

X. Conclusion and Further Explorations

A. Seeking a coherence

To make any conclusions about Abhishiktānanda's experience is necessarily to work at the conceptual level of *nāmarūpa*, names and forms. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that what is important to experience *advaita*, and not to talk about it. "*Advaita* is not an idea...it *is!*".¹ He says that *advaita* can be discussed endlessly, because *advaita* defies all attempts to define it in concepts.² And the real truth of *advaita* is not to be written down at all, but rather spoken by the *guru* to the disciple.³

And yet Abhishiktānanda himself was very conceptual in many of his writings, and his concepts invite a conceptual response. He says that even those who are enlightened must return to the world of *nāmarūpa*. Concepts are necessary and unavoidable, as long as we recognize that they are also relative. But Abhishiktānanda did not want his own texts to be used just for intellectual satisfaction without the desire for conversion or awakening.⁴ I have written the thesis from the standpoint that Abhishiktānanda did achieve a genuine *advaitic* experience. My purpose in exploring his ideas is for personal spiritual reasons as well as academic interest. It is easy to catch Abhishiktānanda's enthusiasm for *advaita*. I have regarded his words as pointers to an experience that he himself says can never be captured in concepts. Nevertheless, it seems to me that some of his concepts work better than others as pointers to the experience. Abhishiktānanda's own views changed over time. And in describing the experience, Abhishiktānanda is sometimes inconsistent. These changes in viewpoint and inconsistencies get in the way of understanding what it was that he was pointing to. Since he is not here to show us, we must attempt to make a coherence from the writings that he left.

¹ *Letters* p. 227 (RV, 8.3.70).

² *Meeting Point*, p. 105.

³ *Letters*, p. 267 (OB 22.5.72).

⁴ *Letters*, p. 239 (OB 20.11.70).

Abhishiktānanda himself was aware of the inconsistencies in his thought. In his Introduction to *Guhāntara*, he says that it is not a thesis. It is in the form of separate essays, often with a lack of logical connection. He says that much of the testimony has a “primitive and spontaneous character”, and that these essays should be regarded as probings often on “the extreme frontiers of thought.” He warns against premature systematization of these ideas. Nevertheless he wanted to publish *Guhāntara*. He says that there are risks to be taken, and that the book is intended to invite the reader to participate in the dazzling illuminations (*éblouissements*) of the research.⁵

He described his ideas in his *Diary* as “vectors of free-floating research” that were not intended for publication. He says that these ideas can only be understood from within the experience from which those vectors well up.⁶ It must be remembered that his experience was one of being torn between his Christian tradition and the *advaita* that he wished to experience. Abhishiktānanda’s quest was filled with uncertainties and anguish; these doubts tortured him right up until the year before he died. For example, I have referred to his fear that in seeking the *advaitic* experience, he was risking his eternal soul for what might be only a “mirage”. My attempted systematization of his ideas is therefore not meant to be a substitute for the record of his lived experience—the experimental, trial and error approach that he took in attempting to live out his ideas, and his fear in doing so.

I have discussed Abhishiktānanda’s understanding of non-monistic *advaita* in terms of perception, thinking, action, ontology and theology. This has helped to clarify which dualities Abhishiktānanda believes are overcome in the *advaitic* experience. It has also helped to clarify what he means by “non-monistic”, and the diversity that he is thereby attempting to safeguard.

My exploration of Abhishiktānanda’s understanding of non-monistic *advaita* has also surprised me in several ways. I have been surprised at the extent to which his idea of non-monistic *advaita* derives from his Christian trinitarian beliefs, although he finds analogues of this within Hinduism. I also did not expect to conclude that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *kevala* experience of *advaita*. As I have discussed, although his disciple Chaduc may have

⁵ Draft Introduction to *Guhāntara* (unpublished), p. 3.

⁶ Note by Chaduc, cited *Diary*, p. 282 (1.7.74).

achieved that experience, Abhishiktānanda's own experience was his near-death experience in his heart attack. Although that appears to have been an *advaitic* experience, it was not an experience of Pure Consciousness.

In this concluding chapter of the thesis, I will discuss these inconsistencies and surprises. I end the chapter with a brief summary of my findings.

B. Christian Trinitarianism

From the beginning of his time in India, Abhishiktānanda was unwilling to accept a monistic view of Vedānta because it conflicted with his Christianity. In the introduction to *Guhāntara*, he says that the Christian will never accept the metaphysical Hindu synthesis, whether or Shankara or Rāmānuja.⁷ In many of his writings, he writes of his desire to “purify” Hindu ideas like *māyā*. Abhishiktānanda wanted Hindus to rediscover the reality of the diversity of the world. He writes to Fr. Lemarié that the final part of *Guhāntara* was an effort “almost imploring the rediscovery the reality of *vyakta* (the manifested).”⁸ Abhishiktānanda wanted to use this idea of *vyakta* to express the individuality and specificity that are given in the Christian revelation.

As I have discussed, Abhishiktānanda regards the *advaitic* experience itself as a purifying stage before the full trans-*advaitic* experience, which for him is Christian Trinitarianism. He says that the “death” that is experienced in *advaita* is an essential stage in one's growth into oneself.⁹ Elsewhere he says *advaita* is a providential means of purification offered to the Church.¹⁰

In his argument for adding a trinitarian experience to *advaita*, Abhishiktānanda seems to assume that *advaita* alone is a kind of monistic experience. *Advaita* is the *kevala*, the aloneness, or what he called *esseulement*. It is an experience of the infinite solitude of God, not solitude with God, nor in God, not of the alone to the Alone, nor of the alone with Alone, but the Alone

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁸ *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54).

⁹ *Saccidānanda*, p. 83.

¹⁰ *Meeting Point*, p. 106

infinitely and essentially alone. It is the experience of *ekam advitīyam*, the One-without-a-Second. It is an experience of the unity where there is no place for the distinction between knower and known, lover and loved; this is the night of St. John of the Cross.¹¹

For Abhishiktānanda, the *kevala* experience is therefore the equivalent of the “dark night of the soul” of the Christian mystics. It is to be followed by the trinitarian experience. This is how Monchanin had described the Hindu *kevala, esseulé*, as being sublimated to trinitarian thought after a crucifying dark night of the soul.¹² And it is also how Lacombe saw the *advaitic* experience: that it is completed or fulfilled by the Christian revelation.¹³

But for Abhishiktānanda the *kevala* experience is not a complete ontological monism, since he believes that there is always the possibility of the trans-*advaitic* experience. But the *kevala* is experienced as a total aloneness. It is the destruction of all concepts of truth, self and reality that one had formed before the experience. It is an emptying of all our words and concepts and even imagination.¹⁴ Any ideas of distinction from God that one had had before the experience must also be surrendered, at least the type of distinction based on the empirical world.¹⁵

Although the source of Abhishiktānanda’s trinitarianism was Christian doctrine, he develops it in a way that is far from orthodox. He interprets it in terms of Being, where the Father is the Unmanifested, the Son is the Manifested Reality, and the Spirit is the union between the two. It is thus an idea of both unity and diversity in a nondual relationship. Abhishiktānanda develops this trinitarian insight in most of his writings. The idea is central to *Saccidānanda*. His

¹¹ *Initiation*, p. 58.

¹² Ysabel de Andia: “Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophasique et l’Inde”, *Jules Monchanin: Regard croisés d’Occident et d’Orient*, (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 128.

¹³ Olivier Lacombe: “Orient et Occident”, *Études Carmélitaines: Mystiques et Missionnaires*, April/1931, vol. 16, p. 133-159. This is probably why Abhishiktānanda wanted Lacombe to be one of the readers of *Guhāntara*. See *Lettres d’un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54). Gozier says that he interviewed Lacombe, who said that Abhishiktānanda had not sufficiently studied the evolution of the Upanishads. He says that Abhishiktānanda only retained the results [Shankara] but not the meandering of Indian thought. Andre Gozier: *Le père Henri Le Saux à la rencontre de l’hindouisme* (Paris: Centurion, 1988).

¹⁴ *Guhāja*, p. 7.

¹⁵ “Dans le Centre le plus Profond”, *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

most radical statements are in *Guhāntara* and the other essays that are published in *Intériorité*.¹⁶ But Abhishiktānanda wavers about the way that he has expressed this trinitarianism. In 1972, when he says that he knows the Upanishads are true, he also says that he believes that what he said in *Saccidānanda* is true, even if badly expressed.¹⁷ Less than a year later he says that the whole trinitarian thesis in *Saccidānanda* had collapsed.¹⁸ And yet even when he says the structure of his thought has collapsed, Abhishiktānanda retains the insight into unity and diversity that was the basis for his trinitarian thought:

The trinitarian mystery is the expansion into a magnificent statement, *namarupa*, of the deep experience at the same time of unity, of non-duality and relationship. It is the realization of the eternity of my relationship with my human brother, etc. But to try to produce a new trinitarian theology only leads to dead ends. It means that one is still under the spell of *mythos* and *logos*. It is simply to replace *theos* by *theo-logica* and to confuse the idea of God with God¹⁹

Therefore, the collapse was only of certain theological ways of expressing the insight and not the insight of unity, nonduality and relationship. And even if Abhishiktānanda was unhappy about his theological expression of this idea, he came back to trinitarianism in his interpretation of his *guru* relationship with Chaduc, where the Father is engendered by the Son's experience.

