937-38 in London. There he continued his literary and journalistic activity, contributing most notably to the weekly revue *The Spectator*. Philosophical arguments inspired by the Indian philosophy he had acquired in India elicited the criticism of certain journalists, and he wrote to Swami Siddheshwarananda for advice. In February-March 1938, he was en route to Paris, where he met with his wife after a separation of many years. If their meeting did not end with the total reconciliation that he had hoped for, it did end nevertheless in restoring amicable relations.

His destiny, however, was to roam the world. Brunton's health had always been fragile, but it gravely deteriorated in the cold and damp climate of London. He developed tuberculosis, and the doctors ordered him to change climates in order to avoid a premature death. (His own mother died of this same illness at about the same age.) His choice settled on California, which had a contrasting climate, dry and warm, and was English-speaking—important for someone who led a life of diverse literary activity. Towards April, he found himself aboard the Queen Mary en route to New York, and he left ten days later for Los Angeles. His health did not improve to any great extent, and he complained that he could not go to Rome where, at a cycle of lectures at the Royal Oriental Institute, he had hoped to interview Mussolini. Nevertheless, his life remained one of fervent intellectual activity. He thought about writing a big work on Vedanta (which, in that form, never materialized), and corresponded with his venerable master Iyer, always including his respectful salutations to the Maharaja of Mysore and his

younger brother, the Yuvaraja.

On December 23, 1938, Brunton embarked by way of Japan on his third big tour of India. He wrote to Iyer of his plans in a letter dated December 10: he would arrive in India the second week of February, spend three months with Ramana Maharshi, then pass three months in Mysore. He hoped to spend the hot season at the mountain retreats put at his disposal by the Maharaja, at Kemmangandi or at Fernhill, and he hoped for the company of the royal guru and his help on the big work he was preparing to write. But severe storms in the Pacific were to change his plans: forced to return to Japan, he took the opportunity to study Zen Buddhism. He then went to China for several months in order to deepen his knowledge of the Taoist school. A letter to Iyer posted from Bangkok dated February 7, 1939 reveals that Brunton's studies continued in Siam, this time on Theravada Buddhism. He then went to Cambodia, where a visit to Angkor Wat impressed him deeply. There he met an extraordinary figure about whom we know nothing save that he was a grand lama in exile from Mongolia: "From him," wrote Brunton, "I received esoteric instruction personally unforgettable…. He gave me a teaching which would form the basis of Mentalism."

The Far Eastern excursion, particularly the meeting at Angkor, arranged by propitious destiny, would enlarge the author's philosophic horizon. His subsequent writings would depart somewhat from the strictly Indian context to become more encompassing:

> All this is but a preamble to the statement that with these volumes a doctrine is presented which in all essential principles is not a local Indian tradition but an all-Asiatic one. According to the testimony of this philosopher who personally initiated me into the Yaka-kulgan[77] (Mongolian) metaphysical school ,which studies a particular phase of this doctrine, so far as India is concerned the teaching spread there from its original home in Central Asia.[78]

Brunton passed February 1939 savoring the beauty of Ceylon. In March he arrived at Tiruvannamalai, where he stayed at Ramana's ashram, not for the expected three months, but for three weeks, just enough time to resolve

> ... a highly deplorable situation in the Ramana ashram which represents the culminating crisis of a degeneration which has been going on and worsening during the last three years.[79]

He described the situation briefly in a letter to Iyer, adding that he would give him all the details in person. The unpleasant episode served to open the author's eyes to certain negative aspects of ashram life in India and elsewhere. Ramana's ashram was at that

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[77] = Mahayana Buddhist.

[78] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, introduction.

[79] Letter from Brunton to Iyer; copy in Brunton Archive.

time under the influence of the *Sarvadhikari* (Intendant General), who instigated dark intrigues in order to drive the Maharshi's most senior disciples from the ashram. He wished to replace them with his own clique in order to gain control over the ashram and thus exploit it for his own personal ends. Several disciples had already been turned away, and Brunton's time had come. The *Sarvadhikari* launched a slanderous campaign against him, which the local press echoed. This caused considerable damage to Brunton's image in Indian public opinion. He defended himself as well as he could, given that he was an Englishman at a time when British dominance was increasingly resented. Moreover, his privileged ties with the Maharshi, the Maharaja, and Iyer had excited not a little jealousy.

In early April 1939, Paul Brunton left Tiruvannamalai forever. He would never see the Maharshi again. Invited by the Maharaja, he stayed at Ootacamund (familiarly Ooty), a pleasant resort in the Nilgiri Mountains. Krishnaraja retired there each year during the hot summer months, accompanied by his master of philosophy. Brunton stayed for several months; the agreeable atmosphere restored his health, strained by the long months of Far-Eastern travel and the depressing struggle against human pettiness in the furnace of Tiruvannamalai.

These few months in the mountains near Mysore, in the stimulating company of Subrahmanya Iyer, were among the most intellectually fruitful, and possibly also the happiest, years of his life. Brunton devoted all his energies to what became his major works—*The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, published in 1941, and *The Wisdom of the Overself*, which followed two years after.

In December 1939, Brunton traveled to the southern tip of India, to the state of Travancore (now Kerala), where he met with the local Indian and English intelligentsia. He missed Iyer. In May 1940, he returned to the Nilgiris, accompanied by the Yuvaraja of Mysore. Brunton loved the tiny village of Ooty, and he asked permission to stay there until after the big celebration in Mysore for the Maharaja's birthday. Permission granted, Brunton did not return to Mysore until June 18, thus avoiding the crowds and commotion.

On August 3, Brunton was back in Mysore for another state occasion, this time a less happy one: the cremation of the Maharaja, who had died prematurely in his fifty sixth year. Krishnaraja did not live to see Brunton's major works, to which his kind support, material and intellectual as well as personal, had contributed so much.

Brunton remained in India until 1947. Interviewed in Bombay by the newspaper *Blitz* on July 12, 1941, he revealed that he had offered his services, both intellectual and practical, to the British war effort.[80] During the war years, he made radio broadcasts from Mysore, on themes such as "The Spiritual Meaning of the War." In September 1943, he made similar broadcasts from Madras for Ceylon Radio.

[80] A small scrapbook of clippings in the Archive contains bits of information about Brunton's work during the war.

2.2 Brief Encounters

Brunton's Indian encounters, so important for the formation of his world view, might be arranged in the form of a triangle, its three points corresponding to three human types: the mystic, the man of action, and the savant—all three, in spite of their apparent diversity, are animated by the same philosophic outlook. Brunton would meet these three in the persons of, first, Ramana Maharshi, then, several years later, the Maharaja of Mysore, and finally, pandit Subrahmanya Iyer. It is interesting to observe that these three individuals corresponded as well to the three aspects of Brunton's final definition of the ideal "philosophic life": contemplation, selfless service, and study. We will see that if, in the end, Brunton distanced himself from Iyer as well as the Maharshi, his attitude towards the Maharaja remained unchanged. This might be explained by the fact that the latter exercised only an indirect influence over him, whereas the other two impacted directly his spiritual and philosophic outlook. Brunton dedicated a volume to each of the three: to Ramana, the brief and succinct *Message from Arunachala*, a denouncement of the ills of the contemporary West; to Iyer, his one work in academic style, *Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture*; finally, to the Maharaja, *The Quest of the Overself*.

But these major, decisive encounters did not magically occur the moment Brunton set foot on Indian soil. The author was led to these key figures in the course of his long wanderings about the subcontinent (well described in *Secret India*). There were other, briefer encounters with great individuals, at least three of which were of particular importance for the author's life and vision.

2.2.1 Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram

The Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram is presented in *Secret India* as the sixty-sixth title holder in the venerable lineage which began with the celebrated Shankara of the eighth century. His meeting with Brunton, fleeting as it was, was crucial to the author's future direction. The episode is described in the chapter entitled "With the Spiritual Head of South India," in the intimate tone which makes the book so charming. The meeting took place in 1930 in the village of Chingleput; the two men were introduced by the Indian writer Venkataramani. It was the first interview granted to a European by the Shankara, who had been enthroned in 1907 at the age of twelve. Brunton was favorably impressed by the master's tolerance and broad-mindedness. The sage had moved beyond narrowly orthodox attitudes of superiority:

> Sri Shankara does not decry the West in order to exalt the East, as so many in his land do. He admits that each half of the globe possesses its own set of virtues and vices, and in this way they are roughly equal! He hopes that a wiser generation will fuse the best points of Asiatic

and European civilizations into a higher and balanced social scheme.[81]

This balanced view attracted Brunton; opposed to the fanaticism and sectarianism so often found in religious and esoteric circles, he wished to maintain a harmonious balance in his thinking and way of life. In his interview with Shankara, Brunton asked for his advice in finding a yoga master. He was given two names: the second was that of Ramana Maharshi. However, Brunton was already planning to leave South India. Shankara abandoned his usual reserve to firmly insist that the writer change his plans: Brunton must meet the Maharshi before leaving. Surprised, Brunton promised to prolong his stay, and that same evening he decided to visit the Sage of Arunachala.

This momentous interview with the spiritual heir of the philosopher Shankara foreshadowed in many ways the subsequent unfolding of Brunton's quest. First of all, it was Shankara who placed him directly on the path to Ramana—the first intervention of destiny in the existential adventure of Brunton's quest. Much later, Brunton learned from an Indian friend the following prophecy which Shankara had given him: "Your friend will travel all round India.... But, in the end, he will have to return to the Maharshi. For him, the Maharshi alone is the right Master."[82]

On the other hand, the serene figure of Sri Shankara, haloed in spirituality, bathed in the light of a perfect interior knowing, prefigured the character of Ramana Maharshi himself. Brunton in his memoirs placed both sages on the same highest plane of spiritual realization:

> Both His Holiness Shankaracharya of Kanchi and Ramana Maharshi were met within the same month of 1930. I had prepared myself by nearly two years' intensive study, principally with the help of the secretary of state for India's library in London. Now more than fifty years have passed and there has been sufficient time to get a little more knowledge and understanding of these two sages and to watch the effects of their persons and teachings upon others.[83]

Later on, in his search for a way beyond yogic mysticism, Brunton would turn to the writings of the original Shankara, the illustrious founder of the lineage of Shankaracharyas.

2.2.2 Sahabji Maharaj

Another figure encountered by Brunton was Sahabji Maharaj, leader of the Radha

[81] *A Search in Secret India*, p128.

[82] Ibid., ch.XV, p. 276.

[83] *Notebooks*, VIII, 6, 150.

Soami sect. The sect was founded in 1861 by a banker of Agra, Radha Soami Dayal, who was from a Vishnuite family of the *ksatriya* caste. Sahabji Maharaj was the fourth guru in the lineage.[84]

Who were the Radha Soamis? We might first note the parallel drawn by Farquhar between them and the Theosophists:

> Nothing is more noteworthy than the many points in which Radha Soami and Theosophical doctrine and practice coincide. The most important items are: the unknowable Supreme, the spheres and their regents ... reincarnation, the use of methodical exercises ... of a hypnotic character for the development of the spiritual powers and of the photograph of the guru in meditation, the worship of gurus, the supernatural powers of the gurus, the claim that the teaching of the sect is scientifically accurate and verifiable in every particular, esoteric teaching, secret practice, and all the talk about astral and higher planes, adepts and such like.[85]

Knowing that Brunton had been for two years a member of the Theosophical Society, it is easier for us to understand his enthusiasm for the Radha Soamis: they were close to the Theosophists in their wish to bridge the religions of East and West, and in their readiness to reconcile mysticism and modern science.

An entire chapter of *Secret India* is devoted to the Radha Soamis and their spiritual leader. In addition, the latter is mentioned in two other places in Brunton's writings:

> … when I re-visited Dayalbagh, near Agra, last year (in 1936) in the company of my friend, Major Francis Yeats-Brown, his Holiness the late Sir Sahabji Maharaj was kind enough to remark, when all three of us were at lunch, that my published account of interviews with him had evinced an amazingly accurate memory.[86]

And also:

> I called the Viceroy. His Excellency had read my book *A Search in Secret India* and, as a direct result, has made a visit to inspect Dayalbagh, the cooperative city founded on spirituality to which I devoted a chapter. He was so satisfied with what he saw of the founder of the city, Sahabji Maharaj, that he made him a knight when the honorary list of the new year was published.[87]

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[84] Farquhar (*Modern Religious Movements in India*, New Delhi, 1977, cites two other masters who succeeded the founder: Huzoor Maharaj, (1828-1898) of the *kayastha* caste, and a Bengali brahmin, (1861-1907) who was born in Benares.

[85] Farquar, op.cit.

[86] *The Quest of the Overself*, chapter 1: "A Writer on his Writings."

[87] *A Hermit in the Himalayas*.

These remarks show that *Secret India* was widely read and appreciated in India, by Indians as well as in British official circles.

How did Brunton come in contact with the curious universe of the Radha Soamis? As always, by means of certain minor characters who seemed to abound in the labyrinth of his quest—in this case, two disciples of Sahabji Maharaj: Sunderlal Nigam, met in Lucknow; and Mallik, encountered "at another place and time." The two spoke with him about their master, who had "conceived the astonishing and interesting notion of combining a yoga discipline with a daily life based on Western ways and ideas."

Brunton was intrigued by this synthesis, which in a way foreshadowed the path he himself would take. He received an invitation from Sahabji Maharaj, the "uncrowned king" of Dayalbagh, a colony of the sect near Agra. Brunton was favorably impressed by this model city, founded by S. Maharaj in 1915. It had 12,000 inhabitants, and was considered the headquarters of the sect, which had some 110,000 members dispersed throughout India. During his stay, Brunton divided his time between interviews with S. Maharaj, visits to factories and schools, and participation in spiritual gatherings of the Radha Soamis. The city was founded on a cooperative principle: the welfare of the community came before that of the individual. The lands, houses, farms, businesses, and schools were community owned. The colony's inhabitants were educated pioneers, willing to make the needed financial sacrifices out of love for their spiritual ideal.

Sahabji Maharaj had met with Gandhi, but refused to join his campaign of civil disobedience. He disagreed with the Hindu nationalist leader on two crucial points: for Sahabji, the practical regeneration of the individual came first, before political action (this was also Brunton's position); and he rejected Gandhi's economic ideas as utopian and impractical. Sahabji Maharaj advocated a moderate industrialization of India which would avoid the mistakes of both capitalism and socialism—and which would safeguard spiritual ideas and practices.

In his first interview with Sahabji Maharaj, Brunton expressed to him the admiration he felt for his disciples. The response of the Radha Soamis' leader summarized his world view:

> I am attempting to show the world … that a man can be perfectly spiritual without running away to caves, and that he can reach the highest attainments in Yoga while carrying on with worldly avocations.[88]

The view is close to Brunton's. According to Sahabji Maharaj, man has a triple nature: the body, which was put to work on Dayalbagh's farms and in its trades; the intellect, to whose development were devoted its colleges and libraries; and the spirit,

[88] *Secret India*, p. 230.

which unfolded and flowered in communal chanting, meditation, prayer, and the gatherings led by S. Maharaj.

If Brunton was struck by the unique character of the Radha Soamis, if he intensely admired their mixture of pragmatism and spirituality, he was positively transported with enthusiasm for Sahabji Maharaj, "a brilliant and breath-taking man."[v] He was not yet dreaming of his decisive meeting with the Maharaja of Mysore, and wrote with a trace of sadness:

> Nowhere in India, nowhere in the entire world, may I expect to meet his like again.[89] [v]

The only negative note in his exalted sojourn at Dayalbagh was that Brunton did not have a spiritual experience with the Radha Soamis, and it was for that that he had come to India—not to report on Indian communities, as admirable as their realizations might be.

In the same way that Sri Shankaracharya prefigured Ramana Maharshi as an embodiment of the Sage of Supreme Realization—in the same way, Sahabji Maharaj prefigured the Maharaja of Mysore, a philosopher-man of action, the philosopher king who had yet to appear in Brunton's life.

2.2.3 Sri Krishna Menon (Atmananda)

A third individual encountered by Brunton, Sri Krishna Menon (also known as Atmananda) was, like Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram, a figure of prime importance in the spiritual landscape of the waning British Raj. In several ways, Krishna Menon resembled Subrahmanya Iyer, the great pandit of Mysore. Like the latter, Krishna Menon was a *grihastha* (householder). He occupied an important post in the police force of the state of Travancore (and in fact had written their Code). Like Iyer, he taught an intellectual form of Advaita which appealed exclusively to reason; also like Iyer, he felt that religion and yoga were inferior stages on the path of *jnana* (knowledge), and that meditation was superfluous. Both of them based their teachings on the fundamental tenets of *avasthatraya* (the three states of consciousness) and *drg-drsya viveka* (discriminating the knower from the known); both favored the *Astavakra-Gita*.[90] But in this case, Atmananda did not prefigure Subrahmanya Iyer: it is probable, in fact, that Brunton did not meet Atmananda until 1940, i.e. after the crucial period in Mysore. Brunton would return two more times to South India after its independence: in 1952, to participate in an initiation given by Atmananda to a group of his disciples in Trivandrum; then in 1953, to Bangalore, where he saw the master again, probably for the last time. After that, it appears that Brunton was no longer seeking out spiritual teachers.

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[89] Ibid., p. 239.

[90] The Brunton Archive contains two versions of this same text, accompanied by the commentary of Iyer and that of Atmananda.

Atmananda's fundamental position did not seem to differ from Iyer's save for a more extreme idealism in which there was no place for practical wisdom or altruistic ideals. Thus Brunton noted:

> From the heights where Krishna Menon stands, the prospect of a world war means little: an illusion within an illusion!

And also:

> The suffering humanity of a dream does not expect our help, nor does the sage see any service to render to a world which does not exist![91]

We will not attempt to get into the details of Atmananda's teachings here—his ideas are similar to Iyer's, and will be thoroughly analyzed in later chapters. It suffices here to say that he takes the position of monistic idealism or mentalism, reducing everything to an entirely homogenous, sole Reality—Mind. The body, the senses and their objects, mental life, are nothing but ideas, which are in their turn, reducible to pure Consciousness itself, the only Reality. The "direct road" of *jnana*, Knowledge, leads to the realization of this truth. The "cosmological path," that of religion and yoga, also leads to Reality, but by a more indirect and lengthy road, for it considers the world, the soul, and a personal God as real.

Brunton notes that Krishna Menon approved of the majority of Ramana's teachings.

In addition to a mentalist teaching which confirmed and overlapped Iyer's, Krishna Menon gave Paul Brunton a number of practical techniques for the spiritual life. For example, in order to become detached from external objects, he suggested undertaking a pointed analysis of the provisional happiness which results from satisfied desire: this happiness is nothing other than the dissipation of the mental agitation engendered by our desire for the object, and a return to our natural state:

> The happiness which *seemed* to come from the object, *in reality* came from the Self. I am myself pure Peace and Bliss.

When this truth is deeply assimilated, a permanent weakening of our desire nature follows, and our ego ceases to be prey to compulsions or *samskaras*.[92] How to be in the world but not of it? Krishna Menon advises us to adopt the Witness point of view as often as possible—i.e. to disidentify with the role that one plays in life. However:

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[91] Notes by Brunton, Brunton Archive.[quote not checked].

[92] *samskaras* = unconscious tendencies inherited from past lives; mental configurations that influence our thoughts and behavior.

> This witness position cannot be taken in the midst of work or activity, because work would suffer from it.[93]

Adopting the neutral, impersonal point of view of the Witness also helps us transcend time. In fact, memory of the past, knowledge of the present, and projection into the future require the existence of a consciousness which is in itself outside time. This cognitive principle in us contains simultaneously the three times: by training one's mind to return to the Witness position as often as possible—in the gap between two thoughts—one can transcend time, or at least reduce its grip on us.

Another practice suggested by Menon, which was also given by Iyer to the Maharaja of Mysore, consists of attempting to reduce external objects to thoughts. The first effect of this practice is a lessening of the impact of events on our mind. In the next stage, we train ourselves to ask where these ideas dwell. The answer we arrive at is: in me, the Self, the *atman*! Thoughts come and go; what remains after they vanish is the *atman* which contains them. *It* alone is Real.

Let us now examine Brunton's criticisms of Krishna Menon's teachings—criticisms which could also be applied to Iyer's. First of all, Atmananda rejects the practice of formal meditation, and Brunton categorically disagrees with him on this point. Drawing from his own personal experience and Indian tradition, including the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and the Buddha himself, Brunton declares that meditation remains necessary as long as Enlightenment has not been attained, and cannot be abandoned except temporarily. Brunton also disagrees with the opinion of Menon and Iyer that the highest state attainable by yoga is no better than deep sleep, and that the work of the intellect can by itself lead to Realization:

> It is only when a disciple is dissatisfied with the intellectual stage of *jnana*, as previously he was with the stage of meditation, that he is truly ripe for philosophy.[94]

Brunton's second criticism of Atmananda was for his hyper-intellectuality and his lack of spontaneity. The fact that Atmananda arranged his lecture tours and programs well in advance offended him: "It smells too much of professional spirituality: did Jesus, Buddha or Maharshi schedule their lectures six months in advance?"[95]

As Brunton saw it, Krishna Menon talked too much about Truth, piling thought upon thought, whereas "a glance, a touch or a mental image do more than lectures for those

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[93] Notes by Brunton, Brunton Archive.[quote not verified]

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

who are ripe and ready."[96]

2.3 Major Encounters: Ramana Maharshi

The first of the three figures who played a major role in shaping Brunton's Indian experience was none other than the Sage of Arunachala, Ramana Maharshi. As he has become well known in the West, we will not linger to repaint his portrait. What concerns us here are the circumstances of Brunton's meeting with Ramana, the nature of their relationship, and the Maharshi's influence on Brunton.

Although it is well known that Paul Brunton introduced the Maharshi to the West through *A Search in Secret India*, it is not so well known that he also revealed the existence of the Sage to the Indians themselves:

> … it is amusing to me to remember that when I first made tentative enquiries about the Maharishee in the city of Madras several years ago, no one had ever heard of his existence, and I could discover nothing at all about him prior to making my visit. Today one may ask almost anyone in the same city about the Mystic of Arunachala and a great deal of information will quickly be forthcoming. It was left for me, an infidel foreigner, to make the Maharishee famous in his own country.[97]

As for the circumstances of their meeting, they seemed arranged by destiny from the beginning. Arriving in Madras, Brunton encountered on the street a disciple of Ramana who obstinately followed him and insisted on taking him to his master. Brunton, who had already made plans to leave for North India, refused the offer, only to hear it repeated even more emphatically several days later by Sri Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram. The events that followed have already been related here.

As a result of his rupture with Maharshi's ashram in 1939, Brunton was never again to see the Sage. He passed near the ashram many times, musing with some bitterness over the obstacles that separated them—obstacles perhaps due to his own karma, he would say one day. But he confessed that the close spiritual tie which united him to Ramana was never severed, and he remained in telepathic communication with him until the Sage's death in 1950. Brunton received Ramana's blessing by telegram on the eve of his departure from India after the Second World War; and every year, on New Year's Day, Brunton wrote or sent a message to the Sage. In 1952, more than two years after Ramana's death, Brunton again visited the ashram at Tiruvannamalai, and discovered within 24 hours that he and the ashram leaders had nothing to say to each other.

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[96] Ibid.

[97] *The Quest of the Overself*, ch. "A writer on his Writings"

Nonetheless, Brunton's privileged relationship with the Maharshi seemed to continue unbroken:

> Death had not ended our relationship or barred our communications. He still existed in my mind, life, as a veritable force, an entity bereft of the flesh but clearly present. And then one evening which I shall never forget, about a year and a quarter after his physical passing, he said that we needed to part and that he would vanish from my field of awareness. He did. I never saw him again.[98]

At first, Brunton believed that this disappearance of the Maharshi's mental image had occurred for the sake of his own development. A short time before his own death, he spoke about it once more. As the editor of the *Notebooks* writes:

> In 1981, P.B. said more about this "next step." He said that while the inner contact had never in fact been broken, he had lacked the ability to recognize this at the time. He had to stop looking for the contact through any sort of imagery, and learn to recognize its presence as pure essence rather than [a] personalized image.

If the reverence and love that Brunton felt for Ramana are undeniable, he nevertheless retained during the second part of his life a certain ambivalence towards the mystic of Arunachala: was Ramana Maharshi, undoubtedly a great mystic and a great saint, also a master and a sage? In an article written for *The Mountain Path* forty years after their first meeting, Brunton calls him "a pure channel for a Higher Power." The Maharshi, who behaved during the day like a completely normal human being, in his moments of meditation would become the receptacle for an impersonal Presence, purely spiritual and radiant. But why then was Ramana content to remain a passive spectator to injustices committed under his own nose? Why this indifference to human suffering, particularly during the war? Brunton noted with a certain disappointment the absence in the Maharshi of an ideal of active service. This ideal, which he already held in himself in a latent way, would be stimulated and confirmed following two crucial encounters in Mysore, during the years when the world was passing through the tragic ordeal of the war. Brunton ended up regarding the mystic of Arunachala as a perfect yogi, but not quite a sage. His ideal of the sage had come to more closely resemble that of the bodhisattva, who sacrifices his own well-being in order to help others, taking on a part of their suffering:

> For the sage the suffering of others is his; for the yogi it is not. The Maharshi was an adept in mysticism—that is, yoga—but his idea of truth needs to be disputed. He says that the sage can watch with indifference the slaughter of millions of people in battle. That is quite true of the yogi but it will never be true of those who have sacrificed *every future nirvanic beatitude* to return to earth until all are saved; they alone are entitled to the term sage; nor can they do otherwise, for they have found the unity of all human beings. They would never have

[98] *Notebooks*, VIII, 6, 183.

returned if they did not *feel* for others.[99]

The full complexity of Brunton's attitude towards Ramana Maharshi is perhaps best summed up in this remark:

> My deference to the dead master's status and reverence for his worth are great and unshakable. His pure life was an inspiration and an influence but it was not an example to imitate in all matters.[100]

What was Ramana's influence on Brunton? We have already mentioned that Ramana had confirmed, more than introduced to Brunton, the possibility that one could attain a superior state of consciousness and firmly ground himself in his own inner being—his only true Self. In the presence of Ramana Maharshi, Paul Brunton "met himself"—he attained this inner, higher Self, distinct from his personality; he took possession of an intimate spiritual inheritance, for which he had been prepared by the more illusive experiences of his youth.

We could perhaps say that in the Maharshi, Brunton found the truth of the Self; in Subrahmanya Iyer, he discovered the truth about the world; and in the Maharaja of Mysore, he perhaps saw the truth of an integrated, fully developed human life. Of course, in reality, events unfolded in a much more complex manner. Still, these individuals were the measure of what was possible on the paths of Brunton's unfolding quest. They corresponded to three existential questions: Who am I? What is the world? How should I live? Concerning the first, the predominant influence was the Maharshi's. He gave Brunton a method called *atma-vicara*, "inquiry into the Self." Brunton summarized it in this way:

> Pursue the enquiry "Who am I?" relentlessly. Analyze your entire personality. Try to find out where the I-Thought begins. Go on with your meditations. Keep turning your attention within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop, and it will eventually lead you to the goal.[101]

One could say without exaggeration that *The Secret Path*, a large part of *The Quest of the Overself*, and certain passages of *A Hermit in the Himalayas* and *The Inner Reality* were born of this message.

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[99] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 470.

[100] Ibid., X, 2, 461.

[101] *A Search in Secret India*, ch. 16, p. 293.

Chapter 3: IN MYSORE

3.1 The Maharaja: A Philosopher King

The fabulous presence of Prince Krishnaraja Wadiyar, the Maharaja of Mysore, hovered over the most fruitful period in Paul Brunton's life (1935-1940). The Maharaja, who loved the company of savants and writers, invited him to Mysore. Brunton accepted, attracted by the sovereign's exceptional reputation. Admitted among the regular visitors to the court, he attended palace celebrations, was granted private audiences, and followed Krishnaraja to his mountain retreat in Kemmangandi. In time, Brunton understood the secret of the Maharaja's noble character, his devotion to culture, and his unceasing efforts to improve the condition of his people:

> I discovered that the secret source of all his greatness lay in the philosophy with which he had identified himself.[102]

As a prefatory quote to Chapter 2 of *The Hidden Teaching*, Brunton cites a telegram sent by the Maharaja to the Indian delegates to the 1937 Congress of Philosophy in Paris:

> Trust you will place before the Congress the goal of the truth of Indian Philosophy, the attainment of happiness of all beings, as enshrined in the great Sanskrit sayings: 'Sarve Janah Sukhino Bhavantu' (May all humanity be happy) and 'Sarve Satwa Sukho Hitah' (which brings about the welfare of all that exists.)[103]

Brunton adds that these two verses were chanted every day in the Palace of Mysore. That all humanity should be treated as one family was not just an empty phrase for the Maharaja. Mysore was frequently called a model state, and was considered the most progressive of all the Indian states.

Historian James Manor remarks that "the approval of the British was crucial to the survival of Mysore's princely authority."[104] The ruling Wadiyar family derived its legitimacy to a certain extent from British power. Thus a British observer at the end of the nineteenth century, following closely the affairs of the state of Mysore, could describe it as "the best run native state in India."[105]

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[102] Brunton notes, Brunton Archive.

[103] *Hidden Teaching*, ch. 2 epigraph, p. 43.

[104] Manor, James, *Political Change in an Indian State: Mysore 1917-1955*. South Asia Books, 1978.

[105] After 1900, the government of Mysore initiated a series of prestigious programs for industrial, urban, and educational development. Hydroelectric stations, iron and steel mills, textile and chemical factories, coffee plantations and roasting facilities, etc. were begun or developed. Manor wrote: "Bangalore was illumined by electric lights before Bombay, Calcutta and Madras;" the cities of Bangalore and Mysore

This progressive image, carefully cultivated by the Maharaja and his government (and co-existing, according to Manor, with a discreet maintenance of autocracy), won for the state the admiration of both the British and the Indian nationalists:

> Congress leaders were frequent visitors to the state and Gandhi vacationed in Mysore as a state guest in 1927, 1934, and 1936. On the last visit, he remarked that Mysore most nearly approximated the utopia of "Rama Rajya."[106]

Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, convalesced in a climatic station near Bangalore in May 1941. But in addition to nationalists and revolutionaries, Mysore attracted princes from all over India:

> The high reputation of the administrative tradition of Mysore made this state a training ground for young princes. The Political Department sent them to us regularly. Travancore, Gwalior and Nagode were among the States whose beneficent princes came to Mysore for administrative training.[107]

Brunton was thus able, while at the Court of Mysore, to meet many eminent individuals, both Indian and British, from political, administrative, religious, and intellectual circles, not only from Mysore but also from the whole of the waning British Raj.

The British author had found a double patron in the Maharaja, this philosopher-king to whom he expressed his gratitude in the dedication of *The Quest of the Overself*:

> He who puts a roof over my head shelters my body from the elements, yet does nothing for my soul. Your highness, however, has done both. For it was through your indirect instrumentality that I was initiated into the study of the higher intellectual wisdom of India.

Here Brunton alludes to the sovereign's personal guru, Subrahmanya Iyer, who became his master after Ramana Maharshi.

The meeting of these two great minds—the progressive Maharaja and the English writer with a passion for Indian wisdom—was certainly a tremendous event, not only for Brunton's personal evolution, but also for the greater narrative of India's encounter with the West.

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would become, thanks to an ambitious urbanization, "among the most elegant in Southern India." In 1916, Mysore became the first native state to have its own university. Thus "an endless line of awestruck visitors described Mysore as a garden paradise beneficently governed." – Ibid., p. 12.

[106] Ibid., p. 13.

[107] Sir Mirza Ismail, *My Public Life*, London, 1954, p. 35.

In the philosopher-king, Brunton not only met a benefactor who so generously gave him residence, servants, various material resources, and even the company of his *Rajaguru*; he also met the supreme embodiment of his ideal of the sage as philosophic man of action. Later Brunton would contrast this ideal to what he considered a lesser type: the reclusive, solitary mystic. The Maharaja, open to science and modern technology, had founded the great iron and steel industry of Bhadravati, one of the most important in the British Empire. His strong example was both a source of inspiration for the English author and a reassuring confirmation of the latter's belief that philosophy and the active life are not incompatible. The Maharaja's life, which unfolded before Brunton's eyes during those years, was proof of the point:

> You have rescued philosophy from those who would make it a mere refuge from disappointment, and converted it into a dynamic inspiration to higher action for service,

wrote Brunton in his dedication to *The Quest of the Overself*.

The Maharaja wished to contribute to the meeting of East and West by receiving Western thinkers and by supporting the travels of Ramakrishna monks to acquaint Westerners with Vedanta. He found in Brunton one of the architects for the bridge he wished to build with the West. In *The Hidden Teaching*, Brunton revealed the great personal interest the Maharaja showed for his work; several years before the Maharaja's death, Krishnaraja had said to him:

> You have studied and carried yoga to the Western people; now study and carry *the best* that India has to give—our higher philosophy![108]

Thus the writer found an inspiring model, and the ruler found an esteemed and gifted interpreter who would transmit the Indian philosophic vision to Europe. Their meeting, while "decisive" only for Brunton, was fruitful for both.

On August 3, 1940, the Maharaja prematurely left his earthly body[109] at the age of fifty six. Brunton attended his cremation. All his life he would hold the sovereign in the highest esteem. Later he would write:

> He was a *knower*, established in the higher philosophy of truth.[110]

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[108] Brunton notes, Brunton Archive.

[109] He died of a heart attack on July 21, a few days after participating in a horse race at Bangalore's race track. He was succeeded by his nephew, Jayachamaraja Wadiyar, "as aristocratic as his uncle" according to Manor. In August 1942, the leaders of Mysore's Congress were arrested. There followed three or four years of uncertainty and confusion. Finally, on October 12, 1947, Jayachamaraja Wadiyar "renounced in writing the prerogatives of the princely house of Mysore."

[110] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 545.

Who was this philosopher-king, who was seen by Brunton as living the ideal expressed in Plato's *Republic*, who had been compared to the Emperor Ashoka by the English statesman Lord Samuel, and who was called *Rajarishi* by Gandhi?

Sri Krishnaraja Wadiyar Bahadur IV, Maharaja of Mysore, born in 1884, was invested with full power by the Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1902, and would reign over the principality of Mysore for almost four decades. Endowed with a personality of exceptional caliber and qualities, he distinguished himself by the eclecticism of his tastes, combining a passion for horses, military exercises, hunting, and sports in general, with a great musical sensitivity, vast culture, and an inexhaustible intellectual curiosity. In spite of the magnificent celebrations given for the sake of his people (for example, the dazzling Festival of Dasara, with its grandiose illuminations of the Palace of Mysore and its majestic procession of elephants), Krishnaraja lived a simple and austere life. Raised in the Hindu tradition, he was both devout and remarkably tolerant towards other faiths.[111]

Sir Mirza Ismail, a childhood friend of the Maharaja's who became his Private Secretary and later his *Dewan* (Prime Minister), a Moslem, wrote in his autobiography:

> Being himself a pious Hindu practicing his religion each day, His Highness took authentic pleasure in helping others in the practice of their own faith. I had the privilege to be intimately associated with him for almost half a century. During this entire period, he never treated me differently or showed less trust because I was an adept of another faith. And many Catholic religious from the Convent of Mysore worked at the palace as instructors, governesses or companions to the women of the princely family.[112]

Krishnaraja would journey to meet Ramana Maharshi, as he had made pilgrimages on foot to Badrinath[113] in the Himalayas, in modern physics. He applied science to industrial development in his own state, traveled to Britain in 1936, and in 1938 invited Jeans and Eddington as well as Jung to Mysore. He especially loved Indian philosophy, and knew the *Bhagavad-Gita* by heart and to Lake Manasarovar in Tibet.

To a knowledge of Western classical literature he added a passionate interest for modern science, and he kept abreast of discoveries. He had a prediliction for the *Mandukya Upanishad* with Gaudapada's *Karika*, and especially for the *Astavakra*

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[111] In his speech at the opening of the Twenty first World Conference of the Association of Young Christian Students (January 2, 1937 in Mysore), he declared: "Unity in diversity is exactly the ideal which I have so often advocated to the inhabitants of Mysore, men of all castes and all beliefs." (Ismail, op. cit., p. 47)

[112] Ibid., p. 61.

[113] One of the three sacred places at the source of the Ganges (the other two are Kedarnath and Gangotri).

Gita.[114]

He founded the University of Mysore and held philosophic discussions with pandits at the Palace.[115] It was with his encouragement in the 1930s that a Circle of Vedantic Studies was formed in Mysore under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Ashram. There the monks took courses in Vedanta, taught from a scientific perspective by Subrahmanya Iyer, as well as other subjects such as sociology, psychology, etc. Paul Brunton frequented this circle and struck up a friendship with Swami Siddheshwarananda. In 1934, the Maharaja encouraged the monks to travel at his expense to Europe and the United States, where they would present Vedanta from Iyer's standpoint.[116]

Pandit Iyer, in "An Inquiry into Truth or Tattva Vicara," an article devoted to the sovereign, recounted various anecdotes highlighting the courage, goodness, and fairness of the Maharaja, as well as his sensitivity towards those in distress. He concluded:

> He was a true renunciant at heart though an active ruler in the world outside.[117]

His words were echoed by Ismail:

> Purity of soul, kindness of heart, generosity of disposition, patience and tolerance, a wise judgment of men and affairs—these are qualities which His Highness possessed to an imminent degree. It was given to him that which is given to few men—to go through life making only friends, to the exclusion of all enemies. I am sure that history will hold him among the greatest in the history of India.[118]

And in Manor's opinion:

> [The Maharaja] was ... a gentle person, a reflective man of great sensitivity who lived a reclusive life within his palace. He maintained a constant interest in matters of high policy,

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[114] This was Ramakrishna's favorite work. The Maharaja published a version in Kanada script with English translation in 1932, then a second version supervised by Iyer in 1936. The sovereign so loved this text that he had passages in Sanskrit read to his mother.

[115] Philosophic discussions were also held in the verdant surroundings of his mountain retreat at Kemmangandi, in the Baba Budan Hills. One of them was reported in the book *Tattva Vicara*, in a report entitled "In the Mahasannidhana of H.H. the Maharaja of Mysore," dated July 31, 1924; among the principal participants of this scholastic "joust" was Subrahmanya Iyer.

[116] Swami Siddheswarananda left for Europe in 1937 to establish the Vedanta Center of Gretz, near Paris. He traveled on the same ship with Brunton and Iyer.

[117] *An Inquiry into Truth or Tattva Vicara*: a collection of speeches and writings by Sri V. Subrahmanya Iyer, edited by T.M.P. Mahadevan, privately printed, 1980. [ok]

[118] Ismail, op. cit., p. 61.

> but he always preferred to entrust his Dewans with the day to day management of his government. Krishnaraja Wadiyar combined warmth and good humor with a rather prim sense of propriety. He was offended by the involvement of his Dewans and administration in these factional squabbles, not only because it threatened to erode his authority in real terms, but also because its unseemliness disrupted the appearance of order and tranquillity in the affairs of state. The Maharaja cared a very great deal about the aesthetics of governance, for its own sake.[119]

During his wanderings, Paul Brunton would have many occasions to meet well-known figures—maharajas, ministers, religious leaders. However, among all these noble individuals, he would give homage to two in particular, for their sagacity and perceptiveness. In the epilogue to *The Wisdom of the Overself* he wrote:

> It is specifically our twentieth-century problem to learn how to combine rapt contemplation with energetic activity, sharp reason with subtle intuition, altruistic service of the common welfare with personal self-interest, the following of Christ with the demands of Caesar in a way that men of earlier times never had to trouble their heads about. This was clearly seen by two great Orientals, the late Maharaja of Mysore and the present (1942) Maharaja of Pithapuram, who had absorbed the best ancient wisdom of their own hemisphere and yet respected the best modern achievements of the Occident. They repeatedly affirmed it during our private discussions and helped us to see it clearly too.[120]

3.2 Subrahmanya Iyer: A Neo-Vedantin

At the side of the philosopher king stood another exceptional individual, the third figure who would help shape Paul Brunton's Indian experience in a major way. He was the personal guru of the Maharaja. Brunton, without naming him, describes his first meeting with the *Rajaguru* in *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*. Sri Subrahmanya Iyer paid him a visit at the Maharaja's bungalow in the Nilgiri mountains; Iyer had read some of Brunton's works and wished to meet him. The meeting would be momentous for Brunton:

> Presently the writer appeared—a white-turbaned, bespectacled old Brahmin gentleman of placid countenance and short stature, with three small books tucked under his arm.[121]

Under Iyer's direction, Brunton would study the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Mandukya Upanishad* with Gaudapada's *Karika*, and the *Astavakra Samhita*; these studies would particularly influence his world view.

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[119] Manor, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

[120] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 270.

[121] *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, p. 35.

Born in Salem in 1869, into a family of Brahmins from the South, V. Subrahmanya Iyer was initially attracted to the exact sciences. After general studies at Madras Christian College, he specialized in mathematics and in physics at Bangalore Central College. He then left South India to teach sciences at the University of Agra. In 1895 he returned to the state of Mysore, where he held different teaching posts. He then became a disciple of Swami Satchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharati, the Jagadguru of the Monastery of Sringeri (founded by the first Shankara), who initiated him into the purer Vedanta of the Shankarian tradition. In 1919 he was the Registrar of the University of Mysore, and a year later became Master of Philosophy (*Rajaguru*) to the Maharaja of Mysore, a post he held for the next twenty years, until the sovereign's death. Iyer was a brilliant intellectual (he would have S. Radhakrishnan as a personal pupil). In the 1930s, through Mysore's Circle of Vedantic Studies, Iyer trained an entire generation of *sanyasis*. Paul Brunton was allowed to attend these courses, which he did with passionate attention, taking copious notes.

Iyer was not a traditional pandit—he moreover elicited much criticism by his unconventional approach to Vedanta. He was a man of incisive spirit, remarkably open, who did not hesitate to question certain typical Indian attitudes: i.e. unconditional faith in revelation and tradition (*sruti* and *smrti*), servility vis-à-vis the scholarly authorities, and the lack of originality in their approach to the texts. He kept abreast of developments in Western thought. In 1936 he accompanied the Maharaja to England, and the following year went to Paris as the sole Indian delegate to the ninth International Congress of Philosophy, organized at the Sorbonne by the University of Paris for the Tricentenary of Descartes. He then visited various European countries, gave lectures in Austria, and met with many celebrated philosophers and scientists of the time, notably Bergson. That summer both Iyer and Paul Brunton were invited by Jung[122] to Kusnacht, where the three discussed issues in Indian philosophy. In 1938 the Indian government invited Jung to the 25th anniversary of the University of Calcutta. On this occasion Jung met with Iyer and had lengthy, in-depth discussions with him.[123]

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[122] Jung also corresponded with Iyer. In a letter dated January 9, 1939, Jung wrote, "I know that Indian thinking is characterized by ascribing to consciousness a metaphysical and pre-human existence. We, however, are of the opinion that what we call the unconscious—that is by definition a psyche which none is aware of—has a pre-human and pre-conscious existence. What we call the unconscious thus corresponds exactly to the Indian term of the highest of Super-Consciousness. As far as is known to me there is no proof whatever of the hypothesis that a pre-human and pre-conscious psyche is conscious—and consequently consciousness—to anyone." (– Jung, *Letters*) As for Iyer's mentalism, Jung admits that all of our experience is mental, but instead of arriving at the same conclusion that the nature of manifestation is mental, he remained prudently skeptical, metaphysically agnostic: "But what these contents, material or mental, are in themselves we *do not and cannot know*, for we experience them as psychic contents only and as nothing else ... I have nothing to say against such a hypothesis but Western thinking has renounced, even though only recently, metaphysical assertions which by definition cannot be verified. In the Middle Ages up to the 19th century we did believe in the possibility of metaphysical statements. India, it seems to me, is still convinced of the possibility of metaphysical statements. Maybe India is right, maybe not."(emphasis added) – Jung, *Letters*.

[123] "I had searching talks with S. Subramanya Iyer, the guru of the Maharaja of Mysore, whose guest I was

What were Subrahmanya Iyer's ideas? Let us first note his affinity with the Neo-Vedanta movement. On several points, Iyer stood close to Vivekananda; thus, Iyer's presentation at the 1937 Paris Conference resembled Vivekananda's in Chicago in 1893. In both cases, the promotion of Neo-Vedanta was financed by Mysore's royal family. Iyer's wish to win over the Western elite to Vedanta represented, in effect, a typically Neo-Hindu attitude, one alien to conservative Brahmanic tradition. In addition to their missionary spirit, Iyer and the Neo-Vedantins were alike in other ways.

3.2.1 Renewing Hindu Tradition

Iyer felt an ongoing challenge to show that Vedanta and modern science were entirely compatible.[124] This caused friction with more conventional pandits. Iyer refused requests to give lectures on the *Mandukya Upanishad* to the professors at the University of Mysore, because they had not studied contemporary science:

> The *Mandukya Upanishad* is proved correct by present-day scientific knowledge; ... They will merely assume that I am offering one more interpretation of this book.[125]

Iyer claimed that he was not just presenting a new interpretation of the *Mandukya Upanishad*:

> I am offering no new interpretation of Vedanta, invented by me as critics say, but I am really giving out the genuine ancient truth.[126]

His opinion of other celebrated Vedantins such as Y. Subba Rao[127] The letter also

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for some time…" – Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections,* p. 275.

[124]For him, the mentalistic interpretation of Vedanta agreed with the view of modern physics, for example in postulating the lack of an objective reality of time and space, the phenomenal world seen as *by* and *for* a mind, etc. This will be developed in Part II, Ch. 4.

[125]Brunton, notes in Brunton Archive.

[126]Ibid.

[127]Iyer knew Y. Subba Rao quite well. Author of *The Method of the Vedanta*, cited later on in the present work, Subba Rao later became Swami Satchidanandendra Saraswati. A letter written to me by one of the Swami's disciples, pandit D.B. Gangolli of Bangalore, states:

"Subrahmanya Iyer was isolated from the contemporary pandits and thinkers, because he, just like Y. Subba Rao ... followed Shankara's original Bhashyas (commentaries) and had found out many discrepancies in the so-called traditional method of teaching adopted by Shri Virupaksha Shastri, who was [their] guru.... It is true that both Iyer and Subba Rao were initiated into Advaita Vedanta by H.H. Jagadguru Shivabhinava Narasimha Bharati. Of course, Mr. Iyer knew Subba Rao; in fact, Iyer, being senior and quite highly educated, guided Subba Rao in his earlier youth and taught him just like Mr. K.A. Krishnaswami Iyer...."

Our informer adds: "Y. Subba Rao came in contact with S. Iyer around 1899-1900, as also a little later

mentions that Brunton met Krishnaswami Iyer in Bangalore in 1946. Their brief meeting, on the latter's deathbed, was arranged by Iyer. and Atreya illustrates the same point:

> Those Advaitins like Y. Subba Rao Sarma and B.L. Atreya who ignore science and want only *avasthatraya* [the doctrine of the three states of consciousness] are children. They will tell you that it is so because it is in *Mandukya*, but they are unable to *prove* it scientifically.[128]

Subrahmanya Iyer was as much an Anglophile as the founder of the Brahmo-Samaj:

> Rammohan Roy greeted the British as instruments of Divine Providence and considered their rule over India and the introduction of a European educational system into India to be both necessary and good.[129]

Like Vivekananda, Iyer disapproved of the traditional Hindu attitude towards foreigners. He considered it both obsolete and inappropriate to the historical situation at that time, which obliged the Indians to cooperate closely with the British:

> It is an essential element of [Vivekananda's] message ... that India must fully accede to the contact and intercourse with other nations and religions in order to fulfill its own religious and national potential ...[130]

The ideal of service to humanity, of social action, was as we have suggested earlier, inspired by the work of the Christian missions in India. Subrahmanya Iyer's position clearly follows in the wake of Vivekananda's. For the Christian ideal of brotherhood—we are all children of the same God the Father—Iyer substituted a sense of interdependence which followed from the Advaitan metaphysical position—we are all connected because we are all ultimately *one* with the Absolute. From this Upanishadic identity of *atman* and *brahman*, Iyer derived principles of ethics, politics, and social involvement unknown to traditional Vedanta, and one could question any assertion that these principles legitimately originate in the metaphysical vision of orthodox Advaita (cf. ch. 6 below). He infused Hindu tradition with Western values, and legitimized this through a reinterpretation of that tradition inclining towards a "practical Vedanta."

Thus Iyer also criticized Ramana's passivity in times of crisis, both local, as during the conflict within his own ashram, and global, as during the Second World War.[131]

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with K.A. Krishnaswami Iyer, both of whom were good friends."

[128] All Iyer quotations taken from Brunton's Indian notes in the Brunton Archive.

[129] Halbfass, op. cit., p. 221.

[130] Ibid., p. 236.

[131] Ibid., p. 236.

If Ramana Maharshi typified the traditional Hindu ideal, Subramanya Iyer, following Vivekananda, championed the newer ideal of the active sage, embodied in the person of the Maharaja. Neither Ramana nor Ramakrishna had emphasized serving society. Paul Brunton would ultimately side with Iyer, embracing the "practical Vedanta" of the Neo-Vedantins, combining tradition with a modern Western outlook.

3.2.2 Neo-Hindu Inclusivism

Finally, Iyer went further than Vivekananda in his inclusivism. Claiming to interpret Ramakrishna's thought, he included the whole of human experience in the Vedantic method, subordinating it to the ultimate stage of Advaitic metaphysical inquiry which alone led directly to Truth. All other approaches, i.e. *sadhu sanga*, (being in the company of sages); *Isvara Cinta*, (religion); *Isvara Cinta* on a higher level, (mysticism); lower *vicara* (knowledge of the phenomenal world, i.e. science) - all these can only prepare the way to higher *vicara*, or knowledge of the noumenal world, knowledge of Truth. Subrahmanya Iyer insisted that

> everything, be it Religion, Science, Politics, Economics etc. ... has a place in the world of true Knowledge. He that omits anything cannot attain ultimate Truth.[132]

He compared the teachings of Ramakrishna to a pyramid whose base rested on religious instruction suitable for the many, while at its apex were metaphysical teachings appropriate for the few. In one sentence, Iyer gives us the key to understanding Neo-Hindu inclusivism:

> Since the highest Truth comprehends everything, even atheistic movements, nothing is hostile to it or outside of it.[133]

Brahman, the Supreme Reality, is the undifferentiated One, and all doctrines and points of view are included in a subordinate way within the ultimate doctrine, Advaita. Everything, in the final analysis, is reducible to the ultimate essence, *Brahman*. There would seem to be a logical link between a non-dualistic philosophy and a psychological attitude of inclusivism.

In this same article, Iyer traces Ramakrishna's universalism back to the *Bhagavad-Gita* and to Shankara:

> Krishna is teaching no particular religion, but Religion in general, which Sri Ramakrishna actually lived. The *Gita* nowhere refers to Hindu, Vaishnava or Saiva *Matam* or *Dharma*. For

[132] Iyer, *Sri Ramakrishna and the Modern Outlook*, Vedanta Kesari, 1932.

[133] Ibid.

> India's greatest need was, as the entire civilized world's need is now, to lift its viewpoint from particular religions to Religion in general.[134]

Shankara, according to Iyer, followed the teachings of the *Gita* concerning religious practice. Moreover, among Shankara's followers, one finds Vaishnavites, Shaivites, and Shaktas. All these practices, correctly followed, lead to the mystical experience, but only philosophy can confirm that the mystical experience is Ultimate Truth.

A striking presentation of Iyer's inclusivism can be found in an article which presents Shankara as a rationalist philosopher, in contrast to the more traditional image of him as a theologian:

> [Shankara's system of Advaita] is not even a philosophical dish cooked to suit exclusively the palate of the Hindu. It is like the air and the water, the common food of all men in all countries. It is ... an attempt ... at constructing a "Science of Truth," nay, in fact, it is the only attempt yet made at such a science.[135]

Thus Shankara's teaching is seen as food for all humanity, the universal teaching par excellence; not a religion, but *the* religion; not a philosophy, but *the* philosophy; not a science, but the Science of Truth; not a soteriology, but *the* path to spiritual liberation par excellence, wide and deep as the ocean which contains virtually all the water of the world and in which all particular forms ultimately dissolve.

One sees again this very particular kind of "spiritual imperialism" which is characteristic of Neo-Hindu inclusivism: serene, non-aggressive, and tolerant of the many contrasting beliefs which seem to oppose it, while reabsorbing them within its womb as so many interesting forms which are valid and even precious, but because of their limitations inadequate to express the fullness of the infinite, Supreme *Brahman*.

3.2.3 Reinterpreting Shankara

Iyer interpreted Shankara from a Neo-Vedantic point of view. He found in the great Advaitin philosopher a validation of his own ethic of social service (in fact inspired, as we have seen, by Western influence), universalism (i.e. Neo-Hindu inclusivism), as well as Indian nationalist sentiment.[136] Iyer used the example of Shankara himself, who led an intensely active life in the world rather than secluding himself in a monastery. Iyer in turn reduced the multitude of racial, national, social, religious, and other distinctions

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[134] Ibid.

[135] Iyer, "Shankara: Reason or Revelation?" in *Sanskrit Research*, reprinted in his *The Philosophy of Truth*.

[136] C.f. Iyer's "Shankara and Our Own Times," reprinted in his *The Philosophy of Truth*.

between individuals to the Shankaran notion of *Maya*, the cosmic illusion which must be transcended in order to realize the truth of *Brahman*. Consequently all social, political, and humanitarian actions which emphasize our common humanity over our differences, will lead us closer to a Realization of *Brahman*. Here we again find the key idea of Vivekananda's "practical Vedanta." Indeed, the entire Hindu tradition, including of course Vedantic orthodoxy, rested on sexual, social, national, and religious discrimination—women, the *sudra* or lower caste, outcasts, and foreigners were excluded from Vedantic teaching. Iyer would not remain silent on the issue of caste. In fact, Shankara himself had gone beyond the barriers and taboos of caste: in performing funeral rites for his mother, he broke the rules of the Brahmin caste. From this Iyer drew two conclusions:

– Social restrictions are fine for the immature, those not yet capable of independent judgment; they are useless for the more spiritually mature.[137]

– Breaking caste rules is condemnable when motivated by personal advantage; it is allowable when motivated by selfless, altruistic service.[138]

Finally, Iyer found in Shankara's deeds the roots of Indian nationalist sentiment: by founding monasteries at the four cardinal points of the Indian subcontinent, Shankara unified very diverse communities with a sense of common interest and purpose. (This later on developed into a fuller concept of political unity under the Mahrattas and the kings of Vijayanagar.)