Abhishiktānanda's Christian Trinitarianism therefore influenced his understanding of non-monistic *advaita*. Despite this influence, his ideas cannot simply be written off as Christian propaganda. For it must be remembered that religious traditions evolve. This applies to Hinduism as well as to Christianity. Abhishiktānanda's ideas are almost certainly different from orthodox Christianity; his trinitarianism evolved. Abhishiktānanda was attempting real religious dialogue. And in true religious dialogue, changes will occur to each side involved in the dialogue. Abhishiktānanda discovered that he was sometimes considered too Christian for Hindus, and too Hindu for Christians.²⁰

¹⁶ James Stuart advises me that an English translation is being planned for *Intériorité*.

¹⁷ *Diary*, p. 349 (11.5.72).

¹⁸ *Diary*, p. 369, (2.2.73).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ That was the mixed reaction of those to whom he showed his work *Guhāntara*. See *Letters*, p. 78 (L, 4.3.55).

This view—that *advaita* is a monistic experience, and that the Christian experience is a higher level experience—has been proposed by Zaehner.²¹ It is also the position taken by Stoeber, who sees a monistic stage even within the Christian experience. That is how he interprets Abhishiktānanda.²² But Stoeber does not take into account how radically Abhishiktānanda has reinterpreted and even rejected theism. Nor does Stoeber take into account the second argument by Abhishiktānanda: that *advaita* itself is not monistic, but that a trinitarian viewpoint is included even within Hinduism. I will now discuss this second argument.

C. Equivalents to non-monistic advaita within Hinduism

Not all of Abhishiktānanda's arguments for non-monistic *advaita* are based upon his Christian beliefs. Many of his writings are devoted to the argument that Hinduism itself has within it a view of unity and diversity. As Panikkar says, Christianity is not the only religion with a trinitarian belief.²³ The argument that Hinduism can be interpreted this way is quite different from the first argument of Christian trinitarianism. In the first argument, Abhishiktānanda assumes that to some extent, the *advaitic* experience is monistic, and that it is fulfilled by a trinitarian experience. In this second argument, he is searching for a way to find diversity within *advaita* itself.

1. The Upanishads

Abhishiktānanda refers especially to the early Upanishads, which give not only a monistic view of *Brahman*, but also a view of the diversity of the world as emanating from *Brahman*. Abhishiktānanda also liked the *Īśa* Upanishad, which speaks of “fullness everywhere.” He says that this Upanishad asserts the reality of God's self-manifestation in the world:

The world is not devoid of truth or reality; it is not *māyā* or illusion, except when it is thought of as separated from the One who reveals himself in it, since its

²¹ R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, reprinted 1973).

²² Michael Stoeber: *Theo-monistic mysticism* (St. Martins Press, 1994).

²³ Panikkar: *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 221, ft. 163.

whole reason for existing, its very nature as a sign, consists precisely in making him manifest.²⁴

Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of the *Īśa* Upanishad is that *ātman* is motionless in all that moves, the one in what is multiple, and that it is simultaneously interior and exterior to all things, everywhere identical with itself. He says that this Upanishad could form the basis for a Christian understanding of Vedānta.

As I have discussed, Abhishiktānanda's opinions regarding the Upanishads has been confirmed by some Western scholars.²⁵ There are two views of Brahman in the Upanishads. Even Shankara is not necessarily monistic. But Vedānta after Shankara became more rigid. In Abhishiktānanda's terminology, "dialectics" took over. The supple and pregnant notion of *advaita* becomes "sclerosed" into something close to monism or pantheism.²⁶ Instead of holding both views of *Brahman* in tension, this later thought identifies the world with *Brahman*, and thereby denies the reality of the diversity of the world.

In support of this argument that *advaita* is not monistic, Abhishiktānanda emphasizes that *māyā* does not mean illusion, and that the world has a reality, although a reality that is wholly dependent on *Brahman*. *Māyā* is the *śakti* of Shiva and produces the world. Scholars agree that sources of thought like *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism* view both unity and diversity as real; the world is produced by the *śakti* of Shiva. As I have shown, these sources were very influential for Abhishiktānanda. Ramaṇa was also influenced by *tantric* ideas, and Gnānānanda had been influenced by Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda was acquainted with both of these traditions very early on, through these contacts, and through the writings of Silburn.²⁷ Abhishiktānanda's contact with these traditions was not a late development in his life, as Panikkar has asserted.

²⁴ *Meeting Point*, p. 67.

²⁵ The ideas of Paul Hacker, Rudolf Otto, Raimon Panikkar, Caroline Franks Davies and Pratima Bowes are consistent with Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic interpretation of the Upanishads. A contrary viewpoint is expressed by Gispert-Sauch, who says that Abhishiktānanda was too selective in his use of texts from the Upanishads. G. Gispert-Sauch: "Exploring the Further Shore", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. 40, 502-506.

²⁶ "L'épiphanie de Dieu", *Intériorité*, p. 123.

²⁷ It is interesting that Silburn's main source for Kashmir *Śaivism* was Swami Lakshman Joo. He visited Ramaṇa in 1938, and said that he received *drishtidarshan* at that moment. Bettina Bäumer: article in *Mountain Path*, 1993.

Whether traditions like Kashmir *Śaivism* and *tantra* are exact analogues of Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism may be debated. Do they really emphasize the importance of the temporal, diversified world? Although it emphasizes the real nature of the world, Kashmir *Śaivism* also has a very strong desire for everything to return to the One. And Hacker says that although Vedānta has a tendency to logically identify the self with *Brahman*, in *tantric* nondualism, there is even less caution and reluctance to view the identity of the absolute as something to be desired and acquired.²⁸ Even this desire for a return to the One is not necessarily inconsistent with Abhishiktānanda's views. Abhishiktānanda also expresses a desire for a return to the One, the Father, the Pleroma. For Abhishiktānanda, this One is not a monistic One, but has community or *koinonia* at its heart. It is in this emphasis of community at the heart of being that we see Abhishiktānanda's Christian Trinitarianism showing itself again. But according to Loy, *tantra* also has within it a view of reality as not wholly monistic, but as static and dynamic.²⁹

2. *Aneka*

As I have mentioned above in various contexts, one of the words that Abhishiktānanda uses in reference to Hindu thought is *aneka*. He says that reality is both *advaita* (*non-dual*) and *aneka* (not-one). For example, in *Ermîtes*, he refers to the Hindu intuition that is at the same time of the not-one (*an-ekam*) and not-two (*a-dvaitam*), both of which are ineffable.³⁰ He refers to *aneka* in both *Guhāntara*³¹ and *Guhāja*.³² In *Saccidānanda*, he writes that God is not-one, *aneka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*.³³ In a glossary at the end of *Saccidānanda*, he also defines *aneka* as meaning “not-one.”³⁴ But although Abhishiktānanda gives numerous quotations from

²⁸ Hacker “The Search for Identity in Indian Philosophy”, Halbfass: *Tradition and Reflection: Explorations in Indian Thought*, p. 256.

²⁹ *Nonduality*, p. 270.

³⁰ *Ermîtes*, p. 39.

³¹ “Dans le Centre le plus Profond”, *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

³² *Guhāja*, pp. 28, 81, 132 (unpublished).

³³ *Saccidānanda*, p. 135.

³⁴ Monier Williams provides a definition for *aneka*: “not one, many, much, separated”, but gives no references for it.

Hindu writings to support the doctrine of *advaita*, he does not give the source for this idea of *aneka*. In one letter, he writes of the necessity of “*a-advaita*” [not *advaita*].³⁵

Now it is certainly true that the issue of the relation between the One and the Many occupied much of Indian thought. For example, the stories of creation refer to the creation of the Many:

In the beginning this was the Self alone, in the form of Man. Looking around he saw nothing whatever except himself. He said in the beginning: “I am” and thence arose the name “I.” So, even today, when a man is addressed, he says in the beginning, “It is I,” and then adds any other name he may have.

[...] He was afraid; so, even today, one who is all alone is afraid.

[...] He found no joy; so, even today, one who is all alone finds no joy. He yearned for a second...³⁶

and

Brahman desired: “Would that I could become many! Let me procreate!” He practiced fervid concentration, he created the whole world, all that exists.³⁷

Although these Upanishads speculate about the origin of the Many from the One, the word *aneka* does not appear.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, it is possible that Abhishiktānanda obtained the idea of *aneka* from the *Śivādvaita* view of a plurality of *jivātman* (*aneka-jiva-vāda*).³⁸ This may explain the use by Abhishiktānanda of the term *aneka* in the sense of ‘not-one.’

It is also possible that Abhishiktānanda learned the word *aneka* through his contacts with Gnānānanda and with the Sivānanda ashram. We know that monks from the Sivānanda ashram stayed with Gnānānanda. And Abhishiktānanda later had close ties with Swami Chidananda from the Sivānanda ashram. Chidananda uses the word *aneka* in a book where he discusses the ideas of Sivānanda:

³⁵ *Lettres d'un sannyāsī chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 38. Abhishiktānanda refers to the need to be purified in a long immersion of *advaita* (*a-advaita*).

³⁶ Bṛhadāranyaka Upanishad I.4.1-4 (translation from Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience*).

³⁷ Taittirīya Upanishad II.6.1. (translation from Panikkar's *The Vedic Experience*).

³⁸ As discussed by Monchanin in “Note D: Māyā”, *Ermite*, pp. 88-92. Monchanin refers to a work on *Sivādvaita* by S.S. Suryanaravana Sastri. The term *jivātman* means “individual self”.

There is a chasm of relativity between us, the individual souls caught in the *aneka* (many), and the *ekameva'dvitiyam* (the Absolute).

This act of multiplying and reproducing is present everywhere. It saturates and permeates the whole universe because from the angle of cosmology, the entire universe is the outcome of such a primal first wish for multiplication. "I am One, may I become many." Thus the *Vedas* say that there was one imponderable, mysterious Being. What that Being was, who knows, because that Being was one without a second. So, a second not being present, not existing how can there arise the question of anyone cognizing that Being? Who was there to cognize when that—*Ekameva'dvitiyam Brahma* (God) alone existed? And in that mysterious Being there arose this germ of an idea. He thought: "May I become many. I am One, may I become many." That is how they try to explain the genesis of the *advitiya* and the *aneka* from the *Ekameva'dvitiya*. And, therefore, the concept of multiplication is at the very heart and essence of existence because it arose from Brahma and therefore it is present everywhere.³⁹

Whether or not Abhishiktānanda learned the term *aneka* through his contacts with Sivānanda ashram, this quotation from Chidananda shows that Abhishiktānanda is not alone in using the term *aneka*. The word is therefore represented in at least some Hindu traditions. It may be questioned whether Chidananda's ideas as expressed here reflect orthodox Vedāntic thought or whether they are more representative of *tantric* ideas. His ideas may also be a result of the influence of neo-Hinduism. As we have seen, representatives of neo-Hinduism like Aurobindo (in his "*advaitic* realism") have also emphasized both the unity and diversity of the world.⁴⁰

The idea of *aneka* is also found in the *Puranas*, a much later development than Vedānta. We can find in the *Puranas* the idea of *Ekaneka-Svarupa* (from *eka* one + *aneka* not one, many + *svarupa* one's own form or shape). *Ekaneka-Svarupa* therefore means "single yet manifold in one's own form." The idea is applied in the *Puranas* to *Brahma*: although the aspect of *Brahma* is single yet it manifests in multiform expressions.⁴¹

³⁹Swami Chidananda: *Twenty Important Spiritual Instructions* (Divine Life Society, 1993), available online at <http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/20instrch.htm>. It is of course possible that Chidananda obtained this term from his contacts with Abhishiktānanda.

⁴⁰ Monchanin saw an analogy between Aurobindo's metaphysics and the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 310.

⁴¹*Encyclopedic Theosophical Glossary* (Theosophical University Press, 1999), available online at <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/etgloss/ea-el.htm>.

Abhishiktānanda's use of the word *aneka* in conjunction with *advaita* weakens his argument that the word *advaita* alone includes both unity and diversity. Some contemporary writers like Ken Wilber speak of *advaita* itself as “not-two, not-one.” Wilber does not use the term *aneka*, but merely asserts the meaning of nonduality as including both meanings.⁴²

D. The inconsistency between *kevala* and *sahaja*

1. Pure Consciousness versus the awareness of interrelation

The inconsistency between *kevala*⁴³ and *sahaja* became evident in the discussion of Perception (Chapter V). Abhishiktānanda speaks of the nondual awakening in terms of perception, of just opening one's eyes. Our true perception is veiled by superimpositions we bring to our experience. Eliminating these superimpositions shows us reality as it is. This is done by meditation, yoga, or even by psychoanalysis. All these methods allow us to get beyond our ego and the superimpositions of our thought. But there is a fundamental inconsistency in Abhishiktānanda as to whether the state of enlightenment is one of Pure Consciousness (*kevala* or *nirvikalpa*) or whether it is the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*, who sees *Brahman* in everything.

Abhishiktānanda says that in the first state, *kevala*, the distinction between subject and object has disappeared. There is no consciousness of anything at all; Ramaṇa likens it to a trance. Forman and Griffiths refer to this experience as a Pure Consciousness experience. In such a Pure Consciousness experience there is no content, and all distinctions disappear. Abhishiktānanda acknowledges that to refer to *kevala* is to use monistic, pure language.⁴⁴ He describes *kevala* in terms of the yogic goal, the experience of the aloneness of the *ātman*:

He [the yogi] reaches what tradition calls the state of *kaivalyam*, that is to say, of isolation, of simply *being*. In that state at the level of pure awareness he is

⁴² *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1999) p. 135.

⁴³ As I have discussed, both Ramaṇa and Abhishiktānanda also use the word *nirvikalpa* to refer to this *kevala* state of Pure Consciousness.

⁴⁴ *Diary*, p. 72 (26.8.53). Abhishiktānanda says that it would be less monistic to refer to the state as “being in God.”

stripped of all that is not essentially and permanently himself, of all in him that is relative and changing, especially the *vṛitti* or ceaseless eddies of his thought.⁴⁵

The second state, *sahaja*, is the state of the *jīvanmukta*, who sees the unity of all things, and *Brahman* in everything. According to Abhishiktānanda, unless we die during this *nirvikalpa* experience, it is followed by a return to the world in *sahaja* awareness. This is the awareness of the *jīvanmukta*, the one who is liberated while in the body. When the *jīvanmukta* returns to the empirical world, he or she sees the interrelatedness of all things, and sees *Brahman* pervading the universe. Such nondual perception does not negate the reality of the world and does not negate the distinction among things. It is a nondual perception that is not monistic.

2. Inconsistency within Hinduism itself

The inconsistency between the state of *kevala* (the experience of the aloneness of the *ātman*) and that of *sahaja* (seeing *Brahman* within all things) is an inconsistency not only in Abhishiktānanda's thought, but one within Hinduism and Vedānta itself. As Fort says, Vedānta has two ideas of *mukti*: freedom from *saṃsāra* and knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. The first view, freedom from *saṃsāra*, is a more negative idea of liberation. It usually requires some form of world renunciation and some kind of yogic practice; it ends in the perfect isolation (*kaivalya*) of the spirit.⁴⁶ This view is also connected with seeing the world as *māyā* in terms of illusion.

The second view of liberation is knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. In this second view, some Vedāntic thought holds that there can be liberation when one is in a body, with the mind and the senses. The one who is liberated in the body is the *jīvanmukti*. Full liberation is only gained after death (in *videhamukti*). But this idea of *jīvanmukti* allows for the continuing function of the liberated person within the world of diversity. This idea of *jīvanmukti* is not at all universally accepted within Hinduism. Indeed, as Fort has shown, the entire idea of the *jīvanmukti* probably derives from *tantric* sources, and is connected with the *tantric* ideas of the

⁴⁵ *Saccidānanda*, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 6.

reality of the world, and of *māyā* in terms of the *śakti* or energy of Shiva.⁴⁷ The idea of *jīvanmukti* was accepted by Ramaṇa and also by Abhishiktānanda. In his meeting with Ramaṇa's disciple Shastri in November, 1953, Abhishiktānanda was made aware of the importance of *śakti*. After this meeting, Abhishiktānanda writes of awakening to being as the awakening to *śakti* and *kundalini*.⁴⁸ The *jīvanmukti* is his ideal for the *sannyāsī*.⁴⁹

Abhishiktānanda was aware that the idea of *jīvanmukti* is contested within Hinduism. He says that academic discussions about its possibility leave him quite cold. For him, the *jīvanmukti* is the person who returns from the death that liberates. He is the one who has cut those knots that make him identify himself with the various levels at which he is manifested. He is himself, but even so he is other than he was before:

For everywhere he goes, there is the fathomless depth of the experience of the beyond, of the *ātman-brahman*, and those three-fourths of him which belong to the other world are now integrated into his concrete existence.⁵⁰

Even for those who believe in the possibility of *jīvanmukti*, there is a further problem. There are those who argue that the only reason that the *jīvanmukti* can continue to function in the world is because of his or her *prārabdha karma*. On this view the *jīvanmukti* is not really participating in the world. However, another opinion is that the *jīvanmukti* is participating in the world out of a mission to save the world or to do good in the world. Fort argues that this second opinion is not found within traditional Hinduism; it is a Western conception.⁵¹ It may also be linked to the Buddhist idea of the *bodhisattva*.

When Abhishiktānanda arrived in India, his idea of *advaita* was that of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He was disappointed in the fact that Ramaṇa seemed so ordinary, and that he

⁴⁷ Hagiographical sources say that Shankara became a *jīvanmukta*. But according to Fort, Shankara only uses the word *jīvanmukta* once, and he never directly describes the state. Shankara believes in the possibility of living liberation, and his writings set many of the parameters for subsequent discussion of living liberation. But because of his devaluation of empirical reality, Shankara does not emphasize the functioning of a liberated person in the world of diversity. He is more concerned with how the body can continue in existence. Fort contrasts this with the “in the world monism of Tantra or Kāśmiri Śaivism.” *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 31-46.

⁴⁸ *Diary*, p. 160 (12.11.56).

⁴⁹ *Ermities*, p. 155.