Another aspect of Subrahmanya Iyer's approach to Vedanta allows us to place him in the lineage of Radhakrishnan and Vivekananda, rather than that of the strict orthodoxy embodied by Gaudapada/Shankara/Suresvara. Traditional Vedanta taught three steps in the realization of the Self.[139] Although Shankara was thought of more as a theologian whose teaching was based on Revelation or *Sruti*, Iyer wished to demonstrate that Shankara's philosophy rested above all on reason and the metaphysical experience.

In "Shankara: Reason or Revelation?" which appeared in *Sanskrit Research*, Iyer

[137] This raises the delicate question of criteria: how does one decide who is spiritually mature? And who decides? Or is one to suppose that the spiritual maturity which frees an individual from the caste system would be recognized spontaneously by society?

[138] On this basis, one could logically condemn mixed marriage, for example. One feels here that Iyer is cornered between his attachment to his Brahmin roots—his wish to preserve Indian social cohesion—and his progressive Anglophile attitudes.

[139] According to the *Vedantasara*, V, 181: *Sravana* (recitation of revealed texts), *Manana* (reflection on the revealed texts), *Nididhyasana* (meditation on the *mahavakya* [Upanishadic short sentences]), these three corresponding to the three traditional criteria of truth: *Sruti* (the Upanishadic Revelation), *Yukti* (reason), *Anubhuti* (metaphysical intuition or contemplative experience).

presents two aspects of Shankara: as a theologian, he leans towards *Sruti*, but as a rationalist philosopher, he leans towards reason. Iyer appeals to the authority of his guru, the ultra-orthodox head of the Monastery of Sringeri, who had said: "Shankara founded his Advaita Vedanta either on reason independent of *sruti* or on *sruti* confirmed by reason."

Iyer also quotes Shankara's commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, II, 1:

> This [the unreality of duality] is borne out by the *Srutis* ... But it is possible also to show the unreality of the object world even from pure reasoning, and this second chapter is undertaken for that purpose.

Shankara himself had often said that his philosophy was based on *Sruti*, or revealed scripture. Iyer believed that this was because Shankara addressed the ordinary man, who finds security in the idea of causality and thus in the idea of God—and Revelation is indispensable to prove the latter, as Iyer fully acknowledged. He believed that those of superior intelligence, have no need of this idea of divine causality, and can therefore dispense with *Sruti* and arrive at the truth of Non-Dualism by pure reason. Finally, Iyer pointed out, Shankara, in debates with Buddhists and others who did not recognize the authority of the *Vedas*, had been obliged to prove the truth of Advaita by means of reason alone. Iyer's favorite text was the *Mandukya Upanishad*, a scripture which appealed to reason to the exclusion of Revelation. He concluded:

> Shankara's system of Advaita does not need the support of any Scripture or Revelation like the *Veda*. The *Srutis* may all disappear, yet will his school stand. For it is based, not upon the varying theological fancies, which are as numerous as the sands of the sea, but upon reason, the common heritage of all mankind, irrespective of colour or creed or clime.

In an article entitled “Anubhava: the Criterion of Truth in Shankara,”[140] Iyer clearly indicates the places occupied, in his opinion, by the three traditional criteria (Revelation, reason, and metaphysical experience); thus he draws a clear distinction between the sphere of *Apara Vidya* (inferior knowledge, i.e. cosmological and theological), and the sphere of *Para Vidya* (ultimate knowledge, i.e. of the impersonal Absolute):

> *Sruti* is made the final or exclusive authority in *apara Vidya* and that for supporting the tenet of the CAUSAL relation or creatorship of *Brahman*,[141] *Nirguna Brahman* = the "Absolute

[140] Reprinted in Iyer, *The Philosophy of Truth*.

[141] *Brahman* = the Absolute, the One Reality behind the phenomenal world.
Saguna Brahman = the “Absolute endowed with qualities” in philosophical terminology; = *Isvara* = "The Lord" in religious terminology; *Apara* = inferior because the Shankarians think that Ultimate Reality is beyond the personal God.
Atma = "the Self" = the spiritual reality behind the empirical individual. For Shankara = identical with *Nirguna Brahman*

> beyond qualities," which can be defined only in a negative way. For the Shankarian school = the Ultimate Reality, higher than the Lord. i.e. of *Saguna* or *apara Brahman* ... The support of Scriptural Revelation is, therefore, absolutely necessary for this hypothesis of cosmology, this *Saguna* or *apara* (= inferior) *Brahman*, but not for the absolute truth of *Nirguna Brahman*. The *Sruti* itself says: "This *Atma* is NOT to be attained by a study of the *Vedas*. [Iyer is quoting the *Katha Upanishad* I, 2, 23.]

Metaphysical intuition, which is higher than discursive thought, alone can give us unwavering certitude of *Nirguna Brahman*, the Reality that lies beyond forms and what is graspable by the five senses. *Sruti* alone is powerless to reveal it, because: 1. doubts can always arise, and 2. in the absence of the metaphysical experience, *Sruti* is nothing but words, empty sounds:

> The tenet of *Nirguna Brahman* is true for Shankara, not because it is taught by the *Sruti*, but because it is based on *anubhava* (intuitive experience) though it is also supported by the *Sruti* ... The Advaitin knows that a legitimate doubt may have here to arise. The Rishis may have truly spoken; but they may have been deluded themselves. How are we certain that what the Rishis cognized is the Reality or Truth? This can be proved according to the Advaita, only by *anubhava*.[142]

And also:

> Again, in the absence of this *anubhava*, *Nirguna Brahman* as an object of thought is mere sound without sense. To one who has not seen a penguin, for instance, the word has no meaning ... Of what use, then, is such *Sruti* to him? Similarly, common sense tells the Advaitin that the meaning of the *Sruti* and especially where there are conflicting interpretations, is made out by means of reasoning based upon the authority of *anubhava*, the supreme court.

Thus reason comes into play between *Sruti* and *anubhava*, corroborating the data of intuition with those of the revealed texts.

But reason also permits discrimination between the different possible experiences, for, in an *a priori* astonishing fashion:

> *Anubhava* ... can reveal not two, but twenty thousand conflicting experiences. And the business of the wise is to sift the ultimate truth from out of all these ... The Advaitin rejects nothing. All human experiences are his data. He tests all by reason.[143]

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[142] According to Halbfass, op. cit., p. 302-303, it was Debendranath Tagore (father of Rabindranath) of Brahmo-Samaj who was the first to verify the contents of *Sruti* not by an appeal to authority but instead by appealing to his personal experience.

[143] Here we find all the ambiguity of Iyer's position: *anubhava* (metaphysical experience), supposedly the "court of highest appeal" by which one develops a reasoning which can discern what is true in *Sruti*, appears now in its turn susceptible to many interpretations, among which it is given to reason to choose! The circularity of the argument is evident: the supreme Authority is ***anubhava*,** confirmed by reason which

Thus, in Iyer's reinterpretation of Shankara, it is metaphysical intuition, confirmed by reason, then in the last resort by *Sruti*, which is the final criterion of Truth.

Let us now consider what certain specialists have to say about Shankara. In their opinion, was the intuitive experience, verified by reason, the supreme criterion of Truth for the founder of Advaita? Did he relegate *Sruti* to a secondary and subordinate position as Iyer asserts?

W. Halbfass (who entitled a chapter of his book *India and Europe* "The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West"), considered the importance given to direct experience a key element in Neo-Hindu ideology. This is shown by the interpretation Neo-Hindu authors gave for the etymology of the word *darsana*,[144] indicating, in their opinion, the primacy in Indian tradition of direct, intuitive experience over discursive thought.

Radhakrishnan (who was for a time a student of Iyer's) is cited by Halbfass and P. Hacker as one of the essential voices of the Neo-Hindu ideology of experience. Radhakrishnan presented Hinduism as "the religion of experience par excellence," in contrast to "the prophetic and dogmatic religions of the West."[145]

The revealed truth of *Sruti* was according to this view a transcription of the direct, metaphysical experiences of the Vedic *rishis*. Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi became, for Neo-Hindu thinkers, living symbols of Hinduism as a religion of experience.

Another modern Vedantic thinker cited by Halbfass[146] is Sri Aurobindo.[147] After

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itself is rooted in *anubhava*! Apart from this failure in reasoning, one could wonder if Iyer does not overestimate the capacity of reason and its role in the metaphysical quest; he seems to neglect the fact that *anubhava*, operating beyond all concepts, constitutes a "leap" into the trans-rational. Iyer does not seem to see the limits of human reason, even as he underestimates the necessary role of Revelation as guide and against the pitfalls of mysticism. It would seem more legitimate to suppose that Revelation and reason must join to prepare the decisive leap into *anubhava*.

[144] This based on the root *drs*: "to see." *Darsana* = "view," "vision," "point of view" = orthodox Hinduism knows six *darsanas* = six systems of thought, six views of the world, six approaches of Reality.

[145] Halfbass, op. cit., p. 382.

[146] Ibid., pp. 384-85.

[147] Aurobindo attempted to take up the Western challenge of experimentation in the physical and natural sciences, reviving the Indian tradition of "experimentation" with diverse states of consciousness, forgetting that scientific experimentation by definition is indefinitely repeatable, while religious experience is spontaneously produced and does not automatically unfold from favorable conditions, such as asceticism, prayer, etc. Advanced mystics know the "dark night of the soul," where the experience of God clearly does not occur, in spite of the contemplation and renunciation practiced by the aspirant.

examining the crucial importance of the concept of experience in Neo-Vedanta, Halbfass asks what role this concept played in Indian tradition before India's encounter with the West. In his opinion, Shankara (to whom, as we recall, Iyer would ascribe his own point of view) accepted the idea (developed by the Mimamsakas) of the non-human origin of the *Vedas* (*apauruseyatva)*:

> The *Veda* and the *Upanishads* ... do not record anybody's personal experiences. They are an eternal, impersonal structure of soteriologically meaningful discourse.... Acceptance of and commitment to the objective structure of Vedic revelation are central for Sankara and certainly more than a concession to historical and cultural circumstances.[148]

Thus, Iyer's view of Shankara would seem to be a modern, Neo-Hindu interpretation,[149] more than a rediscovery of the original thought of Advaita's founder. Halbfass' conclusion (we quote several extracts) follows:

> The role of the concept of experience in Neo-Hinduism is not a mere continuation ... of that of *anubhava* ... in traditional Hinduism. The changes are not only a matter of emphasis; they reflect a radically new situation—the encounter of the Indian tradition with Western science and philosophy; and they represent one of the most exemplary cases of reinterpretation and revision of the tradition in response to Western ideas and perspectives.[150]

And later:

> The Neo-Hindu appeal to religious or mystical experience often involves the claim that religion can and should be scientific, and that Hinduism, and Vedanta in particular, has a scientific and experimental basis. The concept of experience has thus become one of the most significant devices for presenting and interpreting the Hindu tradition to a world dominated by science and technology. Westerners, too, have been attracted by this idea. . . . Experience, with its ... broad range of connotations, seems to indicate a possible reconciliation or merger of science and religion, providing religion with a new measure of certainty and science with a new dimension of meaning.[151]

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[148] Halfbass, op. cit., p. 388.

[149] But this might not apply to the non-human origin of the *Veda*. More precisely, Iyer's hypothesis is that Shankara made a simple concession to Brahmin orthodoxy, which Shankara attempted to restore against the prevailaing heterodoxies of the time (especially Buddhism). While struggling against the excessive ritualism of the Mimamsakas, and in order to affirm his non-dualist message, it seems psychologically plausible that Shankara, on certain points, such as the transcendental character of the *Veda*, judged it necessary to support the Mimamsaka position in order to restore the prestige of *Sruti*. Halbfass' assertion appears questionable to us; Shankara's biography is far too unknown for one to decide whether Halfbass' hypothesis or Iyer's is correct. At this point, it remains doubtful whether Iyer rediscovered Shankara's authentic thought or if he reinterpreted it.

[150] Halbfass, op. cit., p. 395.

[151] Ibid., p. 399.

3.2.4 Remarks

Halbfass' penetrating reflections might have been shared as well, with some reservations, by Iyer and Brunton, allowing us to place these last two within the Neo-Vedantic sphere. The primacy Iyer gives to metaphysical experience (strictly checked by reason) over Revelation is consistent with his persistent presentation of Vedanta from a scientific perspective, and with his resolutely pro-modern, pro-Western, rationalist and anti-religious attitude.

This Neo-Hindu rebalancing of the three criteria of Truth, favoring intuitive experience and reason over Revelation, could not but appeal to a Westerner wishing to present to his contemporaries the essence of Vedanta's message. Indeed it was traditional Hinduism's preeminent appeal to the authority of *Sruti*[152] which made it difficult to export Vedanta as a universal teaching. Meditative experience and reason, on the other hand, are a part of our shared human inheritance, and were consequently the two pillars on which Brunton would build his teaching. His doctrine of mentalism satisfies reason, and his concept of the Overself arises from, and makes explicit, our individual spiritual experience. The success of the notion of experience for Neo-Vedantic thinkers, Brunton included, is explained by its promise of a synthesis reconciling science and religion, modernity and tradition, West and East.[153]Meslin concludes: "From this perspective, one

[152] Nevertheless, the Vedantic Realization is presented in a detailed way in Brunton's work, in the form of allusions, in quotes and in three chapters devoted to commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita* in *The Inner Reality*. Moreover, the translation and diffusion in the West of the essential texts of the religious traditions of the world created a favorable context for the study of Hindu doctrines. For the modern Western reader, the intellectual understanding and possibly a personal empathy for these doctrines would thake the place which the authority of *Sruti* had for the traditional Hindu.

[153] Brunton was familiar with Anglo-American literature on religious phenomena, in particular William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. A French observer, Michel Meslin (*L'Experience humaine du divin*, Paris, 1988, p.128-132), standing outside this tradition, sees things quite differently:

"In the Anglo-Saxon milieu, the scientific model of knowledge was transposed to the religious domain, providing an empirical basis for a theology of knowledge, and taking personal religious experience as the very foundation of religion. It was a veritable misuse of a generally recognized scientific criterion, that of scientific experiment, introduced into a domain where it could not function as in the scientific domain, since the object of religious experience is not an empirical object."

Meslin carefully distinguishes the concept of *Erlebnis* (unanticipated event, transforming experience) from that of *Erfahrung* (integrated, assimilated knowledge): "Now such arguments show to what extent the search for truth held in the religious experience cannot imitate the scientific model into the method, appearing analogous, of an experimental experience in the domain of the exact sciences. This assimilation is illusory and, although seemingly very technical, utterly naive. Because an experience, even religious, is first an event which man is not the master of, even if he is however always the place...."

The result of this unforeseen happening is that this experience, *Erlebnis*, is modified by what I knew, or believed I knew, in the realm where it happened.... Thus all experience brings a Renaissance and opens doors to new horizons. It cannot become knowledge capable of leading to modified behavior—i.e. of *Erfahrung*—in relation to other experiences.

would think that the truth of the religious experience is awakened in the man himself, in as much as to be believing, permitting him to have the experience of himself in having that of the Other. Man is inseparably present to himself as to the Other in the immediate experience of this relationship which unites them. Thus, it is from the experience of self in the discovery of the Divine Being that the religious experience holds its truth."

Subrahmanya Iyer's ideas are known to us both from Paul Brunton's personal notes and from two posthumous collections of articles privately published: *An Inquiry into Truth or Tattva-Vicara* and *The Philosophy of Truth or Tattvagnana*. The general foundation of his teaching is the Vedantic doctrine of *avasthatraya* (the three states of consciousness).[154]

Iyer also posits a clear distinction between religion, which is in the realm of opinion (*matam*), and philosophy, which aims at knowing Reality or Truth (*tattvam*)—a surprisingly categorical distinction for an Indian. If in post-Medieval Europe there developed a firm distinction between religion and philosophy, it was not so in India, where the two remained closely linked. In contrast with his peers, one can find in Iyer a distrust of mysticism which is almost a rejection. This would later on be a source of disagreement between him and Brunton. Iyer's thought is rational and scientific, opposed to blind faith in God and tradition.

How does Iyer define Truth, the goal of pure philosophy? In three phrases: 1. It is that which is beyond all contradictions; 2. it is universal; and 3. it is as necessary as "two times two equals four." That is the abstract definition, but how is Truth tested in life (since in India, philosophy is not separate from life)?[155] Truth at work in our life

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"Thus it is the religious experience which is man's prelude to the mystery of God and that which expands into the infinite dimensions of the Divine Being."

[154] The three states of consciousness: *jagrata* (waking state), *svapna* (dream state), and *susupti* (deep sleep). We will return to this doctrine in detail in Pt. II. According to Iyer, the doctrine of *avasthatraya* is of utmost importance, for it alone takes into account the totality of human experience; this doctrine is exclusively Indian, for European philosophy ordinarily concerns itself only with waking experience. (If Freud reopened an interest in dreams, it was from a very different perspective, and non-metaphysical; as for deep sleep, it remained largely ignored by Western philosophy.) Iyer saw in this doctrine the basis for the metaphysics of Vedanta; furthermore, in following a *sadhana* (spiritual practice), the understanding of this key doctrine required the shedding of the ego, and the adoption of a philosophic discipline leading to impartiality. Thus, in a letter to Brunton (25 March 1956; copy in Brunton Archive), Swami Siddheshwarananada, another Iyer student, remarked: "One must become so impersonal to understand the doctrine of *avasthatraya*!"

[155] Every doctrine implies respect for a corresponding way of life, i.e. the metaphysical is not divorced from the ethical (It was the same for certain great teachers of Antiquity: think of Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, etc.)—while in the West the erudite or philosopher can conduct his private life badly without anyone taking offense. S. Iyer, in spite of having a critical mind, was in this way very Indian. Purely theoretical metaphysics was not sufficient for him.

would be recognized as that which always leads towards realizing the good of all beings. In a lecture given in Vienna in 1937, Iyer declared:

> To live for the sake of one's own good, or that of one's own kith or kin, race or country ... is not to realize Truth, which demands the effort to seek the good of *all*. Such a discipline alone makes for Truth.[156]

3.3 The Master and the Maharaja

Let us take some time to further explore the relationship between Subrahmanya Iyer and the Maharaja of Mysore. This was a relationship of mutual esteem and reciprocal gratitude: if Iyer owed his professional career to the Maharaja, the latter owed his spiritual illumination and his intellectual and moral formation to the pandit. While traveling in North India the Maharaja had visited Agra's college, where Iyer was a professor of sciences. The Maharaja was impressed with Iyer and brought him back to Mysore. The sovereign then suggested that Iyer take *sanyasa* and join Kugli Math, a monastery of the branch of Sringeri, to eventually become its Head. Iyer refused. He had been tempted during his youth to become a *sanyasin*, but his guru had dissuaded him, and in time he had become content with the life of a householder. He represented for Brunton the ideal of an active life in the world, as opposed to the classical Indian ideal of ascetic renunciation of the world.[157]

The Maharaja more than once offered Iyer considerable sums of money, but the latter, loyal to the ancient Indian tradition of free spiritual teaching, would not accept any fees.[158] The pandit would remind Brunton of their indebtedness (and that of Westerners

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[156] Compare this with Montesquieu, quoted by Ch. Malamoud *(Cuire le Monde*, p. 137): "If I know of something that is helpful to me, and is harmful to my family, I reject it from my mind. If I know of something helpful to my family, but which does not help my country, I try to forget it. If I know of something helpful to my country but harmful to Europe, or helpful to Europe but harmful to humanity, I regard it as a crime." Montequieu and Iyer join in condemning egoism—not only the obvious egotism, but also more subtle forms of selfishness, such as possessive and exclusive attachments to groups (family, country, etc., which are considered extensions of the ego) to the detriment of larger groupings; in the end, perhaps only the love of humanity at large could be considered to be free from egoism. (Again the Indians would probably extend this to include respect for all life, thus non-violence towards animals, vegetarianism, etc.) For Iyer, this moral universalism rests on a metaphysical framework, while for Montesquieu the framework is purely ethical. Nevertheless, even if Advaita can legitimately establish an ethic of passive non-violence (*ahimsa*), to find in it the basis for an ethic of active compassion (which is implied by Iyer)—appears much more questionable.

[157] One must remember that in traditional India, the doctrine of the four *asrama* or "stages of life" applied only to older men, who had already satisfied the normal obligations of family and social life. However, the *sannyasa* ideal was prestigious, as testified by the insistence of the Maharaja that his favorite pandit embrace this path.

[158] Iyer also refused payment for his Vedanta lectures to the Ramakrishna monks of Mysore, and once he returned to the sovereign ten thousand rupees which had been given to him via the Prime Minister. The

in general) to Mysore's royal family: Krishnaraja's father had financed Vivekananda's voyages to Europe and the United States in 1893. Forty years later, the present Maharaja, continuing the noble family tradition of patronage, was making it possible for Brunton to study Vedanta in privileged circumstances. In return, Brunton would transmit the teachings to the West.

It appears that in Iyer's view, he and the Maharaja had invested Brunton with a well-defined mission:

> The late Maharaja of Mysore was so anxious to spread the philosophy of Advaita that he once said to me: "Here is P.B. He has a great gift with his pen and an aptitude for mysticism and philosophy. Let us keep him here in Mysore to study Advaita and then make it known to the West."[159]

In turn, the sovereign was conscious of his debt to the pandit-philosopher. The Yuvaraja, a personal friend of Brunton's, confided one day to the latter:

> I realize greatly how much my brother the Maharaja owes to Subrahmanya Iyer for forming his character and molding his outlook on life.[160]

In Mysore, Brunton saw a photograph dated 1928, showing the ruler, his hands elevated and joined in the symbol of reverence. It was signed and annotated in Kanada script by the Maharaja himself with the following Upanishadic quotation:

> I bow my head to my preceptor who shows me the secret truth, destroying all kinds of doubts, and who makes me perceive Oneness directly. I bow my head to such a guru who is really the Lord of all.[161]

One day, the sovereign expressed to Iyer his bewilderment in the face of all the contradictory philosophic doctrines. What should he believe?

> This was the crucial moment when I judged him fit for initiation into the ultimate path—

Maharaja generously financed Iyer's 1937 trip to Europe, but at the end of his lecture tour of various countries, Iyer again disposed of a considerable sum, which he donated to the British Institute of Philosophy for the creation of a course on "Inquiry into Truth." He confided to Brunton at the time of Krishnaraja's death (August 3, 1940) that he had accepted the position of Rajaguru not for personal gain, but as an act of service. He could benefit the people of Mysore through the influence he would exert on the sovereign, bringing material help through wise measures he inspired. And he could serve the world at large through his teaching, which the monks and Brunton would carry to the West.

[159] Iyer, as reported in Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[160] Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[161] Ibid.

> hitherto I had played the pundit, merely explaining the Upanishads in terms of Scholasticism, quoting authorities.... But the utterance of these doubts revealed that the time had come to give him something higher.[162]

The intimate nature of the spiritual bond between the Maharaja and his Rajaguru also appears in the following anecdote from Brunton's personal notes. Iyer was away from Mysore when the Maharaja died:

> [Iyer's] disciples bemoaned this fact but said that perhaps His Holiness concentrated on the mental picture of Subrahmanya Iyer before dying and this was just as good. Subrahmanya Iyer replied: "You have fallen into error. You still think the idea is one thing and the object is a second, as shown by your use of the word 'present.' When the whole world is an idea, how can you say any part of it is not 'present?' It is all present as idea in the mind—*Hence I was present in His Holiness' mind*. The notion of a separate, outside external object and an inside idea is quite incorrect.[163]

Thus Iyer was not content merely to teach mentalism in his classroom. His mentalistic outlook permeated his daily life, and this was an important part of his teaching:

> When His Holiness was worried by family and state troubles, I advised him: "Look upon them all as ideas—know that the whole world is an idea, and therefore within yourself. Ideas are transitory. So why worry about them? Just know they are mere ideas, and thus you can be at peace."[164]

Iyer's unique personality and his privileged position as the sovereign's private tutor evoked some enmity. In fact, he appears to have been isolated from both Indian and Western intellectual circles of the time, the target of envy and calumnies. Brunton noted:

> The Maharaja received more than twenty letters, denouncing and vilifying Iyer. He gave them to him with an amused smile, saying: "Here, this is what people think of you."[165]

Furthermore, Iyer's scientific turn of mind disturbed the more traditional pandits. Thus the Principal of the Indian Institute of Philosophy, Mr. Malkani, agreed with Iyer that "Vedanta must be based on reason, not on revelation" but objected that he himself "[did not] see the need for a scientific method in the study of Vedanta."[166] Iyer refused an

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[162] Iyer, as reported in Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[163] Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[164] Iyer, as reported in Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[165] Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[166] Ibid.

invitation to teach at the Institute.[167]

As for Iyer's reception in the West, Brunton's Mysore notes are revealing of European cultural attitudes:

> We traveled together to the International Congress of Philosophy in 1937. Subrahmanya Iyer achieved little in the way of influencing European thinkers towards Vedanta. Later he said ruefully: "They thought I was a black man and therefore could know nothing. They looked down upon me—although very kindly—as a primitive man who could not possibly have anything to teach them."[168]

In the desert of incomprehension which seems to have surrounded Brunton's mentor, we found nevertheless a few positive appreciations, for instance this one from C.R. Srinivasan, Assistant of Philosophy at the University of Annamalai:

> Subrahmanya Iyer is the greatest Indian thinker today, a direct disciple of the late Nrsimha Bharati of Sringeri. His is the rational position of Vedanta, which includes and assimilates all the possible conclusions of science, religion and philosophy.[169]

And Iyer's student Swami Siddheswarananda wrote:

> I still hold that Subrahmanya Iyer had only one more incarnation to take, that he was a genius for intellectual understanding of the most esoteric truths. He had been initiated into the traditional esoteric doctrine of Shankara, which is not written in the books but only taught in private.[170]

The correspondence between the Swami and Brunton portrays Iyer as brilliant and honest, morally upright, but also revealing an uncompromising and abrupt character little inclined to indulge human shortcomings:

> If Mr. Subrahmanya Iyer was less violent against religion and mysticism, he would have had a very great success. Maharshi was never against something. However, but for Mr. Iyer's training, I for my part would not have been able to appreciate a living Buddha, a living Shankara like Maharshi.... On the intellectual level, keeping aside my personal admiration

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[167] Another anecdote illustrates the differences which existed between Iyer and the other pandits and professors: Iyer had suggested including Bradley's work *Logic of the Unconscious* in the philosophy courses at the University of Mysore, and witnessed an overwhelming refusal by the professors, including Professor Hiriyana, with whom Brunton had many philosophical private discussions. Iyer declared bitterly to Brunton, "So they rejected my advice and I decided to keep quiet in the future." – Ibid.

[168] Brunton's notes, Brunton Archive.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid.

> and love for Mr. Iyer, I have never seen his like. The Vedanta he has taught us cannot become a propagandist teaching. One has to become so impersonal in one's attitude to understand the *avasthatraya*! But the world is sustained and nourished by the emotional and affective reactions that can come only within the jurisdiction of a single state. It is so difficult for a Western mind to make the difference between "experience" and "realization" and I am so tired of hearing the so-called "experiences" of people! But I cannot and will not, like Mr. Iyer, decry them. People have a necessity to live on the compensatory plane; you cannot take away the crutches on which a lame man holds on to life, it would be an act of cruelty to destroy his crutches. This is my criticism against Krishnamurti and Mr. Iyer. But I remain always a very faithful *chela* of Mr. Iyer with my spiritual lineage tracing back to Ramakrishna and his disciples and Maharshi and his teachings.[171]

We might suggest here that Paul Brunton, being more of a realist and natural mystic, was able to present Iyer's teachings in a less purely intellectual form, enhancing their appeal by giving greater importance to intuition and feeling.

Another quality which Brunton said made Iyer a “living Socrates” was his modesty. He wished to be known only as a “seeker of Truth,” and refused during his lifetime to publish a book or even a collection of his articles.[172]

3.4 Indian Master and British Disciple

What was Subrahmanya Iyer’s influence on Paul Brunton? Early on, it was very strong, which is explained in part by the circumstances of their meeting.[173] In 1936-37 as well as in the years following, Brunton had reached a stage where he felt he had mastered yoga, i.e. the practice of meditation. To begin with, he no longer felt he had much to learn about it. In addition he was put off by the denigrating campaign orchestrated against him at the Ramana ashram, and he was thus inclined to distance himself emotionally and intellectually from the world of yoga. If his first stay in India had clearly been under the influence of Ramana Maharshi, the third would be under that of Subrahmanya Iyer. (The second might be seen as a period of transition.) Iyer entered Brunton's life at a time when the latter had formulated questions for which he could not find answers:

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[171] Swami Siddheswarananda, letter to Brunton from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Center in Gretz, March 25, 1956.

[172] Brunton saw two reasons for Iyer’s reluctance to publish: first, Iyer's wish to protect Krishnaraja's reputation as a devoutly religious ruler (The revelation of the Maharaja's agnosticism concerning the existence of a personal God would disturb the Indian public.); second, the fear (inherent in all initiated Brahmins at that time, Brunton noted) of further upsetting the masses by openly declaring that Ultimate Truth is beyond the external forms of collective and ritualistic religious practice.

[173] Brunton actually met Iyer relatively late, in April 1937, seven years after he had met Ramana.

> My plaint is that for long I was told by the Indian Advaitins, by their holy men and even by texts, that the universe does not exist or, if it does seem to, it is merely an illusion. The final declaration which really put me, as a Western inquirer, off Advaita came later; it was that God too was an illusion, quite unreal. Had they not left it at that but taken the trouble to explain how and why all this was so, I might have been convinced from the start. But no one did. I had to wait until I met Subrahmanya Iyer for the answer.[174]

With the help of Iyer, the British author was made more aware of the negative aspects of certain yogic and mystical circles:

> What I have seen in these circles convinces me that a mild insanity pervades many of them, from much reputed gurus to just beginning disciples. It was a man of the sharpest intelligence, of the most acute psychological insight, who first pointed out this fact to me. V. Subrahmanya Iyer illustrated his thesis again and again during our textual explorations and personal excursions in India itself, but it was found still valid when I continued the investigation in Europe and America.[175]

Later Brunton would criticize Iyer's intellectualism, judging it dry and excessive. Seeking balance and harmony, Brunton wished to maintain in his own world view the mysticism disdained by the Maharaja's philosophy master:

> Reject the one-sided narrowness of V.S. Iyer and John Levy, successor to Atmananda, which makes them reject mystic experience and mystic feeling. For then the intellect alone is made to serve the quest so that the result is hardly a balanced one. Fanaticism is too limited a way to trace down truth. Mysticism has its valuable service to render on its own level in feeling and devotion.[176]

Brunton's attitude towards Iyer was nonetheless respectful, that of a student or disciple towards his master. He would address him as “My respected guru,” “My dear Mr. Iyer,” and “Reverend Guru.”

Iyer’s influence on Paul Brunton’s thought was in my opinion twofold: intellectual and ethical. Iyer introduced the criterion of reason into Brunton’s quest for Truth, by presenting Vedantic metaphysics from a scientific point of view: i.e. he questioned yoga as the only approach to Reality. Brunton's position in regard to mysticism (the path of yoga, of intimate, individual meditation) would be that of a sympathetic critic: mysticism is good in its proper place; it is, in fact, a preparation for metaphysical research.

Two of Brunton’s most rigorously intellectual works, *Indian Philosophy and Modern*

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[174] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 366.

[175] Ibid., XI, 11, 47.

[176] Ibid., XI, 1, 52.

Culture (1939), dedicated to Iyer, and *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (1941), were from all evidence written under the influence of the Rajaguru. Brunton's letters to his master from the years 1939-40 are eloquent on this point. Here are some extracts:

> May I take this opportunity to tell you how much I miss the Advaita class? The surgical operations which you have been performing on us have cut away some of the film of cataract over our eyes. We are not so blind as formerly. We are able to evaluate ideas and things more correctly.

And:

> The more I study Vedanta the more I realize how I have wasted precious years in having regarded Yoga as a stop and not as a step.

In addition, this philosophic inquiry into Truth would for Iyer have ethical implications, leading one to selfless service to humanity; this clearly impressed the British author:

> You have so constantly held before us the ideal of doing some service to humanity before we die, that we must be very poor material if we do not respond to your teaching, so my gratitude goes out towards you.

In fact, Iyer's teachings would serve to balance the influence of Ramana Maharshi, giving Brunton a rational, metaphysical framework which would complete the interior, intuitive experiences received through the Sage of Tiruvannamalai. After his return from Europe in 1937, Brunton had the idea to reconcile the teachings of his two spiritual mentors. Writing to Swami Siddheshwarananda from London, he declared:

> I wrote and told [Iyer] that I intended in the future to reconcile both Mysticism and Vedanta.[177]

Writing back to Brunton several years later, the Swami replied:

> You have got it from Mr. Iyer and it will be so nice that the teaching of Maharshi is presented by you in such a way as to fit with the Karika metaphysics![178]

We will examine Brunton's fusion of mysticism and Vedanta in detail in Part II of this work. In brief, he would advocate the cultivation of a latent faculty he called *insight*, which combines the abstract reason of the metaphysician with the mystic's intuition, while transcending both.

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[177] Letter from 1938; copy in author's possession.

[178] Letter dated March 25, 1956, already quoted earlier.

Regardless of their later differences, the English author was always aware of how greatly fortunate had been his long association with the Rajaguru:

> Please, try to spare time for me because I am devoting 1939 to the work on the true Vedanta which is so urgently needed in the West; your cooperation will be of inestimable value.

The contact between such a master and a gifted pupil could not help but be stimulating to both; this is shown by the extracts below. Brunton declared:

> Subrahmanya Iyer invigorated my mind and gave me the courage to question the interpretation which, in accordance with Indian tradition, I had hitherto put upon my mystical experiences.[179]

In turn, the Advaitin master[180] said to Brunton:

> You have a very great and important work before you in introducing Vedanta to the West. I want to prepare you to do this, so that my life may bear some fruit. You grasp my explanations almost instantly, whereas even Sir Radhakrishnan, whom I knew when he was here in Mysore as a Professor, could not grasp things so quickly as you. Moreover, your work in yoga and meditation has prepared you for the higher truth, and your mind is ready and concentrated.[181]

It is enlightening to discover Iyer's advice to Brunton—judicious advice which showed his knowledge of psychology and the workings of society as well as of metaphysics, advice which would generally be followed by the British author for the rest of his literary and spiritual career.

One suggestion of Iyer's which appears in Brunton's Indian notes with great frequency and insistence, is that of ideological neutrality. In reading the following, let us note that later in his life Brunton was to choose the deliberately neutral term "philosophy" to indicate the teachings expressed by the whole of his writings:

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[179] Indian notes, Brunton Archive.

[180] Iyer, a pure Advaitin, had on his personal stationery a monogram illustrating the *Jnana-mudra* or *Advaita-mudra*—a hand with the index finger touching the thumb, the other three fingers extended—accompanied by this verse of the *Isa Upanishad*: "How can there be delusion or suffering when oneness is realized?" The meaning of the mudra is that one cannot know Truth if one has not mastered the analysis of the three states of consciousness, *avasthatraya*. As Iyer explains it, "the bent forefinger touching the thumb means that when you separately stretch out the fingers, i.e. examine the three states, there is a seer or *drik* which knows them, symbolized by the index finger; this is *Turiya*, the fourth. The touching of the forefinger with the thumb means that this fourth state is one with the *Atman* or Self."

[181] These quotes and those that follow are from Brunton's Indian notes, Brunton Archive.

> Do *not* label yourself. If you say Hinduism, opponents will rise up and say Christianity. If you say Vedanta philosophy, they will oppose it with Western philosophy. Vivekananda's Vedanta was welcome and triumphant at the Chicago's World Fair of 1893. But at New York's World Fair in 1938, no exhibit or lecture by the Vedanta or Hindu Faith (or indeed any non-Christian and non-Judaic faith) was allowed. Thus the Ramakrishna Mission being labeled as a sect aroused suspicion and enmity. Therefore, form no cult, tie no label. Be forewarned and thus forearmed.

There was also a vigorous warning:

> If you put P.B. on a pedestal, others will put XX as a reaction. If you start a Shankara day of celebration, then the Madhvites will start a Madhva day. It is therefore best to keep quiet and not start a sect, cult or movement or following.

Thirty or forty years later, Brunton in his *Notebooks* would address a similar warning to his readers. As we have noted before, throughout the course of his life he refused to found an organization or to be considered a guru.

Another piece of advice that appears frequently in the discussions between teacher and student concerns the attitude Brunton should take in regard to yoga.[182] Reading the repeated emphasis on moderation and discretion, one better understands Brunton's inner itinerary.[183] He was at that time working on *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (published 1941), and would regularly show his manuscript to Iyer for criticism and suggestions. The Rajaguru wrote:

> Chapters 7 and 8 ... reveal the ability to present philosophy in an intelligible and attractive manner, in a way I have never seen in any volume. There is no doubt that you have an inner gift for understanding and teaching philosophy.

Later, in his *Notebooks*, Brunton reintegrated yoga—but this time in its broader sense, including its ethical dimension (*yama* and *niyama*) and selfless action (*karma-yoga*)—in his philosophic teaching, harmoniously combining it with metaphysics.

For the moment, Iyer, seeing Brunton turn away from yoga, gave him some personal advice: yoga would appeal to 99% of readers, while pure Vedantic philosophy would not reach more than 1%; thus he should continue writing about yoga—to earn a living as well as to help readers:

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[182] The term "yoga" as used in this work designates the group of meditation techniques brought into play in the three last "limbs" of Patanjali's Yoga sutras: *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (contemplation), *samadhi* (absorption) (for Eliade, = "enstasy").

[183] In the 1940s he may have gone through a crisis of rejection of mysticism and yoga. (In 1939 the disappointment caused by Maharshi's Ashram was completely fresh in his mind.) During this period he put a higher value on metaphysical reasoning, on the rational scientific inquiry into perceptions, and into the concepts of matter, time, and space.

> This is not hypocrisy; it is recognition that there are gradual stages of development of the mind and acceptance of the fact. You may teach individuals who are ripe at any time.

He suggested that Brunton allude in his writings on yoga to a higher level of Truth, thus instilling in readers a thirst for this Truth:

> The Vedantic idea is to give people what suits them; to do so is no error.

All of this shows that despite his elevated and subtle metaphysical views, Iyer was also pragmatic. He would insist repeatedly, "Vedanta is practical." It was important to reach a wide readership, and for this, one could sweeten the pill of Vedantic metaphysics[184] with the syrup of mysticism, appealing to feelings while allowing the lofty ideas to get through. Iyer tried to convince Brunton, who at the time was thinking of starting an esoteric magazine called *The Sphinx*, to be distributed in India and the West, to include in it both philosophic and religious elements, as the great ones of the past had done in their teachings:

> It will never be possible to teach Advaita to the many. It will always be only for the few metaphysically minded who are and always will be rare. Hence to preserve the written tradition, the Upanishads, the Gita and Shankara's works have all deliberately mixed up the esoteric and the exoteric between the same covers. You once disagreed with me when I advised you to devote the magazine to *both* mysticism and philosophy, otherwise hardly anyone will buy it. Now I show you that the greatest *jnanis* of the past have mixed the two together in order to keep the highest teaching in circulation in order to benefit the largest number of people.

Here once again we see the ideal of active humanitarian service given to Brunton by his master. While Iyer proceeded to derive ethical principles from Vedantic metaphysics—which could be problematic, as we will show later on—the larger social context of Brunton's quest also exerted its influence. The Second World War confined him in India until its end. There, echoes of the war's horrors and of the Nazi occupation of Europe reached Iyer and Brunton at their tranquil retreat in Mysore. They could not remain indifferent. The indirect experience of this terrible period impressed Brunton deeply, and motivated him with a sense of urgency to serve suffering humanity in his own way, by making a liberating knowledge available as widely as possible. The last book he would publish during his lifetime, *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*, written in the post-war years, is the work of someone who had survived a cataclysm to exhort his surviving contemporaries to heed the lessons of the tragedy and change their ways.

Iyer had already encouraged Brunton in this direction. He had written to him, probably in 1939:

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[184] Brunton heeded this advice (see Ch. 4 below for a discussion of his concept of the Overself).

> I am very anxious that you should write and publish something to soften the hearts of men in Europe. It is most painful to see how women, children and men are undergoing inhuman suffering. This is not the time for thoughtful people to enter caves and hide themselves on mountains to seek their own peace or commune with the Reality confining this bliss to their individual self.

These remarks bring us to Iyer's ethical and political views, filling out the portrait of one whose influence on Brunton would be almost all-encompassing. Here again, we find that the Rajaguru, far from being a gentle dreamer removed from the world's realities, at times displayed remarkable insight and a rare impartiality during a period when nationalist passions were rife in India.

What then were the ethical principles championed by Iyer? They arose directly from the essential Vedantic axioms found in the *mahavakya*: *Tat tvam asi* (You are That) and *Aham brahmasmi* (I am Brahman):

> Vedanta's fundamental principle is that because there is no such thing as the "I," you cannot live for yourself, whether "you" are an individual, a family, a community, a nation or a race. It is not truth and therefore such separation will go, even though it will take a long time.

Thus the great lesson of Vedanta is the necessity of renouncing individual, familial, national and racial egoism—knowing that egoism is born of an illusion, an erroneous belief in the reality of a separate "me": those who realize that *Brahman* is everywhere are no longer separate from others. But a global unity of the human race would have to arrive slowly, through education and the ripening of individuals, rather than by forced conversion: "Everything which is achieved through violence, sooner or later fails." He added:

> Vedanta wants to trace out the interwoven and united character of all life. Hitler's mining of the British seas raised the cost of British medicines threefold to the poor peasant in Mysore. Thus all the world is inter-related and inter-connected. We cannot really separate ourselves from others. Science has now perceived this.[185]

One can thus understand Iyer's opposition to using Kanada, Mysore's local language,[186] as the official medium for teaching at its University. No modern scientific literature had been published in Kanada. Iyer vigorously favored using English[187] throughout India, over local languages or even Hindi. He saw in English the possibility

[185] These conclusions, unfolding from a Vedantic framework, agree with the holistic point of view of such present-day thinkers as Fritjof Capra.

[186] Now the state of Karnataka.

[187] An opinion shared by the Maharaja's Prime Minister, Mirza Ismail, described earlier.

of a universal language, the use of which would open India to modern science and culture.

In response to Iyer's view that one must first realize Vedanta's metaphysical premises in order to practice its ethical injunctions, one could object that only a few then would be able to put them into practice, given the subtlety of its metaphysics. And if virtue flows from knowing the Truth, practicing the virtues can nevertheless be a way and method for attaining that Truth, helping to dissolve egoism and egotism, and preparing one to perceive the illusory character of the 'I.'

Let us now consider Iyer's political attitudes. Brunton had met Iyer in 1937, ten years before Indian independence. He found Iyer's political position to be clearly distinct from that of Gandhi[188] and other nationalist leaders of the time. Unlike them, Iyer hailed the British occupation as beneficial.[189]

In his view, it was Britain's karmic duty to protect India and strengthen her ability to defend herself. He clearly saw the danger posed by civil war, and also felt the degree to which traditional Indian social structures were ill adapted to the modern world. Hinduism's socio-religious laws were not inherently sacred; they had been made by Brahmins, and could be unmade if necessary:

> We Hindus who sin against the *pañcama* (untouchables) are no better than Hitler, who has declared that it is "a sin against God to regard all men as equal because the Negroes are an inferior race."

This brings us to Iyer's philosophy of living, a practical wisdom which prefigured Brunton's view of philosophy and the philosopher in the modern world:

> Wisdom lies in balancing new and old, harmoniously but fearlessly.

Being too attached to tradition (like Lanza del Vasto and Guénon), was for Iyer as foolish as rejecting it outright for the sake of the new:

> The philosopher realizes the truth that the world is changing and that this change is inevitable, a cosmic process. Therefore, he regards as fools those who reject all modern innovations. Take the case of India—we see the caste system breaking down all around us. Yet the laws of Manu were enacted for a society which was based on rigid caste arrangements. Today we have eighty million Muslims in India who were not here in Manu's

[188] Iyer criticized Gandhi's socio-economic vision as backwards-looking and destined to lead India back to the Middle Ages from which British influence had just awakened her.

[189] "The coming of the English was a blessing for India," Iyer told Brunton. The English language was enormously beneficial for India. The English should stay, but over time give India "dominion" status. The West could help India to develop, while benefiting from the wealth of India's philosophy.

> time, we have some millions of Indian Christians; what is to be done with them? ... But the greatest change of all is that we are living in a *democratic* era when the very notion of caste is against the spirit of the times, whereas it was the exact spirit of the times thousands of years ago. Hence the philosopher is flexible in mind and would adapt to social forms, to the needs of the time in which he lives. It is rubbish to talk of a social arrangement which must last till all eternity. There is no such thing in Nature and man can't create it. Change, *maya*, is continuous. The philosopher will therefore seek out what is good for the *present* use in ancient forms and then not hesitate to reject the rest, whilst he will add new materials particularly suited to contemporary needs.

We conclude this chapter with a remark of Brunton's which alludes, in our opinion, to his relationship with Subrahmanya Iyer:

> Destiny determined that the years of my most critical awakening to the necessity of a complete and radical alteration of my world-view should coincide with the tragic years of the [Second] world war.[190]

As we know, Brunton was in Mysore during this period, and *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, reflecting this new orientation, was written under Iyer's influence. Thus, the "radical alteration" of his world-view referred to above was, beyond any doubt, the fruit of his encounter with the philosophy master of the Maharaja of Mysore.

[190] *Notebooks*, VIII, 3, 136.

PART II: THE QUEST FOR TRUTH

Introduction

Paul Brunton studied with several Vedantic or Neo-Vedantic masters, and in my opinion it was Advaita Vedanta which was the predominant influence in the formation of his philosophic world-view. I would like to begin this study of Brunton's philosophy by examining his two-fold criticism of non-dualist Vedanta, a philosophy to which he nevertheless clearly remained faithful on one essential point:

> I am an Advaitin on the fundamental point of nonduality of the Real.... [1]

Brunton's elaboration of his concept of the Overself and his doctrine of mentalism were in fact attempts to remedy what he perceived as two weak points in the Vedantic system.

His first criticism of Advaita was directed at its extreme attitude, which gave exclusive value to Ultimate Reality. This view resulted in a radical devaluation of our human empirical reality:

> Vedanta is unsatisfying partly because it is too jerky. It jumps abruptly from the finite and physical individual to the ineffable and unutterable Absolute itself. It swings from one extreme to another. It fails to recognize that there is and must be an intermediary—the Overself.[2]

His second criticism of Advaita was for its failure to give a rational explanation of the phenomenal world:

> Vedanta fails to explain the world[3] or else transfers its creation to man.[4]

and for the dogmatic way in which it went about postulating Non-Duality:

> The term nonduality remains a sound in the air when heard, a visual image when read. Without the key of mentalism it remains just that. How many Vedanta students and, be it said, teachers interpret it aright?[5]

Brunton's originality lay in the way he would elaborate answers to the following two questions:

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[1] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 2, 141.
[2] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 90.
[3] "All the late Advaitins, even the most speculative, are aware of the relativity of the doctrine itself, a mere device ... at the disposition of the *guru*. 'We don't explain the world, we explain it away,' their successors would say today." (Michel Hulin, *Le Principe de l'ego dans la pensee indienne classique: la notion d'ahamkara*, p. 277)
[4] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 370. The second criticism made here seems to concern the doctrine of *ekajivavada* (integral solipsism, developed by Prakasatman, Prakasananda,and Sarvajnatman). We will not pursue this point,as it appears only very marginally in Brunton's writings.
[5] Ibid., XVI, 4, 1, 25.

1. How can one ascend from the finite individual to the ineffable Absolute in a way which would be accessible to contemporary seekers instinctively attached to the idea of individuality? Furthermore, can traditional Vedanta, with its purely negative view of the world (which served to justify ascetic renunciation) lead to a balanced living of Non-Duality in our time?

2. How can a satisfactory explanation of the world be given to modern minds attuned to scientific rigor? Contemporary individuals are too conditioned to believe in the external world's reality to reject it in favor of simple faith in the sole reality of Brahman.

If the tenet of Non-Duality is to be presented to modern minds, it must be done by means of a rational argument which arrives at an ultimate unity behind the apparent duality of subject and world—in a way which satisfies the modern scientific temperament.

Brunton responded to the first of the above questions by introducing a concept which could serve as an intermediary between the finite human and the Absolute. He coined a new term for it: *the Overself*. In response to the second question, he formulated an idealistic doctrine of perception and phenomena which he called *mentalism*. His doctrine of mentalism was intended to explain Non-Duality by reducing subject and object, in a purely rational way, to the one stuff of which both are made: Mind.

To better understand Brunton's ideas, I thought it preferable to begin by examining his doctrine of mentalism.

Brunton's way of proceeding corresponds to that of Subrahmanya Iyer. For Iyer, Vedantic logic implied that an inquiry into the nature of the world should come before any inquiry into the nature of the Self:

> Vedanta, unlike the yogin or the mystic, does not begin its inquiry with the mind. We begin with external objects, with the world which surrounds you. This is like science.[6]

And also:

> Do not be satisfied with rituals, yoga etc. which are good in their own way, but inquire. Into what? Brahman and Atman are things you can never see. So do not inquire into them. Inquire into the world around you, which you can see.... So first we deal with the known and the seen, this inquiry leads up to the unknown in the end.[7]

It was also the method adopted by Gaudapada in his *Karika* on the *Mandukya Upanishad*: his chapter on the unreality of the external world (ch. II: *Vaitathya-Prakarana*) precedes the one on the identity of the individual Self with the Absolute (ch. III: *Advaita-Prakarana*). One of the constants of Iyer's teaching was his emphasis on the necessity of first reflecting on the question:

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[6] The quotes which follow are from Brunton's notes of discussions with Iyer in Mysore; Brunton Archive, Wisdom's Goldenrod.

[7] This manner of proceeding from the known to the unknown, by trial and error, shows how Iyer would not begin with the dogmatic affirmations of *Sruti* (revealed scripture), but rather preferred to employ patient, rational philosophic inquiry.

"What is the world" in order to arrive at a realization of the supreme *Brahman*. He insisted that this was the very attitude of Gaudapada,[8] Shankara, and their followers, whereas it seems basically to be a modern view reflecting a scientific attitude:[9]

> *Vivekachudamani*[10] V, 63 says: "Without knowing and examining the external world, you can't know Truth, as the idea that the external world exists, won't go. It can go only by an inquiry into the external world."[11]

In addition, Iyer declared:

> You can never understand what is meant by *Maya* unless you study external objects, because it is said (*Gita***,** ch. XIII): "I show myself in both matter and the knower of matter."[12]

And also (in regard to the *Gita*, XIII, 34):

> Without a knowledge of matter, realization is impossible: for it is explained further ... that matter is non-existent apart from mind. It is an idea. What is an idea? It is that which comes and goes out of the mind and disappears into me. Hence it is mind only.

In reality, the early Advaitins did not appear to be preoccupied with understanding the world around them. Concerned rather exclusively by the *jiva's* bondage in *samsara*, they devoted their energies to seeking the *jiva's* liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Having decided once and for all that the nature of the world was indefinable, or *maya*, they put the world in parentheses and focused on the only matter worth serious interest: the identification of the *jiva* with *Atman/Brahman*—the crowning achievement of an ascetic *sadhana* whose aim was final

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[8] It is true that one finds in Gaudapada a method of rational thought; yet he also took the *Sruti* as starting point (ch. I: "Agama-Prakarana"). It is known that Gaudapada verges on Buddhist Vijnanavadin idealism: in the *Karika* (IV, 65-66), he affirms that the waking state is comparable to that of dream, for in both, objects of perception do not exist externally to or independently of the consciousness that perceives them. But this position, which is also that of Buddhist idealism, was refuted by Shankara in his commentary on the *Brahma-Sutra* (2, 2, 28-32). We will return to this apparent contradiction in our examination of Brunton's doctrine of mentalism.

[9] From Brunton's notes on Iyer's course on the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

[10] *The Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, attributed to Shankara, 63.

[11] The original first half of this verse is: *akrtva drsyavilayam ajnatva tattvam atmanah brahmasabdair kuto muktir*, which Swami Madhavananda translates as:

"Without causing the objective universe to vanish and without knowing the truth of the Self, how is one to achieve liberation by the mere utterance of the word *Brahman*?"

The Swami comments: "By realizing one's identity with *Brahman*, the One without a second, in *samadhi* (i.e. in trance state), one becomes the pure *Cit* (Absolute Knowledge), and the duality of subject and object vanishes altogether."

Here we can see:

1) Iyer's extrapolation: Shankara's text only recognizes the necessity of making the objective world disappear (= *akrtva drsyavilayam*) in order to experience *Brahman*.

2) the modern and original character of Iyer's interpretation, which disagrees with the translators more traditional one. According to Iyer, the sense of the reality of an objective world lapses as the result of rational metaphysical inquiry. According to the translator, it lapses as the result of yogic practices taken to their conclusion. In the first case, the intellect functions at its maximum, in the second it is reduced to silence.

[12] We could not find the corresponding verse; perhaps this is a very free interpretation of verse 2: *ksetrajnam capi mam viddhi sarvaksetresu* = "And know, I am myself the knower of the field behind all the fields."

Liberation, *moksa*. All in all, the classic Vedantic thought process is neither scientific nor even philosophic; it seems purely soteriological. One has only to read the following declaration, which continues as a leitmotif throughout Subba Rao's[13] voluminous book on the Vedantic method, to be convinced:

> The concern of the *Upanishads* is to communicate to sincere inquirers direct experience of the supreme reality as their own Self—that supreme reality which is non-dual, has no particular features, and is beyond the range of speech and mind ... Their function is to communicate that reality in its true nature, beyond the play of the means of knowledge and their objects, merely by putting an end to the superimposition onto it of attributes it does not possess.[14]

A rationalist by temperament and a mathematician by training, Iyer wished to unite modern scientific thought and traditional soteriology:

> Science will prove the idea-nature of the world without our Vedantic arguments, but both combined are irresistible.[15]

More precisely, he wished to make the soteriological quest dependent on scientific enquiry ("Without a knowledge of matter, realization is impossible"). In that, and in spite of his repeated declarations of loyalty to Shankara, he was a typically modern Vedantin, or perhaps a Neo-Vedantin clothed in Shankarian orthodoxy. Brunton followed him on this point.