⁵⁰ “An Approach to the Upanishads”, *Further Shore*, p. 106. The reference is to the idea expressed in the Vedas that the world derives from one fourth of *Purusha*; the other three fourths remained unmanifested.

⁵¹ Fort, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

participated in everyday activities. Over time, Abhishiktānanda came to appreciate the idea of *jīvanmukti*. He did not seem to appreciate the difference between the interpretation of the *jīvanmukti*'s actions as due to *prārabdha karma*, and the interpretation that the *jīvanmukti* was actively doing good. In *Guhāja*, Abhishiktānanda identifies these two ideas he says that the Christian idea of vocation is called *prārabdha karma* in Hinduism.⁵²

Abhishiktānanda's conception of *advaita*, insofar as it affirms the reality of the world, and the possibility of liberation as a *jīvanmukti*, follows a *tantric* view of *advaita*. This of course fits with his Christian bias of reality having both unity and diversity. He compares the state of the *jīvanmukti* to that of resurrection to new life.

Abhishiktānanda believed that the *kevala* (or *nirvikalpa*) state was a necessary stage in order to attain to the *sahaja* state. This view conflicts with Ramaṇa's own opinion.

3. Inconsistencies in Ramaṇa's Story

Ramaṇa himself held that the trance of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is not necessary in order to achieve the *sahaja* state. The method that he recommended for enlightenment is that of Self-Enquiry. Ramaṇa criticized meditation as often leading to the inflation of the ego of the meditator.⁵³

This raises an interesting question. If Ramaṇa is correct, that meditation and *nirvikalpa samādhi* are not necessary, what does this do to Ramaṇa's own story of enlightenment? He is venerated for having been in a trance state during his first period of time at Tiruvanammalai. Abhishiktānanda held Ramaṇa in higher esteem precisely because of his trance experience. If Ramaṇa says that trance is unnecessary, what is the basis of his enlightenment? Is his trance more related to the fact that even as a boy he had periods of profound sleep when no one could wake him? Ramaṇa traces his enlightenment to his enactment of death when he was a boy. Neither that experience nor his actual near death experience several years later was an experience of Pure Consciousness. He was able to distinguish others; it was more an experience of the continuity of the Self. Ramaṇa himself commented on his propensity for "fits". Ramaṇa's

⁵² *Guhāja*, p. 88.

⁵³ His view that meditation is not necessary is similar to Shankara's opinion.

interpretation of his enlightenment was in terms of *sahaja samādhi*. He relates this to seeing *Brahman* in everything, and interprets the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in this way. I have concluded that this text, and others like the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, the *Ribhu Gīta*, the *Tripura Rahasya*, and the *Tayumanavar* play a larger role in Ramaṇa's interpretation of his experience than is generally acknowledged. It may be that his own experience was able to go beyond those texts, but they seem to be the source of his idea of Self-Enquiry.

Ramaṇa is inconsistent in explaining his own continued action as a *jīvanmukti* in the *sahaja* state. At times he acknowledges the reality of the world, although he says that it is a reality dependent on *Brahman*. But at other times he takes a very illusionistic view of the world. We know that he took an active interest in some activities, such as cooking, devotion to his mother (both before and after her death), and looking after animals. He read the newspaper and his mail. These activities certainly look like real involvement in the world. Ramaṇa tries to explain them as *prārabdha karma*, and says he is not really acting. It would be more consistent for him to say that he is really participating in the real world created by *śakti*. But perhaps by saying he is not really acting, he means that he is acting without *karmic* consequences because he is not acting out of personal ego or attachment.⁵⁴

4. The return

For Abhishiktānanda, the *sahaja* experience of the *jīvanmukti* is equivalent to the resurrection. There is a return to the world after the dark night of the soul of the *kevala* experience.⁵⁵

Beatrice Bruteau interprets this return in Taoist terms. She compares the *sahaja* state with the Taoist natural state, a harmony in the mutual interaction of all beings which arises if not interfered with by arbitrary external and artificial means. She says that in the return the ordinary daily life is back, but it is transformed...

⁵⁴ See "Forty Verses", *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 76 (v. 38) and p. 81 ("Supplement to Forty Verses", v.30).

⁵⁵ Even if one has died in the *nirvikalpa* experience, Abhishiktānanda believes there is some form of resurrection. As already discussed, there is no unanimous agreement in Hinduism regarding the possibility of a return.

The self-realized person has the mind of a child—unselfconscious, spontaneous, utterly pure in its sincerity and genuineness, in immediate and honest contact with the realities it meets, unblocked and uncomplicated, free and fluid, possessing sense for the right, the true and the harmonious.⁵⁶

Bruteau cites Abhishiktānanda's words from Swami Gnānānanda:

The *jñāni* lives in the world like every one else; he eats, drinks, sleeps and walks about, just like everyone else. However, while others are primarily aware of the diversity of things, the *jñāni* sees them in their unity.⁵⁷

This statement by Gnānānanda is similar to what was said by Ramaṇa, comparing the enlightened person to the unenlightened:

To those who have not realized (the Self) as well as to those who have realized, the world is real. But to those who have not realized, Truth is adapted to the measure of the world, whereas to those that have realized, Truth shines as the Formless Perfection, and as the Substratum of the world.⁵⁸

The unenlightened see Truth only according to “the measure of the world”—that is, in terms of dualism and diversity. He says that the enlightened person sees *Brahman* as the substratum of the world. This idea of “substratum” is what Ramaṇa must mean when he stresses the importance of seeing *Brahman* in all things.

Can this view of *Brahman* be compared to the Tao, which also gives rise to all things? The use of the word ‘substratum’ gives a reified sense of reality, and may itself be criticized as viewing reality according to “the measure of the world.” But Bruteau's comparison was more with the enlightened person living in the world, apparently like everyone else, but with a different perspective. A Taoist view of Abhishiktānanda's idea of enlightenment is supported by the following passage from Abhishiktānanda:

Recover the state of communion [inter-relation] in which a child is before it has distinguished its I. [...] *Wou-wei*. The Ganges does not flow in order to irrigate. It does not seek to irrigate, to fertilize; it just flows [...] stop thinking, stop acting, let the Ganges flow.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Beatrice Bruteau: “In the Cave of the Heart: Silence and Realization”, *New Blackfriars* (1984), p. 315. She refers to Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu.

⁵⁷*Guru*, p. 73.

⁵⁸“Forty Verses”, *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, p. 70 (v. 18).

⁵⁹*Diary*, p. 312 (16.4.70).

A Taoist interpretation of Abhishiktānanda makes some sense. Abhishiktānanda refers to the spontaneous action of the enlightened person, the action of *wu-wei*. The Tao is known as the Uncarved Block, which gives rise to the ten thousand things (diversity). Taoism therefore has within it a trinitarian view of unity and diversity, at least within Abhishiktānanda's sense. The view that the Tao cannot be named also fits with Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism and his mistrust of conceptual formulations.⁶⁰

But Abhishiktānanda himself makes only a very few references to Taoism. He includes Taoism in the "three great traditions of the world" which he says stand by the intuition of a reality beyond the *dvandvas* (dualities): the Upanishadic, the Buddhist and the Tao."⁶¹ He makes far more references to Zen Buddhism.⁶² As discussed in the thesis, he refers to the Ten Oxherding Pictures of Zen as exemplifying his idea of the return from the *nirvikalpa* experience.

Bruteau also cites Sri Ramakrishna regarding the importance of the return:

The *jñāni* gives up his identification with worldly things, discriminating 'Not this, not this'. Only then can he realise Brahman. It is like reaching the roof of a house by leaving the steps behind, one by one. But the *Vijñāni*, who is more intimately acquainted with *Brahman*, realizes something more. He realizes that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof: bricks, lime and brick-dust. That which is realized intuitively as *Brahman*, through the eliminating process of 'not this, not this', is then found to have become the universe and all its living beings. The *Vijñāni* sees that the Reality which is Nirguna, without attributes, is also Saguna, with attributes.⁶³

Ramakrishna therefore affirms the reality of the world of diversity. We must however remember that Ramakrishna himself was influenced by non-traditional sources as well as by Western

⁶⁰ *Nonduality*, p. 115: The Tao is what there is before bifurcation into subject and object; p. 117: The uncarved block is not named; p. 274: In Taoism, both duality and nonduality are real.

⁶¹ "The Upanishads and the Advaitic Experience", *Clergy Monthly*, Dec., 1974, p. 477.

⁶² There is a link between Zen Buddhism and Taoism. See Ray Grigg: *The Tao of Zen* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle, 1994).

⁶³ Bruteau, *op. cit.*, p. 318, ft. 41, citing *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1992, first published 1942), p. 103.

influences.⁶⁴ Ramakrishna's view does show, however, that within neo-Hinduism there is an emphasis on the reality of the world.

5. Abhishiktānanda's own experience

Based on my reading of Abhishiktānanda, I conclude that he did not achieve *nirvikalpa samādhi*, if that experience is interpreted as a Pure Consciousness experience. I conclude this from Abhishiktānanda's own words. He says in 1963, "...that *aham* which Ramana had promised me, there too I got nothing for my trouble!"⁶⁵ And as late as 1973, he said that he had achieved nothing further since Arunāchala.⁶⁶ I have discussed Abhishiktānanda's experiences with his disciple Chaduc. I conclude that Chaduc may have achieved the state of Pure Consciousness, and Abhishiktānanda may have experienced it vicariously through Chaduc. But Abhishiktānanda's own experience was during his heart attack. And that experience was not one of Pure Consciousness. He continued to make distinctions, and to observe those around him, even if from a distance.

Abhishiktānanda writes about the importance of this near-death experience. He calls it a "great adventure", and compares it to the finding of the Grail. Yet he also de-emphasizes it, afraid that his own story will become too mythical. He says it was not a grand vision, but rather "a waiting, an awakening, something quite peaceful."⁶⁷ I believe that he chose to de-emphasize his experience because of his opposition of those who seek "spiritual experiences" in the form of mystical visions or auditions or trance-like states⁶⁸. He says in *Guru* that the *advaitic* experience is not a personal experience in the sense of a particular mental state, but rather an experience of totality:

⁶⁴ Halbfass says that Vivekānanda, as a follower of Ramakrishna, had been exposed to non-traditional *advaitic* sources, such as the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Wilhelm Halbfass: "Neo-Hinduism and Modern Indian Traditionalism", *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York Press, 1988), pp 229, 240.

⁶⁵ Diary, p. 255 (12.4.63).

⁶⁶ *Letters*, pp. 285, 286 (MC, 1.2.73).

⁶⁷ *Letters*, p. 312 (AF, 17.9.73).

⁶⁸ Preface, *Guru*, pp. Xi, xii.

So long as only one side of human nature is affected—the intellect or the emotions, for example—we can be sure that the definitive experience is still remote.⁶⁹

The fact that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve *nirvikalpa* does not mean that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *advaitic* experience. Ramaṇa himself says that the *nirvikalpa* experience is not necessary. And Abhishiktānanda's experience was like Ramaṇa's near death experience, where he had an overwhelming certainty of the continued existence of the Self. I believe that as a result of his close experiences with his disciple Chaduc, as well as during his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda attained the *sahaja* experience that Ramaṇa speaks about, and which Abhishiktānanda believed to be the goal of *advaita*. It was an experience of connectedness with reality, a state of being beyond his individual ego.

E. Being and the issue of levels of reality

In some places, Abhishiktānanda seems to speak of two levels of reality in a dualistic sense. This is due to two causes: (1) his scholastic background, which emphasizes a dualism of nature and grace and (2) the interpretations of Vedānta that tend to reify *Brahman*.

It is clear that Abhishiktānanda's scholastic background caused him a lot of difficulty in integrating his understanding of *advaita*. Initially, he interpreted *advaita* as something that could be achieved 'by nature' but which was fulfilled by the Christian revelation of the Trinity. This view was in accordance with the articles by Lacombe that he had read before coming to India. Even as he moved away from the view of Christianity as fulfillment, he continued to use scholastic distinctions such as essence/accident, being/becoming, and eternity/time. The comparisons that he makes between *Brahman* and the One of Parmenides show the persistence of Greek thinking in Abhishiktānanda—a dualism between a static form and the changing phenomena of matter.⁷⁰

But as we have seen, Abhishiktānanda also criticizes the Greek way of thinking. He sees more and more how Christian thought is rooted in Greek. This insight seems to have been due to

⁶⁹ Preface, *Guru*, p. xiii.

⁷⁰ See for example *Guhāja*, p. 128, where he compares the *kevala* state with the ideas of Parmenides.

his reading of Heidegger. And over time, Abhishiktānanda rejects much of the dualism from his scholasticism.

In one passage, Abhishiktānanda consciously exchanges the Greek dualism between soul and body for a dualism between Self and world, which is how he understands Vedānta at that time.⁷¹ But to say that Vedānta has a dualism is due to a reified interpretation of *Brahman*. On this view, *Brahman* is very much like the One of Parmenides. *Brahman* is unchanging, with no parts, not moving. And *Brahman* is contrasted with the changing world of illusion. This is certainly a view supported by some interpretations of Vedānta. This view is reinforced by the doctrine that the student who wishes to take up *yoga* must first of all be able to discriminate between the real and the unreal contributes to such a two level view of reality within Hinduism.⁷²

Abhishiktānanda alternates between such an unchanging view of *Brahman* and a more dynamic view of *Brahman* in accordance with the *tantric* ideas of *śakti*. Sometimes he uses the more static way of referring to the experience of *Brahman* in the *kevala* experience. At other times, using Western terminology, he speaks of a “Transcendence within Immanence.” The One is to be found within the deepest part of one’s self, the cave of one’s heart.

As a result of his reflection on dualistic patterns in Greek thought, Abhishiktānanda also interprets his Christian doctrines in much more immanent terms. We have seen this in his rejection of the idea of the supernatural. And he also interprets the nature of Christ in truly human terms. As early as 1954, he asks, “Why want the Incarnation to be more real than the creation?”⁷³

Although Abhishiktānanda uses the word ‘emanation’ to describe the manifestation of diversity, he is uncomfortable with the word. We have seen this in the discussion as to whether he is using the word ‘Being’ in an analogical or a univocal sense. Abhishiktānanda is bothered even in referring to *Brahman* as ‘reality’:

⁷¹ *Diary*, p. 246 (17.2.62). His objection to the Greek soul/body dualism is that it gives too much importance to the intellect, whereas *ātman* is the center of the whole body.

⁷² *Intériorité*, p. 47 refers to the initial discrimination between real and unreal. In *Guhāntara*, Abhishiktānanda says that the discrimination, *viveka*, is only really effective at the moment of awakening.

⁷³ *Diary*, p. 93 (6.5.54).

The goal is to search even beyond the category of reality/nonreality to the experience of Reality itself, which absolutely transcends every previous concept of reality, and lets appear everything that used to be classed as “real” as an analogy of that which used to be classified as “unreal.”⁷⁴

And in *Guhāja* he says,

God is so much present in the universe that to try to distinguish him there is to cease to see him. Being is coextensive with Maya. All of eternity is in each particle of time, all of time in all of eternity. God is not a thing in the universe, not exterior to man, nor an interior thing. The universe does not form a pair with God; God is one without a Second.⁷⁵

We see here that Abhishiktānanda denies that God is a “thing”. God is not to be conceptualized using any empirical terminology. But on the other hand, Abhishiktānanda insists that “the universe does not form a pair with God.”

Although Being cannot be conceptualized, Abhishiktānanda believed that it could nevertheless be experienced. The objectification or conceptualization of God can never be God. This is also the view expressed by Watts:

The point is that Reality, God, the Eternal Now, is entirely beyond speech and understanding and attainment, but at the same time is right here. If you try to catch hold of it, you will miss it. But go straight ahead with your ordinary life, “Walk on!”, wash your dishes, think your everyday thoughts, and you will see that you can’t get away from it. Yet this is already too much conceptualization!⁷⁶

That is also the view of other interpreters of at least some kinds of Buddhism. The nonconceptual experience is the state of unconstructed awareness, beyond concepts. We can have a cognition of the way things really are (of “Thusness”) which can only be expressed apophatically.⁷⁷ We can therefore experience Being, even if we cannot conceptualize it. This may help to explain what Heidegger means by Being. It is related that Heidegger said of D.T.

⁷⁴ *Guhāntara*, p. 44 (unpublished).

⁷⁵ “Vers l’Un”, *Guhāja*, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, originally published 1947). We know that Abhishiktānanda read this book and recommended it to Fr. Lemarié.

⁷⁷ Griffiths: “Pure Consciousness and Indian Buddhism”, *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. K.C. Forman, (Oxford, 1990), p. 89.

Suzuki: “If I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.”⁷⁸

Although he objects to the use of empirical terms to describe God, Abhishiktānanda still makes a distinction between the Unmanifested and the manifested. Using Heidegger’s terminology, there is a difference between Being and beings. There is an ontological distinction. Is this another dualism? Loy thinks that it is.⁷⁹ I believe that the answer is that although there are two different levels of reality, it is one reality. There are two different ways of viewing the same reality. *Brahman* is the nondual view; the view of diversity is the empirical view. To understand this argument, we must look at Abhishiktānanda’s apophaticism, his view of “dialectics” (the overuse of logic), and the analogy of the prism.

F. Thinking and the advaitic experience

1. Apophaticism

These issues relate primarily to the discussion in Chapter VI (Thinking). Abhishiktānanda, like Monchanin, believed that the apophatic tradition of the West was a link to the Hindu *advaita*. God or *Brahman* is One, the One-without-any-Second (*ekam advitīyam*). God cannot be described in terms of anything related to creation. The One and the Many are incommensurable. That is why our experience of the One cannot be spoken of in terms of the Many; we can only be silent.

Monchanin’s use of apophaticism was more nuanced than Abhishiktānanda’s. As I have discussed, Monchanin argued that there are as many different types of apophaticism as there are ontologies. There are different views of self, universe and Being.⁸⁰ He says that Plotinus is

⁷⁸ William Barrett: Introduction to anthology of Suzuki’s writings, *Zen Buddhism* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), xi. Cited in *Nonduality*, p. 175.

⁷⁹ *Nonduality*, p. 321 ft. 23.