In his two-volume magnum opus, Brunton adopts the same approach that I have taken here. *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, reflecting Iyer's views quite faithfully, is devoted to an inquiry into the nature of the world. Its sequel, *The Wisdom of the Overself*, contains more original thought, and in response to the question: Who am I? introduces the concept of the Overself.

[13] See Footnote on Y. Subba Rao and S. Iyer in Part I, ch.3.
[14] *The Method of the Vedanta*, pp. 1 and 3.
[15] Brunton notes: Iyer on the *Mandukya Upanishad*.

CHAPTER 4: INQUIRING INTO THE WORLD: MENTALISM

The three parts of the doctrine of mentalism are: 1) its critique of materialism (epistemological and not ethical), 2) its construction of a cosmogony, and 3) its rational elucidation of the Advaitic tenet of Non-Duality.

4.1 Critiquing Materialism

Brunton's philosophic critique of materialism begins with an analysis of perception and ends with a critique of the concept of matter which recalls Berkeley's doctrine of immaterialism.

4.1.1 A Study of Perception

One section of *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* is devoted to a study of perception. Brunton adopts a deliberately scientific approach, proceeding like Iyer from the known to the unknown. Focusing on the sense of vision, he analyses the processes of perception from the points of view of physics, physiology, and psychology.

We begin by paraphrasing Brunton's argument, a useful prelude to the critical reflections which follow:

From Sensation to Perception

According to the physicist, what we see in reality is the light reflected by objects. The light rays broken by objects into varying frequencies are interpreted by the eye as the colors of which we are then conscious. Thus, a particularly striking discovery of physics is that colors are not inherent in the objects we perceive; they are a mental interpretation, and are thus, in the end, located in our mind.

The physiologist says that light rays are reflected by the object onto the retina of the eye, where a minuscule, inverted, two-dimensional image of the object is reproduced. This retinal image is then transmitted by the optic nerve to the brain in the form of a coded message.

The neurologist and psychologist tell us that the brain then decodes and interprets the retinal image through an unconscious mental process. The conscious perception of the object comes last. It is only from the moment when consciousness intervenes that the object comes to exist for us. This object is in fact *reducible to a collection of sensory qualities or* perceptions—color, consistency, taste, smell, etc. It is not possible to separate the object from its characteristics. It does not exist apart from them. These qualities, in turn, do not exist for us except as sensations—sight, touch, taste, smell, etc.[16]

Sensations, in their turn, are but experiences of our own consciousness, i.e. *states of consciousness*, which we instinctively attribute to external objects. Nevertheless, reflection shows us that colors, for example, are not in the so-called material objects, but in our mind. Is the bitter taste of an unripe fruit in

[16] Sir James Jeans, *Physics and Philosophy*, p. 197.

the fruit or in our mind? The only thing we can be sure of is that the "taste" of the fruit exists within our own mental apparatus, thus in us. Although we say that the fruit itself is bitter, to say that the bitter taste is in the fruit is an unproven supposition. Our sensations are in fact the first and last things we know of an object. We live in our own sensations and cannot leave our own private world. The incredible speed of the chain reaction sense/nerves/brain/mind is responsible for the certitude (perhaps, in fact, illusory) that we are in direct contact with an external object, *distinct from the image of it that we have made*.

A sensation is no longer divisible into simpler elements: it corresponds to an isolated quality of the object. We never receive isolated rough sensations, but they are always combined into a coherent, whole impression which is the result of the constructive work of the mind.

One could sum up the process of perception in the six following steps, of which we are only conscious of the last: a stimulus given to the sense organs by an "external" object; sensory impression; nerve transmission; cerebral response; unconscious mental response (the sensation); finally, the fully conscious perception.

However, a perception is more than a simple simultaneous combination of sensations. The important element of mental interpretation must be added to the rough message from the senses in order to convert the tiny, inverted and two-dimensional retinal image into the familiar object.

Brunton distinguishes four different contributions of the mind to the process of perception:

– That of the mind's innate power: the coordinating of rough material given by sensations (we are reminded of the coordinating function of *manas* ("mental faculty") in Samkhya and Vedanta).

– That of memory: association with similar past experience (cf. *citta*, the fourth function added by Vedanta to the three classic functions which constitute Samkhya's *antahkarana* ("internal organ"), which are respectively: *manas*, *ahamkara* ("egotism"), and *buddhi* ("intellect," "faculty which discriminates or determines").

– That of the imagination: anticipation of a new experience.

– That of the ego: personal interpretation (*ahamkara*).

All these operations, of which the first two are the most important, occur automatically, beyond the control of our will. As a result, what we see, concludes Brunton, is not the thing in itself, but *the thing in our mind*.

That perception is not only an affair of the sense organs was well known by Indian thinkers, notably Isvara Krsna, the author of *Samkhya Karika*, and the commentator Vacaspati Misra, author of *Samkhya-Tattva-Kaumudi*. The latter wrote:

> Every man first uses the external senses; then he considers (with the *manas*); he makes individual application, in referencing the objects to himself (with *ahamkara*); and, finally, he determines (with *buddhi*).[17]

[17] *Samkhya-Tattva-Kaumudi*, 23; Quoted by Tara Michael: *Introduction aux Voies de Yoga*, Editions du Rocher, 1980; page 43.

Vacaspati Misra,[18] in his interpretation of verses 27-28 of the *Samkhya-Karika*, introduced a distinction between pure sensorial apprehension, without intervention of the mind (called *alocana* or *nirvikalpaka pratyaksa*), and perception with mental intervention (called *savikalpaka pratyaksa*). The first is vague and indeterminate, the second is determined. Verse 28 seems to attribute the first to the sense organs themselves, without the intervention of *manas*:

> *Sabdadisu pancanam alocanamatram isyate vrttih*
> = "the simple consciousness of sound, etc. is known to be the function of the five (organs of knowing)."

The translator comments:

> One has said that the known perception was a function of mind (*manas*) which is the eleventh faculty (*indriya*); consequently, the other organs of knowing are only a function of indeterminate awareness.

Indeed, in perceptive knowledge, Samkhya distinguishes between a moment of doubt (*vikalpa*) (as to the true identity of the object) whose seat is *manas* (mind), and a moment of resolution of this doubt (*samkalpa*), which is achieved by the superior authority of *buddhi* (higher reason, intellect). Nevertheless, *manas* itself is already seen as endowed with *samkalpa* ("volition," "imagination," "intention" ...) in verse 27 of the *Samkhya Karikas*:

> Mind is of the nature of both (kinds of organs, of knowledge and of action); it is explicative.

Thus the *manas* not only passively reflects, it explains what is only implicit in the pure apprehension of the sense organs themselves; perhaps it even adds something to the raw material given by the senses.

> The verses quoted by Vacaspati would suggest that the forms (shapes) and characteristics are created or added by the mind to the original perception.[19]

Michel Hulin translates the term *samkalpa* as the "function of synthesis" of *manas*.[20] Whether one places knowledge (*savikalpaka*) on a level with *manas* or with *buddhi*, the mind's contribution to the process of perception was seen as decisive by Samkhya thinkers (and by the Vedantins, who would borrow from them the conception of *antahkarana*). It is a matter of

> a perception-action schema established very early in Indian thought, and having later become common to all Brahmanic *darsana*, if not to all Indian doctrines. The "cognitive organs" capture external data, the *manas* coordinates their sense messages (this is its function of *samkalpa*) and transmits them to the *buddhi*. In this latter, the entire situation comes to be mirrored, and from this picture (modified by the influence of traces of previous actions) directly results a certain reaction which, passing through the *manas* and the "organs of action," modifies the external world. This

[18] Quoted from the *Samkhya Karika* of Isvara Krsna, tr. and notes by S.S. Suryanarayana Sastri, Madras, 1930, pp. 60-63.
[19] Shastri, op.cit., p.61
[20] Ibid., index, p. 371.

"reflexive arc" functions automatically, but not blindly, for one supposes that the self-luminous *atman* (or the *purusa*) stands behind the mechanism and lends to it its awareness. As for the ego, ... [it is a matter of] a fundamentally ego-centered subject selecting from the external data that which concerns him *personally* and reacting according to his *own* passions and interests.[21]

Brunton was familiar with the Samkhya system, and one feels the influence of certain elements of this *darsana* (or of certain pan-Indian elements) in his scheme of perception, especially in regard to the multiple contribution of the mind to perceptive cognition: the power of synthesizing sensations, the role of memory, and the role of the ego. As for the factor of imagination, which unconsciously anticipates the forms and contents of perceptions to come, it seems reducible to the two factors of memory and ego, at least in normal perceptions—the subject anticipating the perception to come according to its egocentric expectations (fear or desire) and past experience. The imagination evidently plays a greater role in false perception, notably in mental projections, as we will see later. Finally, in the mentalist or idealist context, the model for perception is projection, and not reflection,[22] for the sensible content is furnished "from within." From this perspective, it is no longer the individual imagination, springing from egocentrism and personal memory, but a sort of collective imagination, found in the human species that is the capacity of the human mind in general to "subconsciously anticipate how his experience shall come, that is extended in a particular space-order and changing in a particular time-series."[23]

Having examined ordinary perception, we will now look briefly at false perception. Brunton pays tribute to the Indian philosophers for their study of false perception in *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*.[24] Again, we paraphrase his argument.

Three Kinds of Optical Illusions

A first class of optical illusions consists of those found in nature. Thus the table at which I am now seated is in reality a whirl of atomic particles in empty space.[25] All "material" objects belong in fact to this category: "Their existence is undeniable, but their appearance as lumps of matter is fundamentally illusory."[26]

The lesson of this collective hallucination is that we cannot trust our spontaneous interpretation of what is given to us by the senses. Our senses are very limited, and a number of phenomena escape them. Also, how we judge sense data is largely influenced by our sensory and psychological memory, and

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[21] Michel Hulin, *Le principe de l'ego dans la pensée indienne classique*, Paris, 1978, p. 82.
[22] We distance ourselves here from the Samkhya scheme in order to approach that of Vijnanavada Buddhism, for which "the form of the perceived object is not truly its own form, but a form projected onto the pure, inexpressible `that' that it is through the transcendental imagination or *kalpana*." (Hulin, op. cit., p. 293.)
[23] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 38.
[24] *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, p. 234. The Indians made a profound study of perceptive illusions, details of which we will explore later.
[25] Brunton remarks that this genre of collective illusion, not known in Shankara's time, is much better than the old example of rope/snake to illustrate that the perceived world is *maya* = mistaken appearance.
[26] *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*, p. 236.

therefore is often wrong. Brunton suggests an experiment involving three bowls of water[27] to show the degree to which our perceptions are actually a projection of memory. It would be profitable for us to reflect on the relativity of all things, and on the great gap which exists between what *appears* and what *is*.

Geometric illusions form a second category. When we perceive a geometric figure differently from the way it exists in reality, our eyes are not to blame: they have done their job, and the retinal image is correct. It is the judgement that the mind unconsciously makes of this image which is erroneous. This type of illusion proves the importance of the mind's work in human perception, powerful enough to make us see what it chooses, even by constructing a false image.

A third category of illusions, the most important for our study, is that of mental projections, corresponding to Vedanta's *adhyasa* or *adhyaropa* (= "superimpositions").

Brunton gives the example of the movie: a series of still images projected at high speed gives an impression of continuous movement.

Two other examples come from the Vedantic literature. First there is the example of the flaming torch, cited by Gaudapada in the fourth chapter of his *Karika*. A torch, whirled rapidly in the dark traces apparently lingering figures, for example, a figure eight.[28] "The figure is physically non-existent even when it appears to be seen."[29] An image in the observer's mind is seen as outside his body.

The familiar Vedantic example of the rope mistaken for a snake became Brunton's example of the bush one takes for a brigand. Where is this brigand? Evidently not in the bush. Not in the eyes, for the retinal image only reflects a bush. We must conclude that the brigand can be found only in the mind of the one who imagines him, and that it is superimposed by this same mind on the physical object actually perceived:

> The mind, therefore, must possess the amazing power to fabricate images which strikingly resemble ordinary percepts as well as the astonishing capacity to throw them seemingly outward into space.[30]

Thus, according to Brunton, understanding these illusory perceptions would reveal to us an invisible mechanism underlying our normal perception. Because it cannot be proven that an external object exists independently from the image we have of it, and from a study of mistaken perceptions showing the creative powers of the mind, as well as from certain other arguments (presented below), he concludes that the nature of the material world is mental. It is necessary to note that this conclusion required an audacious leap, for the radical idea of the material non-existence of an external object is as impossible to prove as that of its existence. Brunton's position is rooted in a conviction which is only secondarily intellectual, and is perhaps more primarily an intimation of a spiritual order, related to his mystical experiences. His presentation,

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[27] You plunge your right hand into cold water and the left into hot. Then if you put both hands into tepid water, the water feels cold to the right hand but hot to the left hand, due to their association with the previous sensations.
[28] The scientific explanation is that the retinal impressions are transmitted by the optic nerve to the brain so quickly that the brain can't separate them, and they fuse into the appearance of a continuous figure. Moreover, the image lingers on the retina for an instant after the perception itself.
[29] *The Hidden Teaching*, p. 247.
[30] Ibid., p. 249.

influenced by Iyer's, was built on spiritual presuppositions, and is intended to defend a spiritual conception of the world:[31]

> The tenets expounded in my book *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* are of a kind which become more understandable as they become more familiar. It is really their intellectual strangeness which accounts largely for their apparent absurdity. And this strangeness itself arises because mentalism was originally discovered through mystical experience and has had to be translated into non-mystical intellectual terms.[32]

4.1.2 Structuring Cognition: Space, Time, and Causality

Space and Time

Space and time are the indispensable conditions for our perception of external objects. Without them, this would not be possible.

Here again, we begin by summarizing Brunton's idealist mentalist position:

All knowledge involves differentiation—we cannot perceive objects unless they are separate from one another and from sense organs, in space. If all things were brought to the same point in space, they would be impossible to distinguish.

The same applies to time: we would not be able to perceive things if they were all crowded into the same instant. Time and space imply and depend on one another: we see objects separately in space, and successively in time. Also, the measuring of time implies movement in space, for example of the Earth and the Sun. Time is implied even in the thinking process: we can only experience thoughts in succession, i.e. in time. In the same way, it would be impossible to differentiate internal objects—thoughts—without time.

Brunton asks: are space and time objective factors, independent from and external to the subject?

Using an analysis of perception, the conclusions of Kant, and the consequences Einstein's theory of Relativity, he concludes that space and time are *not* objective factors.

We return to the process of seeing. It is impossible to perceive the real object, as only the retinal image of this object, minuscule, inverted, and deprived of a third dimension, is transmitted to the brain, in the form of a vibratory message. From these signals and from the movements of the eyeball, by which we determine the object's distance, position, and motion, the mind reconstructs an image and projects it outside the body; it must thus project, at the same time, the space necessary for its perception.

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[31] Berkeley, in his doctrine of immaterialism, began with theological presuppositions and wished to prove the existence of God; the materialists started from conscious or sometimes unconscious materialistic presuppositions.
[32] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 4, 279.

The power of the mind's projection has been clearly shown in our study of perceptive illusions. The stereoscope provides Brunton a relevant example of spatial illusion: two photographs combined are seen as a single image in three dimensions: the mind reconstructs the image in this way.

The study of illusions (particularly of mental projections, called "superimpositions" in Vedanta), hallucinations without objective physical basis, dreams, and hypnotic phenomena – reveals that objects and persons can be seen as if physical, and yet have but a mental existence. Thus one ought to mistrust the common belief that the mind's products are only experienced inside the body, while things exterior to the body are also exterior to the mind.

Optical illusions are precious opportunities to penetrate the mechanism of perception. Being in themselves perceptions, there is no reason, according to Brunton, to believe that they are intrinsically different from ordinary perceptions. Having established the mental character of illusions, Brunton concludes that all perceptions must, in the last analysis, be mental.

Certainly, he says, optical illusions seem subjective, while other kinds seem objective. But if we think of the illusions found in nature, the distinction disappears. If the objective reality of the chair consists of a swirl of atoms, where does the reality of the *experienced* chair, its inert form, its solid consistency, reside? Clearly, only in the mind of the perceiver.

Now, space being indispensable to the perception of objects (objectless space is as inconceivable as time without events or thoughts), the hypothesis that objects are mental projections implies that space, also, is a mental creation. To reinforce this point, Brunton cites the example of the congenitally blind person who suddenly recovers his sight: lacking visual memory, he at first has great difficulty judging distances between objects.

Brunton does not require that his readers comprehend the mathematical subtleties of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity; its implications for his mentalist philosophy are clear enough. We continue our paraphrase:

Einstein's work proved that time does not have a fixed, absolute value, but depends on the location of the observer. Thus two events perceived as simultaneous by one witness will appear as separated in time by another placed differently, for example on another planet moving at a different rate of speed. Time is therefore not an objective factor, immutable and universal, but is the interpretation of movement between two celestial bodies by an observing consciousness.

Time is thus doubly relative; to the position of bodies in space, and to the consciousness of the observer.

Einstein also demonstrated that an object's mass is convertible into energy. Now energy is a concept much less linked to space than is matter. The conception of space as being a vast void where material objects are suspended, definitely abolished by quantum physics, was already seriously undermined by Einstein's discoveries. The latter demonstrated that space was not always the same in all circumstances, and that it did not possess in itself a standard of reference, depriving Euclidean geometry of the absolute character it had held until then.

In conclusion, three points which emerge from the theory of Relativity seem important to this study:

– First, it is impossible to separate the observer from the objects observed; to do so is to deal in abstractions: subject and object are two ends of a stick, we cannot have one without the other. Quantum physics confirmed this, showing that measuring a particle inevitably implies a considerable modification of that particle.

– Secondly, it has been proven that time and space taken separately are devoid of intrinsic reality; they are relative to the observer's consciousness.

– Thirdly, time and space are inextricably bound together: they constitute a "space-time continuum." For the majority of physicists this continuum possesses an objective existence independent of the consciousness of the observer—this view does not support mentalism and consequently is not emphasized by Brunton, nor in general by those writers who attempt to tilt these discoveries of the new physics towards metaphysical idealism.

Brunton himself thought that mentalism explains this inextricable binding of space and time by showing that both are relative to the observer's mind, and that this continuum is inseparably linked to mind itself.

Thus Relativity would introduce a subjective factor within science,[33] showing that the structure of the world is partly dependent on our own mental structures. Among the principles that determine human knowledge, some exist in the human mind, and not outside of it in the universe.

Causality

The category of causality, like those of time and space, is seen by Brunton as inherent in the processes of human thinking, as one of our mental structures.[34] The empirical world is only intelligible to us only because it presents itself to us spontaneously organized by this triple matrix of time, space, and causality. Causality makes action and intersubjectivity in the world of practical experience possible; it is therefore out of the question to deny it on the empirical plane (which corresponds to Vedanta's realm of *vyavahara*). On the other hand, clinging to the idea of causality while ascending to the philosophic standpoint would mean a falling back into dualism, for cause implies effect. Thus the doctrines which postulate a creation of the world are themselves dualistic, the Creator being the cause, and manifestation the effect. Brunton sums up his position:

> It is all a matter of standpoint. From a practical standpoint the world is composed of many entities affecting and inter-reacting with each other in a causal manner. From the ultimate standpoint the world is Mind-essence, and this being the only existence cannot change its nature and come into a second birth; it cannot fall into the duality of cause and effect. But the Mind's finite productions, ideas, can do so.[35]

[33] However, let us repeat that, if there is a consensus among today's scientists that time and space taken separately are non-objective, there is on the other hand is no consensus that this is so for the four-dimensional space/time continuum.
[34] It seems superfluous to me to analyze this point of view here, as it is well known in Kant's work.
[35] *Notebooks*, XIII,1,4,75.

Is Mind the cause of its ideas? Yes and no. Yes, because it is the source from which they emanate. No, because an idea is not really a transformation of the mind. Mind has the power to assume any form, yet it remains itself: the most relevant analogy is that of the dreamer, whose mind divides itself into a multitude of interacting entities while remaining one and intact. The Vedantic doctrines of creation—*vivartavada* and *ajativada*—will be examined later on, so we will not here linger on this point, but will merely make a brief comparison of Brunton's position with the Vedantic treatment of the problem of causality.

The traditional Vedantic method is clearly presented by Y. Subba Rao in his *Method of the Vedanta*, which follows this well-known citation of Shankara:

> That which cannot be expressed (in its true form directly) is expressed (indirectly) through false attribution and subsequent retraction.[36]

Subba Rao clarifies this pithy formula, showing that the distinction between cause and effect is one of the variants of traditional Vedantic pedagogy:

> The essence of the method of false attribution is that imaginary characteristics are first attributed to the Absolute, and this serves as a negation of whatever is incompatible with those characteristics; then later even the falsely attributed characteristics are negated ... it is falsely affirmed that the Absolute is the cause of the world. The purpose is to deny that the Absolute can be an effect, and then afterwards its true nature is conveyed by denying that it can be a cause either.[37]

Thus, the distinction between an Absolute-cause and a world-effect, at first granted by the Vedantic Masters, is later recognized to be but a pedagogical device. Finally there should be a recognition that the Ultimate Principle is non-dual—that the world as effect, is not different from the Absolute as cause. It is, according to Subba Rao, one of the two doctrines of "true Vedanta" concerning non-causality, i.e. the *sat-karya-vada*, the Shankarian doctrine according to which the effect is real, prior to its production, i.e. as cause. Thus all pots are only modifications of the clay which constitutes their material cause and which alone is real; all jugs, pots, etc. ... are only *namarupa*, ephemeral forms and arbitrary names, mere linguistic conventions necessary for the continued working of *vyavahara*:

> The effect does *not* exist independently with a nature other than that of the cause, even now. The existence of the effect *as* the cause ... is in no way different before or after its production."

> The effect, the world consisting of sound and the other elements, cannot exist except as the cause, either before creation or now.[38]

As to the second "authentic" Vedantic doctrine recognized by Subba Rao, it says the same thing in a more radically negative way. This is the *ajativada* of Gaudapada, according to which "there is no destruction nor creation ..." [39]

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[36] Shankara, *Bhagavad-Gita Bhasya*, XIII, 13.
[37] Subba Rao, *The Method of the Vedanta*, p. 43.
[38] Sankara, *Brahma-Sutra Bhasya*, II, 1, 7, quoted in Subba Rao, op. cit., p. 82.

A later Vedantin, Sarvajnatman, not considered orthodox by Subba Rao, distinguishes three different standpoints and their hierarchy in regard to the question of creation, i.e. causality and non-causality:

> The standpoint of seeing the world as a transformation (*parinama*) of the Absolute is called the standpoint of false attribution (*adhyaropa-drsti*). The standpoint from which duality is totally obliterated is the final standpoint and is called the standpoint of denial (*apavada*). In between the two is the standpoint which is a mixture of the two, and which sees the world as an illusory transformation (*vivarta*) of the Absolute. It is called the "mixed" standpoint, because it includes elements from both the higher and the lower plane. The standpoint which accepts perception ... as authoritative ... is the lowest standpoint; the middle standpoint dissolves the reality of the world; the final standpoint negates the illusion by which the Absolute appeared to fall from its true nature and assume the form of the pluralistic world.... Each of these three standpoints, when dissolved, is superseded by the next higher in the series.[40]

Michel Hulin summed up Sarvajnatman's theory in this way:

> By the light of reason, one has access, at best, to the Samkhya doctrine of "true transformation" = *parinamavada*. By the light of Revelation, one purifies that evolutionism into *vivartavada* (=doctrine of apparent transformation). This is a "mixed view," where *Brahman* is still the material and efficient cause, while nescience (*avidya*) is instrumental to it. Finally, the authentic understanding of *tat tvam asi* restores the subject "to its own majesty," at a level of experience "where all causal connections subside.[41]

Paul Brunton agrees with Vedanta in seeing as mistaken the view which posits a causal connection between the Absolute and the world. The nature of the relationship between these two remains an unsolvable mystery to the human mind. In effect, the human mind, due to its nature, can only ask the question in terms of causality. Now causality is a mental structure, a mental category [c.f. Kant], and thus a notion, an idea operative only in relation to other ideas (internal or external, ideas or objects), but not in relation to the source of these ideas, to their essence, Mind – which transcends mental categories, and is beyond all ideas and relationships:

> What is it in Mind that impels it to make these myriad appearances as ideas we do not and cannot know. The question itself is based on belief in causation, which is another idea, and is therefore invalid because it is without meaning to Mind.[42]

Brunton's mentalism agrees with the *sat-karya-vada* in denying any absolute reality to ideas: Mind, alone, is real in the multiplicity of ideations – just as the clay alone is real underneath the diversity of pots, pitchers, etc. But Brunton is reluctant to adopt the extreme

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[39] *Gaudapada Karika*, II, 32: Na nirodho na cotpattir na baddho na ca *sadhakah* / *Na mumuksur na vai mukta ityesa paramarthata* = "There is neither suppression nor production, nor slave nor aspirant; there is no one desiring deliverance and no one liberated: this is the highest truth."
[40] *Sanksepa Sariraka*, II, 82-83, quoted in Subba Rao, op. cit., p. 931.
[41] Hulin, op. cit., p. 270, footnote 1.
[42] *Notebooks*, XIII, 1, 4, 75.

view of *ajativada*,[43] in keeping with his clear predilection for intermediary notions and positions.[44]

Two Remarks

It remains for us to include two observations on the cognitive process, which claim no originality but seem to support mentalism:

– The first is summed up by Brunton as follows: the mind can only know that which has the same nature as itself, i.e. thought.[45] If matter and consciousness were two entirely heterogeneous entities, what connection could exist between them? How would subtle, immaterial consciousness be able to apprehend gross matter? The supposition that perceptions are caused by material objects external to, and independent of, consciousness, is, as we have already seen, an unprovable inference.

– The second observation is that cognition is possible only through differentiation or comparison. During Iyer's initiation by the Sankaracarya of Sringeri, one of the most important questions asked to him was the following:

> How does knowledge come about? [His response was:] Through differentiation. We know light against the presence of darkness, a thing by its standing out from its background and so on.[46]

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[43] Non-causality; the view that the universe doesn't exist.

[44] One could consider that he is nearer to *vivartavada* (according to which ideas are the apparent transformation of the mind as the world is apparent transformation of *Brahman*)—with some important distinctions which will be explored later.

[45] This constitutes the problem of all dualistic systems such as Indian Samkhya. Brunton's objection had already been formulated by the Buddhists (discussed in Abhinavagupta: *Isvara-pratyabhijna-vimarsini*, I, 2-3): they objected to the Samkhya idea of *buddhi* = "intellect"), the mysterious "meeting place" of the principles of matter (*prakrti*) and spirit (*purusa*), a sort of mirror or crystal capturing both the immaterial light of *purusa* and an "image" of material objects. Due to the insurmountable ontological gap which separates them—*buddhi* being of the order of *acit* (= "unconscious" or "non-conscious"), thus inert, material, and *purusa* being of the order of *cit* (= "consciousness")—the idealist Vijnanavadin Buddhists refuted all possibility of a mutual relationship between the two entities.

This has in fact been the stumbling block of all the mind/matter dualisms, ancient and modern: it is what Jeans (*Physics and Philosophy*, pp. 198-199) calls "the mysterious mind-body bridge," noting that the Berkeleyian argument (according to which, if effects are mental on one side of this bridge, their causes on the other side must also be mental) is reversible in a materialistic argument (where mental processes are as as material as the objects which trigger them). He quotes Bertrand Russell: "So long as we adhere to the conventional notions of mind and matter, we are condemned to a view of perception which is miraculous ... Everything that we can directly observe of the physical world happens inside our heads, and consists of mental events ... It also consists of events which form part of the physical world. The development of this point of view will lead us to the conclusion that the distinction between mind and matter is illusory. The stuff of the world may be called physical or mental or both or neither as we please; in fact the words serve no purpose." Jeans concludes: "If we accept this argument, the dualism of Descartes drops out of the picture altogether, and the only question left is whether we ought to say with the materialists that mind is material, or with the mentalists that matter is mental."

[46] Brunton Archive.

The very perception of objects is possible only through the contrast of color. All human existence is subject to the pairs of opposites: we understand happiness, life, good health, joy, only in comparison with their opposites: unhappiness, death, illness, sadness ... Similarly for states of consciousness: the waking state cannot be known unless compared to the states of dream and sleep.

An important consequence of this last point is the fact that the Witness Consciousness cannot be known in the ordinary sense, as it is impossible to distinguish it as an object among other objects. Being the Subject, it is not objectifiable,[47] and being undifferentiated, it escapes all comparison. In contrast, the three states of consciousness (waking, dream, deep sleep), which follow each other regularly, are knowable as different from one another.

4.1.3 Modern Science and the Concept of Matter[48]

Paul Brunton was deeply interested in the work of the physicists of his day, in particular Jeans and Eddington. Let us examine the new concept of matter put forth and interpreted[49] by those scientists and their more recent followers, who used their discoveries to formulate metaphysical hypotheses which led in the direction of mentalism.

We already know that the two great theories which revolutionized modern physics—Relativity and Quantum theory—had the effect of dispelling the classic conception of matter. The hunt for the fundamental constituents of the universe, the basic building blocks of which it is composed, seemed to be at an impasse. Neither atoms, nor the atomic nucleus, nor the protons and neutrons which constitute the latter, could fill this role, because it was discovered that "elementary" particles were further divisible into other identical particles, none more elementary than the others; furthermore they were now seen not as objects, but as processes:

> The particle can no longer be seen as a static object, but has to be conceived as a dynamic pattern, a process involving the energy which manifests itself as the particle's mass.[50]

It has been understood since Einstein's $E = mc^2$ that mass is but a form of energy, and it has been shown by quantum physics that matter and energy are convertible. After a collision between particles,[51] the destruction and creation of new particles occur ceaselessly. The sum total of energy remains the same, but is redistributed in a fireworks of particles of which the mass, speed and number perpetually vary.

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[47] This point will be analyzed at length in our examination of the Vedantic method of *drg-drsya-viveka* which would be taken up by Brunton in his own fashion.

[48] Five sources were consulted for this presentation: Jeans' *The Mysterious Universe* and *Physics and Philosophy*, Capra's *The Tao of Physics* and *The Turning Point*, and David Bohm's *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. This section consists of a paraphrase of their positions.

[49] To be fair, this has remained a minority trend within a scientific community still generally attached to a materialism which the most honest recognize as akin to a religious belief. However, this trend has been receceived with a certain success among a certain public no longer satified with either materialism or institutional religions.

[50] Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, p. 77.

[51] artificially induced in particle accelerators, but spontaneously occuring in interstellar space.

Fritjof Capra has compared this "dance of energy"—which is also found outside of the laboratory in nature, in electrons encircling the nucleus, and in nucleons whirling inside the latter—to the cosmic dance of Siva, which maintains the Universe through perpetual cycles of creation and destruction.

The concepts of matter and empty space had to be radically revised. It was already known that objects appear solid, dense, massive and inert—but are in reality mainly composed of space.[52] The rotation of electrons—particles of very little mass—at an unimaginable speed around this nucleus, lend matter the solid appearance that we know: in sum, energy appears as inert matter, the Void appears to our senses as the Full.

But there are yet more remarkable things in this dialectic of Void and Full: the theories in the quantum field seem to give the coup de grace to the age-old distinction between solid objects—in this case, elementary particles—and the empty space which seems to separate them:

> Particles ... cannot be regarded as isolated entities, but have to be seen as condensations of a continuous field which is present throughout space ... this field is seen as the basis of all particles and of their mutual interaction.[53]

> The distinction between matter and empty space finally had to be abandoned when it became evident that virtual particles can come into being spontaneously out of the void, and vanish again into the void ... without any other interacting particle being present ... The vacuum is far from empty. On the contrary, it contains an unlimited number of particles which come into being and vanish without end.[54]

Thus, not only does the Void appear as Full to our abused senses, but the Void *is* Full, for it potentially contains all the forms of the world of particles; inversely, the Full is the Void, for the particles which emerge from this latter do not possess an independent, material existence, being only ephemeral manifestations of the Void beneath.

One could call this a modern scientific confirmation of something certain philosophers had discovered long ago by pure intuition: the world as we empirically know it is only an appearance. Its materiality is entirely illusory, this illusion being caused by the limited functioning of our senses, and thus by our mind, the true organ of perception.

If it is now recognized that our mind presents us with the "physical" macroscopic world, what occurs on the sub-atomic level? There also, some physicists assign human consciousness as a factor.

Since the first experiments in quantum physics, scientists have realized that their own observations influence the properties of observed objects. Thus they have made attempts to

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[52] Indeed, the nucleus where atomic mass is concentrated occupies as much room inside the atom as a grain of salt placed in the dome of St. Peters at the Vatican. (Capra's analogy).
[53] Capra, op. cit., p. 221.
[54] Ibid., p. 222.

replace the notion of the detached and objective scientific observer with that of a participant. Capra, in *The Tao of Physics*, quotes Wheeler:

> Nothing is more important about the quantum principle than this, that it destroys the concept of the world as "sitting out there," with the observer safely separated from it by a 20 centimeter slab of plate glass. Even to observe so minuscule an object as an electron, he must shatter the glass ... [55] Moreover, the measurement changes the state of the electron. The universe will never afterwards be the same ... In some strange sense the universe is a participatory universe.[56]

And Jeans already wrote in 1942:

> The so-called electric and magnetic forces, then, are not physical realities ...; they are not even objective, but are subjective mental constructs which we have made for ourselves in our efforts to interpret the waves of the undulating theory ... The waves may equally well be interpreted as representations of our knowledge ... The waves ... are mere mental constructs and possess no physical existence.[57]

Jeans recognized that scientific knowledge could only describe correlations between phenomena, never the reality underlying them. Nevertheless, he leaned in a measured and cautious way towards a mentalist model as a representation of this reality:

> We have no means of knowing the true nature of reality. The most we can say is that the cumulative evidence of various pieces of probable reasoning makes it seem more and more likely that reality is better described as mental than as material.[58]

As early as 1930, Jeans had risked a mentalistic-sounding hypothesis in the conclusion of his *The Mysterious Universe* (which Brunton would study with Iyer):

> Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the physical side of science approaches almost to unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter—not of course our individual minds, but the mind in which the atoms out of which our individual minds have grown exist as thoughts.[59]

Jeans went so far as to call into question the material nature of perceived objects, and in the end almost exhibited the idealistic logic of Berkeley:

> If the waves of a free electron or photon represent human knowledge, what happens to the waves when there is no human knowledge to represent? The simple but surprising answer would seem to be that when there is no human knowledge, there are no waves; we must always remember that the

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[55] To observe the electron, it is necessary to project a ray of light on it; that is to say, a bundle of photons will interact with the electron and consequently modify it

[56] Capra, op. cit., p. 141.

[57] Jeans, *Physics and Philosophy*, pp. 135-139.

[58] Ibid., p. 203.

[59] *The Mysterious Universe*, p. 148.

waves are not a part of nature, but of our own efforts to understand nature. Before man appeared on the scene, there were neither waves nor electric nor magnetic forces; these were not made by God, but by Huygheus, Fresnel, Faraday and Maxwell.[60]

... An answer must be found to the problem of how objects can continue to exist when they are not being perceived in any human mind. There must, as Berkeley says, be "some other mind in which they exist." Some will wish to describe this, with Berkeley, as the mind of God; others with Hegel as a universal or Absolute mind in which all our individual minds are comprised. The new quantum mechanics may perhaps give a hint, although nothing more than a hint, as to how this can be.

In the particle-picture, which depicts the phenomenal world, each particle and each photon is a distinct individual going its own way. When we pass one stage further towards reality we come to the wave-picture. Photons are no longer independent individuals, but members of a single organization or whole—a beam of light—in which their separate individualities are merged, not merely in the superficial sense in which an individual is lost in a crowd, but rather as a raindrop is lost in the sea. The same is true of electrons; in the wave-picture these lose their separate individualities and become simply fractions of a continuous current of electricity. In each case, space and time are inhabited by distinct individuals, but when we pass beyond space and time, from the world of phenomena towards reality, individuality is replaced by community.

It seems at least conceivable that what is true of perceived objects may also be true of perceiving minds; just as there are wave-pictures for light and electricity, so there may be a corresponding picture for consciousness. When we view ourselves in space and time, our consciousnesses are obviously the separate individuals of a particle-picture, but when we pass beyond space and time, they may perhaps form ingredients of a single continuous stream of life ... in the deeper reality beyond space and time we may all be members of one body. In brief, modern physics is not altogether antagonistic to an objective idealism like that of Hegel.[61]

Forty years later, David Bohm responded to this penetrating intuition. Bohm thought that the analysis of the world into separate and static parts, though valid in a limited context, could not apply to the deeper reality, which must be conceived as an undivided, essentially dynamic totality.

Without going into technical details, we will give a brief explanation—taken from Capra and Bohm—of the two contemporary scientific theories most pertinent to our subject. Both theories appear to turn their backs on the reductionist and mechanistic view of the world[62] which had prevailed in the West for the last three centuries, since Descartes and Newton.

The first of these theories is called the *bootstrap* hypothesis.[63] It is a holistic and dynamic view of the world which replaces the old Cartesian-Newtonian theories. Capra says:

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[60] *Physics and Philosophy*, p. 171.

[61] Ibid., pp. 203-204.

[62] The universe was then considered an assemblage of solid and independent objects, reducible to their fundamental simple elements and therefore impossible to analyze. These objects, separated by empty space, were subject to certain immutable laws of Nature, forces imposed by a God, Creator of these same basic elements.

[63] It was formulated by Geoffrey Chew in the framework of a more general theory, the "S matrix theory," which is "a collection of probabilities for all possible reactions involving hadrons (i.e. particles submitted to very high energy interactions.")

> ... the universe is seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events. None of the properties of any part of this web is fundamental; they all follow from the properties of the other parts, and the overall consistency of their mutual interrelations determines the structure of the entire web.[64]

This view implies that "all phenomena in the universe are uniquely determined by their self-consistency."[65]

If the universe is an inextricably intertwined whole, then human consciousness – whose existence is as necessary as that of the observed objects for the coherence of the whole—must be taken into account. Many physicists have already recognized that future theories of matter must explicitly include the factor of human consciousness.

A second scientific theory supporting mentalism is more recent: the theory of *implicate order* developed by David Bohm. Bohm used the analogy of the hologram, which possesses the peculiarity of containing the whole in each of its parts: if one part of it is illuminated, the image of the whole is reconstructed. According to Bohm,[66] the universe itself is structured in a similar way: the Whole is "enfolded," potentially present in each of its parts.

Bohm's notion of "implicate order" views the cosmos as a continuum. No entity exists in isolation, and the connections between elements are—on the atomic level in any case—independent of space and time, and thus of causality such as we classically conceive it.[67]

Bohm coined the neologism "holomovement" to account for the dynamic aspect of the source of the manifested universe. His method was the study of the inherent order of this "holomovement"—no longer trying to elucidate the structure of isolated objects, but rather examining closely the link between Consciousness and Manifestation.

Bohm was led to propose that:

> ... the most comprehensive reality, the most profound and most inner is not of the mind nor of the body, but instead a reality of larger dimension which is their common ground and whose nature is beyond that of each of them. Each is thus only a relatively independent subtotal, and it is implied that this relative independence derives from this ground of larger dimension in which mind and body are finally only (as relative independence of the manifested order derives from the ground of the implied order).[68]

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[64] Capra, op. cit., p. 286.

[65] We will say in passing that one could find a certain analogy between this last view and the doctrine of collective karma. Brunton would turn to this doctrine of *karma* in his explanation of cosmogenesis: things come into being through their own tendencies, according to the regulatory law of *karma* which is inherent in the cosmos itself; i.e. the cosmos is "auto-programmed."

[66] To be precise, in Capra's view, Bohm is at the forefront of scientific research concerning the relationship between consciousness and matter.

[67] Certain experiments have shown that particles separated by great distances behave nevertheless as a coherent whole; they react simultaneously in an ordered fashion, without having time to signal information to each other: i.e. between the separate elements of the Whole exist instantaneous connections of a mysterious nature, non-local and non-causal.

[68] Bohm, op. cit., p. 214.

Of course, Bohm refused to name this unknown reality, in his opinion unknowable. Nevertheless, he would trace the material world, and the human mind which contemplates it, to a unique Source which trancends both. Brunton would agree:

> The world is what it is, an appearance in the little mind; but behind both is Mind, the great unchangeable reality which transcends all human thought and touch and which alone is, was, and will be.[69]

Capra and Brunton both envision the physicists of the future as "philophysicists," philosophic scientists who would transcend the barriers of their discipline and radically redefine the scientific mentality, in order to explicitly do metaphysics.[70]

In conclusion, however, we must recognize that a distinct gap separates a mystic such as Brunton—who was deeply convinced of the mental nature of Reality—from a scientist such as Jeans, who paid lip service to the hypothesis of a mentalistic model of Reality.

In so doing, Jeans was honest enough to admit the inherent limits of scientific knowledge, capable of proposing coherent and rational representations of Reality, but incapable of penetrating its heart. Reality being beyond formulations, the final step would need to be supra-rational, thus beyond all scientific theory. Capra attempted to bridge this gap by pointing to the convergences of modern scientific models and the intuitive experiences of Eastern mystics and philosophers. In doing so, he went beyond the scientific framework. Jeans wished to stay within it.

Thus we have observed that since the 1930s, some scientists, albeit a minority, accepted the hypothesis that the manifested world does not exist independently of consciousness. Some such as Jeans went as far as to admit an idealistic point of view. Therefore, it is not hard to understand the interest shown by Brunton and other spiritual guides of the twentieth century for the writings of these scientists.

At this stage, we are ready to explore the specific features of Brunton's doctrine of mentalism. We will not examine his view alongside all the known forms of idealism, but will instead limit ourselves to two comparisons which seem particularly pertinent.[71]

4.1.4 Mentalism and Idealism

Brunton's mentalism is in certain ways similar to Berkeley's immaterialism and to the doctrine of *drsti-srsti-vada* of Prakasananda, the Indian Advaitic philosopher of the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries.

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[69] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 4, 171.

[70] We note that Capra's call to transcend the boundaries between different fields of knowledge remains for now, fairly marginal within scientific circles. Brunton, however, firmly believed that further research in nuclear physics could only bring—in spite of the reluctance of scientists to acknowledge the philosophic implications of their work—a striking confirmation of mentalism. It would only be a question of time.

[71] First, because of certain doctrinal similarities, and also because Brunton himself mentions these authors (especially Berkeley) as being close to his own point of view.

Berkeley's Immaterialism

The term 'mentalism' had been suggested to Brunton by Subrahmanya Iyer in place of the term 'idealism,' too much associated, in Iyer's opinion, with Berkeley's and Jeans' ideas of a personal God. Brunton followed Iyer's advice here as in other matters, and for similar reasons used the term 'materialism' in place of 'realism.'

Mentalism and Berkeley's immaterialism have several points in common. To quote Pierre Dubois:

> Objects of knowledge, according to Berkeley, fall into three classes: 1) sense objects, 2) states of mind, 3) objects of memory and imagination. That the objects of classes 2 and 3 do not exist outside the mind is beyond argument. On reflection, one sees that it is the same for sense objects,[72] as their nature is sensible, i.e. relative to a subject.[73]

Both Brunton and Iyer subscribed to the famous formula which summed up Berkeley's doctrine of Immaterialism: "Esse est percipi."

This doctrine was explained in Berkeley's volume *Principles of Human Knowledge* as well as in his more accessible *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*:

In the beginning Hylas is a materialist, while Philonous expresses the position of Berkeley himself.[74] There is a progressive convergence of the two speakers' arguments, through the development of Hylas, whose convictions crumble little by little to finally merge with Philonous' position. The first dialogue explains the formula "Esse est percepti": external objects do not exist independent of the mind. In perception it is impossible to distinguish a cognitive act from an external object: the two are one. Matter is not the cause of sensation; it *is* a mental sensation. There is not a thing on the one hand and its representation on the other: the thing *is* the image in my mind, i.e. things *are* ideas. Having examined this point at length in "the study of perceptions," we will not pursue this further here.

The second dialogue concerns the causality of ideas. The sensible world is not imagined by the individual mind, for it is imposed on all consciousnesses; however, it exists only as an object, i.e. for a subject. This in turn implies that a Subject superior to man exists: the only explanation for the sensible world is that there exists an infinite mind which thinks the sense objects – hence the coherence and stability of the laws of Nature – and creates the perception of a sensible world in finite minds.

The third dialogue is a catalogue of objections to Immaterialism, developed by Hylas and successfully refuted by Philonous. Here one finds most of the traditional objections to idealism and mentalism, the mistaken assertion that they deny the reality of an external world. In truth, what is denied is only its existence independent of any mind, whatever its nature. Furthermore, for Berkeley, Immaterialism is incompatible with scripture:

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[72] Compare with Gaudapada, *Mandukya Karika*, II, 15: *Avyakya eva ye antastu sphuta eva ca ye bahih. Kalpita eva te sarve* ... = internal objects, as external objects, all are mentally constructed.
[73] *L'Oeuvre de Berkeley*, Librarie Vrin, Paris, 1985, p. 52.
[74] There is a progressive narrowing of the gap between the two speakers' arguments, through the reflections of Hylas, whose convictions crumble little by little to finally merge with the position of Philonous.

> Creation signifies that things eternally known by God have been rendered perceptible to created minds, and not that unknown substances have come into being. In all theory, there is an enigma in Creation, but the appearance of ideas is less surprising than the production of matter. In addition, the belief in matter independent of mind gave birth to the theory that matter is coeternal with God, which is a rejection of the Creation.[75]

Brunton paid homage to Berkeley for having paved the way for mentalism, by successfully refuting the belief that matter exists independent of and external to the mind. But in Brunton's opinion, it was only a beginning, even if in the right direction. There are several differences between the two doctrines, the crucial one being the absence of Non-Dualism in Berkeley. Brunton wrote:

> Berkeley used his mentalist discovery to restore the anthropomorphic God to its neglected shrine. His great errors were to introduce this personal deity as the author of man's ideas and to cling to the finite ego without suspecting that it was itself an idea.[76]

Said in another way, in Brunton's opinion, Berkeley fell into the typically Western error[77] of confusing Existence with personal existence, consciousness with personality: Berkeley could not go beyond the notion of a personal God, or transcend the human ego. Berkeley's God, the cause of sensible ideas common to all humankind, corresponds to Brunton's World-Mind, and to Advaita's *Isvara*; but these last two are not seen as Ultimate Reality, but only an aspect or a function of it. Brunton remarked:

> When Berkeley says "to be is to be perceived" (he means "by God"), it is equivalent, in philosophy, to "to be is to be known to the World-Mind in the form of Word-Idea." But there are subtle yet important differences between the two outlooks. What did Berkeley define as God? Did he rise to the Ultimate Possible concept that of Non-duality? Did he understand that there is a distinction to be made between the Absolute Mind and the World Mind?[78]

In the end, according to Brunton, Berkeley's merit was a negative one: he did away with the concept of matter. However, he lacked a doctrine of Mind and a positive recognition of that which Brunton called "Pure Mind-in-Itself."

Prakashananda's *drshti-srshti-vada*

Prakashananda,[79] in a work entitled *Vedantasiddhantamuktavali*, had developed a doctrine in some ways similar to Berkeley's—that of *drsti-srsti*, or "creation-by-simple-sight." Brunton knew this work, and quoted from it in his *Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture* (he also quoted from Berkeley's *The Principles of Human Knowledge*). Let us briefly examine the convergences and divergences among the ideas of these three writers.

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[75] Dubois, op. cit., p. 65.

[76] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 4, 233.

[77] In any case, almost unavoidable within the context of exoteric Christianity, where the duality of a personal God and the created soul is felt as being the ultimate Truth.

[78] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 4, 247.

[79] A philosopher of the Shankarian school during the 16th-17th centuries.

> We can admit an analogy between the doctrines of Prakasananda and Berkeley on the point that the nature of Reality is perceptual (and not material) (and) that there is no difference between the perception and the object....[80]

The point where the three doctrines overlap is immaterialism, i.e. the theory that independent matter does not exist, since the object is one with our perceived image of it. This conception, which is also that of the *Yogavasistha*,[81] diverges from Shankarian orthodoxy:

> Vasistha, like Prakasananda, defends conceptions opposed to those of Sankara, who held that "it is incorrect to say that external things do not exist based simply on the fact that knowledge (or perception) has the appearance of an object, because the very appearance of an object is not possible if the object is not there, and also because the object is known externally.[82] That is why the object and the knowledge of it (i.e. its perception) are different.[83]

> For Shankara, objects exist in the same form as that in which they are known. In the second lesson of the *Brahma Sutra Bhashya*, he also rejects the Sarvastivadins,[84] who consider material objects and their perception as equally real; the Vijnanavadin[85] for whom only ideas are real; and the Sarvasunyavadin, [86] for whom all is emptiness.[87]

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[80] Martine Chifflot, *Le theme de l'Esse est Percipi chez Berkeley et Prakasananda*, a comparative study and translation of the *Vedantasiddhantmuktavalli*; Doctoral thesis, Paris, 1990, p.85.

[81] Yoga vasistha = (needs to be finished!)

[82] *Brahmasutra Bhasya***,** Advaita Asrama, p. 420.

[83] Chifflot, op. cit., p. 420

[84] a realist school of Hinayana Buddhism.

[85] also known as Yogacara, an idealistic school of Mahayana Buddhism.

[86] also known as the Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism, founded by Nagarjuna (150 A.D.)

[87] Chifflot, op. cit., pp. 13-14. One could raise the question of an apparent contradiction between Sankara and Gaudapada— *kalpita eva te sarve*—but this could be resolved in declaring that *kalpita* refers to Isvara: the objects, God's ideations, would then be perceived as "external" objects by the *jiva*. Thus, from the worldly or empirical point of view (where Sankara placed himself) "material" objects exist: after all, if one takes the well known example of the rope and the serpent, as long as the serpent "is there" we are justified to give it a certain importance and pay attention to it. From the ultimate point of view, (of Gaudapada) objects dissolve into "mental fabrications," into *maya*, into a negligible "non-reality." Moreover, Gaudapada, (who, is very close, chronologically and ideologically, to idealist Buddhism, while Sankara was one of the artisans of the decline of Buddhism in India), addressed a restricted and evolved audience. He deliberately adopted the radical position of placing the waking and dream states on the same plane, after denying both (= *ajativada*, acosmism: an extreme Advaitic position). The hearers of the *Karika* were *sanyasi*: the negation of the external object helped to liberate the consciousness of the meditator from the objective world.

Sankara also addressed the Brahmanic schools, and wished to reconcile the diverse centrifugal currents of Hinduism orthodox sects. He could not conciliate the Mimamsaka and other ritualists unless he maintained a relative reality of waking state consciousness with regard to dream: hence a more moderate, less uncompromising position, justifying a certain reality accorded to *vyavahara*. Finally, Sankara composed a scholarly commentary designed to refute, among other doctrines, Buddhism (and one knows that between Vedanta and Buddhism, the philosophic debates often serve to subsequently justify the interplay in temporal reality), and thus could not allow himself to adopt a position too similar to that of his adversaries.

In Sankara and Gaudapada these arguments were not systematically developed (as they were in Prakashananda), but were only used for soterological ends, without concern for "scientific" coherence. Thus, on this question of the mental nature of objects, perhaps there would be, between Gaudapada and Sankara, contradiction, not of the spirit, but only of the letter.

Prakashananda's immaterialism provides a rational meaning for the doctrine of non-duality:

> The Absolute Self is the Unique Substratum of this projecting activity of perception which does not have an objective counterpart. Thus, the *drsti-srsti-vada* says: the world, external diversity, and the systems of objects and individuals only exist *in as much as they are perceived*, and their otherness comes entirely from the perception which gives them existence.[88]

Here indeed, in the absence of an objective substratum, the duality of phenomena is reduced to the sole reality of the Self:

> It was Prakasananda who tried, for the first time, to give a consistent presentation of Vedanta from the most thorough-going idealistic point of view.[89]

But if Brunton and Prakashananda both took a non-dualistic perspective which distinguishes them both from Berkeley, Brunton did not share the radicalism of the author of the *Vedanta Siddhantamuktavali*. In fact, apart from their common reduction of external objects to ideas abiding in consciousness, the three authors diverge as to the status of these perceived ideas/objects, as well as to the status of the perceiving subjects.

In both cases, Brunton is seen to take an intermediate position between Berkeley's dualism and the absolute non-dualism of Prakashananda. Berkeley's doctrine is a spiritual realism, a dualism, and a pluralism within a strictly monotheistic cultural framework. "Immaterial" for him did not signify "unreal"; perceived objects are fully real, as are the multiple minds which perceive them. Those individual minds are made of the same stuff as the divine Mind, but remain forever distinct from God by their finitude.[90] On the other hand, for Prakashananda, who pushed the theory of illusion to the extreme and assimilated the *vyavaharika satya* into the *pratibhasika satya* (the waking state into that of dream), "perception is ontologically false (*mithya*), inexplicable (*anirvacaniya*)"; objects and subjects are only dreamlike visions of the cosmic *Jiva*, itself pure hallucination superimposed by Nescience on the One Reality, *Brahman*:

> Prakasananda's approach is an integrative dialectic, but one which *each time denies all reality to the transcended plane*. Thus physical phenomena are reduced to pure perception; perceptions to the *Jiva* and the one Nescience; the Jiva to the *atman-Brahman*.[91]

This position leads to an "absolute acosmism":

> The *atman-Brahman* does not have any cosmological function; there exists not the least creation, neither subtle nor gross, subjects nor objects. Brahman is not, by virtue of its nescience, the cause of

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[88] Chifflot, op. cit., p. 226, note 2.
[89] Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, ch. XI, p. 221.
[90] Consequently there are three types of duality in Berkeley: 1. the dualism of *minds* (= plurality of individual perceiving substances); 2. the dualism of *finite minds and the Infinite Mind*; 3. the principal dualism of *the mind* (that which knows) *and its ideas* (= the ideas are, for Berkeley, objects presented to the mind, and not modes of mind; i.e. ideas are not reducible to mind).
[91] Chifflot, op. cit., p. 167.