⁸⁰“Apophatisme et Apavāda”, *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l’Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauue (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 119: “L’apophaticisme se situe sur le triple plan logique, ontologique et existentiel.”

more apophatic than Plato, and that Shankara's thought is more apophatic than that of Plotinus, but that Shankara's thought does not reach the Emptiness ("Vide") of the Tao.⁸¹

I believe that Monchanin is correct in this analysis of apophaticism. Abhishiktānanda's apophaticism begins with his scholastic dualistic distinctions, and his assumption that the One is the same as the static One of Parmenides. But over time, his apophaticism becomes more radical, ending in a Buddhist-like (or perhaps Taoist?) relativization of all views.

Panikkar also makes a distinction between types of apophaticism. He distinguishes between an epistemological apophaticism and an ontic apophaticism. Epistemological apophaticism merely says that ultimate reality is ineffable—our human intelligence cannot grasp it, even though ultimate reality may itself be supremely intelligible in itself. He contrasts this with the ontic apophaticism within Buddhism:

Buddhistic apophaticism, on the other hand, seeks to transport this ineffability to the heart of ultimate reality itself, declaring that this reality—inasmuch as its *logos* (its expression and communication) no longer pertains to the order of ultimate reality but precisely to the manifestation of that order—is ineffable not merely in our regard, but as such, *quoad se*.⁸²

In this view, ultimate reality is "so supremely ineffable and transcendent" that Buddhism denies it the very character of being. Being relates to what *is*, and what *is* is in some manner thinkable and communicable since it belongs to the order of manifestation.

This also means that when we speak of Being, we are using the word in neither an analogical nor a univocal sense. Panikkar says that the use of the word 'Being' is only as a "catalyst" that must be left behind:

Being is a mental catalyst that enables us to place the incommensurable in relation, or indeed to speak of the ineffable at all. Once used as a category of thought, as the axis of the cylinder of the intellectual piston, it must be discarded, lest, excluded from the vital process of intellection, it congeal, and thereby become the greatest hindrance of all to what it was intended precisely to expedite.⁸³

⁸¹ Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 114.

⁸² Raimon Panikkar: *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 14.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Panikkar says that this is the Buddhist position. It is also what he understands to be the position of Gregory of Nyssa, who uses the concept of *epextasis*. Panikkar says that *epextasis* is an implicit synthesis between a static, substantialistic vision of reality and a dynamic, temporal conception of it. Panikkar cites Nyssa: “Nothing of what the human mind can know is knowledge of God.” Panikkar says that this concept has been insufficiently explored. He points out that Abhishiktānanda uses the word in *Sagesse*, but that Abhishiktānanda does not explain the word.⁸⁴ Panikkar says that many of the Church fathers were much more “Buddhistic” in their views than is commonly imagined.

2. The dualistic nature of concepts

As I have discussed in Chapter VI, Abhishiktānanda sees our conceptualization as dualistic. Our concepts are an attempt to “grasp” and re-present the experience. In reaching this view, Abhishiktānanda was undoubtedly influenced by Heidegger. Abhishiktānanda combines this rejection of *eidos* with Jung’s idea of archetypes. For Abhishiktānanda, our experience is primary. Archetypes are the first expression of this experience. From these archetypes develop myths and symbols. Our concepts are dependent on archetypes, myths and symbols. In order to attain to the nondual experience, we must go beyond all concepts, myths and archetypes. This “going beyond” concepts, myths and archetypes corresponds to what I called the Yogic Model of experience in Chapter II. Once we have the experience, we cannot fully describe it, because that again involves the return to concepts. He says that if we ever experience the One of Plotinus, the Self of Yogis, the God of believers, we cannot express it, because in order to express it our consciousness must return to the surface, return by the archetypes and all that has been built up in concepts, images and words.⁸⁵

If conceptual thinking is dualistic, is there a nondual thinking? Nondual thinking cannot arise in the Pure Consciousness state, which by definition is imageless and without thought. But in the *sahaja* state, it makes sense to speak of nondual thinking in terms of a nonconceptual,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 221, ft. 177. He cites Abhishiktānanda’s *Sagesse*, pp. 239, 245. Monchanin refers to this same saying from Gregory of Nyssa. He says that in his polemic against Arianism, Gregory exalts the incomprehensibility and unintelligibility of God. See Ysabel de Andia: “Jules Monchanin, La mystique Apophatique et l’Inde”, *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 115.

⁸⁵ *Guhāja*, p. 97

creative, spontaneous thinking. This is similar to Heidegger's view of thinking as a kind of perception, of letting truth appear.

Abhishiktānanda believed that the symbols expressed in his poetry would go beyond the conceptual and point to the experience of Being that cannot be captured by our concepts. Abhishiktānanda does not himself refer to his poetry as nondual thinking, but a parallel can be made with Heidegger's ideas. We may also compare this with the views of J.L. Mehta. Mehta writes about the rediscovery of symbolism by Eliade, and the use of symbolism in the poetry of Aurobindo. Mehta says that language is the main instrument of our refusal to accept the world as it is.⁸⁶ I understand this to mean a refusal to accept the world as known by our concepts. The symbol is pre-conceptual and therefore closer to an unconstructed awareness. But Mehta says that Aurobindo was also a conceptual thinker, and he looks at the relation between Aurobindo's poetry and his conceptual thinking. If conceptual thinking is dualistic, is there any positive use for it?

3. A positive valuation of concepts

Abhishiktānanda says that our concepts are dualistic, and grasping. But he also says that after the *advaitic* experience, we must return to the world of *nāmarūpa*, and again use concepts. Concepts are necessary, but we must recognize their relativity. He says that after the *advaitic* experience, which is a radical deliverance from our attempts to think, we later have to be able to recognize the value of the *nāmarūpa*. We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist.⁸⁷ Does Abhishiktānanda give any rationale for why concepts or theory might be positive, provided that one is aware of the dangers of reductionism and of the relativity of thought?

Both the views of Abhishiktānanda and Loy give the impression that our concepts are a necessary evil. They therefore give the impression that nonduality is not only a non-rationalism (in rejecting the dualism of concepts), but of an irrationalism, a rejection of all conceptual

⁸⁶ J.L. Mehta refers to Aurobindo's use of poetic creativity. Mehta cites Rudolf Steiner: "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is." "Sri Aurobindo: Life, Language, Yoga", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition*, ed. William J. Jackson, (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 155.

⁸⁷ *Letters*, p. 284 (MC, 26.1.73).

thinking for all purposes. Abhishiktānanda says for example that concepts are a necessary part of living as a *jīvanmukti* in the world of distinction. After appearing again from the *advaitic* experience and from the “naked truth of the Absolute”, one must again accept the forms and names to which we are “attached so cruelly but which for us nevertheless hold no attraction.”⁸⁸

Loy says that when we see the world as divided this is the empirical world and when we see the world as a unity, this is Advaita. He says that the nondual and the empirical are the “two truths” of Buddhism. According to Loy, the challenge for philosophy is to show the relation between the two truths. There must be some relation between the two truths, or liberation would not be possible, because we could never make the transition (or “leap”) from delusion to enlightenment.⁸⁹

Loy says that Mādhyamika and Yogācāra demonstrate self-contradictory nature of our usual phenomenal world, including the *pramāṇas* (modes of knowledge). Mādhyamika and Yogācāra devalue dualistic experience and pave the way for the nondual experience. Our concepts may be “skillful means” to bring us to the *advaitic* realization. He contrasts this with the view of Shankara, who did not challenge the validity of the *pramāṇas*, but merely limited their application to the empirical world. When we reach the knowledge of *Brahman*, the *pramāṇas* lose their authority. Loy says that Shankara was able to do this because of his reliance on the Vedic revelation of *Brahman*⁹⁰ Without that Vedic revelation, the Buddhist philosophers had to analyze the relation between the two levels, logically refuting the lower for the sake of experiencing the higher.

Loy therefore opts for what he sees as the Buddhist solution. The *pramāṇas* are devalued. In my view, Loy cannot give any rationale for why conceptual activity should be valued. But is Loy correct in saying that Shankara’s solution assumes the necessity of revelation? In my view, Neo-Hinduism and Abhishiktānanda are correct that this revelation is itself the result of an intuition of Being. Just because it cannot be conceptualized does not mean it cannot be experienced.

⁸⁸ “Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond”, *Guhāntara* (unpublished)

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 69.

⁹⁰ *Nonduality*, p. 63.

There are some indications that Abhishiktānanda believed that there is value in concepts, once they are relativized:

Advaitin experience is a new consciousness, a new level of consciousness in which all ideas are seen as if for the first time.⁹¹

If ideas are seen as if for the first time, then presumably there is value in these ideas. And as we shall see in the Appendix, he speaks of “swallowing” the experience in order to attain to a higher degree of consciousness. He says that our intuition must be ‘conceived’ or absorbed if it is to penetrate in full force all the levels of being.⁹² This idea of the valid use of concepts needs to be more developed in Abhishiktānanda, especially since he himself devoted so much of his life to attempting to express the experience in conceptual form.⁹³ If, as Abhishiktānanda says, our myths and archetypes are inevitable, but then sometimes need to be reformulated, does that not point to a positive use of concepts within the disciplines of theology and philosophy? He himself refers to the need for

An Indian theology, freed from thinker [*mantā*] and doer [*kartā*] from thought [*noêma*] and action [*poiêma*]. A theology of becoming oneself. The Trinity: becoming oneself in reciprocal relationship [*paraspara*].⁹⁴

We can gain some insight into what such a valid use of concepts might look like in examining his view of “dialectics”, or the wrong use of logic. If there is a wrong use of logic, that might imply the correct use, provided that we relativize our concepts.