> the world except in a metaphorical sense. *It is the substratum of something which does not in fact happen and which is not truly seen!*[92]

Brunton clearly diverges from Prakashananda's radicalism, by his perspective (relative and not absolute) and by his conception of the relationship between the relative and the absolute. For him, the Absolute includes the world even while transcending it, and consequently the world is conferred a secondary, derived reality.[93]

Brunton has no need of the concept of Nescience (*ajnana* or *avidya* in Prakashananda; *maya* for most Vedantins), which in Advaita is supposed to explain the passage from the One to the many. In reality, this hypothesis explains nothing; it only gives a name to the enigma of multiplicity. Brunton does not need to postulate metaphysical Ignorance, *Maya*. The power of ideation inherent in the World-Mind is enough to account for the "how" of manifestation,[94] if not its "why?" To this day, the problem of this latter has confounded the human mind, at all times and places:

> What is it in Mind that impels it to make these myriad appearances as ideas we do not and cannot know. The question itself is based on belief in causation, which is another idea, and therefore is invalid because it is without meaning to Mind.[95]

This will lead us to examine cosmogenesis within the framework of Brunton's mentalism.

To conclude this digression, Brunton does not attribute total reality to perceived objects, nor to perceiving subjects, as did Berkeley. But he does not reject them as purely negligible, as total illusion, as did Prakasananda, an absolute non-dualist. Brunton's position, which attributes relative reality to perceived objects and individual subjects—a secondary reality, as it is derived from the one first Reality, while remaining subordinate to and dependent on it—could perhaps be provisionally called a mitigated Non-Dualism."

4.2 Mentalism and Cosmogony

This critique of materialism has led us to the conclusion that matter does not exist independent of mind, and that the 'things' that we take for external objects are in fact ideas contained in our own consciousness. Nevertheless, if it has been shown that the human mind, by its own limitations and structures, itself fashions its sense experience, it is clear that it is not the source of these ideas; to believe otherwise would be to fall into solipsism. Mentalism (like Berkeley's idealism, but in a different way) infers the existence of a Universal Mind which implants these ideas in individual minds.

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[92] Ibid., p. 152.
[93] We will come back to this point many times.
[94] The mind having the power to remain itself while producing an unlimited number of images—the process of the ideation of the world by a Cosmic Mind—explains the passage from the One to the many. It is the "why" of this ideation which remains *maya*, "mystery."
[95] *Notebooks*, XIII, 1, 4, 75.

4.2.1 Causality of Ideas: the Notion of World-Mind

In place of the concept of a personal creator God, Brunton elaborates the following:

> ...a principle which being nothing else than Mind, reproduces the universe out of its own substance, contains it within itself and is thus both immanent and transcendent.[96]

To this principle he gave the name World-Mind. Let us examine his definition, which is similar, as we will see, to that of the Vedantic *Isvara*.

He begins with a mentalistic affirmation: God is not an entity other than Mind, and the universe is fashioned from the same entirely mental stuff as this Cosmic Mind. This theory of the emanation of the world out of the divine substance is analogous to the upanishadic metaphor:

> *Yatha urnanabhih srjate grhnate ca*
> *Tatha aksarat sambhavati iha visvam*
>
> = As a spider spins and reabsorbs its web,
> Thus from the Immutable emerges this phenomenal universe.[97]

It is the nature of the mind to produce thoughts, ideations, or mental images; analogously, the universe is a product of the imaginative faculty of the World Mind. When we think of the creative richness of the individual imagination, we can understand how a Mind infinitely more powerful than our finite human minds could produce such a profusion of forms in the universe. The relationship between the Cosmic Mind (the World-Mind) and the things and beings of the phenomenal world can be compared to the relationship which exists between the individual mind and its thoughts.

Mind "contains the Universe within itself," and is thus "at the same time immanent and transcendent." We will return later to the transcendent aspect of Mind (in Brunton's terminology: Mind, or Mind-in-itself); here we will examine the immanent aspect of Mind while only touching briefly on its transcendent aspect. The analogy of the dream illustrates the mind's transcendence in relation to its own creations: the dreaming mind, which in dream gives birth to a multiplicity of objects and creatures, remains unchanged and intact. The dreamer's mind is not affected by the manifestation of the dream: it is one with the dream, preserves its own integrity, and does not transform itself into something other.[98] Consciousness has the ability to assume a multiplicity of forms while remaining itself.

The mind of the dreamer pervades the dream and at the same time transcends it. Thus the Cosmic Dreamer is both immanent in and transcends his dream, which is the phenomenal world, and which is experienced as real by the creatures of the dream.

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[96] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. XI, p. 182.
[97] *Mundaka Upanishad*, I, 1, 7.
[98] The tiger that I dream of is nothing but my own consciousness, yet my consciousness has not changed itself into a tiger.

The World Mind also transcends the universe, in that it is not subject to the limitations of its manifestation. Thus, the *Vedantasara*[99] says:

> The difference between *Isvara* and the ordinary man is that the former, though associated with *Maya*, is not bound by its chains, whereas the latter is its slave.

In mentalistic language, this means that the Cosmic Dreamer (*Isvara* or World-Mind) is conscious that it dreams, and thus is not alienated from its own nature[100] (*maya* here represents the power of ideation inherent in the Cosmic Mind), unlike the *jiva* (= the individual), which is entirely identified with the phenomenal world, which it takes for ultimate reality. Indeed, even if the mind of the ordinary dreamer transcends its dream, the dreamer can nevertheless be alienated from his true Self to the extent that he entirely identifies with the scenes projected by his mind. This is not the case for the World-Mind: if it's projective, imaginative activity prevents it from being the Ultimate Reality, beyond the movement of thought (as *Isvara* the Demiurge is less real than *Nirguna Brahman* in Advaita), this activity does not limit its liberty.

This Cosmic Mind is present everywhere, in all things and creatures. Its consciousness is immanent in the phenomenal multiplicity throughout the four realms of Nature:[101]

> The mind-essence is as much present in a piece of stone as in an animated human being. But whereas the stone cannot rise to the consciousness of its own essence, the human being has always the potentiality of doing so.[102]

This omnipresence of the World-Mind has as a corollary an omniscience corresponding to the Vedantic characteristic *sarvajna* (= all-knowing) attributed to *Isvara*. The Cosmic Mind is not subject to the space-time limitations of individual minds. According to Brunton, it perceives the universe in one global vision, both in temporal succession and in a simultaneity where the three times are fused. For the World-Mind, the past is not dead, nor the future unknown: both are as vibrant for this Supreme Consciousness as the present is for an individual consciousness. Existing in the eternal Now and the infinite Here, the World-Mind is also conscious of the manner in which its spatial-temporal creatures perceive the world, including the finite even while being Itself infinite.

Does the Cosmic Mind imagine the myriads of objects and creatures of the universe in an arbitrary, capricious manner? It does not. Brunton's doctrine of mentalism incorporates a pan-Indian tenet: the law of Karma.

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[99] *Vedantasara* , Calcutta, 1974, p. 8, note 9.

[100] since it remains conscious of its own essence, Mind, and does not identify itself with its ideations; just as *Isvara* gives itself to its *lila* (cosmic play) while remaining ever free or liberated (whereas, in the view of Alan Watts, Christianity seems to take the opposite view: there, the Self becomes alienated in the myriad of individual egos. – *Beyond Theology*, New York, 1964).

[101] Even plants and minerals display a certain intelligence, while lacking a structured brain. Intelligence, an immaterial faculty implying the existence of an immaterial source, Mind, is present at all levels of the evolutionary ladder.

[102] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 183.

Karma

According to Brunton, the law of Karma is twofold. First, at the metaphysical level, it is a general law, applicable to everything in the universe, that of the self-reproduction of each individual entity:

> Whether it be a planet or a protoplasm it has to inherit the characteristics of its own previous existence and thus adjust effect to cause.[103]

Second, at the ethical level, it is a special law, applicable only to human beings, who possess self-consciousness. Karma makes them responsible for their thoughts and actions, for which there are unavoidable consequences.

The ideations which constitute the universe emerge from the World-Mind according to a strict karmic law. We will later on examine in detail the functioning of this law; here we will simply define this law and discuss its relationship to the World-Mind in the causality of ideas.

Brunton calls karma the "kinetic memory"[104] of Manifestation: its first function is memorization, i.e. the storing of all the things of this world, be they material or mental, as latent impressions.[105] The second function of this karmic energy is the periodic reactivating of these latencies, i.e. their re-actualization as the experienced world.[106]

The World-Mind nevertheless does not create karmic potentialities, but only "allows for their existence." Karmic energies are, in a rather mysterious way, a self-programmed or self-actuating system which depends on the World-Mind for its existence:[107]

> All the karmic forces and thought-forms carry on their mutual activities, intertwine interact and evolve of their own accord in the presence of the World Mind just as plants grow of their own accord

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[103] Ibid., p. 29.
[104] Ibid., p. 33.
[105] Thus no object, no creature is ever really lost: at its disappearance from the manifest world, each entity is "memorized" as a "mental seed" and reverts to a latent state in the World Mind, just as our thoughts are not annihilated when they leave the narrow field of our waking consciousness, but remain latent in our unconscious.
[106] Brunton compared the karmic impressions to sounds registered in the grooves of a record, able later on to be reactualized by a phonograph.
[107] The Vedantic *Isvara* is seen as a regulator, the controller of the impersonal law of karma; it seems to play a decisive role at the beginning and end of the cosmic cycle, when it manifests or "de-manifests" the world, i.e. reactivates or deactivates the karmic impressions; but within a cycle, its will seems to overlap with the quasi-mechanical operation of karmic law:

"Isvara Himself ordains that the fructifying karma should be inexorable. So the fact that He is unable to prevent such karma from fructifying is not inconsistent with His omnipotence." (*Pancadasi*, VII, 157)

Let us add that this refers to *prarabdha karma* (karma from the past which has begun to bear fruit (the reason why the enlightened sage continues to live in the body)); perhaps *Isvara* has more power over that which concerns *sancita karma* (karma from the past which has not yet begun to bear fruit).

> in the presence of sunlight. But it is to that very presence that they owe their own sustenance and existence.[108]

The World-Mind is the condition, not the direct cause of the karmic processes, which are without beginning or end, and whose cause, i.e. the cause of Manifestation itself, remains veiled in impenetrable mystery.

The purpose of Manifestation does not exist for the World-Mind, which in its perfection and infinitude has no need of a goal, unlike its creatures, destined to climb the ladder of evolution:

> The value of the cosmic activity consists in the general upward direction along which its individual centres move. The universal movement is destined to raise life and intelligence to ever loftier levels. This is the immediate and immanent purpose behind it.[109]

Evolution

Brunton seems to hold the Theosophic view of evolution:[110] this terrestrial life is an initiatory school in which, through the many earthly experiences lived by individual egos in the course of their different incarnations, all are destined to perfect their personalities, and more importantly, to raise their level of consciousness. This school is compulsory, in the sense that the evolutionary pressure of the World-Idea, the divine plan, cannot be resisted by the individual. All beings are called on to climb the ladder of evolution, whether or not they are willing. Ultimately, all humans are destined to attain Realization, although the time needed (the number of incarnations) to attain this end will vary. Brunton, in accepting this Theosophic view, exhibits yet another of his divergences from Advaita Vedanta, in this instance in regard to the goal of evolution.

Brunton remarked that the Vedantic idea of the total dissolution of the individual at the end of a chain of rebirths, back into the undifferentiated Absolute from which the chain had emanated at the beginning of a karmic cycle, makes the entirety of manifestation into an absurdity, a gigantic mistake.[111] This was another opportunity for him to contest the Vedantic doctrine of *maya*:

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[108] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 29.
[109] Ibid., p. 185.
[110] i.e. The cosmos is composed of many universes, each universe containing many solar systems; the different planets are peopled with beings on different levels of the evolutionary ladder. On the planet Earth, they range from the primitive amoeba to the realized Sage.
[111] If all experience acquired by the individual, at the price of so much effort and suffering, is destined to be swallowed up without a trace, then the long march of evolution is but a waste of time and energy (if not on our part, then on God's): "It is like banging one's head against a wall in order to enjoy the relief which follows when the action ends." (*Notebooks*, XVI, 2, 4, 258).

> Through lack of a cosmogony [112] the proponents of this teaching (Advaita Vedanta) are compelled to explain away the purpose of all this vast universe as non-purpose, using the term *maya*, one of whose two meanings is *mystery*.[113]

As the Vedantic view appeared to him unsatisfactory to both head and heart, Brunton proposed another which was not without its own ambiguity:

> Or will there unfold a higher type of individuality, one that is free because it has *earned* its freedom; free to exist in harmony with the universal harmony, with the Universal Mind. If nonduality, the goal of Advaita, is to be the end of all, the vast work of time and space seems to have been in vain, a ghastly repetition of what was not worthwhile. Or is there another explanation that philosophy offers? The answer is: there is.[114]

In place of the image of a circle, whose beginning and end points coincide, symbolizing the Vedantic doctrine of the *jiva's* wandering through *samsara* to finally dissolve back into the primordial *atman* of which it is but an emanation, Brunton prefers the spiral, symbolizing the perpetual ascending movement of individuality through higher and higher states of consciousness, nearer and nearer the divine perfection.

> ...it may be plainly affirmed that man's individuality survives even in the divinest state accessible to him. There it becomes the same in quality (as the Divine) but not identical in essence.[115]

This apparent infraction of Non-Dualism is repaired by the following passage:

> But because causation is shown to be illusory, and the cosmos uncreated and unending, this does not mean that our cosmology denies the truth of evolution. It denies only the conventional attitude towards evolution. For it takes all change and hence all progress out of the realm of ultimate reality and relegates them to where they belong, to the realm of immediate appearance. [116]

Here there is a return to Non-Dualism, through the Vedantic dialectic of a double point of view and two levels of reality; only, it appears, in Brunton's formulation of the law of evolution and its conclusion, that the sphere of the formless Absolute is forever receding into the distance, while the relative sphere is expanding and "filling the entire space," one could say metaphorically. Reaching the sphere of the undifferentiated Absolute appears to be not that appealing to Brunton, to say nothing of his Western readers. Later we will see that Brunton's conception of Realization differs from the Vedantic (Shankarian) idea in postponing until after the physical death of the Sage the fusion of his individual being with the Absolute. But here, it seems that Brunton is reluctant to accept this merger even after the end of the material body. He seems to find some relief in pushing it back indefinitely to an ever-changing horizon from evolution taking place in the relative sphere. The passing from the relative to the Absolute, which constitutes the supreme goal of Advaita Vedanta, seems to be seen finally as undesirable,

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[112] Advaita Vedanta had developed a cosmogony (see diagrams), but the scheme was considered only a preliminary and provisional teaching for beginners.
[113] *Notebooks*, XVI, 2, 4, 258.
[114] Ibid, XVI, 2, 4, 260.
[115] Ibid, XVI, 2, 4, 257.
[116] Ibid, XVI, 2, 4, 259.

for it implies a devaluation and a too radical a loss of meaning. One could wonder if the Absolute, compared with the more perfected, more purified states of the relative realm, is not reduced to a simple abstraction, for Brunton. We would suggest that Paul Brunton felt a need to interpose between the relative—the concrete world of our daily experience—and the Absolute, one or more intermediary levels which transcend the purely empirical plane accessible to our senses and intellect, but which remain in the relative order of duality and evolution. We will see later on that the notion of intermediary was very important to Brunton in all areas. In recalling once more that Brunton's first criticism of Advaita was aimed at the latter's abrupt character, we now note as well that it is to this first criticism that the question we have been discussing of the goal of evolution is linked.[117]

4.2.2 Cosmogenesis: the Notion of World-Idea

Cosmogenesis

For Brunton, as in Advaita Vedanta,[118] a Cosmic Consciousness imagines or projects objects and creatures according to karmic law, which is an internal and perpetual process of self-actuation in three stages: latent, subtle, and gross, punctuated by the regulated alternating of the two phases of emanation and reabsorbtion.

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[117] An orthodox Vedantin would be able to reply here that the aim of manifestation (on the individual and cosmic scale) is one of the questions which will never be answered: the question of the phenomenal unfolding of a universe peopled with myriads of creatures in perpetual evolution rests entirely on the principle of causality, which obliges one to posit the existence of a Creator God or Superior Principle that one needs to return to—there is a use to the doctrine of creation: to bridge the gap between the relative and the Absolute.

But once this Superior Principle has been reached, this cosmological teaching becomes useless; meditation on the great saying *Tat tvam asi*, which dispenses with the principle of causality, can, at this advanced stage, bring one to the spontaneous realization of one's identity as *Atman*/*Brahman*. When this state is attained, all questions having to do with the meaning and aim of manifestation, etc. fall away of themselves, because they are nourished by causality which, being a structure of human mentality, can only exist in the relative sphere. In the sphere of the Absolute this kind of question simply does not arise.

In sum, all the existential questions linked to the law of causality—where do we come from, where are we going, why evolution etc.—serve only as a springboard to the highest state of Consciousness where the questions dissolve of themselves.

Such a conception would imply that Advaita Vedanta is not a coherent philosophic system (in spite of the scholarly attempts in this direction; one can ask if a coherent system is even possible: even Samkhya, which pretends to explain everything, is not able to avoid the ambivalent tension which prevailed at the Creation: the *Purusa* desires both to play with duality and also to be liberated from it).

Consequently, Advaita is not a philosophic system, but a soteriology, a medicine for the soul. And when a medicine has done its work, it is wise to stop taking it. In this case, to return to the question of the meaning and goal of evolution, the teaching indicates that, beyond the existential anguish which impregnates the relative plane in which we move, exists an Absolute which is *abhaya* (= "without fear"), and which dissolves this anguish and the insoluble questions which it breeds.

[118] See the page of cosmogonical diagrams. This section is based on chapter III of the *Wisdom of the Overself*: "The Birth of the Universe," and the Vedantic cosmogony follows Vidyaranya's *Pancadasi*, ch. VI, 182-208.

The three states of consciousness of *Isvara*, representing three stages of manifestation (cosmogenesis), are parallel to the three states of consciousness of the *jiva*. The term *Isvara* designates both the totality of the three states of cosmic consciousness and the first potential stage of the universe: *Isvara* is the source of the cosmos; the universe remains in it while in its latent stage, non-manifest, then emanates from it, into its myriad forms—to be reabsorbed back into it at the end of a cosmic cycle. Brunton's World-Mind appears analogous to *Isvara* in its double cosmogonical function as receptacle and "manifesting agent" of karmic impressions:

> The world remains potential as impressions in the Lord, and He causes its manifestation in accordance with the past deeds of beings. Creation is like the unrolling of a painted canvas.[119]

If a painted canvas is rolled up, the picture is no longer visible. In the same way, when the karma of beings is exhausted, "the Lord withdraws into Himself the universe"[120] and all that it contains (i.e. all remain in a latent form).

> The World-Mind acts as a receptacle in which are deposited all the missing links of memory and all the missing mental energies. Hence no creature is really lost, whatever the appearances are. The activities of thought, emotion and willed act strung on an "I"-thread which constitute it, fall in the World-Mind's memory like seeds falling in the furrowed earth.[121]

> The archetype of everything found in Nature first existed in this illimitable storehouse. Just as the silent registrations on a gramophone record are converted under suitable conditions into vividly heard words, so the invisible registrations in World-Mind were converted at the ripe karmic time into vividly experienced things.[122]

This first stage is analogous to the state of individual consciousness called *prajna*, experiencing deep sleep—*susupti*. This analogy is explicitly taken up by Brunton:

> A man forgets his own life and the external world during deep sleep, but remembers them completely again the following morning. If all his ideas are latently and mysteriously preserved during the sleep state despite apparent annihilation, then we have a hint from Nature to help us understand how it is possible for all the ideas of the World-Mind to be latently and mysteriously preserved even when they are no longer actualized during the cosmic night.[123]

The term *Hiranyagarbha* (= "golden embryo") refers to the subtle, embryonic state of manifestation; here there is the passage of the One to the Many. One could imagine this stage as a sort of "karmic memory-matrix" of the cosmos, composed of the entirety of the karmic impressions or *vasanas*, i.e. the subtle seeds of all future animate or inanimate objects. This "subtle body" of *Isvara* (= totality of the subtle bodies of creatures and the seeds of objects) corresponds to the individual state of consciousness termed *taijasa* (which experiences the subtle or dreamlike state).

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[119] *Pancadasi*, VI, 183-184.
[120] Ibid.
[121] *Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. III, p. 34
[122] Ibid., ch. III, p. 31.
[123] Ibid., ch. III, p. 32

According to Brunton, at this level, where individuation appears, the interaction between the World-Mind and the individual mind occurs in the abode of the Overself,[124] corresponding according to a mysterious physiological symbology to the organ of the heart:

> The karmic forces become active within the heart therefore and there break into space-time existence. Like light-photographs on a sensitive film, they develop into a tiny seed-like thought-form. This is the matrix of the world-to-be. Were this to remain here, then the individual would experience it only in the form of a dream.[125]

One will note that individual consciousnesses emerge from the non-manifest state simultaneously with their material environment,[126] and also that subjects and objects both emerge in a blurred and shadowy state akin to photographic negatives—this corresponds to the dreamlike stage of *Hiranyagarbha*, whose "phantom-like" character is strongly depicted in three verses of the *Pancadasi*:

> The world in its course of evolution comes to rest in Hiranyagarbha**,** but at this stage it is indistinct, just as an object seen in partial darkness, at dawn or dusk.[127]

The third stage is called *virat*. It ensues from the process of *pancikaranam* (= passage from subtle to gross by the combination and complex composition of the elements). In this stage the karmic impressions are actualized into sense data, i.e. apparent matter. On this level, the categories of time, space, and causality appear, making the objective experience of the world possible for the *jiva*.[128]

This third stage of *Isvara* corresponds to the state of individual consciousness called *visva* (= that which experiences the gross, i.e. the state of waking consciousness). Objects are now seen clearly, in contrast to the hazy world of *Hiranyagarbha/taijasa*. The *Pancadasi* and Brunton agree in this, but do not explain it in the same way:

> In Virat the world appears distinct and shining, like objects in broad day-light ... In Virat all the gross bodies are plainly seen.[129]

The process of *pancikaranam* seems to imply the existence of external "material" objects which are reflected in the intellects of *jivas* as in a mirror. Mentalism itself says that the sensorial images

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[124] the point of intersection between the Absolute plane and the relative plane at the level of the individual; this concept is examined at length in the following chapter of this work.

[125] *Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. 3.

[126] This corresponds to the first characteristic of *Hiranyagarbha*: emergence of the many from the One: "Isvara ... transforms Himself into Hiranyagarbha , when He, the one, wills to be many." (*Pancadasi*, VI, 198.)

[127] *Pancadasi*, VI, 201.

[128] = "quintuplication"; this process is explained by Suresvara in his *Pancikarana-Varttikam*, verses 8-10: "Each of the several elements, Earth etc., must be divided into two equal parts. One of these two parts should be further split into four equal parts. Now to one half of each element should be added one quarter of each of the other four halved elements towards the formation of one gross element. Thus in Ether there will be five constituent parts. Half of it will be Ether and the other half will consist of the four parts contributed together by all the other four elements...."

[129] *Pancadasi* VI, 204.

are fabricated by the complex of brain and sense organs from material furnished from within[130] by the Overself (which is the point of contact between the World-Mind and the individual mind); this material consists of subtle karmic impressions, which are transformed into sensorial images and projected into space outside of the body:

> In order to provide the conditions for a more fully externalized and awakened experience the co-operation of the brain and the senses is required. These act partly in the same way as a transformer which increases the voltage of an electric current, and partly as a microscope which enlarges the appearance of an object. Unless the world-image is caught by the brain,[131] consciousness will remain at the dream level and physical experience becomes impossible.[132]

The World-Idea

> There is an Order in the universe to which it has to conform. Yet it is not so rigid as the carrying out of an architectural plan. Not like an architect-built world does it allow only for creation and maintenance; for it allows for destruction too. I call it the World-Idea.[133]

> The World-Idea holds within itself the laws which rule the world, the supreme intention which dominates it, and the invisible pattern which forms it.[134]

Let us examine more closely these three aspects of the World-Idea in three passages which define each of them more precisely. First, the laws which govern the world:

> When the revelation of the World-Idea came to religious mystics they could only call it "God's Will." When it came to the Greeks they called it "Necessity." The Indians called it "Karma." When its echoes were heard by scientific thinkers they called it "the laws of Nature."[135]

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[130] In this regard, Brunton's mentalism differs from the Samkhya scheme of perception and agrees with that of Vijnanavadin idealism. We have already seen the ambiguity of the Vedantic scheme (Sankara versus Gaudapada).

[131] This reflection appears strange, for the brain (not the senses) is active during dream. Perhaps we are to understand here "by the cerebro-sensorial apparatus."

[132] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 35. In light of what has been said earlier on the concept of matter in modern science, it is tempting to speculate on the equivalents of the stages of this cosmogenesis from the viewpoint of modern physics. I am well aware of the uncertain and unscientific character of such speculations, so I shall present them only as a minor parenthesis, altogether peripheral.

The stage of *Virat* seems to correspond to matter such as we know in our everyday macrocosmic experience, i.e. "deceiving appearance."

The modern scientific idea of a genetic code, or more generally speaking, matter in its microscopic or infra-atomic state might be equivalent to the idea of embryonic creation expressed by the notion of *Hiranyagarbha* (the subtle state being both what is invisible to the senses and the key stage in the self-reproduction of phenomena through the *vasanas*).

Finally, shall we dare compare the first state of *Isvara*, its "causal body"—where the cosmos rests in latency—with the quantum field of the physicists which occupies the whole of space, this creative "vacuum" from whence material particles emerge and are reabsorbed? Perhaps it would be preferable to compare this quantum field, immaterial producer of all matter, to the Vedantic notion of *akasa*—the most subtle, primordial element—which gives birth successively to *vayu* (air), *agni* (fire), *ap* (water), and finally the most gross, *prithivi* (earth).

[133] *Notebooks*, XVI, 2, 1, 115.

[134] Ibid., XVI, 2, 1, 67.

[135] Ibid., XVI, 2, 1, 76.

The two-fold law of the metaphysical and ethical causality of *karma* constitutes the framework for all the particular physical and psychological laws, and reveals the solidarity which connects all the entities of the cosmos through space and time.

Here are two quotations which clarify "the supreme intention" and "the invisible pattern":

> Just as the World-Idea is both the expression of the World-Mind and one with it, so the Word (Logos) mentioned in the New Testament as being with God is another way of saying the same thing. The world with its form and history is the embodiment of the Word and the Word is the World-Idea.[136]

> We may think of the World-Idea as a kind of computer which has been fed with all possible information and therefore contains all possible potentialities. Just as its progenitor the World-Mind is all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing, it is also possible to think of the World-Idea as being this all-knowing, omniscient aspect of the World-Mind.[137]

To penetrate more deeply into these two other components of the World-Idea, it might be useful to retrace the tripartite scheme of Vedantic cosmogony: the World-Idea seems to rest on the first two levels of the realm of the relative plane, the third level being that of its space-time incarnation as the world:

1. On the causal level, the World-Idea is "one with the World-Mind": it is the Logos, or creative divine Intelligence, the primordial and eternal Idea—beyond time and consequently immutable—which presides over cosmic manifestation. For example, it is the supreme intention, the divine intention in regard to its creatures, expressing itself in the law of evolution. This level corresponds perhaps to that of Advaita's *Isvara-Caitanya*.[138]

2. On the subtle level, in this hypothesis of a cosmos self-programmed by its own karmic law, the World-Idea could be compared to a sort of "cosmic genetic code" or "cosmic computer memory." This invisible model is the equivalent of the Vedantic notion of *Hiranyagarbha*, manifestation in the potential state, composed of the totality of *vasanas* not yet actualized into sense data. The omnipresence and omnipotence of the World-Mind correspond respectively to the terms *sutratma* (= "*atman* in the form of a thread") and *prana* (= vital breath), Vedantic equivalents of the concept of *Hiranyagarbha*. The first term designates "this Soul which penetrates the Universe as a thread runs through a garland,"[139] i.e. the immanent aspect of Mind, while the second term, *prana*, evokes the active, creative aspect, the vital energy of Mind which expands into manifestation.

4.2.3 Individual Mind and Cosmic Mind

How does Brunton view of the interaction between the Cosmic Mind and the individual mind? In his view, our human minds are like small circles rooted or contained in the larger circle of the Cosmic Mind, which is their common ground. All the individual minds, seemingly separate, are

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[136] Ibid., XVI, 2, 1, 71.
[137] Ibid., XVI, 2, 1, 92.
[138] 2nd hypostasis of *Nirguna Brahman* according to the *Paingalopanisad*.
[139] Commentary on *Vedantasara* by Swami Nikhilananda, Note on Verse 91.

linked to each other on their deepest level; they plunge their roots into a collective unconscious, a sort of subterranean and universal "lake of Mind."

The Cosmic Mind thinks its ideas into our mind and thus arouses there the perceptions of an "external world." It is necessary to distinguish these latter perceptions from ideas of the personal imagination and will – which have their origin in mental tendencies (*vasanas*) inherited from previous lifetimes. In both cases, the source of the ideas escapes our narrow field of consciousness. One way to express the goal of the quest is that we should try to become conscious of this two-fold source, by conquering our psychological tendencies and by cooperating with God (= the World-Mind) in the harmonious unfolding of the World-Idea.

In this process of perception of the world, the human mind is at the same time passive and active: it is in some way "hypnotized" by the Cosmic Mind, which imposes on it the illusion of matter as independent of, and external to, the mind. Brunton underscores the interest of hypnotic phenomena which "show that suggestions, i.e. thoughts, can cause objects to appear tangibly within a man's experience, they show that mentalism is true."[140]

How is this transmission of consciousness, and consequently of the perception of the World-Idea, being effected from the Cosmic Mind to the individual mind?

We will first examine this question from the perspective of the connection between mind and brain, which in the mentalist framework represent two different entities.

Mind and Brain

The original karmic impressions are received, in a wave-like fashion, "in the Overself center" in the heart. This vibratory current is transmitted from the heart to the brain which, with the aid of the senses, reconverts and amplifies the karmic impressions into physical sensations. The activity of the brain (and senses) is indispensable to waking consciousness: the transmission of karmic impressions and their transformation into "material vibrations" by the intermediary of the cerebral-sensorial apparatus goes on continuously in the waking state. During sleep, the current of consciousness withdraws into the central point in the heart, and the brain ceases its work as a "transformer."

It is undeniable that a close relationship exists between the brain and consciousness; this is not denied by mentalism, which denies only the fact that there is a causal relationship between them. To tell the truth, this causal relationship has never been proven; to claim that the brain "secretes" consciousness, as the liver secretes bile, is a materialistic postulate of the same genre as the belief in a material substance independent of mind. The sole irrefutable scientific findings on this subject are:

1. No brain, no consciousness (at least for humans; it is possible that other forms of consciousness, as in minerals and plants, do not require one);

[140] *Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. 3, p. 70.

2. To such a brain corresponds such type of thought and sensorial-motor experience: thought is accompanied by molecular movements in the brain; certain cerebral zones correspond to precise mental faculties; also, one can affect the state of consciousness of an individual by giving him certain drugs.

But it is necessary to say two things: first, that modifications of the brain can alter the states of consciousness, but not the principle of consciousness—nor does the division of the brain into various centers of specialized perception explain the phenomenon of consciousness itself. Moreover, science cannot explain the interaction between material substances and immaterial impressions: for example, it can only describe without being able to explain, why the excitation of a nerve produces pleasure or pain.

All that science can fairly conclude is that the brain provides the material conditions necessary for consciousness and thought. If these conditions are absent, consciousness is absent; if they are altered, the state of consciousness is altered. But we must not confuse condition and cause; a condition is a necessary but not a sufficient circumstance. Can we say that a piano is the cause of its music? Yet, no piano, no music; bad piano, bad music. The mentalistic hypothesis—that the brain is only an instrument used by the mind—is no more extravagant than the materialist hypothesis in which consciousness is produced by a material organ:

> The mechanism of the brain provides the condition for the manifestation of intellectual processes but does not provide the first originating impulse of these processes ... The mind uses brain as a writer uses a pen ... the body is merely instrumental and the limitations or changes in the instrument naturally modify or alter the mentality expressed. The thoughts and feelings, the ideas and memories, the fancies and reasonings which constitute most of our mental stock can be detected nowhere in the brain, can be seen by nothing physical, and can only be observed by the mind itself as acts of consciousness.[141]

For Brunton of course, mentalism is not a hypothesis but an expression of truth, and he affirms emphatically:

> The brain is a machine for making thoughts; it is an expression of the mind and yet is itself *in the mind*.[142]

For the brain—like the body and all other material substances—is of a mental essence; it also is an idea presented to our consciousness by the Cosmic Mind.

Many spiritual authors and theologians have presented arguments in favor of a non-material origin of consciousness. The Catholic philosopher A.D. Sertillanges wrote:

> If by thought we attain the immaterial; if we create it, in a certain manner, by the abstraction that our thoughts realize, it is because there is in us a principle superior to the activities of matter ... An effect must have a cause on its level; a function, an organ which adapts to it.[143]

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[141] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 1, 63, 67.
[142] *Notebooks*, XIII, 3, 1, 79.
[143] A.D. Sertillanges, *les Sources de la Croyance en Dieu*, Paris, 1921.

The author invokes the principle that: "all effects must have a sufficient cause, and this cause is sufficient only if it is of the same order or of a superior order to its effect."[144] He adds:

> Thought is of a superior order to matter: it thus cannot come from it (matter), and must be linked to something equal or superior to it in value and in perfection.[145]

Mentalism and Christian philosophy agree in affirming the transcendence of the subject in relation to the object. Brunton, following his Vedantin Master Iyer, declares:

> It is mind that tells you that you have a brain; consequently it is mind that comes first, and not matter.[146]

Sertillanges states that man, in studying himself as an object, has forgotten the primordial fact that he is a subject:

> Could man thus speak of himself as an object, if he himself were not a subject? If he were not distinct from matter, in that he is a thinking being, could he study matter? There is, in the fact that thought can study its own workings and analyse its own conditions, the proof of a transcendence that it would be contradictory to deny later. How are we to comprehend that a material phenomenon studies others and studies itself?[147]

Moreover, the delicate question of the intimate nature of thought falls within the realm of the philosopher and not of the scientist; and it is the latter's job to study the material conditions, antecedents, and consequences of thought.

> Thought falls under the light of science in that it uses the brain, in that it requires of the brain certain human preparations and as it produces certain consecutive modifications in the brain.[148]

But let us return to Brunton's notion of the interaction of the individual mind with the Cosmic Mind in our perception of the world. One could speak of it as a cooperation, a "co-consciousness," or as a "double creation of the world."

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[144] The Ancients knew the generation of similar by similar, and the generation of the inferior by the superior; cf. Aristotle's adage: "man engenders man, and the sun also engenders him." (quoted by Emile Brehier in his note on Plotinus' *Enneads* VI, 7. Paris, 1938.)

[143] Sertillanges, op. cit.

[146] Brunton's Mysore notes. He considered scientific hypotheses concerning the history of the earth before the appearance of man as imaginary constructions: the existence of an object without a perceiving subject is impossible to prove. (Correctly said, one could suppose that the inhabited earth existed as an idea perceived by the Cosmic Mind. But, given that it is our human mind which molds the ideas coming from the World-Mind in the space/time/causal matrix which makes our perception of them possible, it is absurd to speak of a world subject to time, space, and causality in the absence of a human mind to perceive it.) In the same way, the history of the Universe conjectured up by the astronomers, disregarding human consciousness, is inconceivable and thus is reduced, according to Iyer and Brunton, to pure imagination.

[147] Sertillanges, op. cit.

[148] Ibid.

"Double Creation" of the World

It is interesting to examine the parallels between chapter 3 of Brunton's *Wisdom of the Overself* and chapter IV of the classic Vedantic text *Pancadasi* of Sri Vidyaranya, as they illustrate the interaction between the Cosmic Mind and the individual mind in the perception of the world as experienced by the individual consciousness. In both these texts there is a true "double creation" that occurs. The *Pancadasi* VI, 212, tells us that the whole of the perceptible world is a creation of *Isvara* and *jiva*:

> As they are created by Isvara, and become objects of experience and enjoyment for the jiva, so they are related to both, just as a woman is related both to the parents who brought her into being and to the husband who loves her.[149]

while Brunton suggests that:

> The World-Mind's idea may analogically be regarded as that supplied by the right eye, and the individual's own subconsciously-made image as that supplied by the left eye; but the one of which the individual actually becomes aware is the final picture resulting from a fusion of both.[150]

Thus, the human mind cooperates closely—although unconsciously and involuntarily—with the Cosmic Mind. Let us examine the levels of this cooperation more closely, and attempt to evaluate the respective importance of necessity and liberty in the role accorded to individual consciousness in this process of creating of the experienced world:

> In the actual creation of the objects the modifications or functions of Maya, the power of the Lord, are the cause; whereas for the actual enjoyment of those objects it is the modifications or functions of the inner organs of the jivas that are responsible.[151]

> The space-time *form* which moulds the perception is contributed by the individual mind whereas the *material* which assumes that form is contributed by the World-Mind. The individual's own mind subconsciously anticipates *how* this experience shall come, that is extended in a particular space-order and changing in a particular time-series, whilst the World-Mind provides *what* he shall experience.[152]

Thus, the first ideation of the "material" world belongs to *Isvara*/World-Mind. This accounts for the common character of the world as experienced by all individuals in the waking state, as opposed to the private, incommunicable character of the world perceived by each in the dream state. The "mental creation" of objects occurs in the *Jiva*, the individual, on two levels:

– First, on the level of the perception, properly speaking, of objects, which implies the projection of "matter" by the individual mind, i.e. the characteristics apprehended by the senses: form/color, tangibility, smell, taste, sound, and the projection of the interdependent mental structures time/space/causality (*desa/kala/nimitta*).

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[149] *Pancadasi*, IV, 18.
[150] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch.3, p.40.
[151] *Pancadasi*, IV, 19.
[152] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. 3, p. 38.

– The second level of "mental creation" is emotional, with the projection of the ego on the perceived world, and consequently the categories of pleasure and pain attached to it. There is therefore, in Vedantic terms, a double superimposition—*adhyaropa*—made by the *Jiva* onto the Real, and we must carefully distinguish between the two types of projection.

The first superimposition—the perception of the material world—is imposed by *Isvara*/World Mind on all individual minds without exception. The Jiva does not have a choice in this, and we have seen that space/time/causality and matter are necessary conditions for the individual to experience manifestation. The second superimposition, to the contrary, is particular to each *Jiva*, and it is this one in particular which causes the *Jiva's* bondage in *samsara*. The *Pancadasi* declares:

> The real cause of man's bondage is his own mental world.[153]

However, even if at the end of the ascetic path of the Vedantic *sadhana* or Brunton's philosophic discipline, the individual ceases to "color" the world around him—i.e. manages to subordinate his ego to the Overself in Brunton's terminology—he will nevertheless remain bound within the confines of time, space, and matter. Now, the belief in the reality of the manifested world is as binding to the *Jiva* as his attachment to the ego.

In fact, the two servitudes and the two methods of liberation, are closely linked: if the individual allows himself to let go of the all-powerful ego, it is because he has had a glimpse of the existence of a higher Reality—which one could call spirit, soul, pure consciousness, *atman*, or Overself—which is situated beyond time, space, causality, and matter. He can thus begin to intuit that these properties of manifestation do not have an absolute character, and if he inquires into the nature of the world, the aspirant might be able to "pierce the veil of *Maya*," i.e. understand that the world which surrounds him is but a deceptive appearance whose invisible and intangible essence alone is real. The Vedantic notion of *maya* is reflected in this statement of Brunton's: "The universe is indeed an enchantment placed upon us by the World-Mind."[154]

Maya is a magic power through whose operation our mistaken senses cause us to take the world for what it is not. It is in fact a hallucinatory power which is imposed on us through the intervention of the sense perceptions: these make us believe in a stable and tangible material world, external to and independent of our mind and ultimately real. Now this is only an empirical and relative reality, for according to mentalism, the world is mental in essence and thus ultimately immaterial, made of the same stuff as our mind and thus closely linked with it, projected by it through the force of the Cosmic Mind.

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[153] *Pancadasi*, IV, 35

[154] *Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. 3, p. 42.

4.3 Mentalism and Non-Duality: the Notion of Mind

4.3.1 A Key to Non-Dualism

As we have seen, Subrahmanya Iyer, opposing the orthodox interpretation of a Y. Subba Rao, refuses to accept the essential principle of Vedanta, the non-duality of the Real, as a revealed truth taught by the *Sruti*; he reiterates that Non-Dualism must be established on a philosophic, scientific basis. This is why he emphasizes analysis of the external world, whereas the classical Advaitins had little interest in examining it.

> It is no use talking of non-duality unless you know that the external world is an idea.... Non-duality is not what is taken on trust or on theory or Vedas; analyze the world, inquire into the truth of the matter, the whole is in mind.... All that you see cannot be taken as something apart from the mind or Atman or Turiya.[155]

Brunton himself insists that the doctrine of mentalism is the only satisfactory way to elucidate the mysterious term "non-duality:"

> ... there are no two separate entities—a thing and also the thought of it. The thing is in mind, is a projection of mind as the thought. This is nonduality, for mind is not apart from what comes from and goes back into it. As with things, so with bodies and worlds. All appear along with the ultimately cosmic but immediately individual thought of them.[156]

Mentalism abolishes the mind/matter dualism by reducing all objects to ideas; nevertheless, an idea is also a mental object;[157] mentalism then abolishes the subject/object dualism by according ephemeral ideas only a relative degree of reality and then by dissolving them back into their immutable essence, Mind to which alone he gives the status of Ultimate Reality.

The most pertinent analogy used by mentalism as a key to understanding Non-Dualism is that of dream. The dream analogy is developed in Gaudapada's *Karikas*, and it is natural that we find Brunton studying it depth, for Iyer's teachings leaned in great measure on Gaudapada's famous text. Let us quote some *Karikas* of mentalist inspiration, where the dream state is taken as a reference point to explain the true non-duality which underlies the apparent subject/object duality:

Karikas 61-62 declare:

> As in dream Consciousness (cittam) vibrates as though having dual functions, so in the waking state consciousness vibrates as though with two facets.
>
> There is no doubt that Consciousness, though one appears in dream in dual aspects, so also in the waking state, Consciousness, though one, appears to have two aspects.

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[155] Brunton notes on the *Mandukya Upanishad* as explained by Iyer, Brunton archive.
[156] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 25.
[157] Thus, for the spiritual realism of a Berkeley, objects are real, even though their nature is immaterial.

while *Karika* 67 states:

> They—living beings, jivas, and the perceiving consciousness, citta—are both perceivable simultaneously. (In fact, to the question:) Does it exist? We respond: No. Both are empty of distinctive character; are known only by the thought that concerns them.[158]

C. Bouy comments:

> *Citta* is 'consciousness of (the object),' perceiving consciousness; *cetya* is 'the object of (consciousness),' the perceived object. They are both imperceptible, one [cannot be perceived] without the other or independently of the other. The object is not perceivable without the thought, and vice versa. The object and the thought are not distinct things. All thought is thought of an object, and all object is object of a thought.... There is not an 'object' that is not a percept.[159]

and Paul Brunton observes:

> Just as the dreamer's mind appears to split itself up into the various figures and persons of his dream, so the One has never really split itself up into the many, but it has *appeared* to do so.[160]

A Non-Dualist Formula

We quote a three-part formula which encapsulates fairly well Paul Brunton's mentalist credo:

> When we experience Mind through the senses we call it *matter*. When we experience it through imagination or thinking we call it *idea*. When we experience it as it is in its own pure being, we call it Spirit, or better, Overself.[161]

This definition of Ultimate Reality, Mind, echoes the three-word Upanishadic formula concerning *Nirguna Brahman* which Advaita Vedanta adopts: *Ekam Eva Advitiyam* = "Alone, Pure, without a Second."[162]

Let us now compare term for term these two ternary formulas, the Vedantic one (but proceeding in inverse order) and Brunton's:

1. *Advitiyam* = "without a second."

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[158] after the translation in the Doctoral thesis of Christian Bouy (see bibliography).
[159] Ibid.
[160] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 40. This quotation of Brunton's seems very similar to the *karika*, but the perspectives, we will see, are different: the radicalism of Gaudapada puts waking and dream on the same plane, in the end denying both (i.e. *ajativada* or acosmism); Brunton uses dream as a simple analogy to show the mental nature of the phenomenal world and its inferior degree of reality (because derived, relative, subordinate) when compared with the only true Reality, the Absolute.
[161] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 2, 134.
[162] *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6 2 1, commented upon in the *Pancadasi* II, 20.

There is not a second principle of Reality: mentalism explains that Matter does not have existence independent of Mind:

> When we experience Mind through the senses, we call it matter.…[163]

2. *Eva* = "pure, homogeneous, without differentiation."

Ultimate Reality is undifferentiated; differentiation arises only on the relative plane, and dissolves when one adopts the standpoint of the Absolute: mentalism erases the dualism of subject/object by reducing mental objects or ideas to their undifferentiated essence:

> …When we experience it through the imagination or thinking, we call it idea…[164]

3. *Ekam*: "Alone"

Ultimate Reality, from whence may emanate numerous creative energies -- numerous gods -- is the one Source of all. After two formulations that negate the mind/matter and subject/object dualisms, we arrive at a positive formulation, the first term in the Advaitic formula, and the last phrase in Brunton's:

> When we experience it as it is in its own pure being, we call it Spirit…[165]

We note that this affirmation implies a negation of both the plurality of individual minds and the difference between finite minds and Infinite Mind.[166]

The Status of Manifestation

Manifestation, according to Brunton's mentalism, is of a mental essence: the object is made of the same stuff as the idea (although the first is produced by the Cosmic Mind, while the second is produced by the individual mind). Now, idea is inseparable from its substratum, Mind; thus we cannot separate manifestation from the Mind which ideates it, and make of this manifestation a second reality: thus, no dualism. This said, is appearance identical with Reality? No, for "not separate from" does not signify "not different from." One could not claim that manifestation has the same degree of Reality as Mind: it is in perpetual flux, while Mind is beyond change. The death of all phenomenal things contradicts their birth; their passage to non-existence contradicts their existence, according to the celebrated formula of Gaudapada in his *Karika* on the *Mandukya Upanishad* II, 6:

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[163] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 2, 134.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] We note that for Berkeley, only the first of these types of dualism (mind/matter) is denied; the three other types exist: mind-subject/idea-objects, finite mind/Infinite Mind, and a plurality of individual spiritual monads.

Adavanteca yannasti vartamane pi tat tatha
= That which is non-existent at the beginning and in the end, is necessarily non-existent in the middle"[167]

Besides their ephemeral character, due to their lack of autonomy, all phenomena are devoid of intrinsic reality: they exist only as emanations from a consciousness which, according to the mentalist postulate, is sufficient unto itself and exists independent of its internal or external objects. (The Indians illustrate this by the state of *nirvakalpa samadhi*, where consciousness is empty of contents.)

Thus, in comparison with Mind, manifestation is of an unreal order. But it is not as such *nihil* (= nothing, pure non-being), for it is experienced by consciousness.

Let us recall that Sankara does not deny that phenomena are experienced by individual consciousness. [168]

He admits a certain relative reality to the world, which is of the order of *vyavaharika satyam,* "empirical reality;" in the three degrees of Reality according to Sankara, *vyavaharika satyam* occupies the intermediate place between *paramarthika satyam*: Ultimate Reality, absolute, (the acosmic Absolute, the *Brahman Nirguna*) and *pratibhasika satyam,* "reflected reality," which is on the level of complete illusion, for example that of optical illusion or false perception, such as a mirage. The intermediary placement of the manifested world between True Reality and complete error indicates its ambiguous status, a mixture of real and unreal: the world is more real than an optical illusion, but less real than *Brahman*. That is what the Advaitins mean when they affirm that the world is "illusory," *maya*.

Probably this last formulation should not be taken too literally, but rather should be viewed as a soteriological device.[169] In the doctrine of *maya*, one can perhaps see a psychological tool for inducing the state of mind of *vairagya* (detachment, dispassion) in the *sadhaka*. The devaluing of the world implicit in the *maya* doctrine would then be worthwhile only for the intense valuing of *Brahman* which it would trigger.[170] It is true that the discourse of many Vedantins can be deceptive. What means, for example, the overly-repeated phrase, "The realized man knows only *Brahman*?" This cannot mean that the sage ceases to perceive the world; as long as he is in the body, the life of the senses and the ego necessarily continue. The *jivanmukta* has an ego, but he is no longer identified with it. The world does not disappear, but it no longer deludes the liberated one, who lives simultaneously on two levels of consciousness: the absolute level, where he is conscious of his true transpersonal "Brahmic" identity; and the relative level of empirical existence,

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[167] *Mandukyopanishad*, tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, p.89.
[168] *Maya* (Nescience) is not something unreal, but rather "indefinable" = *anirvacaniya*.
"Ignorance is different from reality and unreality, as neuter is different from masculine and feminine. Really this ignorance can never be properly explained. It has found a place in the Vedanta philosophy in order to explain the otherwise inexplicable production of the phenomenal world." (*Vedantasara*, II, 34, Note 3, p. 23, Advaita Ashrama ed.)
[169] One tends to forget that pragmatism is an essential characteristic of Eastern soteriologies (as of any authentic soteriology which aims at Liberation in the here and now).
[170] In a similar way, the exaggerated demeaning of women in texts intended for *sanyasis* was intended to help them overcome lust.

where he continues to play the role in the world which his *karma* has given him. But such formulas have added greatly to the misunderstanding of Vedanta. Certain Vedantic authors, aware of this ambiguity, tried to dispel it:

> ...When the ideas of *Jiva* and *Jagat* (world) are negated, the pure *Atman* alone remains.
>
> By negation it does not mean that the world and *Jiva* cease to be perceptible to the senses, it means the conviction of their illusory character. Otherwise people would be automatically liberated in deep sleep or in a faint.
>
> The supreme Self alone remains also means a conviction about Its reality and not non-perceiving of the world. Otherwise there would be no such thing as liberation in life.[171]

Inclusive and Exclusive Views of Reality; *vivartavada* and *ajativada*

Paul Brunton adopted in turn two points of view: an inclusive view and an inclusive one. According to the *inclusive* view, Reality includes manifestation:

> Just as a larger circle may contain a smaller one within it, yet the one need not contradict the other, so the ever-being of Mind may contain the ever-changing incredibly numerous forms of Nature without any contradiction.[172]

According to the *exclusive* view, Reality excludes manifestation:

> For all of us, for the witless and the wise, there are unanswerable questions in life and we must learn to live with them. None of us is a full and finalized encyclopedia, for however far we may penetrate into the meaning of things we are always confronted in the end by the Unknowable Mystery. We do not know why the whole process of involution and evolution ever started at all: because we find that there is in the deepest metaphysical sense no becoming and process at all, there is only the Real.[173]
>
> At the ultimate level there is neither purpose nor plan because there is no creation.[174]

Brunton's exclusive view of Reality agrees with the most nihilistic affirmations of Gaudapada. The contradiction between his inclusive and exclusive views is only an apparent one. In truth, it is a matter of the standpoint one adopts.

The same might almost be said also of the apparent contradiction between Vedanta's two theories of creation, *Ajativada* and *Vivartavada*.[175]

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[171] *Pancadasi*, VI, 12-14.
[172] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 29.
[173] Ibid., XVI, 4, 1, 63.
[174] Ibid., XVI, 4, 1, 64.
[175] But the *Vivartavada* theory nevertheless does not imply an inclusive view, since the world, being as elusive as a magician's trick, is held to be insignificant. Brunton's inclusive view, on the other hand, gives a positive value to the world by virtue of *Brahman* which underlies it.

The classical doctrine of creation in Advaita Vedanta is that of *Vivartavada*, which the Commentator on the *Vedantasara*[176] defines as:

> The transformation of the cause into effect without the former losing its own character, hence, apparent transformation. According to the Vedantin, the world is *Vivarta* of *Brahman*, i.e. the whole visible universe is a mere illusion—an unreal and illusory appearance—while *Brahman* is the only real entity ... The law of *Vivarta* is fundamentally different from the law of evolution (*parinama*), which admits real change in the cause.

A more radical Vedantic doctrine is that of *Ajativada*, the doctrine of "non-birth" (of the phenomenal world). Gaudapada says:

> *Samvrtya jayate sarvam sasvatam nasti tena vai*
> *sadbhavena hi ajam sarvam ucchedas tena nasti vai*
>
> = All this is seen to be born on account of the illusion of experience
> (due to Avidya; therefore nothng is permanent.[177]
>
> From the standpoint of Reality, everything is the birthless Self; therefore there is no such thing as annihilation.

The "birth" of phenomena exists only on the relative plane,[178] and its corollary is annihilation; birth as well as destruction fall within the realm of Nescience, non-reality; from the point of view of Ssupreme Reality (= *sadbhavena*), "all is non-born" (= *ajam sarvam*)—there is thus no creation, no destruction in the one Reality, to which human concepts such as that of causality are inapplicable.

It is a question, in fact, of two complementary and non-antagonistic doctrines aimed at two different audiences.[179] All authentic soteriology is pragmatic: the goal is to move the individual forward from wherever he happens to stand. Consequently, Vedantic discourse aims to be efficient: its content is less important than the effect it produces on the hearer; thus, we find many different presentations for one doctrine:

> *asrama trividha hina madhyama utkrsta drstayah*
> = There are three stages of life corresponding to three (lower, middle, and higher) powers of comprehension. The (Scriptures) out of compassion, have taught this devotion (or discipline) for the benefit of those (who are not yet enlightened).[180]

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[176] *Vedantasara*, 55 (Note 2, p. 41)
[177] *Mandukyopanishad* , (IV, 57) tr. Swami Nikhilananda, p. 267.
[178] Gaudapada uses the Buddhist term *samvrti satya* (= "veiled truth"), which joins in one radical unreality the two levels of conventional truth discerned by Shankara (who made more concessions to worldly people): *vyavaharika satya* = "empirical truth, mundane truth," and *pratibhasika satya* = "illusion, false perception."
[179] The Vedantic sage is intensely aware of the fact that individuals are of unequal intelligence and character. All do not have the maturity needed to absorb the most exalted and subtle metaphysical teaching. The sage knows that each individual is what he is as the result of his past karma. Consequently the sage is infinitely patient and does not judge anyone.
[180] Gaudapada *Karika, Mandukyopanisad* III, 16, tr. Swami Nikhilananda, p. 161.

The doctrine of *vivartavada* (*Brahman* manifests the world out of Its own substance, without Itself undergoing change, as a magician produces magical effects without himself changing), addresses individuals of lesser or average attainment, who are unable to transcend the relative point of view. Indeed, this doctrine implies the idea of causality, which is so deeply rooted in the human mind that very few can rise above it: *Brahman* is seen as the cause of the cosmic illusion, even though there is no true transformation of the cause into the effect. Subrahmanya Iyer finally rejected *vivartavada* for *ajativada*,[181] knowing well that the first doctrine would be enough for most individuals; *vivartavada* is not false, but only provisional, destined to be put aside when it has filled its function.

Vivartavada is about the "apparent" birth of the world, the "non-real" transformation of the Absolute into the world. Here the emphasis is put on the world in order to reassure or make concessions to ordinary minds.

Ajativada is about the non-birth of the world *in reality*, the non-transformation of the Absolute into the world, *in reality*. The emphasis here is put on the Absolute and not on the world, as the doctrine is intended for the most advanced *sadhakas*.

In fact, the fundamental teaching of both doctrines is the same: the world has no absolute, ultimate Reality. It is entirely a matter of point of view. Once the aspirant succeeds in transcending the relative point of view, the doctrinal edifice he had leaned on becomes useless and can be rejected as a crutch. Brunton was steeped in this supple dialectic under the influence of Iyer. One chapter of his posthumous *Notebooks*, entitled "The Double Standpoint," advocates the cultivation of a "bifocal vision"[182] while keeping in mind that these two points of view, the immediate and the ultimate, the ordinary and the philosophic, exist side by side:

> It would be an error to believe that the two standpoints are in conflict with each other; they are not because they cannot be. They can never produce a logical antimony; they are different readings of the same thing, a difference rendered inevitable because referring to different levels of knowledge, experience, and position.[183]

One observes that Brunton had the tendency to put the emphasis on the world (included in the Absolute), and not on the Absolute (excluding the world)—most likely because he was writing for modern readers; we will return to this point in more detail later on.

The exclusive view could lead to this question: if Reality excludes manifestation, isn't it limited by the latter, in which case it would lose its absolute, infinite, unlimited character? But this is a false question, as is the whole controversy over inclusive vs. exclusive views:

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[181] In this he was not consistent, because elsewhere he defended an inclusive metaphysical view (*Brahman* includes the world) which justified an ethic of solidarity with and selfless service to humanity.
[182] *Notebooks*, XIII, 1, 2, 39.
[183] Ibid., XIII, 1, 2, 6.

> Since the Real is unique, the One without a second and not the One which is related to the Many that spring out of it, it cannot correctly be set up in opposition to the Unreal, the Illusory, the Appearance. They are not on the same level.[184]

And also:

> The Infinite has never, can never, become the finite.[185]

Indeed, the Absolute cannot be limited by the relative, because they are of two essentially different orders of reality.[186]

4.3.2 A Threefold, Non-Dualist Conception of the Real

We will now comment now on a passage[187] which clarifies Brunton's notion of Mind:

> World-Mind is only a function of Mind. It is not a separate entity. There is only one Life-Power, not two. Hence it is wrong to say that World-Mind *arises* within Mind, as I said in *The Wisdom of the Overself*. Similarly of the Overself; it too is a different *function* of the same Mind.[188]

The same conception is expressed in another para, this time in theological language, where the mentalist doctrine is clothed in esoteric Christian rather than in non-dualist Neo-Vedantic terms:

> What is the meaning of the words "the Holy Trinity"? The Father is the absolute and ineffable Godhead, Mind in its ultimate being. The Son is the soul of the universe, that is, the World-Mind. The Holy Ghost is the soul of each individual, that is, the Overself. The Godhead is one and indivisible and not multiform and can never divide itself up into three personalities.[189]

Thus we have here a conception of Reality which is at once *non-dualist* and threefold:

– *Mind* is the Absolute without attributes, and consequently without a specific realm. It is the essence underlying all manifestation and the Mystery underlying the unnmanifest.

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[184] Ibid., XVI, 4, 1, 94.
[185] Ibid., XVI, 4, 110.
[186] On this point, Brunton agreed with both Vedantic and Catholic Doctrine:
OM. purnamadah purnamidam / purnat purnamudacyate / purnasya purnamadaya / purnameva vasisyate
= "OM. That is Infinite, and this is Infinite. The Infinite proceeds from the Infinite. Taking the Infinite from the Infinite, it remains as The Infinite alone." (*Isa Upanisad*, initial and final mantra)
Even if the created universe were infinite, it would not add to nor take away from the uncreated Infinite; the world of appearance, which is potentially infinite in the sense of an indefinite multiplicity of phenomenal forms, could not in any way alter the Infinity of Reality.
In different terminology, Sertillanges (*Les sources de la croyance en Dieu*. Paris, 1921) emphasizes the impossibility of the Perfect being limited by the imperfect:
"Nothing can come to Him from the outside which would not already belong to His essence; nothing can depart from Him and cease to belong to Him."
[187] See the Diagram in the section which follows.
[188] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 51.
[189] Ibid., XVI, 4, 1, 54.

– *World-Mind* is the principle of activity having for its proper realm the causal level of the World-Idea (cf. Diagram level 2; also "The notion of World Idea," herein, in B/b). It is conscious of having Mind as its essential nature.

– *Overself* is the principle of individuation having for its proper realm the subtle level of the World-Idea (cf. Diagram level 3; also "The Notion of the World-Idea," herein in B/b); It is conscious of having Mind as its essential nature.

A Diagram

The diagram which follows juxtaposes the Vedantic cosmogonical scheme with Brunton's scheme of the Real and relative planes. As it appears here, it is all a question of level. There are four levels, one for the Real and three for the relative, which are organized into hierarchies in a pyramidal structure, with the non-manifest One at the summit, and at the base the manifest, materialized multiplicity. Each higher level pervades the lower ones; consequently, no level is separate from the others. Each level is real in regard to the levels below it, but illusory in regard to the levels above it: thus, levels two and three are real in regard to level four, but illusory in regard to level one.

The human intellect operates at level four, that of the material manifestation of the universe—*Virat* in the Vedantic Cosmogony—with its three characteristics of time, space, and causality; this is the level of the personality or ego. It is the most gross level, corresponding in individual consciousness to the waking state, *vaisvanara*, in the Vedantic doctrine of the three states of consciousness (*avasthatraya*, cf. following chapter).

D I A G R A M

		BRUNTON	ADVAITA
1/ REAL:		**Mind** Essential nature of World-Mind and Overself	***Nirguna Brahman*** (*Turiya*)
RELATIVE:			
2/ Causal Level		**World-Mind** Causal principle of the Universe	***Isvara*** (*Prajna*)
		/	
		World-Idea	
		\	
3/ Subtle Level		**Overself** Multiplicity & Individuation	***Hiranyagarbha*** (*Taijasa*)
4/ Gross Level	Matter:	**Manifested Universe** Time, Space, Causality Ego	***Virat*** (*Vaisvanara*)

VIEWED FROM THE BOTTOM:

3/ and 2/ are seen as real; superimposed on 1/

VIEWED FROM THE TOP:

2/,3/,4/ are seen as unreal

Level three is that of manifestation in the subtle state—*Hiranyagarbha*—i.e. the sum total of all the *vasanas* (karmic impressions) of all beings and things in the universe, the level at which the multiplicity which was latent on level two manifests. From a mentalist perspective, it is the level of ideas. It is at this level that the concept of the Overself becomes operative as our higher individuality. This subtle level corresponds, for our individual consciousness, to the dream state, *taijasa*.

Level two is that of manifestation in the causal state, i.e. that of the creative Intelligence presiding over the Cosmos. This corresponds to the level of *Isvara* in the Vedantic cosmogony, and

it is effectively at this level that the concept of the World-Mind becomes operative as the causal Principle of the Universe. The corresponding state of consciousness is *prajna*, deep sleep, from whence emerge the multiplicity of perceived objects in the dream and waking states, and into which they are reabsorbed.

These three levels are those of the relative realm. We will now cross the "barrier of *Maya*," which simply designates the Mystery of the emergence of cosmic manifestation at the heart of a perfect and self-subsisting Absolute.

Level one, that of the Real, is the most difficult to comprehend, because it is the most remote from the domain of the human intellect. In Advaita, it is the realm of *Nirguna Brahman*, about which one can say nothing, save that it seems to be the realm of pure Consciousness passively resting in Itself, that of static Being. Here is found the supreme Mystery, Mind, as the veritable essence of the World-Mind and the Overself. The corresponding state of individual consciousness is *turiya*, the state of the realized sage.

Here two remarks are necessary:

1. The World-Mind and the Overself are two functions of the same entity, Mind. The World-Mind is Mind made conscious of Itself through the cosmos; the Overself is Mind made conscious of Itself through the individual. Mind is the essential nature—*svarupa*—of both the World Mind and the Overself.

These two functions operate in the relative realm: the World-Mind as the principle of the causal state, being co-extensive with manifestation; the Overself, as the principle of the subtle state, the realm of multiplicity and consequently of individuation. The proper realms in which these two functions operate are thus not ultimately real. Nevertheless, the functions, or principles, of *activity* and *individuation* are included, in a potential state, in the Real. They are intrinsic to it. In the entire diagram only that which has the status of level one is Real, i.e.:

– That which is self-existent and has inherent Being.
– That which cannot be an object.
– That which cannot change.

The World-Mind and the Overself meet these criteria in that they are conscious of themselves as being Mind, i.e. having Mind as their svarupa. Both are composed of the Real and the relative, for both are Being encompassing a process of becoming (cosmic and individual).

This conception of the Real is thus *non-dualist* because it admits a one and unique Absolute Being: Mind not linked with manifestation—Being in Itself.

This conception of the Absolute is also *threefold*, inasmuch as the Absolute also contains a potentiality for both activity and individuation.

2. This threefold view is necessarily and solely a view *from bottom to top*: it is that of the human intellect, situated on level four. The intellect looks up toward the higher. Incapable of leaping directly to the Non-manifest, it must traverse the various stages of the conceptual pyramid leading up to the Absolute. Thus the notions of the Overself and the World-Mind which the aspirant discovers progressively, are like steps on a ladder leading to the ultimate concept of Mind. All that transcends the gross level, where he finds himself, appears as absolute to the human intellect. Viewed from below, levels three and two appear as if superimposed on level one and almost on the same plane, thus Real. On the other hand, viewed from above, from the Real, levels two, three, and four are perceived as pure illusion.

The left side of the diagram (Brunton) should be read *from bottom to top*, but the right side (Advaita), *from top to bottom*.[190]

Essentially, Brunton takes the relative point of view, while Advaita adopts the point of view of the Absolute. For Brunton, there is a tripartite or mitigated non-dualism, an *inclusive* view of the Real—the Real includes manifestation—which corresponds necessarily and solely to a human view: [191] it is the human individual, locked within the limits of his senses and his intellect, who has need of an inclusive view of Reality, inasmuch as he has not attained the ultimate degree of Illumination. The Absolute Itself can be content with an *exclusive* view of the Real—the Real excludes manifestation. It is there that we find the radical non-dualism, or pure monism, of orthodox Advaita Vedanta. But is it legitimate for a human being to adopt the point of view of the Absolute? That is one of the implicit criticisms of Advaita suggested by Brunton's view.

4.3.3 Symbolism of Numbers

To better understand the concepts of the Absolute—Mind in Itself, Nirguna Brahman—and of the creator God—World-Mind, *Isvara*—it might be useful to briefly examine the symbolism of numbers.

> Manifestation implies the necessity of manifesting. But it might be objected that any sort of necessity existing in the divine equally implies its insufficiency. The answer is that the number One may become aware of itself as being one only by becoming aware of the presence of Two—itself and another. But the figure Naught is under no compulsion. Here we have a mathematical hint towards understanding the riddle of manifestation. Mind as Void is the supreme inconceivable unmanifesting ultimate whereas the World-Mind is forever throwing forth the universe-series as a second, an "other" wherein it becomes self-aware.[192]

The number One is perhaps not the best choice to symbolize the Absolute, because it presupposes the numerical series two, three, four, etc. It is linked with the other numbers, whereas

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[190] Two possible readings of this diagram will be examined in the next chapter, in response to the following questions: Is the concept of the Overself, central to Brunton, compatible with Non-Dualism? At what level does this concept of Overself appear. And for what purpose?

[191] The significance he accords gives it will be examined in the following chapter , within the framework of psychological realism.

[192] *Notebooks*, XVI, 3, 3, 60.

the Absolute is beyond all relationship. Brunton prefers zero as the symbol for Mind-in-Itself, the inconceivable Absolute, empty of all qualifications. On the other hand, the number One, inasmuch as it presupposes the number Two, could apply more correctly to the-One-in-relation-with-the-Many, i.e. the Cosmic Mind, *Isvara*/World-Mind. This is also why the term "non-dualism" is preferable to "monism," for the One is, in the end, as illusory as the Many which it implies. The One presupposes The Two, because all things of the world exist in pairs of opposites, every thing has a contrary or a complement. Only the Absolute escapes this law. In an interview with Brunton, Professor Hiriyanna declared:

> Nirguna Brahman is not unconscious, but un-self-conscious—Saguna Brahman is self-conscious Brahman, i.e. Isvara.[193]

Indian scientists have proposed a mathematical interpretation of Advaita. Because of the ambiguity of the number One, they prefer to substitute the mathematical symbol for Infinity as a more adequate representation of *Brahman*:

> This one is not the numerical one which is half of two or one-fourth of four but the infinite one in which all the mathematical numbers get merged and lost ... Thus the unity of Brahman is not the unity of the number one, but the One of the mathematical infinity or Advaita.[194]

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[193] From Brunton's Indian notes. One could perhaps make this somewhat enigmatic expression clearer with a quotation of Plotinus regarding the Good (*Enneads* VI, 7, 38): "And nothing belongs to it, save a certain simple intuition relative to itself," about which Emile Brehier comments: "A mode of knowledge which does not suppose a splitting into subject and object." This split, on the contrary, exists in *Isvara*/World-Mind (as it exists in the *jiva*): World Mind would therefore be the Subject/Witness contemplating the Idea of the World as object, while being conscious of its true Being as being the essence of the Witness (*saksi-svarupa*); in the same way, the *jivas* become aware of their true nature through the splitting of witness (*saksin*) and ego (*ahamkara*). It is the otherness of the object which causes the witness-consciousness to arise; thus the subject becomes conscious of himself. "This is why [Plato] was correct in putting the otherness where there is intelligence and essence; intelligence must always grasp both itself and the other in [its] thinking." (Plotinus, op. cit., VI, 7, 39)

[194] From an article by Prof. R. Krishnamurthi, Osmania University Hyderabad: "Advaita and Mathematics," which appeared in: *Kumbakonam Advaitasabha Golden Jubilee, Commemorative Vol.*, 1978.

He cites in his commentary the great Indian mathematician Bhaskaracarya, who gives to *Brahman* and to *Maya* respectively the mathematical-symbolical equivalents Infinity and Zero:

"He states that any number divided by zero is called *Khahara* (= infinite), a value which neither increases by addition nor decreases in value by subtraction ... Thus, at Pralaya (= cosmic dissolution), when a number of finite or infinite quantities enter the Brahman, the Brahman continues to be unaltered: and so, the Prapancha (= manifestation) or Tvam (= the individual being in the upanishadic great saying, "Tat tvam asi" = That thou art), which goes back into the Brahman, has as its true nature Tat (= That, ie. the Brahman), as it neither increases or decreases the value of the original.

"Any thing which neither increases nor decreases a value may be either Sunya (Zero) or Maya (negligible or very, very, very small). Bhaskara's Zero is not the Sunya of the Buddhists, but the Maya of the Advaitins. Modern mathematicians think that zero, in the sense of Sunya, should not enter any mathematical process as it is of the nature of the son of a barren woman. This zero is of the nature of ... Maya, which is not a complete nothingness."

Brunton's choice of Zero as symbol for the Absolute indicates perhaps a Buddhist influence, zero evoking more the idea of the Void than it does the Plenitude of *Brahman*.

4.3.4 Conclusion: Mentalism and Advaita

It would seem that Paul Brunton drew from two essential sources in constructing his mentalist doctrine:

1. Without a doubt, the general framework was provided by Iyer's Neo-Vedantic teachings which, we have seen, consisted of a rational, philosophic, and scientific re-reading of Sankara, as opposed to the traditional orthodox reading: it is the two-fold process studied above, which first passes from materialism to idealism, then from idealism to non-dualistic mentalism (reducing ideas to their source and substratum, consciousness, and affirming the existence of a sole and unique Mind):

> The jnani knows that the world is idea; he knows that the idea is only Brahman. He has converted external objects into ideas and ideas into Brahman, because he has inquired into their real nature. Moreover, I have not yet taught you the reverse process: how ideas are converted back into the external world.[195]

2. I have not found anything in Advaita, nor in Brunton's Indian notes, on this "reverse process," and so I am inclined to think that this specific doctrinal point must likely originate in a source outside of Advaita. It would amount to a mentalist cosmogenesis: the transmission of the image of the world, of the karmic "seeds of ideation" to the individual consciousness, the connection between brain and heart, between World-Mind and individual mind, etc.

Brunton affirms moreover that he had the intuitive conviction of mentalism (in states of mystical contemplation) well before his analytical, intellectual construction of it. Mentalism seemed the only viable interpretative gateway to Vedantic non-dualist teaching, whose traditional dogmatic formulation would not appeal to the modern rational mind. Brunton deliberately opted for a tripartite or mitigated non-dualism, because he placed himself in the relative point of view, that of the human individual. The standpoint of Sankara and orthodox Advaita looks like a pure monism, for it at once adopts a point of view transcending the human condition. In concluding this comparative study of Brunton's mentalism and the Advaita, we would now be inclined to speak of them not as two different doctrines, but as two different perspectives on what looks like the same doctrine.[196]

[195] Brunton Notes on Iyer's Mysore classes, Wisdom's Goldenrod archives.
[196] This question of the same doctrine explained from different perspectives will be examined in relation to the concept of the Overself in the section of the following chapter entitled "The Overself and Non-Dualism: Two Interpretations."

Chapter 5: INQUIRING INTO THE SELF: THE CONCEPT OF THE OVERSELF

5.1 The Illusory Nature of the Ego

In his writings, Paul Brunton took up the classical psychological analyses presented by Advaita: *drg-drsya viveka* (discrimination between subject and object) and *avasthatraya* (analysis of the three states of consciousness). We will briefly review these two methods (emphasizing certain usages and extrapolations made by orthodox and Neo-Vedantins), and outline their adaptation by Brunton, who in this regard remained fairly close to Ramana Maharshi and Subrahmanya Iyer.

5.1.1 Discriminating Subject and Object: *drg-drsya viveka*

According to Y. Subba Rao,[197] the method of *drg-drsya viveka*,[198] found in the *Kena Upanisad* (I, 4-9) and systematically explained in the treatise which bears its name, is a variant of the principal method of Vedanta, false attribution followed by retraction, already mentioned in the previous chapter. As was the case in discriminating effect from cause, here the opposition and separation of *drg* (the seer, the perceiving subject) and *drsya* (the thing seen, the object perceived) is only a preliminary and purely pedagogical step, whose essential purpose is to help the aspirant disidentify from his ego, by showing that the latter is an object for the true subject, the Self. The following step would be to understand that the *drsya* is not in the final analysis different from the *drg*, but the method to be employed at this point is that of *avasthatraya*.

The analysis of *drg-drsya viveka* presented here was taught by Subrahmanya Iyer. Our source is thirty-five pages of notes taken by Brunton during sessions with Iyer on the classical text *Drg-Drsya Viveka*.[199] These notes allow us to determine what Iyer drew from this analysis, but before examining Iyer's interpretation, we will first summarize the classical Vedantic analysis:

All that is perceived by consciousness—external objects, and internal objects such as thoughts, feelings etc.—is *drsya*. The two characteristics common to all *drsya* are: their changing, impermanent character, and the fact that they are mental constructions—for they exist above all *in* and *for* our consciousness. Thus Suresvara wrote:

Drsyah sabdadayah klpta ...
= Sensible objects, sounds etc., are imagined.[200]

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[197] in his *The Method of the Vedanta*, London and New York, 1989.
[198] This method is also used by Suresvara in Ch. 2 of *Naiskarmya Siddhi*, with the aim of "purifying the category *tvam* [= *aham*]" in the great saying *Tat tvam asi* from the objectifiable elements pertaining to the third person.
[199] The short treatise was published by the Ramakrishna Ashram of Mysore (6th ed., 1976), with an English translation by Swami Nikhilananda, himself an Iyer student; the preface was written by Iyer and the text is dedicated to the Maharaja of Mysore. The translator attributed the work to Vidyaranya's master, Bharati Tirtha, the Jagad-Guru of the Monastery of Srngeri from 1328 to 1380.
[200] *Naiskarmya-Siddhi*, II, 46.

The terms *kalpana, kalpita*, etc. (= fabrication, mental confection, imagination) are used abundantly by this author in conjunction with the category of *drsya*, the sensible or, more generally, the perceptible. The ego (*ahamkara*) falls into this category of *drsya* because it is an object for consciousness.

Michel Hulin has shown that for Sankara, self-consciousness necessarily bifurcates into a Witness-Self and an ego-object "seen" by this Witness:

> ... All phenomenal forms of consciousness (and of knowledge) turn out to be intentional—founded on the subject-object division—whereas the essence of the Self implies absolute indivisibility. To distinguish between the universal form of knowledge, which expresses the side of the subject, and its particular contents, where the structure of the object is reflected, always appeared indispensable to Sankara.[201]

Furthermore,

> If intentionality is the structure of any consciousness, in all cases the "grasper" will be other than the "grasped." Either I am the grasper, but in this case what I apprehend is not "myself," but only a certain object, or I am indeed the grasped content, in which case it is another, and not myself, who grasps me.[202]

Hulin showed that this analysis only confirms for Sankara the self-established character of the *atman*, independent from the *pramanas* (= means of knowledge: perception, inference, etc.). Since the Self cannot be an object, it is therefore the true subject, the "grasper," and the ego-pseudo-subject is in reality an object, the "grasped":

Further characteristics of *drg* are inferred from those of *drsya*: perception of change implies the necessary existence of an immutable pole, able to register the evanescence of things by its very stability. To be precise, the use of the terms "to see," "seeing," etc., is certainly metaphoric: we must not confuse empirical perception with the transcendental principle of consciousness. Thus Sankara[203] reminds us:

> Seeing is of two kinds ... That which passes for such in the world is a function of the inner organ (mind) associated with the sense-organ of sight. It is an act, and hence it begins and ends. But the seeing of the Self is (not an act but) the very nature of the Seer, as heat and light are the very nature of fire, and hence it has no beginning or end. Because it appears to be fused with the seeing that is an act, and which is only its conditioning adjunct, the Self is spoken of as "the seer"....[204]

Since all that is objectifiable is reducible to a *drsya* and thus to a fluctuating appearance, it follows that only the *drg* is unobjectifiable: it is precisely what remains when one has mercilessly subtracted from consciousness all possible contents, even the most subtle, the idea of "I," the sense of egohood, *ahamkara*. The analysis of *drg-drsya* thus brings us to the discovery of the witness, the immutable *saksin*, which is nothing other than *atman* witnessing the spectacle of the world. The

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[201] Hulin, *Le Principe de l'ego dans la pensee indienne classique*, p. 116.
[202] Ibid., p. 117.
[203] Quoted in Subba Rao, op. cit., p. 91.
[204] *BrhadAranyaka Upanishad Bhasya*, III, 4, 2.

Self being still tainted by relativity—a witness presupposes a thing to witness, thus duality—this step is only preliminary; it allows the unmasking of the ego as illusory, thus eliminating the principal obstacle to the direct experience of non-duality.

Let us note in passing that this identity of the Self as "seeing," or uninterrupted Consciousness, is reflected in Sanskrit terminology. For example, Suresvara frequently uses such words as *drsi* and *drsti* (= view, vision) as absolute synonyms of the name of the agent, *drastr* (= "the seer"). We note that the Sanskrit language itself, by its polysemy, seems to encourage this identification by condensing both of these ideas into one term, *drg* or *drk*, the very term used in the name of the method *drg-drsya viveka*.

We will now examine Subrahmanya Iyer's ideas about this *drg-drsya-viveka* analysis. Iyer considers it as the very first step of the Vedantic method, allowing the attainment of a provisional truth. It serves as an indispensable prerequisite to the more subtle and complex *avasthatraya* analysis, which in turn leads up to Advaita's ultimate truth, the non-otherness of *jiva* and *Brahman*.

Iyer took a certain national pride in this analysis, which he recognized was unknown in Europe, and we sense that his sympathies for the West were compensated for by a sense of superiority in the philosophic realm. He was convinced that India had gone much farther than the West in metaphysical investigation:

> Knowledge in the West implies the *known*. In India it implies both the *known* and the *knower*.[205] This distinction is not known to Westerners. It is the chief point of Drg Drsya Viveka. The knower is entirely different from the knowable or known....
>
> Let Western thinkers begin with study of Drg Drsya Viveka. If they have the capacity to understand the book, they do not need yoga. But if they cannot grasp that the drg is not the Arsyam, they must have recourse to yoga practice....

Iyer's pride seems legitimate, for the originality of Indian thought (from the *Upanisads* on) lies in its shifting of the subject-object boundary much deeper within the individual. The Indians rejected as being on the side of the object, external and material, all the psychic structures and functions which Western thought regards as the true subject.[206] Thus, for the Indians, pure non-particularized Consciousness, unaffected by the world, is the only true subject—the whole subject and nothing else than the subject. This subject is one and the same in all individuals. The Witness-Self is not individualized; it is universal.

Iyer relied on this analysis, the veritable base of Vedantic thought, to criticize both Western psychology and mysticism in general:

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[205] The emphasis is Brunton's.

[206] For Descartes, the subject is the *res cogitans*, opposed to the *res extensa*, which is matter: consciousness is identified with the capacity to think. But for the Indians, the intellect, with its fine mechanism of thinking, is entirely on the side of the object, is "subtle matter," while the true subject is Consciousness devoid of thought.

> This book is the most important one to teach you: 1. that even if you see Krishna, it is only your imagination; 2. to ascertain the true meaning of personality; 3. that things are coming and going, and hence are mere appearances.

In fact, the first two points draw their crucial importance from the third: all that is *drsya* does not have substantial ontological reality; rather, it is pure phenomenal evanescence, simple mental projection.

> Whoever knows the Drg Drsya Viveka analysis can easily evaluate all yogic phenomena, all occult and spiritistic "wonders." Let us analyze the meaning of "inner psychic, mystic, or clairaudient voices." Whatever should you hear, where is it? In the mind. If it is in the mind it is only an idea, and an idea is something seen, a drsyam, and hence not a reality.

One can imagine the effect of such a teaching on Brunton, with his mystical tendencies and his early involvement in the realm of the occult and the supernatural. Let us remember that, in his correspondence with Iyer, he compared the latter to a surgeon who had removed a cataract from his eye.[207] To continue the surgical metaphor, another painful operation involving Iyer's intellectual scalpel was his extraction of the visceral belief in the reality of the "I":

> European psychology has not gone beyond personality, has not reached the Witness. This is because unless one's mind is sufficiently sharp, the notion of the Sakshin cannot be seen. One must perceive that the I itself comes and goes, as in sleep, for instance. What is it that perceives this? It is the Witness. The I is an object, the Witness is the subject. This position is the next step ahead for Western psychology. It must be reached, mastered, and then dropped for the next higher step, the understanding of the Atman. The Witness-self is not an individuality, it is universal. But still it is only a temporary stage, not the ultimate truth.[208]

Subrahmanya Iyer in passing praises Ramana Maharshi, who taught to those who came to him the method of *atma-vicara*, inquiry into the Self, beginning with the question: "Who am I?"

> Maharishi has rendered excellent service in this respect. He lead to the knowledge of the illusoriness of the I: only after this is mastered do we drop *that* as a lower view and teach the final truth of non-duality.…
>
> It is for beginners, and here Maharishi's "Who Am I?" analysis is most useful, as it shows beginners that the I comes and goes, and that they must look beyond it to *the principle of Awareness* which tells you of these appearances and disappearances of the I. But beyond that point of the Witness self, the Sakshin, the Maharishi's teaching does not go.

Iyer clarifies the notions of Witness and Self, each in relation to the other:

> This witness is the final subject; it cannot be the object to any other thing. When regarded apart from its object or objects it is the Atman, and when considered in relation to mind or objects, it is Witness, but both are same. Of it we may postulate nothing, only that It *is*. No qualification may be added.

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[207] See Part I, ch. 3 of this thesis.

[208] This quote and those which follow are from Brunton's Iyer notes.

Drawing on concrete examples, Iyer shows that perceiving the multiple and the changing is only possible in reference to a principle of unity and immutability:

> You see the horse and then the house and so on. The eye which sees all those remains changeless. If the eye also changes it could not distinguish between the house and the horse. If the eye which sees the horse and the eye which sees the house are different it cannot distinguish the two. The change of forms you are able to see because there is one thing which does not change and which perceives it.… That which perceives the changes cannot itself change.

To this unique and immutable consciousness, one cannot assign birth nor destruction:

> This final consciousness never sets or rises. For to rise means to come to existence in time can never go beyond it. Growth and destruction are only related to objects and not to the subject. Unity is something enduring.

What soteriological teaching does Iyer draw from the analysis of *Drg-Drsya-Viveka*?

The confusion between *drg* and the *drsya* which reigns prior to undertaking the Vedantic inquiry (*vicara*) is an effect of *maya*. We take this opportunity to take a look at Iyer's interpretation of this key Vedantic term:

> Maya is the thinking power, but as Maya is difficult to understand, it has been wrongly defined as magical illusion. But it is only thought power, i.e, world is idea.
>
> When the mind is completely engrossed in the dream, the subject is concealed by the object which covers or makes you forget. This is the veiling power of Maya. Gnani, i.e. discrimination-yoga, is necessary to get at the Drik. Maya is like a dancing girl. Your mind is always dancing busy with either internal or external objects.
>
> Maya is that tendency which makes you think more and more of the world, and which is constantly projecting or creating new things, changes etc. Thus we had bullock carts at first, then man made coaches, then trains, then motor-cars—always creating something new in the world. The other quality of Maya—the veiling—means that despite this tendency, he does not know what it all means, and the real nature of his life and activity is veiled from him. This tendency never to keep quiet but to be always doing something-projecting—applies equally to thoughts and feelings.…
>
> Vichara is that which enables you to know what Drik is and what Drsyam is; how to free yourself from these two. It enables you to see that Maya is only a function of the mind.

Here we recognize (despite Iyer's mentalist interpretation of *maya*) the two "powers," obscuration (*avarana-sakti*) and projection (*viksepa-sakti*), which classical Advaita attributes to *Maya*. We find here also, the image of the dancer, used by Samkhya to symbolize *prakrti*, matter.

Here is the soteriological practice recommended by Iyer: rational inquiry itself, accompanied by inner renunciation (i.e. disidentification from the various levels of the personality), which is his interpretation of the term *sannyasa*:

> The object of Sanyas is: (a) to dissociate yourself from the body; (b) at a later stage you dissociate yourself from even the thoughts in the mind, and (c) lastly you dissociate yourself even from the 'I,' the ego. Then you know that you are only the seer.

It is this practice, learned from both Ramana Maharshi and Iyer, which Brunton takes up, fairly faithfully in spite of some adaptations, in *The Quest of the Overself*.[209]

Of course, this method of progressively shedding all the constituents of the personality (the image of peeling an onion) recalls the Vedantic analysis of the five *kosas* (the five "sheaths" of the Self) found in the *Taittiriya Upanisad*. The physical ego corresponds to the *annamayakosa* (= "the sheath made of food"); the emotions to the *pranamayakosa* (= "the sheath made of breath, vitality") and to the *manomayakosa* (= "the mental sheath"); the intellect to the *vijnanamayakosa* (= "the intellectual sheath"). The last Vedantic *kosa*, the *anandamayakosa* (= "the sheath made of bliss"), a transparent and tenuous veil covering the Self, is included, as we shall see, in Brunton's concept of the Overself.

If it is relatively easy for the attentive reader to understand that he is different from his body and his emotions, it is less easy to disidentify from his own thinking. Until now, indeed, he has progressed through thinking, whereas from now on, it is the stopping of mental activity which is required of him.

In order to grasp the thought of the "I" and to see it for what it is, i.e. a simple mental object (*drsya*), he must transcend the plane of thinking and become pure, transpersonal attention, emptied of all thoughts other than the primitive and primordial one which engenders all the others: the thought of the "I."

When this intense state of concentration is attained, the individual has entered the condition of the witness (*drg* or *saksin*): he observes that he is not totally identified with his empirical psycho-physical ego, that there subsists a residual conscious principle which *sees* this empirical ego as one sees an object—a residue beyond which one cannot go (without falling into infinite regression, "witness to the witness," etc.)—and he feels that this residue is not *in him* as are the body, emotions, thoughts etc.., but *is* him, that it *is* his most intimate, most authentic Self-itself. Through the experience of the witness, the mind already enters the ascesis of meditation, whose first stage is sustained concentration. Later on, in the stage of contemplation proper, the "I" thought in its turn dissolves, leaving consciousness empty of all contents, solitary and naked. The "residual" presence of the witness then reveals itself spontaneously as the one real Self, the seeker's true identity.

5.1.2 Analyzing the Three States of Consciousness: *avasthatraya*

The method of *avasthatraya* constitutes the second step of this progressive path towards non-duality. It is explained in the *BrhadAranyaka*, one of the oldest *Upanisads* (IV, 3, 9-30), and also in

[209] In chapters III-V.

the *Mandukya Upanisad* (2-6) and Gaudapada's *Karika* (Ch. I). Subrahmanya Iyer[210] gave it considerable importance, as is evidenced by fifty pages of notes taken by Brunton during sessions they devoted to it. Before examining Iyer's own interpretation of it, let us briefly sum up the analysis of *avasthatraya*.

This analysis, the details of which we will not enter into here, once again takes up the distinction between *drg* and *drsya* employed in the previous method, but this time applies it to the whole of human experience. It shows that the three states of consciousness which perpetually succeed each other, waking (*jagrata*), dream (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*susupti*), are of the order of *drsya*, perception. That element of consciousness which is able to register their succession must necessarily itself be fixed and immutable, otherwise it would be carried along, dispersed and fragmented in the perpetual rotation of these states, without any possiblity of a synthetic, total experience. That is the seer (*Drg*) or witness (*saksin*), itself independent of the different states which it knows as objects. Those states come and go and are ultimately devoid of reality, while the witness (which cannot be seen by anyone, but is itself pure seeing, pure cognitive consciousness) is the *atman*, the one reality.

The *atman*, which was called *drg* or *saksin* from a relative point of view, when it faced the spectacle of the world, is called here *turiya*, "the fourth" in relation to the three states of consciousness. It differs from them while being the only true element in them: it is coextensive with them while at the same time transcending them. In fact, *turiya* is not a state, it is the nature of ultimate Reality, a non-dual form of consciousness generally unknown to us. One could only describe it by use of paradoxes, like the "conscious sleep"spoken of by Brunton to Swami Siddheswarananda. Here the Vedantic method used is no longer directly *adhyaropa-apavada* (= false attribution followed by retraction), but rather *anvaya-vyatireka* (= co-presence and co-absence of two datas), allowing the discrimination of the invariable from the variable. Here one observes *anvaya* (the coexistence) of the Self with *jagrat*, *svapna*, and *susupti* (= waking, dream, and sleep); thus the Self is present in the three states, but *the experience of one state is not present in another*. Thus the Self is coexistent with the three states, but the states are not coexistent with the Self. It is thus proven that the Self is the invariable factor, immutable, while the states themselves are variable, and only that which is immutable is real.

The analysis of the states of consciousness made by certain Vedantins such as Gaudapada insists on the mutual contradiction between the waking and dream states (which neutralize or reciprocally cancel each other out) and on their common annihilation in the state of deep sleep, which proves their impermanence, and thus their metaphysical unreality. Sankara (who in his youth, in his Commentary on Gaudapada's *Karikas* agreed with Gaudapada's position) adopts a firm position of anti-idealist realism in his Commentary of the *Brahma-Sutra*, refuting the Buddhist doctrine of *niralambanavada*,[211] which was rooted in the analogy of the waking and dream states. For Sankara, the dream state does not refute the waking state, whose relative reality he maintained:

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[210] See also Part I, ch. 3 of the present work, "A Neo-Vedantin," end footnote.

[211] = "perception without external support" (support of an external object) – that is, the object is mentally constructed and projected; it does not stand outside of consciousness.

> Because of a difference in properties, the experience of the waking state is not the same as that of dream.[212]

But even if dream is relegated to the level of *pratibhasika* (= absolutely illusory), while the waking state is seen at the dignified level of *vyavaharika* (= relative, empirical reality of the waking state), it still remains true that both are superimpositions on the *atman*, the only Absolute Reality.

> The method of…teaching that the Absolute undergoes the three states of waking, dream and dreamless sleep and that of teaching that it is the cause of the world belong together. In both cases it is taught that the origin, maintenance and dissolution of the world proceed from the highest Lord, and this teaching is given to indicate that the world is non-different from Him. The name and form found in dream and waking exclude one another mutually, and each lapses when the other is in play. Both lapse by nature in dreamless sleep. Hence we conclude that they are only superimposed on the Self thorough Ignorance. So our final conviction must be that the whole notion that the Self undergoes the three states of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep it itself a mere illusion (maya).[213]

The logical result of this analysis is an *exclusive view* of Reality, one in which the *Brahman nirguna* (the Absolute without attributes) excludes manifestation. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, the Vedantic tradition applies to cosmogony an ordering which is the equivalent on the collective plane (*samasti*) to that of the *avasthatraya* on the individual plane (*vyasti*). There is a respective correspondence between *vaisvanara* (waking consciousness), *taijasa* (dream consciousness), and *prajna* (deep sleep consciousness) on the one hand, and *virat* (the material world), *hiranyagarbha* (the subtle world), and *Isvara* (the world reposing in the latent state in God) on the other. The orthodox vision, which found no better expression than in Sankara, clearly holds the exclusive view:

> The Absolute is entirely bereft of the three states.[214]

As for Iyer's and later Brunton's use of the *avasthatraya*, their emphasis is put on the analogy of waking and dream to illustrate their mentalist interpretation of non-duality,[215] leading, unlike the orthodox position, to an *inclusive view* of Reality:

> That which appears as the three states plus that into which the three states disappear, these two together form the Supreme Brahman.

We will not here linger on this issue of exclusive vs. inclusive view, for its metaphysical premises were explored in the previous chapter, and its ethical implications will be examined in the following chapter.[216] Here we will continue our examination of Iyer's approach.

According to Iyer, the doctrine of *avasthatraya* applies the method of *drg-drsya-viveka* to the whole of human life. It allows us to include the evidence from all three states of consciousness, and

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[212] *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya*, II, 2, 29.
[213] Subba Rao, *The Method of the Vedanta*, p. 104-105.
[214] *Brahma Sutra Sankara Bhasya*, I, 3, 42.
[215] See ch.4, section 4.3 of this thesis.
[216] In section 6.3.3.

thus to arrive at the complete truth. By contrast, Western philosophy, which limits itself to the experience of the waking state, can only formulate systems which are only so many contradictory opinions:

> If you want to know the truth of a matter, you should not see one side only, but both sides, nay all sides. Hence the three states are necessary for finding whole truth of world.

Therefore, he maintains, a study of *avasthatraya* is indispensable if one is to perceive the true nature of the world from a mentalist and non-dualist perspective:

> The West will have to take up Avastatraya, because it is the only way to learn that the world is in me. A theory of dualism can reduce world to ideas, but still the mystery remains of where these ideas originate. Berkeley says from God, Jeans from Divine Architects etc., but what are their "Gods?" Only ideas, and therefore within me. Only through dream-analysis can it be shown that the idea of the world have arisen in me. Hence the theory of idealism is not enough.

Indeed, we have seen that idealism is compatible with several kinds of dualism. These formulations of Iyer's could suggest that he supports a doctrine of solipsism, which he does not. The source from whence emerge and into which are reabsorbed the images of the world is not one's individual mind, but the *atman-Brahman*, transpersonal and supra-individual, which, due to its immanence in all things, completely pervades individual minds.

The crucial point for Iyer is not to show that dream is as real as waking state, but rather that the latter is as unreal as dream. The becoming aware of this unreality, when it happens *in the dream state*, is seen by Iyer as a prefiguration of Liberation:

> If you have any realization, it is tested thus: in your dreams, if you realize dream objects to be unreal; the same experience of unreality of objects, will duly come upon you even in the waking state.

Indeed, all of Iyer's arguments rest on the realization that the dream state is always experienced from the dreamer's point of view, and not from the waking point of view. This is the strength of his position, for the dreamer himself is convinced of the reality of his dream, where his own mind is projecting a world of objects. Thus, if one becomes aware of the unreality of dream during the dream itself, it means that one has taken the position of theWitness, who sees the dreamer as an illusory entity. This shift in consciousness prefigures the one which can later occur in the waking state, revealing the illusory character of the empirical ego, and, is perhaps, a forerunner to the ultimate realization.

The importance of the doctrine of *avasthatraya* is not only metaphysical and epistemological (the dream analogy illustrates the idealist model of passage from the One—the mind—to the many—the ideas), but also soteriological. For the study of this doctrine to bear fruit, the aspirant must undergo a discipline of becoming impersonal, culminating in a disidentification from his own ego:

> Yourself is an idea, your I is idea, your body is an idea, your asking questions is an idea. You must become a looker-on, the Witness, keep yourself behind and aloof from all these ideas and examine

> their characteristics as expressed in the three states. This is avastatraya as proposed in Mandukya. Then you will see all the states coming and going. Ask yourself the question, "Where am I standing?" Am I the Witness, the Drik or am I P.B.? If I am P.B., then I can never understand Avastatraya. If I am the Witness, detached, then I see the P.B. of waking as apart, the P.B. of dreams etc.

We observe that Iyer is nearer to the radical idealism of Gaudapada (for whom dream refutes the waking state) than to the realism of Sankara (who, in his *Brahma-Sutra-Bhasya*, III, 2, firmly maintains the distinction between the two states). Iyer proclaims:

> Dream and waking are the same, both being a projection of the mind.

which surely recalls Gaudapada's *Mandukya Karika* II, 15:

> *Avyakta eva ye 'ntastu sphuta eva ca ye bahih*
> *Kalpita eva te sarve*
> = "Those objects that appear as obscure inside the mind, and those that appear as vivid outside, are merely created by imagination."

Despite his radicalism, Iyer is aware of the legitimate criticism which his position could invite:

> Western psychologists will object that in dream you never know there is a waking state whereas in waking you know that you dreamt. Hence they will not accept dream-illustration as proof. They are right to the extent that it is insufficient. So we must give them proof from science, in addition to this dream reference.

We thus understand Iyer's (and later Brunton's) interest in the metaphysical implications of certain discoveries of modern science: he thought that they would compensate for some weak points in the traditional Vedantic argument.

Iyer gives a mentalist interpretation of the traditional saying that *atman* is unconcerned with actions:

> What is it that is climbing, waking, eating in dream? It is Mind itself. You, yet in dream think you are awake, just as here also you think you are awake. This is the meaning of the statement that the Atman does not perform any actions really, because it remains what it was, does not change and only appears to act, as in dream-acts.

Thus the mind rests unaffected by the myriad of forms that it projects as a result of its own dynamism.

Iyer attributes an epistemological function to dream:

> Why do we have dreams? Why should Nature give us dreams? Vedanta alone replies. It is to illustrate for man the highest truth, that from the non-dualistic standpoint everything is only dream. This truth is so difficult to discern that dream-experience is given as a clue or hint to man; it is a light in darkness.

Iyer, in spite of his mentalistic approach, remains faithful to one of the constants of the Brahmanic mind, which is its inclination to always reason in terms of essence, substratum, common base, or ontological support—*asraya* (the examples of clay as the substrate of all pitchers, and gold as the substrate of all jewelry, are well known):

> Just as in the external world all ornaments can be converted back into a single mass of gold, so in the dream world all are converted back on waking to the single mass of mind.

If Iyer especially insists on the analysis of dream, he equally examines the state of deep sleep, *susupti*. He denies that it is the equivalent of a loss of consciousness ("Susupti is unindividuated mind"). One here recognizes Brahmanic substantialism and also Iyer's dialectical logic, based on the observation that the mind thinks in pairs of opposites, and thus each idea implies both its opposite and the existence of a mind which thinks them. The three states are seen as interdependent (each is known by contrast with the others), and their alternation within *turiya/atman* is compared to the play of waves rippling the surface of the ocean without altering the water which forms their substance (a classical image in Brahmanic thought):

> They object that there is nothing in deep sleep. I reply that the term 'nothing' indicates the existence of a thing to start with, therefore non-existence implies existence. 'Nothing' must have a meaning, i.e. a thought, and if you had not seen there was a waking world, you could not negate it in sleep. Waking and sleep go together, one is not possible without the other. You get deep sleep even in the waking state. It comes during interval between two ideas, when one goes and the other appears. Hence non-existence of Brahman in sleep is wrong. It is like the waves disappearing but their substance, or essence water, remains.

Brunton also uses the dream state to illustrate his mentalist theory. In addition, his own analysis of the three states of consciousness (in *The Wisdom of the Overself*, Ch. IV-VI) points to the illusory character of the ego. He had earlier demonstrated this by other means, analogous to *drg-drsya viveka*. Here, it is the analysis of deep sleep, especially, which permits the distinction between our familiar, individualized ego consciousness and the broader, impersonal consciousness which constitutes its source. Indeed, Westerners generally think that all forms of consciousness disappear during deep sleep. Now the fact that we emerge from deep sleep with the pleasant feeling that we have slept well, and that we retrieve our sense of personal identity, suggests the presence of a "subterranean consciousness" during sleep, where the absence of objects is registered, and the continuity of the subject is preserved in a latent way. Deep sleep is a temporary dissolution of individualized consciousness, but not the dissolution of all consciousness. In the state of sleep, a kind of consciousness must exist which to us is incomprehensible (since it transcends the dualistic consciousness of our ordinary experience). Brunton, like the Vedantins, affirms its existence based on the following experience: upon waking from a tranquil night, we have a sense of well-being resulting from an absence of objects in consciousness:

> The wakeful state is simply the natural result of mind projecting a mere fraction of itself as the personal consciousness with the fullest force. The dream state is the result of the same mind projecting the person with partial force. The sleep state is the result of mind withdrawing the attenuated dream consciousness into itself and closing the personal aperture altogether. Then the individual being loses its awareness. But the mind, possessing its own peculiar kind of awareness,

> does not…. This loss of personal consciousness during sleep is inevitable because the person itself is a nucleus of thought-structures temporarily lit into life along with the world-thought but both thoughts dissolve when their informing principle of attentive awareness is withdrawn.[217]

Let us briefly comment on this passage. Brunton would give this 'principle of consciousness' the name Overself. He makes a distinction between *consciousness* and *mind*: "Consciousness is only a phase of mind."[218] Mind is the underlying principle, of which dualistic (i.e. subject/object) consciousness, characteristic of the waking and dream states, is only a form of functioning. It is only this particular form which ceases to function during sleep, and not the mind itself, whose existence, through its diverse phases, is continuous and uninterrupted. This mind is the Self or Overself, "Projecting a mere fraction of itself as the personal consciousness."[219] This is to be taken in a figurative sense, for the principle of consciousness, being one and universal, and thus identical in all individuals, does not really burst forth into multiple individualized centers. As to the expressions "with the fullest force, "with partial force," "closing the personal aperture," "a nucleus of thought-structures temporarily temporarily lit into life," they are better explained if one refers to a diagram drawn by Ramana Maharshi[220] (no doubt familiar to Brunton) to illustrate the doctrine of the three states of consciousness through spatial symbolism. Here is Ramana's commentary:

> The diagram illustrates how the luminous Consciousness of the Self , brilliant by itself, functions as the causal body in the interior chamber encased by the walls of ignorance, barred by the door of sleep, put into action by vital forces…through the doorway where interposes the mirror of the ego. It passes, with the light reflected by this mirror, into the intermediate chamber of the dream state; then, it is projected into the open courtyard of the waking state, through the five sense windows. When the door of sleep closes again…it pulls back from the states of waking and dream into profound sleep and stays there alone, without the ego. The diagram also shows the serene existence of the Self, in that it is different from the ego and the three states of sleep, dream and waking.

The two analyses that we have examined—*drg-drsya-viveka* and *avasthatraya*—have advanced our inquiry into the "I", the concrete, individual subject. This "I" appears triple, consisting of a physical body, a personality (comprised of thoughts, feelings, desires, aversions, karmic tendencies, all elements claimed by the ego as its own), and finally an impersonal observer—which it will now be necessary to study in detail. With the concept of Overself, we arrive at what is, in my opinion, Brunton's most original contribution to the the adaptation of Neo-Vedanta for Western readers.

5.2 The Concept of the Overself

The concept of the Overself will here be studied, in parallel to certain Vedantic notions, through a series of quotations commented upon and classified under eleven headings.

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[217] *Wisdom of the Overself*, p.83.
[218] Ibid., p.136 Dutton
[219] Ibid., p.139 Dutton
[220] See *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, pp. 22-24.

5.2.1 Its Evolution in Brunton's Thought

> If a new term is helpful, why not use it? It need not and does not displace the existing ones. The 'Overself' was chosen just because it lacked precision but served an idea.[221]

> The term 'Overself' was used in one sense in some passages of the books and in another sense in other passages. This is confusing to the philosophically minded. However, these books were written primarily to extend the doctrine of mysticism or meditation. From this standpoint, the inner self of the man is the goal; from the philosophic standpoint, the Universal Self is the goal. The latter, of course, includes the former.[222]

The above two quotations reveal that, far from being static, the concept of the Overself evolved along with the ripening and deepening of Brunton's own quest. In addition, they throw some light on the motivations the author may have had for selecting this term. It seems to me that one can deduce two things:

1. The term Overself is used both in a restricted sense and a larger one. The first corresponds to the idea of our "higher individuality" and to Brunton's first, mystical period; the second, to the concept of the Absolute—the Universal Principle—and to Brunton's second, philosophic period.

2. Brunton was the first to acknowledge that the term Overself lacked precision. He once admitted in private:

> The Overself is a general, vague term used in my early books to indicate that man has a *higher* self. It was not meant for fine, Advaitic distinctions. In later books it became necessary to make it more specific.[223]

Brunton coined this neologism more for pedagogical efficacy than for semantic rigor.

Returning to the term itself, from a purely linguistic point of view, we note the three following observations:

– Brunton came up with this word while under the influence of Emerson. In his *Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture*, he quotes "this magnificent passage in prose" from Emerson's essay "The Oversoul" (1841):

> We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree, but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.

– Brunton had always criticized the English translation of the Sanskrit word *atman* by "self":

> It is a misfortune that having no equivalent to *atman* among English words, our scholars lazily took the nearest to it instead of going to the trouble of coining an appropriate term as scientists coin new terms

[221] *Notebooks*, VIII, 5, 231
[222] Ibid., VIII, 5, 232
[223] in a meeting with Alan Berkowitz in Vevey in 1975.

> every year to fit their new discoveries. For the full implication of *atman* is wholly ultra-individual and in no way commensurate with self as we use the term. The consequence of this mistranslation has been an immense barrier to right comprehension amongst all Westerners who have grappled with this doctrine.[224]

Thus, in order to prevent the confusion between the empirical self, the ego, and the divine Self, Brunton deliberately rejected the term 'Self,' and substituted the term Overself.

– Professor Hiriyanna, one of Brunton's Indian mentors, approved:

> The term 'Overself" immediately makes clear the fact that it is not the ego which is meant here.[225]

Let us now examine the history of Brunton's use of this term. It first appeared in the volume *The Secret Path* (1934). The author had already met Ramana Maharshi, but not yet Subrahmanya Iyer. Brunton was in his mystical phase; later in his philosophic period he would be preoccupied with explaining the world and presenting rational elucidations of non-duality. In this short, youthful work, a certain theosophical influence (which would later lessen) is still perceptible, for example, in the image of primordial humanity endowed with a subtle etheric body, ignorant of personal passions and discursive thought, basking in the innocence of pure Selfhood. Humanity, in the course of its long history would have superimposed on this *ipseite*, this pure self, a second "me," the personal "I" so familiar to each of us:

> ...but the first and real self, which existed before thinking and desiring appeared within the being of man, is the one which few of us know, which is subtle and not so apparent because it makes us all partake of the nature of divinity. It lives always over our heads, an angelic thing of unimaginable grandeur and mysterious sublimity, and therefore I call it the *Overself*.[226]

Thus each individual is composed metaphorically of two different I's: the "lower," the personal ego, purely human; and the "higher," the impersonal Self, divine in nature.

Here one must keep in mind the audience for whom Brunton was writing: with no specialized knowledge of Indian doctrines, convinced of the reality of the world and the personality, cut off from their own traditions and stranded in a spiritual wasteland. It is these readers, still asleep to their own inner dimension but conscious of their existential malaise, whom Brunton tried to touch, not as a scholar (though he was capable of it) nor as a guru (he did not want disciples), but as an "awakener of souls." What feelings did he try to inspire in his readers?