4. Rejection of logicism

a) Dialectics

Abhishiktānanda says that the followers of Shankara had a monistic view of the identity of *ātman* and *Brahman* due to their “dialectics.” It seems to me that Abhishiktānanda obtained

⁹¹ Diary p. 326 (20.5.71).

⁹² “The Upanishads, an Introduction”, *Further Shore*, p. 97.

⁹³ In my opinion, a nondual reading of the ideas of Herman Dooyeweerd: *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969). (*op. cit.*) would provide a helpful start to showing how theory can be used positively while not denying a nondual reality. He contrasts our concept-forming activity with our everyday activity where we see reality in its interconnectedness and wholeness. A development of this idea is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁹⁴ *Diary*, p. 333 (20.9.71).

this view from his readings of Rudolf Otto and Alan Watts. Otto says that there is a tendency to create a language and dogma of rigid formulas and that:

The school of Śankara afterwards retained and exaggerated this tendency, and became rationalistic and dialectic. It confines the unspeakable within such close limits, forces the non-rational into such stiff formulas, and develops such stereotyped and unyielding technical language, that feeling is almost crushed out; the glimmer of the mystery almost disappears, and a hair-splitting dialectical system replaces the deeply significant language of the mysteries of the Upanishad-tradition.⁹⁵

Otto refers to the saying (*mahavakya*) “Brahma is this *ātman*”. He says that the use of the copula here is not to be interpreted as logical identity:

The last sentence is of course not of a logical, but of a mystical nature. The word “is” in the mystical formula of identification has a significance which it does not contain in logic. It is no copula as in the sentence: S is P; it is no sign of equality in a reversible equation. It is not the “is” of a normal assertion of identity. However much the emphatic pronouncements of Śankara and Eckhart strive to attain to the latter, they do not succeed in hiding the fact that their logic is indeed the “wonder” logic of mysticism.⁹⁶

In *Ermities*, Monchanin says something similar in his comments about the logic of *advaita*. He says that *advaita* is a challenge (*défi*) to all thought, even to the principle of identity, and a challenge to all experience, even that of the One.⁹⁷ Abhishiktānanda would have been aware of this remark by Monchanin.

Abhishiktānanda may also have obtained his view of the overuse of logic from Watts. In *Behold the Spirit*, Watts says,

Our logic, our method of reasoning is entirely dualistic, and therefore cannot without contradictions treat of a Being who surpasses duality. The unity of God is therefore seen as *opposed* to multiplicity in God. God has no opposite, and yet we apply to him the term unity in a sense which has an opposite, for unity as we conceive it is unthinkable without the contrast of multiplicity. [...] Our difficulty is that, while admitting the non-duality of God, we apply terms to him in a

⁹⁵ Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 49, ft. 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁹⁷ “Note D: *Māyā*”, *Ermities*.

dualistic sense. We speak of him rightly as one, but then go on to reason from the term as if it were to be used in an exclusive and privative sense.⁹⁸

Watts says that terms of privation should be used to show God's freedom from limitation. But to use the word 'one' in a dualistic sense does not do this; it confines God within a dualistic conception of the One and the Many. "The very concept of one-ness is a term of duality, because it is inconceivable apart from the idea of two, or of many, or even of none."

Abhishiktānanda makes a similar statement about not referring to God as simply one, since this would be a conceptual and dualistic interpretation of God:

[The *jñāni*] will not say that the I, the world and God are simply one, any more than he will reduce being to a philosophical monad. "This would exceed the limits of his insight, and moreover would be a conceptual—and so dualistic—interpretation of that which transcends all conceptualization. All that he can allow himself to murmur is that 'there is not two', *a-dvaita*, since being cannot be divided."⁹⁹

Abhishiktānanda says elsewhere that even referring to 'monotheism' is a measuring of God by our own human scale at the very moment when we proclaim God to be beyond all measurement.¹⁰⁰

Watts says that the phrase 'One-without-a-second' (*ekam advitīyam*) is to be seen in this sense of God's freedom from limitation—that nothing can set any boundaries to God's being and power. The phrase *ekam advitīyam* is not to be interpreted in a monistic sense.

For if the unity of God is truly all-inclusive and non-dual, it must include diversity and distinction as well as one-ness; otherwise the principle of diversity would stand over against God as something opposite to and outside him.¹⁰¹

The rejection of "dialectics" by Abhishiktānanda is therefore tied into a view of reality that allows reality to both the One and the Many. His rejection of this dialectics or logicism is not a rejection of faulty reasoning, or the drawing of wrong conclusions. It is rather the application of logic in an "area" where it does not belong: the area of Being. Watts thinks that

⁹⁸ Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, first published 1947), p. 139.

⁹⁹ *Saccidānanda*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ *Saccidānanda*, p. 45. .See also *Saccidānanda*, p. 88, ft.1: The mystery of being transcends all numeration as it does all thought.

¹⁰¹ Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, first published 1947), p. 141.

Shankara avoids the dualistic use of logic. Abhishiktānanda on the other hand sees in Shankara (or at least in his disciples) a rigidity of logic that refers to *Brahman* as One in a sense that opposes One to multiplicity. In other words, applying our dualistic logic to *Brahman* results in a monistic conception. But the trinitarian “revelation” solves this problem that our human logic has reached:

The reality of the creature would be really inconceivable without the revelation of the trinitarian mystery, which clears away the impasse in which we have become enclosed with our too human logic, still too dualistic, the *advaita* of Shankara.¹⁰²

The *advaita* of Shankara, in holding to the logical identity of God and world, is too dualistic, because it applies dualistic logic to Being that is beyond logic.

b) The analogy of the Prism

Abhishiktānanda’s idea of the avoidance of dialectics or logicism is not a proof of the non-monistic nature of *advaita*. The idea of this kind of misuse of logic itself assumes that reality has both unity and diversity. But although it is not a proof, it shows how logic ought to be used by those who know this “trinitarian” nature of reality. The cosmic diversity of the world is not the same as the distinctions and identities that we make in logic.

This distinction between cosmic diversity and logical distinction does not seem to be recognized by Loy. That is why his acceptance of Nāgārjuna’s dialectics leads him to a denial of individuality and plurality. I think that the distinction between cosmic diversity and logical distinction can also explain why Abhishiktānanda can say that there are still distinctions in the nondual state, even if dualisms are overcome:

The I as witness...simply TO BE, without reflecting on the subject as be-ing. Perceive beings beyond the distinction between myself/not-myself, but do not deny this distinction by means of an idea.¹⁰³

The difference between cosmic diversity and logical distinction is sometimes explained by the analogy of the prism. By virtue of a prism, white light breaks up into many different colours. There is a nonduality between the one white light and the many colours. But the one

¹⁰² *Guhāja*, p. 119 (my translation).

¹⁰³ *Diary*, p. 312, (16.4.69).

white light cannot be explained by or reduced to one of the colours. Similarly, the One cannot be reduced to the distinctions of logic. Logic is a part of empirical reality and can never explain the nature of undivided reality.¹⁰⁴

This analogy of the prism is very old. Rudolf Otto cites Eckhart's use of this analogy, where space and time are the prism that break the One into the manifold nature of the world:

In space and time the One cannot also be the other; objects fall into distinction. Let me however conceive them without this dispersing prism, then should I see them in their identity.¹⁰⁵

Otto applies this analogy of the prism to *advaita Vedānta*, where *avidyā* is the prism:

As the one homogeneous, white light, seen through a prism, breaks up into seven colors, and as the basis of the existence of the seven colors is not the prism alone, but is chiefly the white light and its own nature, so, in the prism of the *Avidyā* the one "only Being" breaks itself up into *Īśvara* with soul and world. But the reason that it breaks, and must so break, lies unquestionably in "Being" itself." Brahman is the great *Māyīn*, the Magician who "deludes" the man without knowledge; the magician is the reason for the world's appearance in its present form to the person without insight.¹⁰⁶

Otto also refers to Fichte's use of this analogy. He cites Fichte's view that it is our concepts that break up reality:

Just as your physical eye is a *prism*, in which the ether, which is homogeneous, pure and colorless, breaks on the surfaces of things into manifold colors, so it is in the things of the spiritual world. [...] We see Him (through the eye of conception) as stone, plant, animal; we see Him when we pass beyond these, as the law of nature, as the moral law. Yet all this is still not He. Always the form hides the Being from us. Always our seeing itself covers up the object of our seeing, and our own eye stands in the way of our sight.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Dooyeweerd has extended this analogy of the prism one step further. The one white light cannot be reduced to an individual colour. But neither can any individual colour be reduced to another colour. Logic cannot be reduced to mathematics. There are analogies between various aspects of our life, but each aspect cannot be reduced to the other. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Critical Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969). Dooyeweerd cautions that the analogy of the prism ought not to be taken in a literal sense, since that would imply the notion of substance, which he rejects.

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970 first published 1932), p. 83.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Otto compares this eye of conception with the doctrine of superimposition in Shankara. We only see God through the prism of concepts.