He did not here address the reader's intellect (as he would do later in *The Hidden Teaching beyond Yoga*), but rather his emotions and intuition. He tried above all to awaken a feeling of veneration or devotion to a principle or entity *above* the concrete and trivial ego: the words "angelic," "grandeur," "sublime," "mysterious," are meant to arouse a feeling of sacredness or numinosity. This is why he coined this new word, *Over*-self, to better express that this Self "lives *over* our heads" and belongs to a higher order of reality. (One could object that the Overself would

[224] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 278.
[225] Brunton's Indian notes, Brunton archive.
[226] *The Secret Path*, pp. 54-55.

be described at other times as the *deepest* reality of our being. But "above" and "deep" are purely metaphorical; in truth, the Overself is not spatially localizable, being purely immaterial.)

By this neologism, a reverential attitude is evoked by means of a non-religious terminology untainted by particular religious connotations. Loaded words such as *soul*, *God*, and even *spirit* could have been rejected or misunderstood by the reader, while the term *atman* might have been found too exotic.

The neologism 'Overself,' on the other hand, could evoke a higher order of reality, but beyond the confines of traditional theology. The drawback was that the concept designated by this term might be felt as blurry or vague. In fact, the word 'Overself' was chosen not for its precision, but for the emotional charge it carried. The combination of *self* (evoking intimacy or interiority) with *over* (evoking the transcendent, sublime, or numinous) suggests an interiorization of the divine otherness, and invites both introversion and veneration. It might induce a mood favorable to meditation, thus fulfilling the author's purpose.

The concept of Overself is used in this same sense of Higher Individuality in all of Brunton's early works: *A Message from Arunachala, A Hermit in the Himalayas, The Quest of the Overself,* and *The Inner Reality*. In the course of his first, mystical period, the Overself is presented as an intimate presence, warm and soothing, felt in the depths of meditation. Thus, the author uses this image for exercises in concentration as a prelude to contemplation. It is, for beginners, a more attractive focus than an abstract metaphysical principle such as *Brahman*.

Brunton's second period, which we could term philosophic, began with his meeting with Iyer in 1937. It was marked by the production of his major works, *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* and *The Wisdom of the Overself*. In the latter, the idea of the Overself was considerably expanded and became supra-individual:

> Now the Overself's original consciousness is a single and undifferentiated one....[227]

Here the Overself is the Absolute, which limits Itself in the multiplicity of personalities, in order to become conscious of Itself through another. (It is at least an attempt tot explain a fundamental enigma, for in reality the absolute Self, being pure self-luminous consciousness, has no need of another in order to be immediately and fully present to Itself.):

> We can know that we exist only by knowing that some thing or some thought other than ourself, also exists. This is a supreme law which must bind all intelligence, both that of the tiniest gnat and of the Overself alike. This is why the unlimited Overself must delimit its horizon, must make a descent from its own transcendent Oneness into separate selves and must reduce itself to setting up relations with them. Consequently, when the universal and infinite Overself both limits and differentiates itself in order to acquire self-consciousness, the portion of itself so limited and finitized forgets its infinite character.[228]

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[227] *Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. VIII.

[228] Ibid. As we have said earlier, this explanation is unsatisfactory; but this is the case for all interpretations that first posit a perfect Principle, to then reintroduce something which is lacking, in order to explain the necessity of manifestation.

Here the Overself corresponds to the Vedantic ideas of both *Nirguna Brahman* (pure Consciousness, one and undifferentiated) and *Saguna Brahman* (pure Consciousness self-limited through manifestation). The term Overself is here equivalent to two other key terms, Mind and World-Mind, while continuing to be used as well in its former, more individual sense (i.e. the impersonal or transpersonal Self, the divine essence man). But in this second period, emphasis is put on the Universal Self, the Absolute Principle, pure Being and pure Consciousness. The fact that the term Overself was used both for the individual Self and the universal Self is perhaps a semantic inconsistency (which the author sometimes later regretted), although it does help one to grasp the idea that the two are not separate. In his *Notebooks*, Paul Brunton admitted the ambiguity of the term Overself, and attempted both to dispel it and to justify it by acknowledging the dual or twofold aspect of this concept.[229] Those which follow are mostly from Brunton's later period, when he attempted a synthesis of his prior formulations.

5.2.2 A Metaphysical Principle of Consciousness

It might be interesting to examine the idea of a "double consciousness" in both Paul Brunton and in the Vedantic text *Pancadasi*, ch. VIII:

> There are two kinds of consciousness, one is in ever-passing moments, the other ever-present. The one in time, the other out of it. The ordinary person knows only the one; the enlightened sage knows both. (*Notebooks*, XIII, 1, 3, 182)

> When many mirrors reflect the light of the sun on to a wall which is already illumined by the sun, spaces between the various reflections are illumined by the light of the sun alone; and even if the reflections are not there, the wall still remains illumined. (*Pancadasi*, VIII, 2) [230]

Here consciousness is symbolized by light. The two texts recognize two kinds of consciousness; let us examine them further:

> Similarly, both in the intervals between the modifications of the intellect (*vrittis*), in which *Cidabhasa* is reflected, and during their absence (in deep sleep) *Kutastha* abides self-illumined; and *Kutastha* is therefore to be known as different from *Cidabhasa*. (*Pancadasi*, VIII, 3)

> Our present physical form of consciousness is but a rapid succession of changing thought-moments, each member of the series being individually conscious and the whole producing the illusion of a single stream of integral awareness.… Philosophically speaking however, this momentariness of consciousness applies only to the personal self, not to the Overself. Here, as our later studies shall reveal, there is unbroken continuity of awareness. (*The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. III)

In Brunton's terminology, "moment to moment thoughts" correspond to *vrtti*; the "personal self" to *cidabhasa*, and the Overself to *kutastha*.

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[229] see further B/6.

[230] tr. by Swami Swahananda, pub. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, n.d.

Let us now sum up the theory of consciousness presented by the *Pancadasi*, in particular in chapter VIII:

Brahman, which is in essence pure Consciousness (*Cit*), is, according to *Sruti*, the sole Reality, being the substratum of both the object—the world, *jagat*—and the subject—the human individual, or *jiva*. On the subject side, which interests us here, this Consciousness is also called the *atman* (the Self) or *kutastha* (the immutable, the unalterable). It is the "absolute" subject, without reference to an object, of the Consciousness which is not dispersed in the "unreal" objects. This Consciousness is called *asanga* (without association, i.e. without contact with the object),[231] *nirvikara* (not subject to modification, immutable),[232] *kevala* (non-dual), and *svaprabha* (self-luminous).[233] The *Pancadasi* VIII, 12 also calls it *Brahman-Caitanya*, Brahmic Consciousness.

This pure Consciousness reflects itself in the mental organ of the *jiva* (*antahkarana*), and more precisely in the intellect (*buddhi*), as in a mirror.

We will make a brief digression here in order to define the idea of *antahkarana* according to another Vedantic passage, the *Vedantasara* 57-69:

From *Brahman* associated with Nescience (*Maya*), or rather with its power of projection (*viksepa-sakti*), emerges *akasa* (ether), followed by the four elements, air, fire, water and earth in the subtle state, containing the qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. From these subtle elements are produced subtle bodies subject to transmigration: *linga-sarira*, composed of seventeen parts: the five sense organs, the intellect, the mental organ, the five organs of action and the five "vital forces" (corresponding to the functions of respiration, circulation, digestion, excretion, and evacuation of the subtle body out of the gross body at the death of the physical body).

The intellect, *buddhi*, and the mental organ, *manas*, are two aspects of the *antahkarana*, an internal organ corresponding to the brain. *Manas* is the "mental" organ which coordonates the data provided by the sense organs and considers the different aspects of a thing or situation while remaining indecisive. *Buddhi* is intelligence, higher reasoning, the discriminating faculty, which discerns true from false. It includes *citta*, the faculty of memory, while *manas* includes *ahamkara*, the ego sense. *Buddhi*, *citta*, *manas*, and *ahamkara* are but four functions of one and the same mental organ: *antahkarana*.

Pure Consciousness, reflected in *buddhi*, gives birth to the very first thought or ideation, *vrtti*, that of *ahamkara*, the ego. The term *vrtti* signifies a modification of the consciousness, corresponding to a sensation:

"According to Vedantic philosophy, when an organ perceives an object, the mind transforms itself into the object. When, for example, the eye sees a pot, the mind projects itself through the eye and takes the form of the pot."[234]

Thus *vrttis* form themselves in the intellect in contact with external objects (perceptions), but also with mental objects (memories, imagination, desires, etc.).

The sum of these *vrttis* (outwardly or inwardly directed) constitutes the "reflected consciousness," *cidabhasa*. The *vrttis* are flashes of object consciousness occurring so rapidly that they give the illusory

[231] *Pancadasi* VIII, 70.
[232] op. cit., VIII, 21.
[233] op. cit., VIII, 59.
[234] *Vedantasara*, 69, Note.

impression of a continuous flux of consciousness: in reality they are discontinuous vibrations, arising against the immutable and uninvolved background of *kutastha/saksin*, the Witness Consciousness. In the infinitesimal interval which separates two *vrttis*, and in the absence of external or internal ideations in the states of *susupti* and *samadhi*, *cidabhasa* disappears. It is thus the opposite of *kutastha*: always associated with an object, variable, *cidabhasa* is not self-existent, but derives its light and being from *kutastha* – of which it is only a reflection.

Thus the pure Brahmic Consciousness, *Cit*, entering into vibration by the action of *Maya* ("*mayaya spandate*," *Gaudapada karika*, III, 29), fragments itself into dual subject/object consciousness. The very first ideation which breaks up the unity of *Cit* is that of the ego, and all other thoughts follow in its wake.

The *Pancadasi* gives a concrete example of this double consciousness (or double condition of consciousness) in analyzing an ordinary perception: what happens when I see a pot? The perception itself is a mental activity, *vrtti*, but it is only made possible (so postulates the Vedanta) because there is a Principle of Consciousness independent of, and prior to, all perception: the immutable principle of *kutastha* which is Consciousness-in-itself, i.e. beyond the contingencies of *cidabhasa*, which is consciousness-of (an object).

How are we to discriminate between *kutastha* and *cidabhasa*? By applying the Vedantic method called *anvaya-vyatireka*, the ability to discern that which is variable from that which is invariable. Here again, the parallel between Brunton and the *Pancadasi* shows that the British author assimilated the lessons of his Vedantin masters.

> That consciousness which witnesses the interval between the disappearance and the rise of successive vrttis (thoughts) and the period when they do not exist, and which is itself unmodifiable and immutable, is called Kutastha. (*Pancadasi*, VIII, 21)

> To become aware of the arising and disappearing of all those thoughts which make up the totality of the waking self, their witness must be relatively changeless for it is only the striking contrast between them and itself which could possibly make it aware of such transience.
> (*The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. VI)

And also:

> The constant succession of sensations, the innumerable changes of perception and experience could themselves be evident only to some observer whose own mental permanence and unity must be presupposed or he could not notice the facts of succession and change.

This method (*anvaya vyatireka*), already applied in the discrimination of subject and object (*drg-drsya-viveka*) and in the analysis of the three states of consciousness (*avasthatraya*), permits us to conclude that *turiya*, ultimate Reality, is nothing other than *kutastha*, the pure Consciousness of the Self, which abides ever identical to Itself, free from the perpetually arising fluctuations characteristic of the ego in perpetual becoming.

The distinction made between the flux of particular thoughts—*cidabhasa*—and the general principle of Consciousness which makes their existence possible—*kutastha*—brings us back to the

issue of *drg/drsya* studied earlier: "If it perceives, then it cannot be perceived, as the physical eyes can see everything around them but cannot see themselves."

The Overself, inasmuch as it overlaps the Vedantic notion of *kutastha*, represents the metaphysical principle of pure Consciousness—far removed from the purely psychological dual consciousness, the *cidabhasa* or "reflected-consciousness" of the *Pancadasi*, and the personal self or ego of Brunton.

5.3.3 The Overself as an Intermediary

> Vedanta is unsatisfying partly because it is too jerky. It jumps abruptly from the finite and physical individual to the ineffable and unutterable Absolute Itself. It swings from one extreme to another. It fails to recognize that there is and must be an intermediary—the Overself.[235]

As we said earlier, this is one of Paul Brunton's major criticisms of Advaita Vedanta.

Certainly the basic Vedantic texts have an undeniably abrupt character. One could not imagine more striking shortcuts to the Absolute than the great sayings: *tat tvam asi*, *aham brahmasmi*, and *ayam atma brahma*.[236] These formulas leap in a single bound the deep chasm that exists between the finite individual and the Absolute. To attempt this leap is dangerous for the individual without a teacher; particularly for a Westerner whose unconscious is infused with the idea of the personal and individual, i.e. the human person and the personal God.

In the Vedantic tradition, a master is necessary to lead the student through these stages: initially he places the disciple in a doctrinal context. He superimposes idea after idea, building a splendid edifice whose purpose is to make the disciple feel more secure. Thus the theory of the five *kosas* or sheaths of the Self (*Vedantasara*, 72 ff.), that of the three bodies, (ibid., 113 ff.) etc. This is the phase of superimposition (or false attribution), or *adhyaropa*. Next, the master progressively eliminates these ideas, by demonstrating that they are only mental constructs from which it is important to disidentify, since they cover up the one true identity: the Self. This is the phase of negation (or retraction of the false attribution), or *apavada*.

In spite of these steps in the soteriological process, the final leap is an abrupt one:

> …between the state of servitude and of spiritual liberty there is no common measure, and in depicting the innumerable degrees which grade the way of deliverance, *the last step is an abrupt leap from relativity to the absolute*....[237]

Too formidable a leap, in any case, for most modern minds; it is one thing to disidentify from the inferior elements of one's personality – the physical appetites, selfishness, vanity. It is another

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[235] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 1, 90.
[236] *Tat tvam asi* = That thou art, *Aham brahmasmi* = I am Brahman, *ayam atma brahma* = this Atman is Brahman.
[237] O. Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedanta*, p. 268.

thing to *renounce the idea of individuality itself*, as implied by the two great formulas *tat tvam asi* and *aham brahmasmi*, of which Michel Hulin remarks:

> Destructive and self destructive, their reality could be, anachronistically, compared to that of explosives.[238]

Brunton tried to bring in an intermediate level between the individual, *jivatman*, and the Absolute, *paramatman*. The Vedantic idea of *Isvara* could not alone fill this function, although it furnishes the *jiva* with a concept to focus on during meditation, thus facilitating access to the formless Absolute. The idea of Overself, as we have seen, overlaps some functions of *Isvara*, for instance that of the "inner guide." Nevertheless, in my opinion, Brunton found that the image of *Isvara* did not cover the wealth of meanings which finally crystallized around the term Overself. First of all, the use of a term consecrated by tradition does not permit the innovation or semantic flexibility which neologism allows. *Isvara* possesses a function more clearly cosmogonical than Overself, even if the latter has its role to play in Brunton's own cosmogonical scheme;[239] *Isvara* is the Absolute, limited to and defined as the Creator God, the Demiurge, or the Soul of the World. Moreover, but also partially due to this cosmological—more than anthropological—coloration, the idea of *Isvara*, translated by the term "Lord," would have had, for Westerners, too strong a connotation of exteriority, otherness, or pure transcendence to be able to evoke this "higher Individuality" which Brunton made the pivot of his teaching. He needed a term which could evoke both the transcendence and the interiority, one which would connote a subtle otherness—*over*—in the midst of selfhood—*self*.

Among the Vedantic idea, that of the *saksin* = "witness," seems to better correspond to this necessary intermediary between the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*. The *saksin* is the witness consciousness which observes the spectacle of the world, yet remains unaffected by it, being itself pure cognition: it is distinct both from the *jivatman*, in which it finds itself limited and obscured by the *upadhi* ("extrinsic, limiting conditions," i.e. psycho-physical and sociological conditioning of the personality), as well as from the *paramatman*, which, being beyond all relationships, is not affected by the spectacle of the world.

Brunton's concept of the Overself covers the Vedantic notion of *saksin*, but is much broader. Its psychological importance is infinitely greater, and it occupies a central place in Brunton's system. A true bridge between two worlds, the relative and the Absolute, it is the Vedantic *saksin* inasmuch as it remains unaffected by that which it knows: "The Overself is never hurt," repeats Brunton. And also: "It is the observer which is itself unobserved."[240]

> From the human standpoint the Overself is the deeper layer of mind where man can become conscious of God. It is the timeless spaceless immanence of the universal being in a particular centre.[241]

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[238] Hulin, op. cit., p. 138.
[239] "It is ... from its own Overself that every individual receives the world-picture." (*The Wisdom of the Overself*, p. 35) The cosmogonical function of the Overself was presented in ch. 4, B of our thesis.
[240] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 271.
[241] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. VIII.

> That which I call the Overself is intermediate between the ordinary human and the World Mind. It includes man's higher nature but stretches into what is above him, the divine.[242]

Two Vedantic ideas are suggested by these quotations: *drk* ("witness-consciousness") and *antaryamin* ("internal controller," or "internal agent"). Let us add that the notion of *kutastha*, as the principle of identity in the midst of diversity, is also a link between the Absolute and the relative.

– First, the notion of *drk* (seer, spectator) or *saksin* (witness). According to Professor Hiriyanna,[243] "the ego is a combination of *drk* and of *drsya* (seen, spectacle) ... the ego is not pure *drk*, because the individual mind (*manas* or *antahkarana*) comes and goes like a *drsya*." In Brunton, "it is the timeless, spaceless immanence of the universal being in a particular centre" which seems to correspond to *drk*, a passive, perpetual presence which is pure cognition; the *drk* is "the innermost layer of the mind" because it cannot be known save at the end of a rigorous and subtle analysis resulting in the elimination of all objective experience.

– But for Brunton the Overself is more than a purely passive spectator. It is the locus "where man may become conscious of God"; it is the presence of World-Mind in the human individual, or, in Vedantic language, it is the presence of *Isvara* in the *Jiva*. Hiriyanna comments:

> Yes, Isvara regarded as immanent in us is the higher self. The Bhrhad-Aranyaka Upanisad III, 7, 3, calls this the antaryamin = Inner Controller ... Antaryamin is how Isvara sustains the universe. It is one of the functions of Isvara.

The Overself as *drk* is the immanence in the individual of Mind or *Brahman* (*nirguna*), i.e. of the Absolute in its *passive*, purely cognitive aspect.

The Overself as *antaryamin* is the immanence in the individual of World-Mind or *Isvara*, Demiurge and Lord of *Maya*, i.e. of the Absolute in its *active* aspect, as an ideating power and regulator of karma.

In an interview with Brunton, Hiryanna said:

> Antaryamin or Isvara includes knowledge of all that [an] individual is and does. To that extent he is the observer of ego but not a *mere* spectator, but much more than that he is its inner controller.[244] He is also actor. Only Brahman is a pure Spectator, inactive, in a transcendent sense.

Brahman is the cosmic *Drk* as pure Consciousness (Hiriyanna: "Nirguna Brahman, Drk, is behind each of us and also behind Isvara."), and *Isvara* is the cosmic *Antaryamin* as the dynamic Power, the source of life and activity. Of course, these two aspects exist naturally in the Overself which is the Absolute circumscribed by human individuality.

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[242] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 330.
[243] Brunton's many talks with Prof. Hiriyanna, who taught Sanskrit at the Maharaja's College in Mysore, were recorded in notes now in the Brunton archives of Wisdom's Goldenrod.
[244] See also *Mandukya Upanisad*, 6.

He added:

> Individuals are *Phases of Isvara*. You can say that an individual who progresses through expansion of consciousness develops into recognition of presence of Isvara *within* himself as his true or higher self. This gives him only a phase of Isvara but does not enable him to acquire all the powers of Isvara. He can't create a world. But being a phase it will be a distinct being, although harmonious with all other beings of same attainment. He has transcended evil and is sure of liberation. It is only a question of time. So one may call it higher self ... Moreover it is only a temporary self so long as it is not realization of Nirguna Brahman. It is the ideal self, the wider self.

The first degree of illumination lies in the transfer of the center of consciousness from the ego to the Overself. When the identification with the Overself is stabilized, consciousness stays habitually in the Witness-Self (i.e. *saksin* or *drk*), and the quiescent mind (*manas*, *ahamkara*) is then receptive to intuitive instructions emanating from the *antaryamin* (the interior Guide-Self). The Overself both *guides* the ego and *watches* it act; i.e. there has been up until then an *expansion* of consciousness which was previously centered in the personality. The next step is a *deepening*, leading to the ultimate and silent union with *Nirguna Brahman*, the impersonal Absolute, Mind. But according to Brunton, it is only a temporary state, experienced during periods of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. Even the realized Sage, whose individuality abides only as long as his corporeal life, knows that Ultimate Reality transcends all relativity; but while in the body he can only identify with his Overself, which as intermediary, harmonizes in him Being and becoming, the Absolute and the relative.

5.2.4 The Overself and the Individual Karmic Series

> The Overself of each man is historically distinct from that of another man but only in the sense that each has over-shadowed or animated a different series of reincarnated persons and presided over their different destinies.[245]

> Just as there is no intrinsic difference between individual sun rays themselves, so there is no intrinsic difference between one Overself and another, but just as each ray will have a special *relation* of its own with the objects it encounters so each Overself will have a special relation of its own with the cycles of reincarnated personalities.[246]

> [It is the] thread-soul by which all the innumerable reincarnations are joined together.[247]

Let us now attempt to circumscribe the idea of individuality in the notion of Overself. Individuality here does not mean that a different entity exists for each person; Brunton refuses to use the term Overself in the plural, to avoid the implication of a plurality of entities (as his teaching was inspired by Advaita Vedanta and not by Samkhya). The Overself is the point of contact between the World-Mind and the individual karmic series. It is a sort of karmic reservoir where the trace memories of essential characteristics from all one's previous lives are preserved in a latent state.

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[245] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch.VIII.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.

Thus, while the experience of the Overself would be the same for all, the karmic contents memorized within the Overself are absolutely distinct in each case, because each series of personalities projected from it is distinct: "This content cannot be abolished – from the spatial-temporal point of view, it justifies the affirmation that the Overself possesses a sort of individuality." Thus we have an additional indication that this individuality of the Overself exists only on the relative plane (*vyavaharika satya*), where time, space, matter, and causality coexist.

The Overself can play the role of "karmic reservoir" inasmuch as it is not different from the divine World Mind, the receptacle of all the karmic impressions of manifestation; it is not other than the World Mind as limited by human individuality (in the same way as the *jiva* is separated from *Isvara* by his *upadhi*).[248] In Advaita this role is given to the "causal body" (*karana sarira*, also called *anandamaya kosa*, "the sheath of bliss"); it is the final veil covering the *atman* and corresponds to the state of consciousness of dreamless sleep. It is in this causal body, the individual equivalent of the cosmic *Isvara*—and not in the *atman* itself—that the karmic traces of the subtle bodies are reabsorbed during deep sleep, as well as during the interval between two incarnations. The Overself therefore clearly includes the notion of the causal body and that of *anandamaya kosa* (also by its nature of "pure beatitude"). This statement confirms the lack of an absolute identity between Overself and *atman*, and suggests that the Overself is a sort of intersection of Vedantic ideas, overlapping many without being reducible to one in particular. The individual character of the Overself thus conceived, is consistent with, and equivalent to, the Vedantic idea of *saksin*, inasmuch as this latter does not make sense except in reference to an actual empirical experience (a witness is always 'witness of ...'); it implies the category of individuation. This is explained by Hiriyanna:

> The saksin which is the psychical element is always present like an ever-luminous lamp, the enduring and changeless element in experience which does not cease to be even in deep sleep. It is individual and determinate, being defined by reference to the particular internal organ with which for the time being it seems associated. It is accordingly termed jiva-saksin. *What comes within the range of one saksin* – through the medium of its own antahkarana in the waking and dream states and through avidya in deep sleep – *is not necessarily within the experience of other saksins*.[249]

Here, the individual aspect of the Overself means that, as witness-of-a-particular-ego, in its states of waking/dream/sleep (and its successive incarnations), it is connected to a different set of experiences from that of *another* witness, linked to *another* ego.

Let us note that the idea of *antaryamin* also implies individuation, because the interior guide—even if identical in each person—does not have to deal with the same set of karmic forces. It controls an *individual* transmigratory series; and therefore acquires, in the same manner as the Witness-Self, an individual coloration.

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[248] Even when united with *Isvara* in the state of *susupti*, the *jiva*, who then exists only as *anandamaya kosa* (and experiences the state of consciousness called *prajna*), nevertheless the *samskara* of egohood.
[249] Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, 10th ed., p. 360; emphasis added.

As for the entity which transmigrates from one life to the next, superimposing itself again and again on the immutable *atman*, in Advaita, it is the "subtle body" (*suksma sarira*), which is reabsorbed, latent, into the causal body between incarnations. It is only at the death of the realized being that the causal and subtle bodies dissolve; his *karma* has been exhausted, and transmigration ceases. Brunton himself does without the notions of subtle and causal bodies, probably for the sake of simplicity. He includes the causal body in the Overself, and reduces the subtle body[250] to the ego alone. He makes it clear that it is *not* the Overself which transmigrates (it is only the receptacle of the potentialities of the reincarnating entity), but the ego. This term "ego," used by Brunton in a broader and non-technical sense, includes the functions and faculties of the Indian *antahkarana* (i.e. synthesis of perceptions, reason, memory, will, etc.). As a result, his substitution of the ego for the subtle body as the transmigrating entity does not change the particular threefold function he assigns to the Overself in regard to *karma*: it serves as "karmic reservoir," as witness (passive), and finally as "internal instigator" (active) of an individual series of transmigrations. We have shown earlier that this triple function implies an *individual* nature for the Overself, inasmuch as "each Overself will have a special relation of its own with the cycles of reincarnated personalities."[251] But the notion of higher Individuality brings a certain ambiguity which we will here attempt to resolve.

5.2.5 The Overself as Our Higher Individuality

> The dictionary defines *individuality* as separate and distinct existence. Both the ego and the Overself have such an existence. But whereas the ego has this and nothing more, the Overself has this consciousness within the universal existence. That is why we have called it the *higher individuality*.[252]

> Many persons in different parts of the world and in different centuries have had glimpses of that other order of being which is their highest source, but how few are those who have succeeded in establishing themselves in continuous communion with that higher order, how rare is the feat? And who, having established himself therein, can find enough words to express what he now perceives and experiences? Words fall back; this is a plane not for them: this is a vast universal silence impregnated with consciousness which swallows every individualized being, for individuality cannot exist there. The established man can turn to it in this great silence and must himself remain silent to do it the honour it deserves. All language is so limited that it must seem blasphemy when put side by side with this awed reverent stillness which is the proper form of worship here.[253]

> The teaching of a higher individuality needs to be correctly understood. It is not that a separate one exists for each physical body. The consciousness which normally identifies itself with the body – that is, the ego – when looking upward in highest devotion or inward in deepest meditation, comes to the point of contact with universal being, World-Mind. This point is its own higher self, the divine deputy within its own being. But if devotion or meditation is carried still further, to the very utmost possible stretch of consciousness, the point itself merges into its source. At this moment the man is his source. But – "Man shall not see My face and live!" He returns eventually to earth-consciousness, where he must follow out

[250] The subtle body includes the internal organ associated with the five sense organs, the five organs of action, and the five vital forces.
[251] *The Wisdom of the Overself*, ch. VIII, p. 116.
[252] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 394.
[253] Ibid., XV, 2, 4, 204.

its requirements. Yet the knowledge of what he is *in essence* remains. The presence of the deputy is always there meanwhile, always felt. It may fittingly be called his higher individuality.[254]

The first two quotes and the beginning of the third show that Brunton recognizes that the complete dissolution of all individuality into Universal Being *is* experienced in the deepest phase of contemplation. The "point" cited in the last quote is the Overself as higher Individuality; in the ultimate phase of meditation, even *this* Individuality merges with its source, Mind. The relative plane vanishes completely, taken up into the absolute plane, pure Mind-in-Itself.

Thus Brunton does not thus deny that a state of complete fusion with the Absolute (with the annihilation of individuality) is accessible to man. On the other hand, and probably contrary to Advaita,[255] he maintains that this state can only be a temporary one: individuality even in the Sage inevitably reappears with the return to life in the body and ordinary consciousness. Brunton illustrates this with the Biblical quotation, "Man shall not see my face and live," which shows the incompatibility of the divine/absolute and the human/relative planes. One or the other must prevail. One could illustrate this in the following manner: when one is sufficiently near the Absolute Plane, the relative plane is as if swallowed up or absorbed by the latter: all is as if, in a certain perimeter around the Divine, an irresistible force of magnetization would attract to itself and absorb all objects, leaving an emptiness around the Divine Presence which does not admit anything else. But when one regains his individual and corporal consciousness, one is inevitably propelled back to the relative plane,[256] and the latter again comes between him and the plane of the Absolute.

Having returned to his ordinary state, one has then access to only a fragment of the Absolute, which he feels in the intimacy of his person as his own higher Individuality. Thus the Absolute, refracted in the prism of the relative plane and in the human mind, can be apprehended as *individual*. But for us, this seems to be the Vedantic notion of *atman*, or more precisely, *pratyagatman*, "inner *atman*." Nevertheless, Brunton is reluctant to admit the possibility of complete liberation from individuality while in the body, as shown in this quotation:

When it is said that we lose our individuality on entering Nirvana, words are being used loosely and faultily. So long as a man, whether he be Buddha or Hitler, has to walk, eat, and work, he must use his individuality. What *is* lost by the sage is his *attachment* to individuality with its desires, hates, angers, and passions.[257]

Certainly, the sage makes use of this individuality, of this body; his inner center of gravity has shifted from the ego towards the Overself. Detached from his lower individuality, disidentified

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[254] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 155.

[255] Liberation according to Brunton and Advaita will be examined in section 6.3.2, "Realization."

[256] The following passage from Brunton implies indeed something like a "de-magnetization" from the divine pole, permitting the finite mind to pull away from its attraction:

"The state is so blissful, moreover, that there is no worrying about the loss of the ego. However, it is a temporary state because so long as we are living in the flesh we are unable to sustain it and are drawn back by the forces of nature - first to the ego and then to the body." (*Notebooks*, XV, 1, 8, 172)

In short, in the imperfect condition which is our own, the attraction to the divine pole quickly fades, and is soon supplanted by the opposite magnetic force, that of Nature, or manifestation.

[257] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 2, 190.

from it, he watches it act as if observing another. Nevertheless, he retains individual social and familial characteristics which are different from those of another sage. As impersonal as he can become, he remains an individual distinct from all others.[258]

What the sage has attained, according to Brunton, is what the aspirant still seeks: the state of permanent union with the Overself, with his Higher Individuality. The aspirant himself attains it only in rare, fleeting moments. In Brunton's opinion, the highest realization accessible to man in this life, is a union with the Absolute which retains an individual (subjective) flavor:

> The Overself is *our* knowledge, experience, or sight of the World-Mind, of God, and is the only one we shall ever get while we are still in the flesh.[259]

> Let us not deceive ourselves and dishonor the Supreme Being by thinking that we know anything at all about IT. We know nothing... Even the sage, who has attained a harmony with his Overself, has found only the godlike *within himself*. Yes, it is certainly the Light, but it is so *for him*, for the human being. He still stands as much outside the divine Mystery as everyone else. The difference is that whereas they stand in darkness he stands in this Light.[260]

We will speak more about this in the following chapter (section 6.3.2), as we examine the meaning of realization for Brunton and Advaita.

5.2.6 A Dual and Paradoxical Concept

> Whenever I have written that the higher individuality is a part of the divine World-Mind, this is so only from the ordinary human standpoint looking upwards. But from the ultimate one, it is not so, for the World-Mind is not the sum total of a number of parts. It cannot be divided into them. This is why I prefer to use the phrase "rooted in the World-Mind.[261]

> Because of the paradoxically dual nature which the Overself possesses, it is very difficult to make clear the concept of the Overself. Human beings are rooted in the ultimate mind through the Overself, which therefore partakes on the one hand of a relationship with a vibratory world and on the other of an existence which is above all relations.[262]

> The mysterious character of the Overself inevitably puzzles the intellect. We may appreciate it better if we accept the paradoxical fact that it unites a duality and that therefore there are two ways of thinking of it, both correct. There is the divine being, which is entirely above all temporal concerns, absolute and universal, and there is also the demi-divine being which is in historical relation with the human ego.[263]

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[258] This theme of empirical diversity in sages, for example from the psychological point of view, is well known in general Indian thought.
[259] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 312.
[260] Ibid., XVI, 4, 2, 95.
[261] Ibid., XVI, 1, 158.
[262] Ibid., XIV, 3, 390.
[263] Ibid., XIV, 3, 386.

In all these reflections, Brunton emphasizes the idea *of a double standpoint*, in order to dispel all hints of dualism—for he is aware of the ambiguity of certain formulas referring to the Overself as a "fragment of the Absolute" or the "higher Individuality of man," which could lead to misunderstanding.

This double standpoint corresponds to the two levels of reality distinguished by Shankara: the *paramarthika satya*, or ultimate Reality, the level of *Paramatman*, the undifferentiated One; and the *vyavaharika satya*, or empirical reality, the relative plane where the *jiva* moves, the space-time universe where everything is different from everything else.

In the previous quotes, the Overself appears as a bridge uniting these two planes at the level of the individual, just as World-Mind, *Isvara*, unites them at the macrocosmic level. It is connected to both the human and the divine and in this way. It possesses a "dual nature." Depending on the plane from which one views the Overself, the result will naturally differ (cf. diagrams in section 5.2.8).

– If one stands on the relative plane, the Overself is the Absolute in its relationship to the human individual, the Absolute conditioned or limited by the psycho-physical individuality. It is identical to the Absolute in essence, but differs from it in amplitude and power. The Overself, as one's higher Individuality, appears as a fragment of the Absolute *when viewed from below*. At the lower level, the Absolute is limited by the relative, but higher up, the relative merges into the Absolute. As long as the human being is individualized, the relative plane interposes itself between him and the Absolute, and only allows a fragment of this latter to show through.

The Overself, as the "human soul," is in relation to "the vibratory motion"[264] of the universe; this vibratory movement in fact constitutes *maya*, this "illusion-making power"[265] of the supreme *Atman*, through which is effected the transition from the undifferentiated One to multiplicity.

– When one is liberated from the relative plane and lifted to that of the absolute, the relative plane vanishes or dissolves of itself. The angle of vision is radically reversed, and at this level, the Absolute does not appear as a sum or totality of parts; rather, it is perceived as it is in itself, i.e. as an *undivided Whole*. The "higher Individuality" which was contemplated from the relative plane is here reabsorbed into the undifferentiated, divine Whole. This divine Whole, in turn, could be called World-Mind (or *Isvara*) if it is in relation to manifestation, or Mind (or *Brahman Nirguna*, *Paramatman*) if it is beyond all relationship. In this latter case, the Overself is simply the Absolute Itself, the Divine Being beyond time and space, matter and individuality, undifferentiated and immutable. Here, the term Overself is taken in its larger sense.

[264] One thinks of the perpetual vibration of atoms within apparently inert matter, and hence of our universe as a world incessant movement, symbolized in Hindu mythology as the dance of Siva. This vibratory movement is also that of the mind in waking and in dream: *mayaya spandate manas*. (*Gaudapada Karika*, III, 29)

[265] = "pouvoir illusionnant," in the words of C. Bouy (in his Thesis—see Bibliography).

5.2.7 The Overself and Vedantic Notions

> Ernest Wood's *Yoga Dictionary* defines "Overself" as follows: "A term designed by Dr. P. Brunton to indicate that the holy fount of our being and root of our consciousness is still ourselves, is indeed our true self. The Sanskrit equivalent is adhyatma as in *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter VII and VIII."[266]
>
> The interpretation of "Overself" which I have given in my book *The Wisdom of the Overself* is confirmed by the teaching of a former Sri Shankaracharya of Kolhapur (1912) as told by one of his disciples. He taught Atman – that part of the Absolute which is Man. He interpreted it as "higher self."[267]
>
> Atman = higher self; Paramatma = Mind;[268] Ishvara = World Mind. Overself – all three generalized (preferred by Hiriyanna). Jiva = individual... (Tony's Center) "souls ... behind the physico-mental complex commonly called the individual ... the eternal consciousness (Atman) as limited by the organism ... the sense-organ, the manas, and the antahkarana."[269]

Here Brunton himself gives the Sanskrit Vedantic equivalents for his own terminology. Of these, we shall review only those terms which correspond to the idea of the Overself. This latter, we have seen, overlaps a number of different Vedantic notions. Let us summarize:

* In the limited sense:

– *kutastha* (a term defined at length in the *Pancadasi*, ch. VIII.): the metaphysical principle of consciousness which informs dualistic psychological consciousness (empirical individual consciousness).

– *drk* or *saksin*: witness-consciousness, the inactive, unaffected spectator of the ego's role-playing in waking and dream, and of the absence of ego and objects in the state of deep sleep.

– antaryamin : *Isvara*/World Mind immanent in the individual mind as the Inner Guide, Inner Monitor, or Master. Its instructions can be received by the *jiva* who has reduced his *ahamkara* to silence.

– *anandamayakosa*: the "sheath made of bliss," corresponding to the causal body, which contains the karmic potentialities of the individual transmigrating entity.

– *adhyatma* (*Bhagavad Gita*, VII, 29 & VIII, 1 & 3): translated as "the domain of the Self," "each one's own essence," [270] or also as "the existence of *Brahman* as incarnated soul."[271] One can compare this term to that of *pratyagatman*, "inner Self."

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[266] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 177.
[267] Ibid., XIV, 3, 254.
[268] The term *Paramatma* is equivalent to that of *Nirguna Brahman*, which we founded in Ch. 4 corresponded to Brunton's concept of Mind or Mind-in-Itself, the acosmic Absolute.
[269] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 303.
[270] *Bhagavad-Gita*, French tr. by Esnoul and Lacombe, Fayard.
[271] *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita* , English tr. pub. by Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

– as for the "higher element controlling the inferior element in man," this probably refers to the *Gita*, VI, 5 & 7: "Let one lift oneself by oneself"; "He is his own ally who has triumphed over himself by himself,"[272] etc.

One could say that the Overself overlaps those Vedantic concepts which link the Absolute and the relative: the notions of "Self of bliss," witness, and "inner controller," are evidence of the Advaitins' attempts to bridge the world of empirical knowledge and that of ineffable Reality. These are *upaya*, soteriological means, whose function is to indicate the *atman* to the aspirant in the same way that a finger pointed at a star helps one recognize it. Whether they have been elaborated within the framework of a theory of knowledge (like the notion of *saksin*), probably in the course of scholastic jousts—notably against the Buddhists—or in the more spiritual framework of the search for a more profound identity than *namarupa* with the inquiry "who am I?" (like the notion of *antaryamin*)—these notions are fated to self-destruct when they have fulfilled their role.

* In the larger sense:

Overself = *Brahman*, or Overself = *Atman*, *Isvara* & *Paramatman*, conceived *intellectually* as the three-fold ultimate Reality from the human, relative point of view (the ultimate conception offered to the *human intellect*, and not to supra-intellectual Intuition). Here the Overself corresponds to the ideas of Mind and World-Mind previously examined.

5.2.8 The Overself and Non-Dualism: Two Interpretations

> Actually there is only One thing, whatever you call it, but it can be studied from different standpoints and thus we get different results. That thing is Mind—unindividuated, infinite.[273]

The different notions in Brunton's terminology do not refer to different entities, but to *one and the same entity considered from different standpoints*. Having thus removed the suspicion of dualism aroused by the expression "higher Individuality of man," there remains only the following question: is Brunton's non-dualism the same as that of Advaita Vedanta? Here, two responses are possible, depending on whether one considers the difference between Brunton and Advaita to be *metaphysical*, or simply *pedagogical and psychological*. We will consider these two hypotheses, explaining why we give preference to the second.

A Metaphysical Hypothesis

This hypothesis discerns a *metaphysical* difference between the doctrines of Brunton and Vedanta in regard to their conceptions of the Real, and consequently, to the status of the world and the Overself. It might be elaborated from the following passage:

[272] *Bhagavad-Gita*, Fayard.
[273] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 263.

> Mind active and mind in quiescence are not two separate beings, but two aspects of one and the same being as they appear to human inquiry. Mind active expresses itself in the heart of man as his higher self and in the universe as the World-Mind.[274]

The "metaphysical hypothesis" would deduce from this the two following assertions:

1. The status of manifestation would not be the same for Brunton as for Vedanta. For Brunton, Mind has two aspects: passive, as essence, and active, as function. The active aspect is the World-Mind, and its ideating function produces manifestation, i.e. the universe. Now this active aspect would seem as necessary as the passive one to the perfection or plenitude of Mind; active perfection would be as important as passive perfection. If, in this case, we would take away manifestation, Mind would no longer be as perfect as it could be. The function of ideation would thus be intrinsic to Mind in its aspect of World-Mind, and its suppression would mean the maiming or lessening of Mind. By contrast, in Vedanta, *Nirguna Brahman* would not be less perfect or complete without manifestation. Brunton's World-Mind (according to our metaphysical hypothesis) seems to have an ontological status equal to that of Mind, while the Vedantic *Isvara* clearly has an inferior status to that of *Nirguna Brahman*, being "contaminated" by its association with *Maya*.

2. It follows that the status of Brunton's Overself would be different from that of the Vedantic *atman*. According to our metaphysical hypothesis, the Overself as the higher Individuality of man could claim a certain ontological reality. If there really is ontological equality between Mind and World-Mind, the Overself, "embedded" in the World-Mind, would partake of this ontological dignity in some way. Indeed, the metaphysical hypothesis would imply that Brunton's conception of Reality is much broader than the Vedantic conception. The active aspect of the Absolute, the principle of manifestation or activity, the World-Mind, from which emanates the World Idea, the divine world-plan, infused with order and wisdom and invested with positive value, not reducible to mere illusion—the World-Mind includes the principle of "Overselfness," i.e. the principle of individual centers of consciousness. We would thus have a different non-dualism than that of Advaita Vedanta, a "triune" or mitigated non-dualism, rather than a pure monism. The sphere of *Maya*, illusion, would for Brunton be reduced (according to this hypothesis) to only apparent characteristics within manifestation: matter, time/space/causality; while only the level of the underlying divine idea would be real. Now one knows that by contrast, in Vedanta the sphere of illusion extends all the way to *Isvara*, including the individual being of *jiva*.

This metaphysical hypothesis, it seems to me, is not completely satisfactory because it does not take into account the dialectic of the double standpoint. The differences between Brunton and Advaita as to the dividing line between the Real and the relative have been well enough shown, but this is, so to speak, a "flattened" view of things. What is the starting point of each doctrine? On precisely which level does each stand in order to unfold its perspective? We know that the view of a landscape changes according to the space-time position of the observer; it is the same here, mutatis mutandis, for the ordering of concepts.

Let us now consider a second hypothesis.

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[274] Ibid., XVI, 3, 3, 66.

A Hypothesis of Psychological Realism

My preference for this hypothesis is mainly based on remarks made by Brunton in a private interview late in his life.[275] Even if he was capable of oscillating between different interpretations during the course of his long life, it is likely, in our opinion, that these notes reflect his final and definitive point of view. The following excerpt and the quotes which follow lead us to favor what I am calling a hypothesis of "psychological realism":

> Both [World-Mind and Mind], from our present relative, finite point of view, are Absolute. Mind alone is the Absolute of Absolutes, no second thing, but the use of a channel to control the world is necessary. From the human point of view both are absolute. From the human, relative standpoint, anything that transcends our point of view is Absolute. An analogy is: we are to the World-Mind as the World-Mind is to the Absolute; this is not to be taken literally.

These remarks seems to indicate that the concepts of World Mind and Mind are *not on the same hierarchical level*, which would invalidate our metaphysical hypothesis. The concept of Mind is hierarchically *superior* to that of the World-Mind, in the sense that the World-Mind's dynamic Becoming is *contained* potentially in the passive, immobile Being ("The Ever-Still") of Mind. In his *Notebooks*, Brunton says that:

> When Mind concentrates itself into the World-Mind, it establishes a focus. However vast, it goes out of its own unlimited condition, it passes from the true Infinite to the pseudo-Infinite. Consequently the World-Mind, being occupied with its cosmos,[276] cannot be regarded as possessed of the absolute character of Pure Mind. For what is its work but a movement of imagination? And where in the ineffable absolute is there room for either work or imagination? The one would break its eternal stillness, the other would veil its unchangeable reality. This of course it can never do, for Being can never become Non-Being. But it can send forth an emanation from itself. Such an emanation is the World-Mind. Through its prolonged contemplation of the cosmos Mind thus becomes a fragment of itself, bereft of its own undifferentiated unbroken unity.[277]

> The notion of a personal God includes a truth and an error. So far as there is a World-Mind, manifesting along with a world itself, the notion is true. But so far as there is only the Unique, the One without a Second, both are appearances, phenomena out of the Noumenon. In the case of the world, it appears in time out of the Timeless; but in the case of the World-Mind, all times are embraced in its Duration. Yet it too withdraws into its other aspect, Mind-only.[278]

Thus the three essential concepts, Mind, the World-Mind, and the Overself, point only to the one Reality. From the interplay of two standpoints, relative and Absolute, this one Reality appears differently.

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[275] in Vevey, 1975.
[276] in the sense that it "ideates" the cosmos and absorbs itself in the contemplation of its differentiations, like a Cosmic Dreamer which would let itself become fascinated with Its own dream to the point of identifying with the totality of the forms dreamt, *all the time knowing that It is dreaming*. Mind is the Pure Mind free of all dreaming, while World-Mind is Mind partially "alienated" by its dreaming the cosmos.
[277] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 41.
[278] Ibid., XVI, 3, 3, 55.

DIAGRAM No. 1 Metaphysical Hypothesis

"Flattened" Vision

PAUL BRUNTON		**ADVAITA**	
Mind	REAL	REAL	***Nirguna Brahman***
Passive: **Mind**	Active: (Macrocosm causal & subtle states) **World-Mind**	_____MAYA_____ ILLUSORY ***Isvara*** (causal)	
including **Overself** (Microcosm causal & subtle states)			***Hiranyagarbha*** (subtle)
RELATIVE			
Manifested Universe Matter Time Space Causality Ego			***Virat*** (manifested)

DIAGRAM No 2 **Hypothesis of Psychological Realism**

	PAUL BRUNTON	ADVAITA
I/ REAL	**Mind** Essential nature of World-Mind and Overself	***Nirguna Brahman*** (*Turiya*)
RELATIVE		
2/ Causal Level	**World-Mind** Causal principle of the Universe	***Isvara*** (*Prajna*)
3/Subtle Level	**Overself** Multiplicity and Individuation	***Hiranyagarbha*** (*Taijasa*)
4/ Gross Level	**Manifested Universe** Matter: Time Ego Space Causality	***Virat*** (*Vaisvanara*)
VIEW FROM BOTTOM TO TOP: 3/ & 2/ seen as real, superimposed on 1/		VIEW FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: 2/,3/,4/ seen as unreal

1. In Itself, in the purity of the Absolute plane, this ultimate Reality is Mind (= *Nirguna Brahman* or *Paramatman* in Advaita): the acosmic Absolute, the undifferentiated, immutable One. On this level, only the absolute plane exists, and not the relative plane.

2. Refracted through the prism of the relative plane on the scale of the cosmos, this same Reality is called the World-Mind (= *Brahman Saguna* or *Isvara* in Advaita). The World-Mind appears as the intersection of the absolute and relative planes on the scale of the cosmos.

3. Refracted through the prism of the relative plane on the scale of the individual, this same Reality is called the Overself or "Higher Self." It is the Advaitic *atman* as *jivatman*, i.e. conditioned by the psychosomatic individuality. The Overself appears as the intersection of the absolute and relative planes on the scale of the individual.

We note that the absolute plane includes the relative plane only on the levels of World-Mind/Isvara and Overself, and this only from the human standpoint of the ego (situated on level 4 of the diagram) looking up. On the level of Mind/*Paramatman*, the absolute plane excludes the relative plane. This is the point of view of the Absolute Itself, adopted by Advaita, which positions itself at once on level I. Since the diagram has already been analyzed in the preceding chapter of this work (in section 4.3.2), we will not continue here.

Advaita strongly devalues 2/ and 3/, and only values 1/. It is an abrupt or short path. Brunton, on the other hand, is careful not to devalue 2/ and 3/ so as not to frighten us off. He repeatedly emphasizes what, in Advaita, are only provisional teachings, and offers only glimpses of what in Advaita constitutes the heart of traditional Vedantic discourse.[279]

Brunton's is a *slow and graduated path*. If at the very last stage, the contents of the two doctrines are the same, the perspectives from which they are explained are altogether different. Thus Brunton declared:[280]

> From the point of view of the Absolute, there are no questions, no Overself, nothing to transcend. IT IS—this is Advaita.

Asked whether it is necessary to understand the three concepts of Mind, World-Mind and Overself in order to understand the Absolute, he responded:

> If you are trying to think things out in an intelligent way, you must do that. You can't leap there.... you can take the Absolute Advaitic point of view if you like, but you can't get there until you've gone through them—because you don't understand; the instrument is lacking which can handle it.... Why did Plotinus split it into three if it wasn't necessary for us? Eventually you rise to the point where there is only THE ONE. In studying, using the intellect; all three are necessary.

Thus Brunton acknowledges that the fragmentation of the non-dual Reality into three distinct concepts has only an empirical value, the fruit of an intellectual operation which is only preliminary to the contemplative experience that alone allows attainment of the Real. Intellectual activity, dualistic by nature, can only apprehend concepts, mental constructs belonging to the category of *drsya*. The intellect can only produce thoughts, yet Reality is not a thought. Accumulating thought after thought, reason is forever powerless to grasp the Real. But it can open the way for metaphysical experience, and that is, moreover, its traditional function in Vedantic *sadhana*. According to Professor Hiriyanna,[281]

> Reason—yukti—is intended to convince us of the truth of teaching the Upanishads ... thus we do not depend on mere texts or blind faith alone: but reason gives only an indirect mediate knowledge, not experience. Intuition is the transformation of the indirect knowledge of reason into immediate experience of Brahman.... Intuition is experience of what is already intellectually known.

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[279] what is sometimes called *ajati-vada* = "the theory of non-birth" (of phenomena), i.e. acosmism.
[280] in a private interview with Alan Berkowitz.
[281] in conversations with Brunton in Mysore.

Now reason is incapable of a global apprehension (that is the work of intuition); reason is an analytical instrument used to divide what is given by experience into names and forms linked by the laws of logic. The idea of the Real—and not the Real itself—is accessible to reason only if separated into distinct but related concepts, although ordinary logic may find itself mired in an impasse of paradox. Reason proceeds by successive steps and not by sudden leaps—it cannot apprehend the concept of the Absolute without intermediary concepts. However, the ultimate step will always be "trans-rational." Brunton seemed to be aware of this paradox, for he confided to a student:

> Understanding the One is not a matter of discrimination, because it can only be risen to in the silent mind, the stillness. In having that experience he (Plotinus) could have only had it in the silent mind, the stilled, silent mind, the higher intellect, when he was not trying.[282]

Thus the World-Mind and the Overself are only intermediary concepts permitting the aspirant to construct a coherent mental representation of Reality. This representation has a double function: first, to satisfy the needs of the discriminating intellect, then, to provide supports and symbols for the meditator not yet able to contemplate the "Formless," giving him a motivation less abstract than the ineffable Real.

But the usefulness of these concepts ends here, for we have seen that Brunton, unlike Subrahmanya Iyer, had an acute awareness of the limitations of conceptual thought.

If one adopts this second hypothesis (which differs, not in its metaphysical content, but in its pedagogical presentation or psychological coloring of the doctrine), then the notion of the Overself seems to fit into this framework most happily as a soteriological tool.

5.2.9 A Soteriological Aid for Westerners

> The idea of a higher individuality was more acceptable to Western mentality than the Brahmanic one of total dissolution in a single mass consciousness. It was also more understandable. The lesser self finds its transcendental goal in submission to this higher individuality. Here is the highest form of duality.[283]

> The oriental ideas about the spiritual goal and methods of spiritual practice as they appear in most Buddhist and many Hindu sects are not likely to appeal to Occidental seekers. For they seek the dissolution of the human personality, either through merging into the inconceivable Unity or through disappearance into an indescribable Nirvana. As a rolling wave dissolves into the sea, as a wisp of smoke vanishes into the air, so does the separated human life enter its ultimate state. Few Westerners are prepared to renounce their own identity, to sacrifice their inborn attachment to personality for the sake of such a vague goal....[284]

Most likely, these two reflections in the *Notebooks* hold the key to the unsettling gap between the notions of Overself and *atman*. If Brunton preferred the relative point of view to the

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[282] interview with Alan Berkowitz, Vevey, 1975.
[283] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 2, 224.
[284] Ibid., XII, 1, 5, 21.

transcendental perspective, this is due to his deliberately adopting a pragmatic, even pedagogical approach. He understood that the Vedantic perspective of a complete annihilation of individuality in impersonal Being would only confuse and frighten contemporary readers, attached as they were to the personality—whether the Christian notion of the individual soul forever distinct from God, or the modern cult of the ego. From this comes his criticism of the "abruptness" of Vedanta. The notion of the personality which permeates Western consciousness made necessary a reformulation of the Vedantic teaching. We suggested earlier that in order to move and inspire Western readers, a more acceptable terminology was needed to lend new ideas an aura of familiarity, and that the term 'Overself' was chosen precisely because it met this criteria.

The "psychological" hypothesis, which we chose as a hermeneutic key for our comparison of Brunton and Vedanta, leads us naturally to think that Brunton introduced this reassuring notion of a higher Individuality of divine essence, to sweeten the pill of non-dualism. In doing so, he maintained, while interiorizing it, the essential otherness of a personal God. This inner divine presence is *other* than the ego, which could then enter into personal relationship with it; nevertheless this Other is in fact the true "I" of the aspirant. The purely psychological otherness here masks an ontological non-otherness. In principle, the day may come when the aspirant can say: "You alone are my real Being, my "I", my higher Self." Naturally this can only inadequately reflect the essentially mysterious process of identification with the Overself which takes place in the deepest inner silence.

Still, Paul Brunton's pragmatic outlook could elicit two questions:

1. Is the notion of a higher Individuality compatible with a non-dualist doctrine? In other words, is Brunton's system coherent?

2. What might Brunton's Vedantin mentors have thought of this Western version of the Upanishadic *atman*?

Regarding this last question, one might surmise that they would not find it a serious issue. Given that Brunton here and there hinted at the eventual dissolution of all individuality in the Absolute, one could consider his approach after all as not so remote from the traditional Vedantic method as clearly laid out by Subba Rao:

> Whatever characteristics are attributed to the Self as a means to awaken the student to ultimate reality are always finally denied. This is the heart of the method.[285]

In the language of orthodox Vedanta, one could say that the notion of "higher Individuality" is an *upadhi*, a limiting condition superimposed on the Absolute by the method of *adhyaropa*. To finally deny this higher Individuality corresponds to the method of *apavada*: i.e. negating the attributes which had for the sake of pedagogy been superimposed on the Absolute. But of course one should keep in mind that this "superimposition" has a predominant role and an eminently positive value for Paul Brunton, while for the Vedantins it has only a preliminary and limited role, and a strictly subordinate value. Inversely, there is an exultation in the Vedantic stage of

[285] Subba Rao, *The Method of the Vedanta*, p. 111.

apavada[286] which in Brunton becomes reluctance. He mistrusts the intoxication which Advaita Vedanta can produce by its sublime metaphysical flights of fancy:

> The exhilaration induced by Advaita can be as heady as champagne. The belief that there is only the Real and that nothing else exists or is to be concerned with, can be quite unsettling to intense or neurotic temperaments. The votary can become mildly mentally disturbed.[287]

Brunton was content with occasional allusions to the Reality beyond the Higher Self. Moreover, he had been well-schooled in matters of pedagogy and pragmatism by his Vedantin masters. Iyer had said, "The Vedantic method is to give to people what suits them best." And also, "According to Vedanta, all things have their place in the world, and fill a function for someone."[288] Iyer had presented Sankara as an able tactician, moving with the orthodox stream of Brahmanism (respect for castes, *sruti*, etc.) to better impart his message of absolute Non-Dualism. It would seem that pragmatism was not invented by the Neo-Vedantins: the *Bhagavad-Gita*, raised by Sankara to the status of orthodox *sruti*, long ago declared that:

> The Sage does not have to disturb the minds of the ignorant who bow before their attachment to acts. (III, 26)

and furthermore,

> He who knows the total truth does not have to disturb those who have only a small amount of knowledge. (III, 29)

As we observed in Part I, Iyer, both astute and modest, wished above all to spread his ideas in a way which would arouse the least amount of opposition. We recall his advice to Brunton: "Do not publish the fact that you are writing on my request," he had cautioned, "because critics will then say that you are guided by others and that you don't have your own judgement."[289]

He had advised Brunton to avoid using the term "Advaita Vedanta" in his writings. Thus he would most likely have approved Brunton's introduction of a new and original terminology. However, this new terminology did bring with it a new set of associations, thereby giving a different coloration to the whole doctrine.

Iyer said to him:

> If you are asked which system of Indian philosophy you are studying, never answer that it is Sankara's; say that you are studying all the systems and taking what is true in each. Otherwise you will get wrongly labeled as a follower of Sankara, …or else you will get quarrels only opposed by the questioner if he belongs to a rival school…[290]

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[286] One thinks, for example, of the triumphant song of King Janaka in *Astavakra Gita* II, 22 : *naham deho na me deho jivo naham aham hi cit* = "I am not this body, this body is not mine; I am not this individual, I am Pure Consciousness."
[287] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 379.
[288] Brunton's Mysore notes.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Ibid.

Brunton, appearing to heed this advice, initially presented his teaching as the "Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga," and later, in a more general way, without explicit reference to India, used the term "Philosophy." Iyer had previously told him:

> The term 'philosophy' was once defined as "Search after Truth," and I want now gradually to restore that meaning to it.[291]

As for a view which simultaneously postulated the existence of a higher Individuality and a unique, undifferentiated ultimate Reality, its ambiguity seems to have been resolved by what we recognzed as a "dialectic of a double standpoint," taken with a pedagogical intent.

Thus, we are inclined to think that Brunton's *metaphysical discourse* is identical to Advaita's, but his *psychological discourse* is different. He gives the relative point of view a value, a dignity which Advaita gives only to the ultimate, absolute point of view—the difference is only one of method. In Advaita, it could be said that "the Absolute speaks of the Absolute," whereas in Brunton, we might say that "the human being speaks of the Absolute," even while knowing that, in the end, the former is destined to merge with the latter.

Our hypothesis of "psychological realism" implies that the notion of a higher Individuality is true only for the aspirant who is still attempting to transcend the relative plane. One could picture the *sadhaka* as a prisoner bound by the conditionings of his psycho-physical and social personality—the Vedantic *upadhi*—which, like the walls of a funnel, prevent him from seeing the infinite sky of the Absolute. Only upon lifting his head does he see, through the orifice of the funnel, a minuscule portion of the vast space above. It is that fragment of the Absolute, limited by the walls of the funnel of the personality, which Brunton, in our opinion, calls the Overself.

The prisoner of the funnel believes that the fragment constitutes the whole of the supreme Reality. But if he would succeed in leaving the funnel, he would see that there is no fragment, but only the Absolute. Nevertheless, to tell the prisoner that the fragment he sees is not the ultimate Reality, would certainly discourage him.

It seems to us, therefore, that the concept of the Overself as the higher Individuality of man is ultimately not intended as a philosophic category, but rather as a soteriological device for modern seekers—an acceptable notion which might save the non-dualist doctrine from total rejection, and an efficient means of attracting the aspirant's thoughts and efforts, lifting him towards the higher.

Furthermore, the presence of elements drawn from other traditions can only confirm our hypothesis that the notion of Overself is a soteriological concept.

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[291] Ibid.

5.2.10 The Overself and Other Traditions

> It is a *felt* presence.[292]
>
> The Overself is truly our guardian angel, ever with us and never deserting us. It is our invisible saviour. But we must realize that it seeks primarily to save us not from suffering but from the ignorance which is the cause of our suffering.[293]
>
> The particular function of the Overself was known also to the more percipient among men of the Middle Ages and of antiquity. Thus Epictetus: "Zeus hath placed by the side of each, a man's own Guardian Spirit, who is charged to watch over him." [294]
>
> To Dr. Wood's learned definition .... I would not leave out Buddha's transcendent atmosphere of goodwill to all beings.[295]

With the expressions "presence," "guardian angel," "guardian spirit," "savior," "transcendent atmosphere of good will," we leave the Vedantic sphere and find instead a coming together of Buddhist, Greek, and especially Christian influences. Here Overself is defined as a sacred, protective presence. This presence is intimately felt, and is permanently accessible to those who have established contact with it. Serene and soothing, ever identical with itself, it is a haven of peace where one who is troubled by the world may take refuge and find healing. This eminently beneficial presence dissolves the negative, for in it, thoughts—and thus desires and fears—vanish.[296]

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[292] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 292.
[293] Ibid., XIV, 3, 301.
[294] Ibid., XIV, 3, 302.
[295] Ibid., XIV, 3, 177.
[296] One might compare this to Jung's 'process of individuation,' for it results in a state of equilibrium and harmony where one seems to feel at one with his true nature. The ego feels itself contained in a transcendental Presence which Jung calls 'the self,' and which is unknowable:

"The individuated ego senses itself as the object of an unknown and supraordinate subject." ("The Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious," in *Collected Works*, v. 7, p. 240) (One is reminded of the Vedantic experience of the Witness-Consciousness).

The spatial and dynamic symbolism used by Jung to suggest the Self and its relationship to the Ego recalls the magnetic force inherent in the "higher Individuality" of man which attracts the ego and transforms it:

"Sensing the self as something irrational, as an indefinable existent, to which the ego is neither opposed nor subjected, but merely attached, and about which it revolves very much as the earth revolves round the sun – thus we come to the goal of individuation." (ibid.)

Finally, Jung considered the process of individuation to be "indispensable for certain people, not only as a therapeutic necessity, but as a high ideal, an idea of the best we can do." (ibid., p. 226) Jung further remarks that "it is at the same time the primitive Christian ideal of the Kingdom of Heaven which 'is within you.' The idea at the bottom of this ideal is that right action comes from right thinking, and that there is no cure and no improving of the world that does not begin with the individual himself." (ibid.)

The metaphor of the Kingdom of Heaven within us is one of Brunton's favorites for describing the ego's knowledge of the Presence of the Overself as the Higher Reality, and its loving submission to this Power.

Jung denied going beyond the limits of the purely psychological. From this ensued a certain ambiguity: one cannot know if terms such as 'the Self' and 'the process of individuation' imply the idea of transcendence, or only the recognition of a *psychological need* for transcendence. For Brunton, an avowed mystic, the transcendent meaning of the Overself is obvious. He relates that (in a conversation he had with Jung at the latter's home in

This vocabulary gives Brunton's Overself a Christian flavor (while the allusions to Buddhism and Stoicism help to universalize it). The mystics, in particular the Christian ones, speak of God as a felt presence in the deepest recesses of the human heart. But the Christian coloration needs not mislead us:

> By seeking to perpetuate for all eternity the same human personality in the spirit world, too many orthodox church interpreters of Christ's teachings have misinterpreted it. For Christ taught in several clear sentences the giving up of self, the denial of personality. These theologians reduced this preachment to the practice of charity and unselfishness but kept the ego as something precious, whereas Jesus asked not only for these moral virtues, but for the immeasurably more important metaphysical-mystical virtue of rooting out the ego itself.[297]

> The Christ-self who was in Jesus is in us too.[298]

Here Brunton voices a criticism of the dualist view of exoteric Christianity, for which he substitutes a non-dualist, esoteric interpretation. One sees that in spite of the Christian connotations of the term Overself, Brunton's concept seems to indicate a reality different from that of the soul in exoteric Christianity.

What are the deep reasons for this borrowing from diverse traditions? Does it reflect a syncretism;[299] does it show a pedagogical intention to move an audience through familiar terminology; or does it indicate a universalism born of a conviction that the great traditional soteriological paths are in esoteric agreement? These three hypotheses all contain some truth, but in different proportions. Brunton admitted that he used Christ's Sermon on the Mount in order to present his own spiritual views:

> In *The Inner Reality*, I have used the words of Jesus as mere pegs on which to hang my own teaching. This follows the example on the ancient religion makers. It has thus helped thousands of Christians, who might otherwise not have been reached by my words, to a higher concept of Truth.[300]

This declaration is interesting because it inclines us to favor the second of our three hypotheses: that whatever can help the seeker to progress towards a higher spiritual level is welcome. Thus terms, notions, even mythical emblematic figures may be invoked to impart a message different from the one traditionally associated with them: a teaching presented as the esoteric meaning of Christ's words might be more attractive to nominal Christians than would be an overly exotic or purely abstract philosophy. This pedagogical flexibility can also be found at the root of the Vedantic method,[301] as we have already shown.

Kusnacht,) Jung "kept his mystical belief and experience secret in order to preserve his scientific reputation." (*Notebooks*, VIII, 6, 82)

[297] *Notebooks*, XII, 1,5, 21.

[298] Ibid., XIV, 3, 275.

[299] We respond to this point in our Conclusion, following the definition given by Meslin in his *L'experience humaine du divin*, p. 246.

[300] *Notebooks*, VIII, 5, 199.

[301] But it is also one of the essential modalities of the process of religious acculturation in general, as Meslin shows. (op. cit., ch. VI)

Nevertheless, the other two explanations are not to be rejected. Brunton himself claimed that he was presenting a *creative synthesis* of a number of teachings, traditional as well as modern, including the discoveries of science. We will attempt to summarize the content and form of his synthesis in our conclusion. Here we will simply observe that Brunton appears to have retained from his own esoteric past a belief in a primordial doctrine which contained the whole of Truth, which was then scattered throughout the various religions, each of them retaining fragments of it. As each tradition was now in itself incomplete, it would therefore be necessary to combine elements of several of them in order to reconstruct the complete Teaching.

Brunton once pointed out that Sri Sankaracharya of Kancipuram had said the same thing:

> Sankara of Kanchi says ... that there was originally only one great religion or truth, the Sanatana-Dharma, which was later fragmented into the different religions, and what we call Hinduism stems from.[302]

Nevertheless, it does not seem that Brunton drew on elements of Christian doctrine, although the many volumes on Christian mysticism found in his library[303] are indicative of the deep affinity he undoubtedly felt with their authors.

Finally, although Brunton seems to have recognized that the great traditional spiritual paths led to the same goal, he nonetheless considered certain aspects—metaphysical, ethical, or soteriological—more developed or articulate on one path than on another. Hence there was a need to combine elements from diverse traditions.[304]

5.2.11 Symbols for the Overself

The Overself is *not* a metaphysical concept, although this study examines it as such in order to better analyze Brunton's thought. According to him, the Overself is a *presence*, a reality, and even *the* highest Reality of our existence. The mystics of all cultures have not experienced otherwise. To apprehend this intangible, ungraspable reality, there exists another means of knowledge than that of the rational concept: the symbol, different from ordinary metaphor as well as from allegory, which is devoid of initiatory power.[305]

Let us re-examine the Overself in the mystical and poetic language of two symbolic images which reveal the divine immanence—the "divine atom in the heart" and the "inner divinity"—and two evocative metaphors which illustrate the doctrine of divine emanation—the ray of light and the divine deputy.

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[302] in conversation with Alan Berkowitz, Vevey, 1975.
[303] Brunton's personal library was left to Wisdom's Goldenrod at his death.
[304] I will explain this point more fully in my Conclusion.
[305] see M. Meslin, op. cit., p. 402-404.

Divine Atom in the Heart

> The divine atom of the Overself, the soul which links man to God, is hidden away in the human body on the right side of the physical heart.[306]
>
> The void within the divine atom of the heart is literally filled with stillness, utter peace.[307]

Here we have a double-layered symbolism of the center: the symbol of the heart, the vital center of the physical organism as well as the seat of psychic and spiritual life in many traditions, is duplicated by the symbol of the divine atom, located on the right side of the organ of the heart, exactly occupying the center of the chest. By its infinitesimal dimensions (it is called a "point"), this atom evokes well the ideal geometric center of a circle. Meslin remarks:

> We might well profitably take up again the famous phrase of Augustine: "God is a circle whose center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere," to well mark to what extent the image of the center of a circle underlies the idea of a divine absolute, while that of a point represents the essence itself of the individual soul.[308]

This atom-point-center thus perfectly symbolizes the dual meaning of the Overself, for it is both transcendent divinity and the higher Individuality or "individual soul" of man. By its paradoxical union of opposites—a *microscopic* atom, it opens onto the *unlimited* Infinity of the divine Being; an *empty* atom, it is a *plenitude* of peace; supremely *tranquil*, it is the very source of the heart's perpetual *activity*, maintaining the life of the entire organism—this symbol aptly conveys the idea of the divine Absolute as an inexpressible whole. In Jung's words:

> Oddly enough the paradox is one of our most valuable possessions…. *only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fulness of life*. Non-ambiguity and non-contradiction are one-sided and thus unsuited to express the incomprehensible.[309]

Furthermore, this symbol has cultural connotations for both Indian and Western readers. For Indians, it will recall the image of the *Atman* as a grain of rice, found in the *Chandogya Upanisad*. Here also, the ineffable is evoked by means of paradox:

> This soul, which is within my heart, is smaller than a grain of rice, than a grain of barley, than a grain of mustard, than a grain of millet, than the kernel of a grain of millet; this same soul which is within my heart is larger than the earth, larger than space, larger than the sky, larger than all the worlds.[310]

Let us not forget the importance of the symbolism of the heart in the *Upanisad*:

> One understands that the knowledge of the heart should be deemed *satya*, real and true, for it alone can lead man from the unreal and illusory to the real. This knowledge is thus *transforming*, for it discovers through the heart the divine immanence in man.[311]

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[306] *The Inner Reality*, p. 72.
[307] Ibid., p.78.
[308] Meslin, op. cit., p. 232.
[309] C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (*Collected Works*, v. 12), 1968, pp. 15-16; emphasis added.
[310] *Chandogya Upanisad*, III,14,3.

For Christian readers, Brunton's image of a divine atom impossible to enter except by shedding all possessions, i.e. the ego, recalls the "narrow gate" of which Jesus speaks (Matthew 13-14; Luke 24), or the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:23-26; Mark 10:23-27, Luke 18:24-27), i.e. the total renunciation which is necessary to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

By its *polyvalence* [312]—superimposing the symbologies of the Center (religious intimacy), the Heart (place of the divine immanence), the Door (passage, initiation, death of the 'old man'), etc.—by its *ambivalence*—uniting the opposites and putting human finitude in communication with divine Infinite—and by its *integrating power*—evoking the presence of the Transcendent in the seeker's own deepest recesses while stripping him of everything, including his "me"—Brunton's vivid, powerful image of the divine atom attains the status of a religious symbol.

The symbol of the divine atom appears to have been taken from Indian tradition. "The little hole in the heart" is "the expression in the microcosm of the infinite abyss of space."[313] The *Chandogya Upanishad* (III, 12, 7 ff.) states:

> That which one calls Brahman is this space which is external to man; but this space external to man ... is the same as that which is within man, ...the same as that which is within the heart. It is the full, the immutable.

Nevertheless, this symbol is sufficiently universal that it appears not to be rooted in only one tradition. We have seen that it can evoke different things for readers of different cultures. Brunton did not draw exclusively on one particular tradition; rather, he wrote for the modern individual "emerging from the cocoon of religious traditions" (P. Ricoeur), no longer in a simple or evident relationship with a traditional universe, and for whom no truth would be self-evident; one who, while still carrying more or less unconsciously certain religious and cultural references, now ponders the meaning of the universe, God, and himself, and seeks to have his own particular spiritual experience.

Inner Divinity

To become aware of the ethereal presence of the Overself, the metaphysician would need to become a mystic or a poet, for it is the language of poetry which can best present a symbolic image of the Overself as inner divinity:

> Remote, yet near, unutterably aged, lone,
> He sits within the temple's inner shrine,
> With folded hands and countenance divine,
> Omniscient, inscrutable, unknown.[314]

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[311] Meslin, op.cit., p. 219.
[312] = multiple levels of meaning in a single image.
[313] Charles Malamoud, "La Brique percée: sur le jeu du vide et du plein dans l'Inde brahmanique," in his *Cuire le monde*, Paris, 1989, pp. 89-90.
[314] This poem by G.P. Williamson opens ch. III of Brunton's *The Secret Path*.

In this case, rather than a true transforming, initiating symbol, we have a symbolic image useful as a support for meditation, an image enveloped in the mystery of transcendence, intended to evoke in the meditator a feeling of the numinous.

In the poem above, we find two characteristics we have seen before: the symbology of the Center—“the inner shrine”—and the paradoxical union of opposites—"remote, yet near." "Omniscient" and "unknown"—it knows all, but itself is not known—recalls common Vedantic formulas such as, "It sees all, but itself is not seen," which evoke the ineffable. This essential unknowability of divinity is expressed by "inscrutable," while "lone" suggests the idea of divine solitude. "Unutterably aged" suggests the immemorial nature of the inner divinity, its primordiality, which transcends time. C.G. Jung understood well the timeless character of archetypes:

> We are then confronted with the underlying human psyche which, unlike consciousness, hardly changes at all in the course of many centuries. Here, a truth that is two thousand years old is still the truth today—in other words, it is still alive and active. Here too we find those fundamental psychic facts that remain unchanged for thousands of years and will still be unchanged thousands of years hence.[315]

Metaphors of Divine Emanation

The two preceding images, the divine atom and the inner divinity, reveal, by their mathematical (i.e. the "point") or anthropomorphic symbolism, the Overself as an immanent, divine presence in man. By contrast, the following two images evoke the Overself as an *emanation* of the supreme Reality. These two metaphors evoke the idea of our higher Individuality as an emanation of the divine Absolute. They clarify in a figurative way a point of metaphysical doctrine, even if such simple pedagogical images might lack the richness or the effectiveness of true, transformative symbols.

One image which Brunton uses is that of a ray of the sun:

> Overself is the inner or true self of man, reflecting the divine being and attributes. The Overself is an emanation from the ultimate reality but it is neither a division nor a detached fragment of it. It is a ray shining forth but not the sun itself.[316]

> The individual is as inseparable from the Infinite as the ray from the Sun. Nevertheless he differs from it in degree and in attribute.[317]

This same idea of a common nature with a difference in degree is taken up again in a second image—that of a spark and a fire:

> Is a tiny spark the same as a great fire? Can it destroy a house as fire can? No—although the two are of the same nature, they are not of the same identity. For any man to say "I am God" is incorrect, unless he

[315] Jung, op.cit., p.476.
[316] *Notebooks*, XIV, 3, 319.
[317] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 151.

> understands the statement to refer only to the nature of his innermost being and only in this way, that he is but an insignificant spark of God, with all the limitations that belong to a spark.[318]

A comparable image is found in the Vedanta as a provisional teaching which in the end is subsumed within non-duality: that of the spark from the fire (*Mundaka Upanisad*, II, 1, 1), which conveniently expresses both the identity of, and the difference between, *jivatman* and *paramatman*: the former is identical to the latter in nature, but different from it in terms of its *upadhi*, its limiting attributes.

Lastly, the same idea is expressed by the more anthropomorphic image of the divine "deputy," the representative of supreme Power within each human individual:

> When they assert that they have united with God, they have, if truly attained, united with God's deputy, their higher self, their own divine soul—which is not the same. And if they have deceived themselves then they have united only with their conception of God. That is, they have never gone outside the enclosing circle of their own thought.[319]

[318] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 146.
[319] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 131.

Chapter 6: THE PHILOSOPHIC LIFE

6.1 An Ethical Critique of Materialism

6.1.1 Brunton's Evolution

Paul Brunton's ideas evolved greatly during his lifetime, so with any a position of his on a given subject one must determine whether it was formulated earlier or later in his life. The subject we will examine here is that of his attitude towards the West and its materialism.

During his younger years, Brunton was severely critical of modern Western civilization, especially in his early volume *A Message from Arunachala* (1936). This was an iconoclastic period in his life, and no aspect of Western life found favor in his eyes. His denigration of the West went naturally hand in hand with an overly idealistic view of India, which he admitted he "saw through rose-colored glasses."[320]

Sixteen years later, in *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*, Brunton had arrived a more mature position, one which would become more moderated and nuanced with the years. He repudiated *A Message from Arunachala*, whose tone now seemed to him too negative and unilateral. The muting of his criticism of the modern West moreover went together with a lowering of his esteem for traditional India: he saw his earlier tendency to contrast a materialistic West with a more spiritual East as both naive and inaccurate:

> ... there is plenty of materialism in Asia, only it takes a different form. It is evidenced in religious hypocrisies, for instance, in barbarous customs sanctioned and sanctified by the priests. And there is plenty of spirituality in Europe, if you know how to look for it. Here it appears as organized charity for the sick and poor, and as pity for suffering animals"[321]

In addition, he no longer criticized materialism per se, but only its excesses, and he showed his appreciation for the comforts and conveniences of modern life:

> I am not enamoured of the medieval interpretation of life; its poverty of comfort and narrowness of outlook are neither simplicity nor spirituality in my eyes.... The simple life is not incongruous with the electric light, nor the tranquil mind with automobiles—all depends upon *how* we use or abuse both light and car. Inner quietude is priceless, but it need not conflict with outer comfort.[322]

There was as well a recognition of the value of money for securing privacy and leisure. Its use only became materialistic when the pursuit of the material would overshadow spiritual needs. Brunton thus clearly distanced himself from such figures as Guénon, Lanza del Vasto[323] and Gandhi, denouncing their anti-modern ideologies for exhibiting a certain hypocrisy:

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[320] See following this chapter the section of the Appendix entitled "Brunton's view of India."
[321] *Notebooks*, X, 1, 257.
[322] Ibid., X, 2, 229.
[323] cf. ch. 1 of this work.

> Gandhi would throw Western science plus Western systems of medicine into the dustbin. But when Gandhi had appendicitis he threw his own doctrines there and submitted to an operation by an English surgeon. The fact that he picked them up again when he was well makes me think: do these people live to justify doctrines?[324]

6.1.2 Critiquing Materialistic Values

Brunton's critique of materialism may be the least original aspect of his writings, so it will receive brief treatment here.

Among the collective values of modern life, Brunton singled out three for criticism: the cult of speed (linked with a too rapid pace of life imposed by advancing technology, creating stress and frayed nerves, while perpetual agitation hindered the cultivation of intuition, and a quantitative mentality bred superficiality), the accumulation of material goods (when an end in itself, becoming a substitute for the true aim of human life), and the cult of science and the intellect (resulting in an intellectual arrogance which could be one of the greatest obstacles on the spiritual path).

As for the individual values to be found in today's society, Brunton cited for criticism the cult of youth and the body (the worship of appearances and promiscuity), self-centeredness (which he distinguished from the individualism he so valued), and modern extroversion (which made individuals unfit for the philosophic life). The whole of modern civilization seemed to him to be based on perpetual and useless agitation, taking one to be first of all a consumer of superfluous goods. Continually dispersing one's mind in sensory or mental distractions rendered one incapable of concentration, meditation or metaphysical study.

6.1.3 The War: a "Materialist Cancer"

The Second World War played an important role in Brunton's personal development. Its horrors made him painfully aware of the futility of a certain lower mysticism which sought only personal quietude while showing no concern for the world. Already his meeting with Iyer in 1937 had helped him to take his distance from the world of yogis, and the war would finally succeed in convincing him of mystical yoga's insufficiency as a way of life and a path of liberation. It might lead to peace, but it would not lead to Truth:

> My own drift away from a self-centered and unscientific mysticism had been proceeding fitfully for some years, in consequence of reflection upon its theory and observation of its practice. With the war, however, all this came to a climax, for both the attitude of mystics towards that cataclysmic event and a series of explosive personal experiences in India, the largest stronghold of such doctrine today, brought me to a parting of the ways.[325]

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[324] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 528.
[325] Ibid., 8, 5, 179.

Brunton called Nazism a "materialist cancer," and the war led him to reflect on the notion of collective and national karma:

> There is a collective national karma which gradually grows and then materializes. When a group of people live together and work together, either in a country or a city, they gradually form for themselves a national or municipal destiny which they have to bear.... Ultimately, we must say that the sad situation in the world was a self-earned one; and because it was self-earned it was necessary. The world needed to undergo the experience which it has undergone because it needed ethical and intellectual education, even though that particular form of education has been unpleasant and painful. What mankind can learn clearly and obviously from its continued present sufferings is that without goodwill towards each other brought into external manifestation there is not actual peace but only its pretense, that outward peace may even be a cloak for the preparation of war.... Only through repeated suffering is he beginning to learn that justice and goodwill, the attitude of give and take and even the spirit of generosity are essential to the maintenance of peace. These are merely ethical qualities, and yet without them there is not peace—there will always be war.[326]

He saw Nazism as a malignant tumor, the result of the uncontrolled growth of anti-spiritual, anti-religious, materialistic behavior in individuals, groups and nations. While Communism, the other totalitarian ideology, which survived Nazism by another forty years before in its turn collapsing, could have been seen as equally malignant, it was the shock of the Nazi horror whose ripples penetrated the peaceful philosophic retreat in Mysore where Brunton was writing in the 1940s:

> Why not work for self-aggrandizement alone if self be nothing more than the physical and egoistic person? Why not let war destroy a million men, women and children when they stand in the path to such personal triumph—if, sooner or later, they are doomed to perish forever anyway? Why not set up the acquisition of more and still more possessions by the most frightful means if successful acquisition of material things be the only sensible aim in a man' s life? Why not bludgeon the brains out of every minister of religion, every student of literature, every preacher of ethics, every philosopher of spirit, every artist of exalted mood whose influence gives his followers the weakening idea that there can be a reality beyond this lump of flesh and its earthly environment? These were reasonable questions to the Nazi mind because it was filled with hostility to the divine in itself and with hatred of the divine in others.[327]

In the Nazi dream of world domination, Brunton saw a diabolical parody of the universal and peaceful alliance of nations which was in the long run destined to appear in a unfied world made smaller by new technologies:

> The Nazi version (of this alliance) was quite simple. It consisted in the German python's swallowing up all the other animals and thus creating a union of them all! The Nazis had sufficient intelligence and willingness to appropriate some spiritual values by offering their materialist counterfeits. The startling fact is that they created a hideous travesty of leading ideas which have become timely for incorporation in the modern man's outlook on life. It is thus that they hoped to take advantage of the time-spirit to deceive him.[328]

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[326] *Essays on the Quest*, ch. 3: "Karma, the Law of Consequences," pp. 70-71.
[327] Ibid., ch. 1: "The Mystery of Evil," p. 21.
[328] Ibid.

6.2 The Philosophic Life

6.2.1 The Philosophic Discipline

It is easy to find parallels between the philosophic discipline advocated by Brunton and the Vedantic path (*sadhana*).

We note that Subrahmanya Iyer had reinterpreted the traditional Vedantic disciplines of *viveka* and *vairagya* in a mentalist way: true discrimination and true detachment mean the letting go of the instinctive belief in the world's *materiality*. This is the belief which is at the root of the ordinary person's sense that the world is ultimately real:

> The man who runs after women shows thereby that he regards the woman's body as real. How then can he get at Vedantic truth? But our practical view is that if the woman is there already in your life, let her remain but *regard her as an idea*. ... Similarly with wealth, position and household life. They can remain, provided you regard them as ideas, provided you know what their value is. Otherwise you are so addicted to regarding them as real that you cannot get at the truth.[329]

The mentalist attitude was both the outcome of a subtle intellectual analysis and a psychological device to help one detach oneself from the world of the senses.

A comparison can be made between the seven qualifications required of the aspirant which are given in Brunton's *The Hidden Teaching beyond Yoga*[330] and Advaita Vedanta's nine qualifications required of the *sadhaka*.[331] We can divide all these qualifications into two classes: mental-intellectual prerequisites and moral prerequisites. The former would include, first of all, intelligence (i.e. the faculty of discerning true and false, between the Real and illusion: in Vedanta, *viveka*, the ability to "discriminate between permanent and transitory things"). In this initial class would also be found the aptitudes for concentration (the Vedantic *samadhana*, "constant concentration of the mind") and equanimity (*sama*, the ability to keep the mind stable, contained in itself and not affected by external objects). The second class, moral prerequisites, would be: an intense desire to find truth (equivalent to the Vedantic *mumuksutva*, the aspiration for spiritual liberation), a determination to follow the Quest at all costs (recalling the Vedantic *sraddha*, "faith in the truths of Vedanta such as are taught by the Master"), inner detachment (the exact equivalent of *vairagya*, "renouncing the fruits of one's actions in this world and the next"), an "ascetic equanimity towards pleasure" (which resembles *titiksa*, "indifference to hot or cold and other pairs of opposites"), and finally, control of the emotions (roughly at the same level as the Vedantic pre-requisites of *dama* and *uparati*, control of the sense organs). The last of Brunton's prerequisites, "giving up the ego," is equivalent to the Vedantic *manoksaya*, (also called *manonasa*, lit. "destruction of the personal mind," or *manolaya*, its dissolution), although this latter is not included in the official list of Vedantic qualifications.

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[329] Brunton's Mysore notes.
[330] Found in Chapter V.
[331] Such as those explained in Chapter 1 of Sadananda's *Vedantasara*.

It is interesting that Brunton and the Vedanta do not arrange these qualifications in the same order. Thus Brunton places the ardent desire for truth first, while Vedanta places *mumuksutva* last, supposedly the outcome of its first three qualifications, which are: v*iveka, vairagya,* and *satsampatti* (= "the six pre-requisites," *sama, dama, uparati, titiksa, samadhana,* and *sraddha*), each qualification being indispensable to those which follow. For Brunton, the faculty of discrimination comes only third (after (2) faith, which supports the desire for truth), immediately before (4) inner detachment (as in Vedanta). After (5) the qualities necessary for meditation (concentration, calm and reverie), and (6) the mastering of the emotions, Brunton's seventh requirement is giving up the ego, which in Vedanta is implicit in its first qualification, *viveka*. In both systems, intellectual discrimination is seen as the necessary condition for detachment, giving the latter a metaphysical and not solely an ethical base. The most significant divergence in the lists concerns the place given to the desire for liberation, *mumuksutva*. Perhaps for Brunton's modern readers, the motivation to attain spiritual truth would have to be of primary importance, or there would be no incentive to start out on the Quest. In traditional India, by contrast, liberation was taken for granted as the Fourth Aim of man,[332] thus perfectly legitimate. Their emphasis was therefore placed on cultivating the intellectual aptitude for discrimination, and it became the first criterion for candidates on the Vedantic path.

6.2.2 Long and Short Paths

The *sadhana* advocated by Paul Brunton is a harmonious combination of what he called the Long Path and the Short Path. Almost all traditional soteriologies can be classified according to one or the other of these two paths.

The Long Path is an *ascetic* path. It is a perfecting of the ego and a disciplining of the senses and the mind, with the aim of achieving a more purified personality, through detachment from the physical appetites and egocentric passions.

The Short Path is a *mystical* path. In it one identifies with the Overself by means of a series of spiritual exercises, primarily meditative contemplation. Here the means imitate the end, and the aspirant cultivates letting go, trust in Divine Providence, and serenity and perpetual recollection, all of which in the realized sage are stable and permanent qualities.

It is important for each person to choose carefully the amount of time and energy that should be devoted to each of the paths. But cultivating one at the expense of the other may lead to an unbalancing of the personality.

Indeed, the Long Path, "the ant's long path," is too negative a discipline if deprived of its positive counterpart, the Short Path, which is likened to the flight of a bird. In the former, the goal is to purify the ego, in the latter, to transcend it. The first is a path of *discipline* which uses the will

[332] The classical theory of *purusartha* (the four aims of man), as explained in the *Dharmasastra* enumerates them as: 1. *dharma*, duty (caste and station in life), 2. *artha*, fortune and power, 3. *kama*, pleasure, and 4. *moksa*, liberation from the cycle of transmigration.

and reason; the second is a way of *faith*, which calls on intuition, contemplation and metaphysical study. The first, if practiced to the exclusion of the second, can lead to drying up and discouragement. The second, if embraced too quickly and to the neglect of the first, can lead to utopian delusions.

> The Long Path is unutterably irksome whereas the Short Path is gloriously attractive. The one is associated with toil and suffering; its emblem is the Cross. The other is associated with peace and joy; its emblem is the Sun. Yet those who would prematurely desert the one for the other will find their hopes frustrated in the end, however enthusiastic and rapturous the experience may be in the beginning. This is because Nature, the Overself, will not let them enjoy permanently what must be taken into every part of their being, properly cleansed and prepared to absorb it, with the being itself properly equilibriated to endure the experience of absorption without stimulating the ego.[333]

As the Long Path is one of struggle, demanding conscious will and individual effort, it may be practiced in the world. The Short Path is a path of surrender to the Divine, employing auto-suggestion and a steeping of the unconscious in formulas and images meant to attract divine grace. It is best practiced in solitude, apart from the world, but it can be practiced anytime, anywhere.

Let us now look for equivalents of these paths in some soteriological traditions:

The Long Path, active, psychological, and moral, resembles Greco-Roman stoicism and Patanjali's system of yoga (yogic powers are the fruit of *tapas*, ascetic efforts by the individual). Among the Indian traditional yogas, *hatha-yoga* and *raja-yoga* correspond to the Long Path, while *jnana-yoga* corresponds to the Short Path. As for *bhakti-yoga* and *mantra-yoga*, Brunton states that their most elementary forms belong to the Long Path, while their most advanced and subtle stages belong to the Short Path (Christianity as a path of purification, devotion and good works, belongs to the Long Path, while the mystical Christianity of a Meister Eckhart belongs to the Short Path). Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism emphasize the Short Path, contemplative, spiritual, and metaphysical. Chinese Confucianism, where one tries to aquire specific virtues, recalls the Long Path, while the Taoist techniques of emptying the mind to make it receptive to Tao belong to the Short Path. Among more recent spiritual teachers, Krishnamurti was a master of the Short Path, while Gurdjieff laid out a Long Path.

In Brunton's view, it is useful to cultivate both paths; the importance given to each will depend on the level of the aspirant. The Long Path, centered on purification of the ego, is more accessible to the beginner:

> The philosophic Method is to combine both these schools of thought synthetically, with the explanation that both are necessary to complete each through the other.... Beginners need to give more weight to the hard effort of the Yoga school; but advanced persons need to give it to the Vedanta viewpoint, because in their case much of the ego-thinning and mental-emotional cleansing has already been done.[334]

Brunton insists on the benefits of combining the two paths:

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[333] *Notebooks*, XV, 1, 2, 1.
[334] Ibid., XV, 5, 150.

... *act* as the Long Path requires by working on and improving the self, but *think* as the Short Path enjoins by holding the attitude "There is nothing to be attained. Realization is already here and now."[335]

6.2.3 The Notion of Grace

The Short Path brings us to the concept of *grace*, which in the context of Brunton's philosophy differs from the popular theological-religious concept, whose connotations of favoritism and arbitrariness imply an anthropomorphic, over-simple vision of the divine. Brunton's use of the term 'grace,' with its deep theological resonance, drew much criticism from Indians, who saw it as an alien Christian element superimposed on their own culture, as well as from Western intellectuals who had been attracted by the rational side of his doctrine. For the latter, Brunton proposed a definition of grace which freed it from divine caprice as well as from the narrow religious attitude that held external sacraments the necessary means to its attainment, confining grace to a context of particular rituals and religious institutions.

Brunton assimilated grace to a Higher Law and inserted it in a plausible way in his own conceptual system, tying it to the concepts of Overself, ego, and karma. In his system, grace is the Overself's "power of attraction," a spiritual magnetic force present in individuals as a kind of internal gravitational force which tends to pull the ego towards the Self:

> The rejection of the idea of Grace is based on a misconception of what it is, and especially on the belief that it is an arbitrary capricious gift derived from favouritism. It is, of course, nothing of the kind, but rather the coming into play of a higher law. Grace is simply the transforming power of the Overself which is ever-present but which is ordinarily and lawfully unable to act in a man until he clears away the obstacles to this activity. If its appearance is considered unpredictable, that is because the karmic evil tendencies which hinder this appearance vary considerably from one person to another in strength, volume, and length of life. If the karma which generated them becomes weak enough, they can no longer impede its action.[336]

As for his Indian critics, Brunton sent them back to the Indian tradition, citing two texts of *Sruti* and the most venerated *Smriti* text, the *Bhagavad-Gita*. It is true that the Sanskrit word for grace, *prasada*, only appeared for the first time in the late *Svetasvatara Upanishad*. Nevertheless, the feeling of a dynamism inherent in the *atman* itself could already be sensed in the much more ancient *Katha Upanishad*:

> *na ayam atma pravacanena labhyo*
> *na medhaya na bahuna srutena*
> *yam eva esah vrinute tena labhya*
> *tasya esah atma vivrinute tanum svam.*[337]

[335] Ibid., XV, 5, 154.
[336] Ibid., XII, 2, 5, 6.
[337] *Katha Upanishad*, I, 2, 23.

= "This *atman* cannot be attained by the exegesis [of the Veda], nor by the intellect, nor by much study. It can only be attained by the atman itself, to which the aspirant prays. To him, the atman reveals its own nature".

One finds in this very ancient text, part of the Revelation on which the orthodox doctrines including Sankara's Advaita would later be founded, the idea that human efforts are not sufficient for the attainment of Liberation, even if they are necessary to prepare the path for the self-revelation of the *atman*. In the theistic *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, the fundamental text for *bhakti*, grace (*prasada*) appears more personalized:

> More subtle than the Subtle, greater than the Great, is the atman; It is hidden in the heart of creatures; the man without desires, free from suffering, by the grace (*prasadat*) of the Creator, sees the Lord and His majesty.[338]

The individual soul, through its own efforts, has detached itself from desire and thus from suffering; having erased its own relativity, it is henceforth comparable to a stainless mirror in which the divine *atman* spontaneously reveals itself through its grace. In the double movement of *bhakti*, grace is God or the *atman* going towards its devotee after the latter has taken refuge in the Divinity.

Finally, we find the concept of *prasada* in the last chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

> The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, and by His maya causes them to revolve as though mounted on a machine [i.e. like automatons]. Take refuge in Him alone with all your soul, O Bharata. By His grace will you gain Supreme Peace and the Everlasting Abode.[339]

Thus the notion of grace, while absent in early Buddhism, existed in theistic Vedanta, where the *atman* is assimilated to a personal God. And we can even find the germ of this notion in the archaic Vedanta of the earlier *Upanishads*. It was thus an idea which should not have disturbed orthodox Hindus. Brunton also pointed out that the notion was used a number of times by Ramana Maharshi, and that it was known to the Tamil mystics:

> Those Indian critics who have rejected my inclusion of Grace and stamped it as an alien Christian idea do not belong, and could not have belonged, to the great Southern region of their country, with its far purer Brahmin knowledge (because less subject to admixture by repeated Northern invasion). The mystical literature of that region is quite familiar with *arul*, a Tamil word which has no other and no better equivalent than "Grace."[340]

There is thus no need to see in this notion of grace an indication that Brunton was inclined towards syncretism. The most which could be said is that he used this notion intentionally—while carefully redefining it—as the majority of his readers were from a culture formed by Christianity.

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[338] *Svetasvatara Upanisad*, III, 20.
[339] *Bhagavad-Gita*, XVIII, 61-62. tr. Swami Nikhilananda. N.Y., 1969.
[340] *Notebooks*, XII, 2, 5, 24.

6.2.4 Progressing on the Path

Brunton gave both advice and warnings to those willing to undertake the philosophic discipline and to engage in the combined practice of the two paths.

Following the ideal proposed in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the philosophic life is to be lived in the world and not in an ashram. For Brunton (as for his Advaitin master Iyer), true renunciation involves giving up belief in the world's reality (in mentalist terms, in its materiality). Living in the world, while not being of the world, is the best way of testing one's progress on the path. Progress in the world may be much slower than in the sheltered quietude of an ashram or monastery, but the gains will be more solid and long-lasting, as they are realized in overcoming the challenges encountered in daily life.

Still, there remains the question of whether one can attain complete detachment in the conditions of normal family life, or find immutable serenity in a society based on ceaseless competition. Finding oneself caught up in various conflicts appears inevitable when one is in the world, and one might certainly wonder if spiritual realization is compatible with the struggle for existence. We will refrain from any final judgment in this matter, but it appears that Brunton towards the end of his life felt that in his initial writings he had underestimated the challenges of the Quest. In his posthumously published *Notebooks* and *Essays on the Quest*, he acknowledged the extraordinary difficulties involved, and warned that we should expect only slow progress after much effort and repeated setbacks. However, he insisted that we should not become discouraged, for the essential thing is to be headed in the right direction.

In the course of his journey, the aspirant might make mistakes or fail various tests and ordeals presented by destiny. The principal errors of the spiritual seeker are: seeking occult powers (vigorously denounced in one chapter of the *Inner Reality*) and being tempted by spiritual materialism, spirituality used for materialistic ends (health, wealth, achievement). Ordeals or tests, opposition from the environment and negative forces, will allow the aspirant to measure his inner strength, his detachment from the passions, etc. Besides occult powers, the traditional temptations include wealth, power, sex, and fame or success.

Faced with the numerous pitfalls along the path, Brunton gives three general warnings:

– *Be discreet*. One should not talk about the Quest except to serious seekers, and should not make a display of one's practices.

– *Remain humble*. Humility is invaluable for the beginner, who should be aware how little he knows, as well as for the Sage, whose humility is the natural consequence of egolessness. This humility towards the Overself has nothing to do with feelings of inferiority or low self-esteem.

– *Maintain your balance*. Mindful of his own youthful errors as well as his observations of mystical and esoteric circles, Brunton understood the dangers of becoming unbalanced.

The attainment of balance—avoiding excesses (asceticism becoming self-torture, devotion becoming sentimental or hysterical, intellectualism becoming dry or arrogant, excess meditation leading to setbacks), replacing swings of enthusiasm and discouragement with moderation and steadiness—constitutes the heart of his practical soteriological teaching.

6.2.5 Stages and Aspects

Brunton distinguished three levels or stages of the Quest: 1. *religion*, suitable for the many; 2. *mysticism*, suitable for those capable of deep introversion; and finally, 3. *philosophy*,[341] suitable only for those few ready to go beyond religion's gregarious comfort and lower mysticism's self-centered quietude. Nevertheless, the philosophic life does not deny the other two levels, but embraces them while transcending them. Indeed, it includes religious devotion (which can dissolve the ego's pride and the intellect's arrogance) and mystical contemplation. To these it adds an intellectual component—metaphysical study—and an ethical one—selfless action. For Brunton, it is self-development in this four-fold way, and the resulting balance to be realized between heart, soul, intellect, and body, which constitutes the true philosophic life.

6.3 The Ideal of the Sage

The sage as depicted in Brunton's writings represents perhaps more an ideal than an actuality. Such an individual would be encountered rarely in our world, so that one ought not to be attached at all costs to meeting one. Nevertheless, we will proceed to examine Brunton's portrait of the realized individual, comparing his view with that of Advaita, and more peripherally with those of other traditions.

6.3.1 The Faculty of Insight

In order to attain Realization one must develop a faculty which exists only latently in the ordinary person, but which manifests fully in the sage. Brunton called this faculty *insight*. Here are two of his definitions for the term:

> In one sense insight is a synthetic faculty, for it blends the abstract reason of the metaphysician, the feeling of the artist, the intuition of the mystic, the concrete reason of the scientist and the practical will of the active man. It fuses all these and yet it is also something higher which transcends them all. What the metaphysician only recognizes intellectually and what the mystic only feels emotionally are contained, combined and yet transcended in the philosophical insight.[342]

> Insight is a three-in-one faculty: it sees, it knows, and it is, all at the same time. Because knowing involves a duality of knower and known, it disappears at this point and merges into being. Realization is not a personal experience, for there is nothing personal in the real. Nor does it consist of intellectual

[341] He may have chosen this term on the advice of Iyer. In fact, the same triple, pyramidal structure of the Quest can be found in Iyer's writings.
[342] *Essays on the Quest*, p. 124.

> activity, although the pressure of right intellectual activity is one of the factors which helps us to arrive at it.[343]

This faculty develops in four stages (which we will not detail here) over a greatly extended period of time. Intermittent at first, manifesting in the form of brief and incomplete "glimpses," it gradually becomes a permanent and established faculty in the realized individual, to whom it communicates direct, intuitive and complete knowledge of Reality, accompanied by an unshakable certainty.

Insight is an intuition of a higher order. While ordinary intuition only applies to the things of this world, and is not always reliable, by contrast, insight is *metaphysical* intuition, applied to that which transcends the world of the senses, intellect, and emotions, and is an entirely reliable guide. It is not just an idea, but rather a powerful and vivid immediate certainty of the unity of all things in Mind, a unity which accompanies, without contradicting it, the continuing ordinary perception of multiplicity and differences.

The flowering of insight is the result of the simultaneous practice of the two Paths, human effort and surrender to divine grace. We may strive to develop this faculty in ourselves, but the final unfolding, which leads us towards Realization, does not depend on us; it merely "happens" when we is ready.

In his *Notebooks*, Brunton twice referrs to the Sanskrit term *antardrsti* in connection with his idea of insight. In one passage, he states:

> The translation of the Sanskrit phrase *antardrishti* is literally "inward seeing" in the sense of seeing beneath appearances what is under them. It does not refer to clairvoyance in the psychic sense, but rather to the metaphysical or mystical sense. It can be particularized as meaning entering into the witness state of consciousness. The ordinary person sees only the object; penetrating deeper, he enters the witness state which is an intermediate condition; going still deeper, he reaches the ultimate state of Reality when there is no subject or object, whereas in the witness there is still subject and object, but the subject no longer identifies himself with the object as the ordinary man does.[344]

In another passage, Brunton translates *antardrsti* as "a kind of clairvoyant insight."[345] And in other places, he relates insight, the faculty of knowing the Real, to *sahaja samadhi*, the state of realization of the Real,[346] and finds equivalences with the the Buddhist term *vipassana*[347] as well as with *samadhi* as it is used in Pali Buddhist texts.[348]

Brunton suggests a derivation of his term *insight* from Mahayana Buddhism:

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[343] Ibid.
[344] *Notebooks*, XIV, 8, 85.
[345] Ibid., XIII, 3, 4, 101.
[346] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 139-140.
[347] Ibid., XV, 1, 7, 298.
[348] Ibid., XIII, 2, 4, 197.

> *The Wisdom of the Overself* shows in what relation the planetary Overmind and the individual ego-mind stand to each other, and the nature and extent of the "interference" set up by the individual. The contact cannot be established by the limited operations of intellect or by the emotional ecstasies of the mystic, as an entirely new faculty has to be brought into play. This has been called "insight" (following the terminology of the Mongolian Yaka-kulgan school.) It is a transcendental fusion of thought, feeling, being, and act which yields an " isolation," as it were, of the principle of awareness.[349]

Elsewhere he suggests that insight also differs from purely intellectual knowledge in its effects:

> Where intellectual knowledge puffs up a man, insight humbles him, has indeed the very opposite effect.[350]

When this faculty, after a slow and obscure period of germination punctuated by intermittent glimpses, attains its maximum growth, it suddenly blossoms into Realization.

6.3.2 Realization

Brunton's view of Realization differs from the Vedantic conception of *jivanmukti*, as the following quotes will show:

> Nevertheless the World-Mind, through its deputy the Overself, is still for humans the highest possible goal.[351]

> ... the phrases ... such as the Indian "That thou art", the Persian "I am God", and the medieval European "union with God", are exaggerations of the truth, which is that God is immanent in us, [so] that through realization of our higher self we become more *like* God, but that God never ceases to be the Unattainable, the Incomprehensible.[352]

For Brunton, as long as we are incarnated in this world, Mind-in-itself is inaccessible to us. Only the World-Mind is accessible, through its intermediary the Overself, whereas for Vedanta, *moksa* is identification with *Brahman Nirguna* and *not* with *Brahman Saguna*. It appears that for Brunton, a total identification with the acosmic Absolute would only be possible to the realized person *at the death of the body*. Thus his position would be that only partial Realization is possible while in the body, with total Realization only at the death of the body; no *jivanmukti*, but a *videhamukti*.[353] The following passages should dispel any ambiguity on this point:

> All human beings on this planet are imperfect. Perfection is not fully attainable here. But when a man has striven for it and advanced near to it, he will attain it automatically as soon as he is freed from the body.[354]

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[349] Ibid., VIII, 5, 214. "Yaka-kulgan" is the Mongolian term for "Mahayana."
[350] Ibid., V, 2, 1, 72.
[351] *Notebooks*, XVI, 4, 1, 41.
[352] Ibid., XVI, 1, 1, 150.
[353] = "Liberation-without-the-body," i.e. after physical death.
[354] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 2, 110.

> So long as man is immured in this earth plane, so long must the enlightenment he attains be an imperfect one, or the fulfillment he experiences a limited one.[355]

> The liberation from further reincarnations can be attained while still here in the flesh, but the full completion of its consequent inner peace can come only after final exit from the body.[356]

> So long as he is held by the finite flesh, so long as existence in the inner human body is continued, the perfect and complete merger of his individuality in the cosmic mind is impossible. But once through the portals of so-called death, it becomes an actuality.[357]

Brunton's conception of liberation as occurring in two stages seems to be similar to that of the Vedantin Bhartriprapanca, thus described by Subba Rao:

> The one who has immediate intuition (saksat-kara) of the Absolute while still alive in the body is said to be liberated, even though he is not dissolved in the Absolute. He will have a second liberation in the form of dissolution in the Absolute on the death of the body....[358]

Subba Rao points out that this view was refuted by Suresvara, who agreed with Shankara's view that only the liberation attained while still in the body is liberation in the true sense of the term. Once again we see that Brunton's ideas differ from those of orthodox Vedanta, while being very similar to those of other forms of Vedanta.

Brunton fell back on the term *sahaja samadhi* to describe the state of consciousness of the realized individual:

> This (sahaja samadhi) is as high as human consciousness can possibly go while yet encased in the flesh.[359]

> I do not claim that *sahaja* yields ultimate reality; I only claim that it yields the ultimate so far *known to man*.[360]

While borrowing the term from Ramana Maharshi, he gave it a slightly different shade of meaning, as the above comment shows. For Brunton, *sahaja* became "the awareness of Awareness,"[361] flowing through the individual's entire life, accompanying normal daily activity without hindering it, the "continuous unbroken realization that as Overself he always was, is and shall be."[362]

The consciousness of the sage, Brunton and Advaita would agree, is a paradoxical state where he lives simultaneously on two incompatible planes: the Real, where he has no ego, and the relative,

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[355] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 111.
[356] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 112.
[357] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 113.
[358] *The Method of the Vedanta*, p. 245.
[359] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 2, 142.
[360] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 143.
[361] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 140.
[362] Ibid., XVI, 1, 2, 139.

where he uses the ego as a tool. The sage at once dips his cup in the river of life and contemplates it from afar. He participates without participating.

6.3.3 Ethics and Metaphysics of Compassion

Brunton distinguished five sorts of realized beings:

> The *Saint* has successfully carried out ascetic disciplines and purificatory regimes for devotional purposes. The *Prophet* has listened for God's voice, heard and communicated God's message of prediction, warning, or counsel. The *Mystic* has intimately experienced God's presence while inwardly rapt in contemplation or has seen a vision of God's cosmogony while concentrated in meditation. The *Sage* has attained the same results as all these three, has added a knowledge of infinite and eternal reality thereto, and has brought the whole into balanced union. The *Philosopher* is a sage who has also engaged in the spiritual education of others.[363]

For Brunton, it is in fact the fifth of these types which corresponds to his ideal of the sage. And he himself chose to emulate the model of the *active* sage exemplified by the Maharaja of Mysore and advocated by Subrahmanya Iyer in the wake of the Neo-Hindu ideals proclaimed by Vivekananda. Iyer had made a clear distinction between the *yogi* who knows only the inner Self, and who is content with his own quietude, indifferent to the world, and the *jnani* who, attaining knowledge of the universal Self, does not retreat from the world, but rather works continuously for the good of others. Here again, Iyer disagreed with traditional Vedantins for whom *moksa* was a purely individual affair. His conception of the *jnani* agrees in fact with the Buddhist conception of the *bodhisattva*, for according to Iyer, the *jivanmukta*, at the moment of death, always makes a vow to return to earth in order to help humanity. Thus in his view sages continue to reincarnate. He once remarked to Brunton:

> There is no such thing as personal salvation. It is selfishness of the worst kind. No gnani can attain it unless all other people attain it too. Those who talk of finding moksha for themselves are dualists who harbor the false notion that the individual ego is real, and who are deceiving themselves.[364]

Brunton agreed with this view. Moreover, he came to idealize the philosophic sage engaged in a life of *active altruism*, whereas in his younger years he had been impressed by the attainments of the mystic engaged in yogic contemplation:

> I discovered in the end that the yogi is afraid of action and consequently indifferent to the troubles of the world and unconcerned about mankind's well-being; that his society and presence does not radically change human character for the better, as it is claimed, but merely lulls its worst qualities into semi-quiescence to spring up again, however, at the first release from his immediate influence. I perceived how I had over-idealized mystics in the past and wrongly thought them to be sages, how I had mistaken their attainment of yogic peace for the true self-realization, and how inevitable was their preoccupation

[363] *Notebooks*, XVI,1,3,102.
[364] Brunton's Mysore notes.

with themselves when the knowledge of universal truth alone could give the wider interest in the welfare of others.[365]

Brunton parted company with orthodox Vedanta on this issue. Traditional Vedanta did not particularly insist on the necessity of cultivating *compassion*,[366] which was advocated by Buddhism. The human indifference Brunton often encountered in Advaitins bothered him and left him dissatisfied; the absence of compassion which he occasionally sensed even in such elevated beings as Ramana Maharshi and Atmananda[367] left him with a secret hurt:

> From the heights where Krishna Menon stands, the perspective of a world war is beyond him: an illusion within another illusion.[368]

> Suffering humanity is a dream has no need of our help, in the same way that the sage sees no service to give to the world that does not exist.[369]

At first he sought to overcome this disappointment by differentiating and hierarchizing the yogi and the true sage, as did certain Neo-Vedantins. Later he turned away from Indian Vedanta like a disappointed lover, looking instead to doctrines and traditions which better met his expectations on certain issues, and this would be his way of synthesis.[370] The following passages illustrate these two approaches:

> For the sage the suffering of others is his; for the yogi it is not. The Maharshi was an adept in mysticism—that is, yoga—but his idea of truth needs to be disputed. He says that the sage can watch with indifference the slaughter of millions of people in battle. That is quite true of the yogi but it will never be true of those who have sacrificed *every future nirvanic beatitude* to return to earth until all are saved; they alone are entitled to the term sage; nor can they do otherwise, for they have found the unity of all human beings. They would never have returned if they did not *feel* for others.[371]

The second to last sentence here contains one of the key points of Neo-Vedantic thought, which in fact was, for Brunton, the only acceptable way of presenting Vedanta: an argument, made by Vivekananda and taken up by Iyer, which legitimized the values of human solidarity, compassion, and altruism by showing them to be the direct outcome of the fundamental Advaitic postulate of the non-otherness of the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*. The Neo-Vedantins thus rooted these values in the metaphysical core of the Hindu tradition—a view which would be open to question.

The next passage illustrates Brunton's three-fold reaction: his disappointment with orthodox Advaita, his adoption of Neo-Vedanta, and his inclination to look for a synthesis:

> The ruination of Vedanta in India was partly due to the fact that it got into the hands of people for whom it was never intended, who turned it into an arid dry and formal study similar to the scholasticism which

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[365] *Notebooks*, VIII ,4, 173.
[366] The Appendix of the original French version of this thesis elaborates this point at length.
[367] See Ch. 2, section 2.2.3 of this work.
[368] Brunton's Mysore notes.
[369] Ibid.
[370] It is not, however, a true syncretism, as we will argue in our Conclusion.
[371] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 470.

> posed as philosophy in medieval Europe. They therefore misunderstood it because they were unripe. Such hair-splitting intellectualism was barren of results for human life, and as a karmic consequence the modern Indian has turned against and rejected philosophy, especially Vedanta philosophy, with a despairing sense of its futility. On the other hand, the Chinese provided India with an example in *practical* Vedanta, and for several centuries their leaders, statesmen, artists, scholars, soldiers, and religious geniuses were all men who had been trained in it. Thus Truth was made fruitful.[372]

"Practical Vedanta" was a neo-Hindu term coined by Vivekananda. Here Brunton associates it with China. This allusion might be more understandable in light of the influence on Brunton of the esoteric or Theosophic view that Vedanta and Buddhism are actually fragmentary vestiges of one primordial pan-Indian Tradition. In this view, one without the other would be incomplete:

> The defect of all the Vedantic authorities in India today is that they have lost the Buddhist esoteric tradition and even despise it; for only in the combination of both can be realized that restoration of the genuine, archaic Indian wisdom.[373]

Another passage sheds further light on Brunton's move towards constucting his own synthesis:

> The compassion which Jesus showed for men's suffering, the sympathy that the Buddha manifested for mankind, are not very dominant traits in the yogis. Jesus and Buddha tried to save men; the yogis attempt to run from them.[374]

In the last analysis, all ethical positions are bound to rest on metaphysical ones. In the present case what matters most is whether the *ultimate view* one takes of the relationship between the relative and the Absolute is an exclusive or inclusive view. Traditional Advaita's *exclusive* view—*Brahman* excludes manifestation—results in a devaluing of the world. This logically implies a further devaluing of the entire sphere of human activity. It is thus a view of radical renunciation, which might lead one to an attitude of passive indifference towards others (as well as to oneself) and a certain drying up of feelings (of no use since objects are illusory). All this appears fully consistent with the initial metaphysical position, which is why Brunton thought it pertinent to ask whether for the exclusive view of Reality was for them really the ultimate one, or whether there might be a place in Vedanta for the idea of compassion or altruistic service:

> There seems to be a gap between the need of doing any service in this world and the theory of World-Illusion (maya). However, it is not correct to say that this theory is the ultimate view of Indian philosophy. It is used as a jumping-off ground, a first and tentative step to break the crude materialism of the average mind. It was propounded in ancient times when the scientific knowledge now available, which makes materialism a ridiculous theory, was unknown. The Ultimate view is that this world is also *Brahman*, or Reality, and therefore life here is not to be despised but fully valued, experienced, and honored.[375]

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[372] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 357.
[373] Ibid., X, 2, 356.
[374] Brunton's unpublished *Asiatic Ideas* notebook, Brunton archive.
[375] *Notebooks*, X ,2 ,373.

The view Brunton considered to be the ultimate view of Reality, the *inclusive* view—that *Brahman* includes manifestation—was in fact the Neo-Vedantic position. Subrahmanya Iyer, surveying the *Upanishads* and Vedantic treatises with Brunton, presented it as the authentic way of interpreting Advaita. Once again, we find Brunton's Mysore notes revealing. Here, for example, is the second sloka of the *Mandukya Upanishad*, with Iyer's commentary:

> *sarvam hi etad brahma ayam atma brahma sah ayam atma catuspat.*
> = All this is surely *Brahman*; this Self is *Brahman*; this Self has four parts.
>
> Atman has got four quarters: in the first quarter you find only material objects; in the second, ideas and feelings; in the third, there will be nothing at all. In the fourth where all merge the Atman is the same as Brahman.
>
> Both the seen and the unseen are Brahman. It is not only that which is within but also that which is without. Hence *Mandukya Upanishad* sloka 2 says Atman has got four quarters, which must be all put together to form the whole: if any quarter is omitted you have not got Brahman. If only the within is taken, then you get only a fraction, not true Brahman.[376]

And here is what Iyer had to say about the doctrine of *avasthatraya*:

> That which appears as the three states plus that into which the three states disappear, these two together form the Supreme Brahman.
>
> Atman is the highest Reality *and* its opposite: note the word "and". Reality and illusion *together* make Brahman: nothing can be left out.

His remarks seem to indicate that for him, manifestation on these three levels (*Isvara*, *Hiranyagarbha* and *Virat*) is an integral part of *Brahman*, that it is intrinsic to *Brahman*. This *inclusive* view gives back to the world something of the Reality which the exclusive view denied it. One could say that the world becomes real through contamination with *Brahman* which contains it, underlies it, and completely pervades it, even if this reality is "lesser," being subordinate to its Source—a bit like the status of creation in relation to its Creator in Christian doctrine. In Iyer's mentalist presentation, ideas take their reality from the Mind which is their Source. There is nevertheless a clear break with the exclusive view, which confers on the world a purely illusory, that is to say negligible, status. There is no possibility of agreement between the exclusive and inclusive views, each claiming for itself the status of ultimate Teaching, and for the other, simply that of a preliminary step.

According to specialists in Advaita, Shankaran orthodoxy takes the position of the *exclusive view*:

> In the history of thought, two conceptions are found regarding the relation of the Absolute and the relative: 1. the Absolute transcends the relative, though the relative is assimilated in the Absolute. 2. The Absolute denies the relative.... Kasmere Saivism ... has drawn the relative out of the Absolute. Concentration and diffusion are the two contrary processes by which the indeterminate gets into the

[376] Brunton's Mysore notes.

> determinate and the determinate breaks its limitation and passes into the indeterminate. The whole conception has been wrought upon the indeterminate being which is the only category of existence. The relative grows out of the absolute and ultimately dwindles into it. But such is not the conception of the Absolute of Sankara. The Absolute *denies* and not simply transcends the relative.[377]

It is evident that by contrast, the *inclusive* view places a value on the world and on human experience. An ethics emphasizing compassion and active altruism follows from this metaphysical position.

On the other hand, such an ethic does *not* follow from the exclusive view of reality held by orthodox Shankarian tradition. In fact, the Neo-Vedantins often perpetuated a certain ambiguity through their mixing the two levels of reality, as was well shown by Halbfass:

> Radhakrishnan, just like Vivekananda, ignores the distinction between the metaphysical and absolute (*paramartha*) and the empirical (*vyavahara*) that is observed in traditional Advaita Vedanta; the very presupposition of Radhakrishnan's Neo-Hinduism is that the metaphysics of unity is also capable of offering guidelines for social and political practice.[378]

Indeed, if in orthodox Advaita all the *jivas* (individuals) are in the last analysis identical to the supreme *Brahman*, then it does not follow for all that—as the Neo-Vedantins hastily conclude—that the *jivas* should feel solidarity with one another. On the empirical level, individuals can be impervious to one another; their differences are often irreducible. On the absolute plane there is indeed a Unity, but the human person no longer exists (i.e. there is nobody behind the ego).

Thus it is this radical split between the two planes which in Advaita prevents the formation of an ethic of interconnectedness. On the level of the ego, differences prevail. As for the sage who has transcended this plane, the human person, whether himself or any other, appears unreal. Thus it would seem logical for him to simply refrain from evil, and to maintain a passive non-violence sometimes akin to indifference. How could the Advaitin sage, therefore, *feel* what others suffer, as does Brunton's ideal sage? The Advaitin sage lives identified with the *atman*, which is in no way concerned by suffering, which would result from being identified with the *ahamkara*, or ego.

It appears then that there might be an inherent ambiguity in the Neo-Vedantins' position, stemming first of all from the fact that they do not always make their inclusive view fully explicit. We have seen that Iyer *did* make it explicit, but the others did not always do so, risking inconsistency as we have shown. In addition, they all, Iyer included, presented their ethic of compassion and service as coming from Shankara himself, whereas it was actually a contemporary reinterpretation linked to well-known historical circumstances.

This ethical question leads us back to our opening discussion of Brunton's first criticism of Advaita for its overly abrupt character, one logical consequence of which is, as we have suggested, the impossibility of deriving an ethic of compassion and service. To the question of whether one could today adopt traditional Vedanta's purely negative view of the world, one which in the past

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[377] Mahendranath Sircar, "The Vedantic conception of God," in the *Calcutta Review* (undated; from a volume in Brunton's personal collection, bound by him in Mysore, 1937-40).
[378] W. Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 254.

had been suitable for ascetics, we can now give Brunton's reply: this negative attitude, resulting from an *exclusive* view of reality, is untenable except as a purely intellectual concept. We humans are constituted in such a way that we can only hold the *inclusive* view, which grants a degree of reality to the world, and from which follows a humanistic, altruistic ethic. Still, Brunton does not deny that the *exclusive* view might well be the ultimate truth. But he postpones its realization beyond this life. He does not consider it accessible while in the body, nor even beneficial, for it risks drying up one's feelings and paralyzing one's ethical sense. For Brunton, the inclusive view is a psychological necessity, deeply ingrained in the human mind. Only a disembodied mind would be able to adhere to the strictly exclusive view. Indeed, Subba Rao effectively cites the following phrase of Shankara:

> Therefore, since being embodied is the result of false notions, it is proved that the enlightened person is not embodied even while alive.

Subba Rao concludes:

> [This] remark ... shows that statements about having to wait for the death of the body for liberation are only made in the context of empirical experience.[379]

We have clearly shown that Brunton deliberately situated his discourse on the relative plane. Indeed, the plane or standpoint of the Absolute corresponds to that of a disembodied mind. An embodied individual could live in its rarefied air, so steeped in relativity is his consciousness. Here below, the most one could hope to transcend the relative would be to assimilate it into the Absolute, while never being able to deny it completely. A realized individual would have to wait for death for the relative realm to vanish of itself.

6.3.4 Character of the Sage

The qualities possessed by the sage are those sought by the aspirant on the philosophic path—only in the sage they have become natural and spontaneous, rather than being the result of continuing discipline. The sage's life is naturally in harmony with his ideas; his behavior is consistent; he is free from the inner conflict between reason and passion. To represent the realized individual, Brunton offers us the symbol of the Sphinx:[380]

> The Sphinx is a perfect image of the adept in whom the man controls the animal. The attainment is a rare one—too many are satisfied to remain hardly more than an animal, with a few human traits.[381]

Peace, compassion and spiritual power radiate from the sage. He is not perfect in all ways, however, and it would be a mistake to deify him—he or she is still human and capable of error. For Brunton as for Advaita, the sage's behavior is unpredictable and beyond all rules, and in fact, sages, having different *karmas*, will behave differently. Brunton's ideal sage possesses universal

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[379] *The Method of the Vedanta*, p. 166.
[380] In fact, the bookplates in Brunton's own books pictured the emblem of a Sphinx.
[381] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 3, 203.

compassion, does not quarrel with anyone, and is able to understand all points of view. Beyond all traditions and their injunctions and prohibitions, the sage does not overly plan his life or manage his spiritual life like a professional career. Adaptable, flowing, free as the wind, modest and unassuming, impersonal as Nature, in which he moves incognito, Brunton's sage recalls the Taoist sage whose inner state is "empty":

> The current of peace carries him along. He does not have to struggle for it.[382]

> He conforms to the higher laws, his life is based on the cosmic life, his thought and attitude are in harmony with the cosmic order.[383]

By his impersonality, which makes him more akin to Nature than to humankind, by his freedom, which transcends confining mental categories, and by his exceptional accord with the cosmic order, Brunton's conception of the sage is also reminiscent of the "perfect man" of esotericism:

> [The perfect man] is presented by esotericists as the realized summation and active synthesis of the world.... He completely achieves human possibilities and the correspondances between the inner man and the outer world.[384]

6.3.5 Synthesis and Balance: the Idea of the Intermediary

Throughout this chapter, we have seen how Brunton's attitude inclined towards synthesis: of tradition and modernity, of standpoints (relative and Absolute), views (dualist and non-dualist), and paths (Long and Short):

> Just as we have two viewpoints in philosophy—the immediate and the ultimate—so we have two paths to the philosophic goal—the Long and the Short. This double emphasis is not peculiar to philosophy for it may be found in Nature too.[385]

> ... we see this cycle everywhere in Nature, and in every other activity she compels us to conform to it. We see the alternation of sleep with waking, work with rest, and day with night.[386]

Finally, the passages below illustrate what is perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of Brunton's work: its attempt at a harmonious reconciliation of opposites. Like a tightrope walker, he tries to maintain a middle path between extremes:

> There is no compulsive necessity, as most advocates of one or the other site seem to believe there is, to choose fully and finally between them, no real need to reject the one because the other is accepted. We may go along with the Vedantins and say that the One alone is real. But we may also go along with the dualists and say that the world around us and the human being are, in another sense, also real! It is quite

[382] Ibid., XVI, 1, 3, 338.
[383] Ibid., XVI, 1, 3, 328.
[384] Pierre Riffard, *L'Esoterisme*, p. 380.
[385] *Notebooks*, XV, 1, 5, 167.
[386] Ibid., XV, 1, 5, 159.

> fruitless to bring the two views into fanatical controversy with one another, far more useful to bring them into amicable relation. Why divide them when they serve us so well when reconciled? … *Iso Upanishad*: "They enter the region of the dark who are occupied solely with the finite. But they fall into a region of still greater darkness who are occupied solely with the Infinite."[387]

> Each side—dualist and nondualist—is quite correct when they apply their teaching in its proper place, but quite wrong when they misapply. Thus, dualists who offer dualism as ultimate are wrong, but then nondualist Vedantists are also misconceiving the proper application of their tenets when they insist on applying their "no world exists, no ego exists' doctrine to human life generally.[388]

In Brunton's idea of the sage, we find again the notion of the intermediary which he held so dear. (His Overself is also an intermediary, he saw himself as an intermediary between East and West, and his ethical teachings advocate intermediary positions between asceticism and hedonism, mysticism and intellectualism, etc.) Brunton's sage stands as "a link between the commonplace world of ordinary living and the sublime world of mystical being," having attained the perfect balance of all his strengths in the synthetic faculty of *insight*:

> The sage has achieved perfect obedience to this fundamental Law of Balance in himself, in his life, and in the universe.[389]

The original French version of this chapter includes at this point the following sections which we have not translated here:

6.3.6 Two Remarks on Compassion

1. Response by an Orthodox Advaitin to the Question of Compassion

2. Compassion and the Dialectic of *purusartha* in Sri Sankaracarya Jagad, Guru of the Sringeri Math

[387] Ibid., XV, 1, 5, 157.
[388] Ibid.
[389] *Notebooks*, XVI, 1, 3, 207.

APPENDIX: Mutual Impressions: Brunton, India, and the West

> My opponents cannot deny that the fact that yoga has begun to enjoy a new vogue in India—the land of its birth, and this time amongst the educated classes with whom it had formerly lost its prestige—as well as a new introduction in the West, is attributable to the success of Paul Brunton's books.[390]

Brunton's writings were met with a certain ambivalence both in India and in the West. Attempting to remain a strictly independent and neutral mediator between two very different cultures and wearing no label, he was often misunderstood and criticized from both sides.

In this Appendix we will try to sort out the impressions made on each other by Brunton and India, and then by Brunton and the West. Brunton had to confront the unforeseen favorable and unfavorable effects of his writings. Having gone to India to study its spiritual teachings, Brunton subsequently found himself looked to by many Indians as a guide who, through his writings in English, was able to re-acquaint them with their own traditions. Still later, having contributed to the West's infatuation with yogis and ashrams, he would lament an undesired consequence of the success enjoyed by his works: the dilution or distortion of Indian teachings in the popular New-Age culture.

1. Brunton and India

India's View of Brunton

How was Paul Brunton perceived in India? The intricacy of this question obliges us to examine the circumstances of his situation. An Englishman, Brunton lived in India between 1938 and 1947, the final years of the British Raj, a time of great political unrest. Holding no official position, he wandered incognito while trying to maintain a strict political neutrality. At the same time, he had a passionate interest in the most subtle Indian doctrines, and he continued to cultivate his own original interpretations of them. His originality intrigued some, but angered others. A Westerner who had come to study Hindu traditions, he yet refused to become their unconditional apologist. Several years after his return to the West, Brunton wrote:

> I have for some years kept myself apart from Indian spiritual movements of every kind and do not wish to get associated with them in any way. Consequently, I shall not resume my contact with any swami or yogi, for I wish to work in utter independence of them. My reasons are based on the illuminations which have come to me, on my understanding that the West must work out its own salvation, and on the narrow-minded intolerance of the Indian mentality towards any such creative endeavor on the West's part.[391]

And also:

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[390] Ibid., VIII, 4, 195.

[391] *Notebooks,* X, 1, 139.

> These swamis and ashrams do not accord me the tolerance which they are so fond of preaching—to others.... They criticize me as a perverter of Hinduism and a degrader of its ideals. They denounce me as a Western journalist who has picked up a smattering of yoga for mercenary reasons: whereas they claim that the monkish state is the highest goal of humanity, I reply that the highest state has nothing whatever to do with monasticism. It is entirely invisible because it is an inner state.... Therefore I say that if the swamis criticize me, I criticize them back and call them materialists! For they are preoccupied with such a highly material matter as regulating the material body whereas I am occupied with a purely mental matter that is, with the discovery of truth.[392]

Some Indian intellectuals estranged from their traditions at first reacted negatively to Brunton's writings, but eventually they came to have at least an implicitly positive appreciation of them:

> I believe in the work of time, in the unseen power that uses it to weave wrong into right. In my own short life I have seen Hitler's false "thousand-year" kingdom hurtle to the ground. I have seen an Indian journalist whose pen jabbed viciously at *A Search is Secret India* when he lived in London, himself engaged in the same search a few years after his return to India. In his London review he denounced as superstition what in his later life he found essential to his mental peace.[393]

Conversely, others who had welcomed Brunton's earlier writings could not accept his later shift from yoga to philosophy:

> They welcomed me as a supposed recruit to Hinduism as a religion. But the years taught them that they were wrong. Alas! the lesson brought bitterness in its train![394]

> My exposure of the demerits and dangers of yoga brought as expected a storm of criticism and a shower of disapproval from Hindus who thought I had attacked their religion. These people confused truth with superstition, and mistook my scientific impartiality for the superiority complex of the average Westerner.[395]

Moreover, Brunton's close intimacy with such prestigious figures as Ramana Maharshi, the Maharaja of Mysore, and Subrahmanya Iyer elicited jealousies and enmities. Consequently, as we saw earlier, in South India, he became the target of hateful calumny orchestrated by a certain faction at the Ramana Ashram (reinforcing his instinctive distrust of groups and sects). Though painful, the experience helped him arrive at some lucidity in regard to India:

> That I was most unfairly treated by one ashram in particular and many Indians in general was a shameful fact but nevertheless it was a fact which helped my own emancipation.[396]

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[392] Ibid., VIII, 5, 110.
[393] Ibid., VIII, 5, 101.
[394] Ibid., VIII, 4, 181.
[395] Ibid., VIII, 4, 177.
[396] Ibid., VIII, 6, 212.

Other negative reactions to Brunton's writing came from more sophisticated minds. Their objections were not personal, but rather ideological—with interesting implications. Sir Shanmukhan Chatty, Prime Minister of Cochin, would one day tell him:

> Your book about the yogis has circulated too widely for my liking amongst the educated generation of Indians.... People like you are being quoted here both to sustain the faith in all those undesirable attitudes and to support the exploitation of religious impostures and mystical apathy which have harmed India for centuries. Thus you are helping to undo our good work and to retard the progressive movement in modern Indian life.[397]

Indeed, in the eyes of progressive Indians, it was not only the degeneration of Hindu tradition which was responsible for modern India's failings (poverty, social inequality, ignorance, superstition, inertia). The tradition itself was also to blame, for it determined the totality of the psycho-socio-economic structures of Indian life.

> Nevertheless, Sir Shanmukhan Chetty's statement reveals something of the impact which Brunton's writings had on the cultivated Indian public. If his work was considered a hindrance to the progressive Indian movement, even labeled as such by some political authorities, this suggests that his writings had awakened a lively interest among the Indian intelligentsia.

A number of important Indian figures recognized in Brunton an excellent interpreter of Eastern wisdom for contemporary readers. Disillusioned by tradition and increasingly influenced by Western modes of life and thought, modern Indians sought a more rational form of discourse, less abstruse than the old Sanskrit formulations. Mussooree Shun Shere Jung Bahadur Rana, the Prince of Nepal and a personal friend of Brunton's, wrote:

> ...it seems to me that [Brunton's] ideas ... are specially fitted for the guidance of Western people and of those increasingly numerous Orientals who have taken to their mode of living and thinking. I personally find it easier to understand many intricate subtleties of our own Asiatic philosophies and spiritual techniques, including Yoga, when explained by Brunton in his scientific, rational, modern and unsectarian manner than when expounded in the ancient ways, which are so remote from twentieth century understanding.... I am convinced that Brunton is one of the chosen instruments to re-interpret the half-lost wisdom of the East to those caught up in the mechanical life of the West....[398]

One could also cite Ramana Maharshi's brief, unreserved recommendation of Brunton's approach:

> When the Maharshi was asked by the financial secretary of the government of Mysore, "Is Paul Brunton's *Secret Path* useful for us Indians as well as for the Westerners?" he replied: "Yes—for all."[399]

Many Indians publicly acknowledged Brunton's mastery of their spiritual traditions:

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[397] Ibid., VIII, 5, 80.
[398] from the Foreword to *A Hermit in the Himalayas*.
[399] *Notebooks*, X, 2, 460.

> ... Why did Yogi Ramiah, then esteemed one of the leading disciples of Ramana Maharshi and later head of his own monastery, declare on January 1, 1936 in the presence of some of his own Telegu disciples to P.B.: "You have learned all about yoga. There is nothing more for you to learn about this practice...."[400]
>
> ... Why did Captain Mohamed Rashid, A.D:C. to the late Yuvaraja of Mysore, say in 1939 when broadcasting from the Akash Vani Radio Station in India: "My learned and distinguished friend and European yogi, Dr. Paul Brunton, is now in our midst again. He has done more to clarify the subject of yoga than any other Westerner."[401]

Some Indians took Brunton's side during the injurious campaign launched against him by the management of the Ramana Ashram. Brunton noted that:

> When I consulted my respected friend, Sir Vepa Ramesam, late chief Justice of the Madras High Court, about these calumnies emanating from those who had repaid my services with ingratitude, his advice was: "Ignore them! Whoever knows you will immediately dismiss such attacks with the hearty contempt they deserve."[402]
>
> Faced with such misunderstanding and malevolence, Brunton at least had the solace of appreciative support. He wrote:
>
> Indeed, how many Indians of the educated classes have confessed to me that they owed intellectual recovery of yoga or their revived faith in religion to my writings![403]
>
> He is indeed glad and grateful that where little men and narrow minds doubt, scorn, criticize or distrust him, great sages and lofty spiritual personages of the Orient, who read by inner reality rather than by outward appearance, confide in and trust in him.[404]

In fact, several members of royal families considered themselves Brunton's disciples and looked to him for spiritual advice. The Yuvaraja of Mysore kept Brunton's photograph on his desk at the palace of Mysore. Some exceptional individuals were able to transcend biases of race, caste, and culture.

Besides Brunton's undeniable charismatic appeal, it is necessary to also point out another factor, important for Indians: during his second and third stays in India, Brunton became Subrahmanya Iyer's disciple. It seems unlikely, given the dispositions of the two men, that a formal ritual of initiation ever took place, but a *guru-shishya* relationship was established between them. (The tone and language of Brunton's letters to Iyer leave no doubt on this subject.) Now, as Iyer had been the disciple of the Jagadguru of the Sringeri Monastery, Brunton, in recognizing Iyer as his guru, joined an authentic spiritual lineage. This bestowed on him, in the eyes of Neo-Hindus, spiritual credentials beyond reproach. Swami Siddheshvarananda wrote in a letter to Brunton that, "initiated in the pure tradition, having

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[400] Ibid., VIII, 5, 34.
[401] Ibid., VIII, 5, 34.
[402] Ibid., VIII, 5, 108.
[403] Ibid., VIII, 5, 59.
[404] Ibid., VIII, 5, 106.

received it from a lineage of orthodox gurus," the latter was entirely qualified to explain the Vedanta in Europe.

Further testimony[405] came from G.S. Venkataramani Iyer, Assistant Secretary of the Legislative Council of Mysore:

> When your book *A Search in Secret India* reached India, it made a furor in cultivated circles. It was passed from hand to hand, a single copy being borrowed by dozens of people. We knew nothing or almost nothing of what you spoke of in this book, and we were astonished that a Westerner would be able to show such knowledge and character.

He added:

> Your book *The Quest of the Overself* is perfectly correct as an exposition of the highest Indian metaphysical thought (that of Shankara) and of yoga. I have often reread it. It has been a great help to me, as well as to others, even though I know Sanskrit and have studied Shankara in the original. Nevertheless, you have made it much easier for me to understand these things, as well as inspiring me.

V. Iyer had for years suffered terrible nightmares in which he saw snakes. After speaking about them to Brunton, they disappeared: "What is more, in your presence I was always at peace," he declared. He also appreciated greatly Brunton's attempt to synthesize Eastern and Western ideas.

Sir Vepa Ramesan of the High Court of Madras expressed the view of a certain fringe of the Indian intelligentsia which viewed Brunton as a bridge between Indian culture and the West:

> On two occasions I have visited the hill and the hermitage [of Arunachala], and on the second occaison renewed my friendship with Mr. Brunton.... We Indians have lost much of our ancient spiritual and philosophic heritage. We have now to recover the basic gold that lies in it.... I commend [his book] to both the Eastern and Western world of readers. I hope it will be a link in bringing both hemispheres spiritually nearer to co-operate in the future evolution of a superior humanity.[406]

Elsewhere he told Brunton:

> I think that the three chapters of your book *The Inner Reality* which discuss the Bhagavad-Gita are excellent. They could be reprinted separately ... so that all Indians who understand English could read it.[407]

Finally, Prof. M. Sreeamamurty wrote in the *All India Literary Annual* for 1945:

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[405] Brunton Archive, Wisdom's Goldenrod.
[406] Foreword by Sir Vepa Ramesan to Brunton's *A Message from Arunachala*.
[407] Brunton Archive.

> Even our religion must have the West's approval before we can have confidence in it.... We regard PB and a whole series of foreign admirers of India with gratitude, because on our own we have never known what attitude to adopt towards the greatness of things Indian.

Brunton's comments, scribbled in the margins of this testimonial, are revealing: "This is a misunderstanding. I never gave such sanction." And elsewhere: "Again an example of misunderstanding!"[408]

Brunton's View of India

Let us now examine the other side of the question: how was India viewed by Paul Brunton? Here also, our response will necessarily be complex, as we must take into account a number of factors. The author's attitude towards the British Raj would have to be distinguished from his view of traditional India, a view which itself evolved during the course of his life. Finally, India's diversity and Brunton's particularly varied experiences of it would be reflected in his view.

When Brunton first set out for India in 1930, the British Raj was experiencing a period of unrest. The Foreign Office representative advised the author to stay away from political leaders in his travels, and to avoid ideological controversy in his writings. As a result, in his articles as well as his books, Brunton adopted a rigorously apolitical tone, and refused tempting offers to interview such figures as Gandhi. Unfortunately, his neutrality would be misinterpreted, and he found himself in the end arousing suspicion from both sides. He would be declared *persona non grata* by Nehru, who had him closely watched, and who suggested that he leave India at the end of the war. Nehru justified his attitude in declaring that Brunton "didn't lift his little finger to help India gain her independence."[409]

A similar misunderstanding from all sides, ironically for opposite reasons, was the fate of another Westerner. Annie Besant, the famous President of the Theosophical Society, had thrown herself with her customary zeal, into the campaign for Indian Home Rule. Such was her success, that in June 1917 she was interned by the authorities for three months (in Ootacamund, that same resort in the Nilgiri Hills where Brunton would later experience the climax of his Indian period). Nevertheless,

> Mrs. Besant never advocated separation between India and the British Raj; what she was fighting for was Dominion status for India—that is, self-government—and if she had won her campaign much bloodshed might have been avoided. As it was, both the British Government and the Indian extremists, who wanted to get rid of the Raj altogether, regarded her as a dangerous enemy.[410]

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[408] Ibid.

[90] From a conversation I had with Tim Smith, who served as Brunton's secretary towards the end of the author's life.

[410] Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: the Years of Awakening,* London, 1975, p. 100.

Brunton's proclaimed neutrality, however ("I do not wear, and I do not want to wear, any political label."[411]), sprang from deeper roots than loyalty to His Majesty's Government. First of all, he did not really believe in the value of political engagement, regarding it as too external and superficial to make deep and lasting improvements in society:

> Not that there is any real end to the turbulence of political clashes and harassments of racial differences. We shall have a pacified world when we have pacified hearts – not before.[412]

> The best starting point from which to reform the world is undoubtedly my own self. The best way to spread the spirit of benevolence is to begin with myself.[413]

Thus the author chose to to devote his energies to self-cultivation, rather than political action, a decision not made from selfishness, but rather as preparation for selfless service of a less immediate and visible sort: the philosophic and spiritual teaching which was to be his life's work. To each his own: Brunton's place was not in the political arena.

Secondly, Brunton's view of the British occupation of India was a lofty one, detached from everyday vicissitudes. His reasoning made sense in the larger philosophic perspective of the evolution of humanity:

> Life is unlikely to have thrown the two people across each other's path in this strange manner without some purpose. Have they a service to render each other?[414]

He further explained this idea by citing the example of the British expedition to Tibet—led, as we recall, by his friend Sir Francis Younghusband in 1904:

> Contact in everyway between the Occident and the Orient is inevitable. Tibet cannot close its high passes against the inflow of Western ideas.... To keep men always immersed in the doctrines and doings of the centuries before Christ is not entirely healthy.[415]

Later, he alluded to the massacre of the Tibetans by the British (We have already recounted[416] how the Tibetans had imagined that the magical powers of their lamas had made them invulnerable to bullets.) and in the language of his time expressed his hope that their opening to the modern world would bring progress:

> The episode illustrates [their] habitual mixture of ridiculous superstition and profound wisdom.... Yet no people can afford to go on believing in arrant untruths. The coming of the white races in the East is like a clean strong wind which blows away repulsive cobwebs of outworn beliefs and barbarous customs. For the whites bring sanity, common sense and scepticism. There is room and necessity for these things in life, also.[417]

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[411] *A Hermit In the Himalayas*, ch. 3.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid.
[415] Ibid., ch. 7.
[416] in chapter 1 of the present work.
[417] *A Hermit in the Himalayas*, ch. 7.

Brunton's opinion of the benefits of British colonization in Asia echoed both Younghusband and Subrahmanya Iyer:

> India needed, and needs, the efficiency, hygiene, and honest administration which the West can give it.[418]

No doubt Brunton's British citizenship had helped him considerably in his investigations, bringing him easy access to all sorts of connections and material assistance. Later on, he would feel a certain nostalgia for the good old days, lamenting: "The old easy-traveling pre-war world has gone."[419]

Between 1930, the year of his first Indian voyage, and 1947, when he left India (he would only return for brief visits), Brunton's view of India changed considerably. In his *Notebooks* he nearly disavowed "this immature book, *A Search in Secret India*."[420] He recognized how he had first seen the country through rose-colored glasses, and that the more he knew it, "the more his enthusiasm evaporated." India was not a model to be imitated by the West, as he once thought, and he concluded that "the West must work out its own salvation."[421]

Brunton was aware of his share of responsibility for the West's infatuation with India and Eastern spirituality in general—in particular as the result of his early works *A Search in Secret India* and *A Message from Arunachala*—something he eventually regretted:

> I contributed toward that movement to Indian ashrams; now I criticize it.[422]

The disappointing experience he had at the Ramana Ashram undoubtedly contributed no small amount to his disillusionment.

Conscious of having overestimated the India of yogis and ashrams, Brunton did not fall into the opposite error of underestimating it, but rather began to take a more balanced view of what East and West had to offer:

> Not by turning solely eastwards, as superficial enthusiasts would have us do, nor by turning solely westwards, as the white-race superiority complex would suggest, but by taking what both have to offer as the starting point only for our own twentieth century quest, shall we work out this vast problem of giving a spiritual significance to modern man's life in the most effective and satisfying sense of the term.[423]

Volume X of the *Notebooks*, *The Orient*, contains many criticisms of traditional India, tempered by a smaller number of favorable impressions. He complained, as had others before him,

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[418] *Notebooks*, X, 1, 284.
[419] Preface to the first British edition of *A Hermit in the Himalayas*, 1949.
[420] *Notebooks*, VIII, 6, 246.
[421] Ibid., VIII, 6, 246.
[422] Ibid., X, 2, 217.
[423] Ibid., VIII, 6, 246.

of a lack of energy and initiative, a fatalism and lethargy, in a good portion of the population, and he lamented the credulity and ignorance, lack of rigor, looseness with facts, absence of hygiene, and resignation to misery which he encountered, and he was critical of the caste system. In spite of all this, however, he found the Indians simple and likable, and possessing an inner respect for the spiritual.

The practices of popular religion fared no better. Brunton lamented the greed and corruption of certain priests, the degeneration of the *sanyasa* ideal into simple begging, and the sanction given by religion to superstitions and cruel customs.

Indian intellectual and spiritual life was not spared either. Brunton complained of an absence of original thinking in the majority of pandits, and a lack of compassion among yogis, whose "powers" were unable to ameliorate the life of their people. He encountered sectarianism, ossification, and intolerance in the ashrams, which he called "little dictatorships." The swamis, he found, did not understand the psychology of Westerners, and so were unable to help them, invoking instead simplistic images of materialistic West versus spiritual East. He felt moreover that Neo-Hinduism did not address the less flattering aspects of popular religion:

> The Neo-Brahmins offer a carefully expurgated system of Hinduism, all sugar and no gritty sand! They have dropped the curtain on the idol-worship and kept careful silence on degrading customs.[424]

In conclusion, Brunton's opinion was that India's gravest problems were self-inflicted and not a result of British colonization:

> India's curses are rapacious priests who turn religion into a business, inherited ignorance which lets thrive vile superstitions, the dishonest charlatans who trade on the credulity which afflicts seventy-five percent of the people. The cure of these things is Western education and sound instruction. India's greatest oppressors do not come from the grey West, but from within herself.[425]

In spite of all this, Brunton appeared optimistic about India's future. He approved of the modernization in which the country was engaged, and hoped that the the strength of her traditions would help her to avoid the West's materialism.

Finally, Brunton affirmed his gratitude to his Indian mentors for the teachings he received from them. Simultaneously, though, he proclaimed his right to his own creative independence:

> Paul Brunton is trying to do something new. He went to India to learn from the most perceptive Indians, not to copy their followers. Yet the latter at times lack the wide tolerance of their teacher. Merely and politely to disagree with them is denounced as immense arrogance.... Brunton has the highest regard affection and reverence for these Indian teachers, and especially for the ones who freely initiated him into their knowledge and inner circle. But this regard does not necessarily mean that he is obliged always to agree with them and always to think along with them.... Paul Brunton also has something of

[424] Ibid., X, 2, 196.
[425] Ibid., X, 2, 192.

> his own to give. He cannot merely copy these others in living or echo them in writing. He too must be himself just as they were themselves. He may be their friend but he cannot be their follower.[426]

And elsewhere:

> I am not a mere transcriber of Hindu thought ... The present fact is indeed that I no longer regard myself as an exponent of any particular ancient system. I wish to speak only of such knowledge as lives within me, as I have arrived at through my own thinking, experiment, and research, but which is nevertheless firmly based upon a reformulation of the hidden wisdom of Asia.[427]

2. Brunton and the West

The West's View of Brunton

In the West, Paul Brunton had many critics. Both materialist and religious circles found fault with him, and he was met with reticence in academic circles. Having no label was a sure way to experience rejection. Nevertheless, the misunderstandings were compensated for by great success with readers on five continents, and by a subsequent acceptance within certain milieus, notably in certain communities in the more open and non-conformist United States:

> The statement made by a Cornell professor reviewing one of P.B.'s books that "the author is always entertaining" [was] meant offensively, implying that those books are not to be taken seriously but only laughed at. Now, nearly forty years later, a hundred students from Cornell meet weekly in the same town to study P.B.'s and kindred authors' books, as well as to practice meditation, because they cannot get needed intellectual and spiritual help in depth from their dry professors.[428]

Works as multi-faceted as Brunton's could easily attract critics. The adventure-book style of his early writings could be off-putting to intellectuals; his proclamations of spiritual freedom could displease the conventionally religious; his mentalism could invite the sneers of diehard materialists; and his criticism of the limitations of yoga could only alienate him from its practitioners. In fact, it was from these circles, whether Christian or in the Hindu orb, that there came the most virulent objections:

> The critics who have kept their worst venom for me do not belong to the materialist camp but to the mystic camp. Why is this? It is because I understand their defects to be defects.[429]

It is true that Brunton himself was unsparing in his criticism of those representing Hinduism in the West. We will now examine his view of the "Hinduized" West, as we have already in the preceding chapter elaborated his overall view of the West and its materialism.

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[426] Ibid., VIII, 2, 144.
[427] Ibid., VIII, 2, 209.
[428] Ibid., VIII, 5, 99.
[429] Ibid., VIII, 5, 77.

Brunton's View of the "Hinduized" West

We will begin with a few words about the presence of Hinduism in the West, after which we will look at the attitude of those Westerners who came under the influence of India and its traditions.

Brunton welcomed the Neo-Hindu presence in the West—in Ramakrishna Missions throughout the world, but also in all sorts of ashrams, sects, etc.—as a way of advancing the East-West dialogue which he sought. Nevertheless, he found that that the Neo-Hindus' avowed universalism had its limits, and he denounced the narrow nationalism, sectarianism, and intellectual ossification of Hindu *sanyasis* who made no attempt to adapt to the Western context:

> [The swamis] talk of the universal nature but in the talking and despite it, set up a cult, start a sect, promote vested interests, and compete with rival organizations. They talk of the universal nature of truth but insist on harking back to past presentations of. They denounce the sacrilege of the twentieth century creatively giving birth to its own original presentation. They talk of the universal nature of truth but use the parochial language of Indian mythology, Indian religion, and Indian yoga.[430]

As for his reaction to the Western infatuation with India, it was ambivalent. Conscious of his contribution to it, he was pleased to find that a change of outlook could be felt even in conservative England: materialism had been unsettled, interest in Eastern religious and philosophic ideas had grown, and Christianity was now viewed in a different light.

On the other hand, Brunton was too perceptive not to see that this opening to Eastern mysticism could also open the door to charlatanism, attracting the naïve and gullible. He was particularly critical of the "Indolatry" which led certain Westerners to take on the physical and mental trappings of Hindus:

> In the blind adherence to superstitious beliefs which affects Westerners who try to blindly turn themselves into Hindus, I am more anti-Hindu than most prejudiced sceptics; but in the deep acclaim for the wonderful truth-statements to be found in some ancient Indian texts, I am more pro-Hindu than the swami followers. This is because in both cases I write from inside knowledge and personal experience. My attitude is consequentially a semi-detached one.[431]

In Brunton's view, it was unhealthy in most cases for individuals to deny their Western identity. Those inclined to do so would need first to take care of their wounded psyches before continuing on the spiritual quest, which, being an inner affair, did not require a trip to India. Moreover, the West had its own spiritual treasures. Finally, why were those spiritual seekers born in the West, if only to adopt Indian ways? There were surely karmic reasons, and it would be futile or dangerous to ignore them and to oppose one's destiny.

Lastly, Brunton deplored certain unintended consequences of the interest in his work:

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[430] Ibid., X, 1, 169.
[431] Ibid., X, 1, 117.

When I saw that yoga was being taken by most people as a sensation-seeking cult, I felt that they were going too far. And when I saw that a crowd of exploiters—both Western and Eastern—had begun to take advantage of the interest aroused by my works, I felt that it was time to call a halt.[432]

What distressed me most, however, is a painful realization of the opportunity I have given to religious humbugs, commercially minded mystics, and half-baked teachers of yoga to exploit earnest but credulous people. I would not have my books exploited by mystic quackery and parasitic superstition.[433]

[432] Ibid., VIII, 4, 196.
[433] *Notebooks*, VIII, 5, 53

CONCLUSION

> You will raise an ancient statue, now lying half buried in the sand, and reveal it as a thing of worth.[434]

Arriving at the conclusion of our study, we will attempt to summarize some essential points about Paul Brunton and his work.

1. His Work: Renewal and Synthesis

> ... we all should study and digest the Oriental wisdom. But I say first, that we should not make it our sole and exclusive diet and second, that we should cook, spice, and serve it in a form suitable to our Occidental taste.[435]

This remark sums up what I consider to be the two essential characteristics of Brunton's work. First of all, it is a reformulation of Vedanta. Second, in a broader sense his work is a synthesis of diverse elements, made for a contemporary audience.

A Reformulation of Advaita Vedanta

If some orthodox Vedantins did not recognize their own doctrines in Brunton's writings and did not hesitate to criticize him, this is because his adaptation of these doctrines was far-reaching, and his reformulation of them was a broad one. From the point of view of orthodox Shankarian tradition, Brunton's transposition was twofold, and it appeared on two successive levels:

1. The ethics held by Brunton arose from the Neo-Hindu *inclusive* view of *Brahman*. This view grants a certain reality to the manifest world, as it is derived from, while remaining subordinate to, *Brahman*. It is not the view of traditional Shankarian Vedanta.

Moreover, the *mentalist* interpretation which Brunton gave to Non-Duality belongs in spirit to the particular Neo-Vedanta of such rationalist thinkers as Subrahmanya Iyer and Atmananda.

2. This interpretation was itself transposed by Brunton into concepts adapted to the Western mentality: his trinity of *Mind, World-Mind* and *Overself* is, indeed, an original creation.

Of these three, the notion of the Overself is undeniably the most original and interesting—one could consider it Brunton's greatest contribution to the attempt to acculturate Vedanta to the West. The mentalist Neo-Vedantins could have themselves posited the equivalence *Brahman* = Mind, but the concept of the Overself, whose cultural and emotional richness we have discussed, could only have been created by a Westerner wishing to bring together two spiritual cultures. If we re-examine

[434] A prediction made to Brunton by Brother M., Ibid., VIII, 2, 79.
[435] Ibid., X, 1, 152.

the two doctrinal tenets at the root of Advaita Vedanta (beyond the internal variety of its schools)—the sole reality of the one and only *Brahman*, and the non-difference of the *jivatman* and the *paramatman*—we find that Brunton's attitude towards these two tenets is "yes, but...." Having adopted a more inclusive initial standpoint, Brunton's view of Ultimate Reality is broader than that of Shankarian Advaita. As for his attitude concerning the non-difference of the *jivatman* and *Brahman*, we have shown that it is much less abrupt than orthodox Advaita's. In brief, what we might call his 'threefold Non-Dualism' is a Vedanta whose cutting edge has been blunted.

We have already proposed an explanation for this dilution of Vedanta—the need to take into account the psychology of Westerners, with its emphasis on the personal, and the modern temperament, which favors reasoned argument over dogmatism. One could add to these historical and psychological considerations a further sociological reason: in the modern West, Brunton had found authentic masters to be very rare. As the individual would in most cases not succeed in finding one, it was for these individuals that Paul Brunton wrote his books. By contrast, in the traditional Vedantic context, students would study texts with a guru, whose presence tempered and humanized their often dry discourse. Contemporary seekers would generally miss the enormous blessing of such endless hours of direct contact with a personal guide. The solitary quester would then be left only with books—a discouraging thought if they had the uncompromising character of most Vedantic literature. From this perspective, the need for an adaptation was clear.

While any reformulation runs the danger of being either too abstruse or too simplistic, in my opinion, Brunton succeeded in avoiding these two extremes. The essentials of Vedantic doctrine were presented without technical jargon, but also without serious distortion. His presentation made Vedanta available in a more contemporary form. Even the often criticized repetitiveness of his style has a certain pedagogical value.

We have seen that the modernization of Vedanta enjoyed far from universal endorsement. It may be true that it was made at the price of diluting, or even being untrue to the traditional doctrine. However, it is due to the work of such pioneering authors as Paul Brunton that Advaita Vedanta has had a chance to become more widely known in the contemporary world.

A Contemporary Synthesis

> We need a communication of what is best in Orient and Occident, a combination of antique mystic detachment and modern rational practicality, which it should be the business of the coming faith to advocate.[436]
>
> The Eastern knowledge of spiritual matters and the Western knowledge of science are really two parts which should be put together to make the whole diagram, the whole pattern. Both were deficient while this was not done.[437]

[436] Ibid., X, 1, 336.
[437] Ibid., X, 1, 348.

These two excerpts show that Brunton's vision is not so much of a doctrinal synthesis, but rather of a synthesis of points of view, values, and approaches to living. More than a new purely intellectual system, Brunton wishes to usher in a new global attitude.

On the doctrinal plane, Brunton's key ideas are a transposition of fundamental Vedantic concepts. Nevertheless his doctrine of mentalism, his conception of Ultimate Reality as Void (and not only as Pure Consciousness) and the importance he gives to compassion, reveal in addition the influence of Mahayana Buddhism. And the concept of w*u-wei* (= "non-action"), taken from Taoism, influenced his view of the enlightened Sage. Yet these elements are more equivalents of elements found in Hindu doctrines than true complements. Thus, for example, compassion is not absent in Hinduism (there is the householder's duty of hospitality, or the *guru's* selfless love for his disciple), yet it is more emphasized in Buddhism. Similarly, Hinduism developed its own idea of non-action through, for example, the notions of *niskama karman* (= "action without desire") (notably in the *Bhagavad-Gita*), and *nirvritti marga* (= "the path of the renunciation of action"), as compared to *pravrtti marga* (= "the path of action"). As to the Mahayanic concept of Emptiness, it is evident that Brunton used a different approach in name only to arrive at the same ultimate Reality, that of Mind or the Vedantic *Nirguna Brahman*.

We can therefore say that Brunton's teaching is a reinterpretation of Advaita Vedanta for modern Westerners. The concept of Overself, with its new values of Higher Individuality, guardian Presence etc., is a reinterpretation of the ancient Brahmanic concept of *atman* remolded for a Western mentality shaped by Christianity. The Overself is essentially the *atman* influenced by the Christian mode of relating to the Divine, the relationship of "I and Thou."

Nevertheless, in a larger sense, we are justified in viewing Brunton's work as a synthesis, reflecting his wish to unite East and West, mystical traditions and modern science. His openness, flexibility, and lack of prejudice, and his aversion to all sectarianism and fanaticism, prompted him to achieve such a synthesis. Deeply convinced of both the value of scientific thinking and the universality of mystical experience, he refused to sacrifice modernity to tradition or vice-versa. In his mind, there was no one school which had a monopoly on Truth (thus, to officially subscribe to Advaita Vedanta would be to deny, at least implicitly, the truths of Buddhism). For him, Truth, being unformulatable, can be approached in many ways, all of which are approximate:

> If a man finds the truth he does not find it labelled "Indian truth" or "European truth."[438]

We therefore find in Paul Brunton a champion of tolerance and universalism. The elements of his synthesis have beeb fused in a crucible of personal spiritual experience which feels genuine.

2. The Man: Bridging East and West

Seeker, Messenger, Awakener, and Guide

[438] Ibid., X, 1, 321.

Paul Brunton repeated many times that he was only a spiritual seeker who shared with his readers his ideas and reflections, including his re-evaluations as well as his discoveries. He was aware that his own quest was representative of that of a number of modern Westerners:

> My only serious significance as a writer does not lie in the quality of my work, about which I hold no illusions, but in the symbolic relation and representational capacity whereby I, as a Westerner, sought Eastern wisdom and I, as a mid-century man, sought deliverance from the prevailing materialism.[439]

Brunton was conscious of speaking for modern Westerners who were not at home with materialism, liberal or Marxist, in institutional religion, or in the moral relativism of modern literary movements. Beyond these movements which have so often claimed center stage, there has remained a certain readership which has found itself mirrored in Brunton and his work. Hence historians of twentieth-century ideas will eventually have to make a place for him.

More than a creator, Paul Brunton saw himself as a messenger. He did not claim to be totally original, but only that his work represented an adaptation and synthesis of ideas. His most original contribution in my opinion, the concept of Overself, deserves a place in the history of soteriologies as an authentic creation, a pivotal notion which bridges the spiritualities of East and West. The term messenger moreover perfectly suits the author, for his is a message from the East to the West, from ancient Wisdom to modern times, proclaiming tolerance and universalism.

More than a Master, Paul Brunton might be called an "awakener of souls." Refusing to play the role of a guru, he was equally against the formation of a Brunton cult. Moreover, a Master would personally train a small number of disciples directly, while Brunton instead gave out a written teaching intended to touch a large number of readers. He sought to awaken his readers' intuition of their own inner reality. Once awakened, those who felt the need could try to find a personal teacher.

Finally, unlike Krishnamurti—who, although also an awakener, seemed ready to abandon his readers to their own devices—Brunton stood ready to serve as their guide, leading them through the labyrinths of the spiritual quest, warning them of possible dangers, and encouraging them to persevere.

A Pioneer

> It is no longer only an affair of bringing Hellenism and Hebraism to terms, as it was in Matthew Arnold's day; to these now must be added the whole Asiatic culture from Hindustan to Japan.[440]

> Can the tide of Asia's wisdom flow westwards, so that nations like the English or the Americans, with their thoroughness and energy, will take up the old truths and utilize them for the rebuilding of their societies? But for that teachers are required.[441]

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[439] Ibid., VIII, 4, 104.
[440] Ibid., X, 1, 341.
[441] Ibid., X, 1, 340.

Athens and Jerusalem traditionally represented the two poles of reference for Western culture. To these two, it has been suggested that a third pole could be added as contemporary culture has sought to become more universal: Benares, an emblem of Asia's philosophies and spiritual disciplines. Sociologist Peter L. Berger has written that it is time that we ask: "What is the meaning of Benares for Jerusalem?"[442]

Paul Brunton was one of the pioneers of the movement to bridge East and West. He is one of those who have contributed, in an intelligent and balanced way devoid of all fanaticism or sectarianism, to the successful grafting of Eastern traditional wisdom onto the body of modern Western culture. We have shown, in fact, that he occupies a place in the line of thinkers and spiritual seekers from East and West who have worked to unite the two hemispheres. We have also seen how his originality lies (thanks in part to the exceptional circumstances of his life) in his approach: nuanced, even-handed, careful not to reject either modernity or tradition, nor to favor either East or West. This all-encompassing synthesis seems particularly relevant to today's individual and society. His work can be seen as an important contribution, at the least, to greater awareness, and thus to greater understanding, between East and West, and at the most to the creation of a new planetary culture and the formation of a "new individual," more whole and balanced, integrating and embodying the best qualities of both cultures.

[442] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, Garden City, N.Y., 1980.

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