Monchanin was aware of the analogy of the prism. He refers to “le prisme de non-être” in relation to Shankara’s ideas. He interprets Shankara’s ideas as the manifestation of substance in its accidents.¹⁰⁸ He does not say so, but the implication is that substance is Being, which manifests in its accidents through the process of becoming, which he understands as non-Being.

The analogy of the prism is not specifically used by Abhishiktānanda, but it does help to explain what he means by the improper use of dialectic. The true nature of reality is of a different order than that of our conceptions. In my opinion, that there are two orders of levels does not mean that there is a dualism. The white light and the spectrum of colours are nondual to each other, but exist on different levels. Abhishiktānanda says that we must become an awakened one, a Buddha, and in this awakening itself discover that it is an order of reality just as irreducible to our conceptions as the state of waking is to the state of dream.¹⁰⁹

In this discussion of apophaticism (especially as interpreted by Panikkar), the analogy of the prism, and the misuse of logic, I believe that a basis has been established to understand what Abhishiktānanda may mean when he speaks of the necessity of Transcendence while at the same time rejecting a dualism. All of these ideas rely on the idea of cosmic diversity being manifested from the “One” [or *Brahman*, or the Tao, or *Śūnyatā*]. This is Abhishiktānanda’s trinitarianism, which as he has argued, is not unique to Christianity.

G. Acosmism and ethics

Abhishiktānanda has two conflicting principles relating to nondual action. The first principle is that it is unnecessary to do anything. This is related to the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* or Pure Consciousness. Abhishiktānanda emphasizes the importance of just being in this state. Attaining this nondual state is the highest achievement. The monk or nun in his or her solitude contributes more to the world than all the activism of those who wish to improve the

¹⁰⁸ “Note D: *Māyā*”, Ermites.

¹⁰⁹ *Guhāntara*, p. 44 (unpublished excerpt).

world. The only justification given by Abhishiktānanda for this view is the idea that we are a microcosm, and that in finding the Self we also help the world as macrocosm.

The other principle for Abhishiktānanda's ethics is that of seeing the Self in the world—in others and in nature. This is something that occurs in the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*. The basis for all of our ethics towards others is this realization that these 'others' share the same Self. For Abhishiktānanda, ethics continue to be important even in the state of liberation. Nondual actions will be spontaneous, without ego and without attachment.¹¹⁰ Abhishiktānanda says of this view that only the *advaitin* totally enjoys these words of Genesis: and all things were perfectly good.¹¹¹ Abhishiktānanda is not aware that this *tat tvam asi* basis for ethics is only a recent development in Hinduism, and that it largely derives from Western ideas, and Schopenhauer in particular.¹¹² It is true that some yoga texts like the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* express ideas of compassion, but these can probably be traced to Buddhist influences. Other ideas of the *jīvanmukti* “doing good” in the world derive from Western influences that have since been adopted by neo-Hinduism.¹¹³

I have discussed the problem as to whether or not a *jīvanmukti* will always act without ego. In *Guru*, Abhishiktānanda says that the *jñāni* “always acts well” because all egoism, which is the source of sin, has disappeared. It is true that Christians have spoken of Christ as one without sin, but the Church has long struggled with the problem of whether or not Christians are to attain the standard of perfectionism. Yet that is exactly what these writings of Abhishiktānanda would seem to say. Abhishiktānanda says,

The *jñāni* will do whatever his companions and colleagues do—only he will do it perfectly. Freed from then limitations of human selfishness and anxiety, in all that he does he will be in a pre-eminent way the instrument of the spirit. He will have a marvellous detachment from everything, because, if the Absolute is

¹¹⁰ I have referred to Bruteau's Taoist interpretation of these ethics. However, as also mentioned, Abhishiktānanda continued to believe that Christian ethics would apply.

¹¹¹ *Guhāja*, p. 61

¹¹² As discussed, Vivekānanda relied on Deussen who got the idea from Schopenhauer. But even Schopenhauer was inspired by the Upanishads. He may have reinterpreted the Upanishads to give them this ethical twist. But this is a good example of change within religions—a change occurred in both Western ideas and in Eastern ways of viewing ethics.

¹¹³ See Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (State University of New York, 1998), p. 13.

present in everything that happens, equally it is not limited to any one thing. If his vocation leads him to the service of his brothers, for example, the poor, the lepers, or the underprivileged, he will give himself completely to each one of them, totally forgetful of himself; for in each of these needy and unfortunate people he discerns the whole mystery of the Presence.¹¹⁴

This is what Abhishiktānanda calls “true acosmism”, or “the acosmism of the Gospel.” I believe that Abhishiktānanda is reinterpreting acosmism and the *sahaja* state awareness in terms of the *tat tvam asi* principle of ethics.

But will the enlightened person always act in a good way? I have discussed Barnard’s solution of a spectrum of ethics. Wilber has suggested that even an enlightened person like Ramaṇa might be deficient in his ethics, requiring further integration. But how do we determine the adequacy of someone’s integration? In Abhishiktānanda’s view, we cannot appeal to an authority such as Scripture, since Scriptures are also based on experience. At this stage, my answer would be the pragmatic one of James: we look at the moral effects of the action over the long term. And the criterion to judge the effects is that of love, as Zaehner has emphasized.¹¹⁵ Whether or not this is itself a Western standard is an issue beyond the scope of this thesis. The fact that neo-Hinduism has adopted the *tat tvam asi* principle of ethics as enunciated by Schopenhauer and Deussen is a sign of convergence of thinking in terms of ethics.

Most of Abhishiktānanda’s writings concern the principle of acosmism. In my view, he overemphasizes the importance of monasticism and acosmism. In monasticism, one flees the diversity of the world in order to seek the unity of the One. This was Abhishiktānanda’s motivation in coming to India. In his letter to Bishop of Trichy, Abhishiktānanda speaks of wanting to live in some hermitage, to lead the contemplative life, in the absolute simplicity of early Christian monasticism and at the same time in the closest possible conformity with the traditions of Indian *sannyāsa*. He writes to a fellow monk, Lemarié:

...all that matters in monastic life is the help it affords for entering within. All the rest (...) is simply *māyā*! And yet, so long as we are in this world and in this *māyā* -body, we have to play the game, I to plant banana trees, translate my

¹¹⁴ *Meeting Point*, p. 64.

¹¹⁵ R.C. Zaehner: *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957, reprinted 1973).

booklet, prepare accommodation for those who will join us, you to make polish here, liturgies there...¹¹⁶

The asceticism of the monk is an attempt at de-creation of the diversity of creation. It is an attempt to step back to the essential aloneness by stripping oneself of everything but one's true self. As Abhishiktānanda says in *Guhāja*, the solitude of the monk takes him away from the things of the world, and even from the things of nature. . It takes the monk away from the senses, the imagination, and thoughts.¹¹⁷ Monasticism may assist in breaking the hold that our ego has on us. But not even Abhishiktānanda believed that acosmism should be a permanent condition. There is a return. And in the return ethics continue to play a role. But Abhishiktānanda does not outline what a trans-*advaitic* ethics would look like, except in very general terms, such as the importance of community and the lack of personal ego. His ideas of love and communion (*koinonia*) have their roots in his Christian trinitarian framework. This allows him to see both a commonality with others and a difference from them; this difference allows the *relationship* of love.

In *Further Shore*, based on the last articles he wrote, Abhishiktānanda says “The *sannyāsi* is essentially acosmic, just as were the original Christian monks.”¹¹⁸ Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on acosmism continued even after his heart attack. He says that Chaduc (who took a very acosmic view¹¹⁹) was the only one who had really understood him. This emphasis on acosmism is in contrast to the dreams he had just after his heart attack, which he interpreted as saying he need not continually test himself by asceticism. Even after his heart attack, Abhishiktānanda writes,

I am so much fed up with all those swamis who are convinced that they have a ‘chosen’ mission, whereas the true mission of a swami is to sit in his cave till the angel takes him by the hair of his head like Habakkuk.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *Letters*, p. 64 (L. 29.4.53).

¹¹⁷ “Prière et Silence”, *Guhāja*, pp. 2, 9.

¹¹⁸ *Further Shore*, p. 13.

¹¹⁹ I believe that Panikkar is correct here. Panikkar: “A Letter to Abhishiktānanda”, p. 448: Chaduc caused Abhishiktānanda to revert to the “fervour” of the acosmic monk; he reawakened in him his almost vanished dream of pure *sannyāsin* according to the strictest standards.

¹²⁰ *Letters*, p. 310 (MR, 2.9.73).

Habakkuk was a Biblical prophet, who received a vision to speak to the people that they should be loyal to God. In the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon, mention is made of Habakkuk the prophet in the land of Judah, who was carried from there by an angel to Babylon, to feed Daniel in the den. Abhishiktānanda's reference to Habakkuk's action is therefore a hint that Abhishiktānanda's emphasis on acosmism is not absolute, and that the swami can be asked to be a prophet, or to perform some action. Despite this hint of ethical action, I conclude that even after his *advaitic* experience, Abhishiktānanda continued to experience the conflict between an acosmic view of ethics and the view of a communitarian ethic of love in the *sahaja* state.

H. The relativizing of Religion

1. Religions are different views

As we have seen in Chapter IX, Abhishiktānanda relativizes all religious doctrines. Abhishiktānanda uses the terminology of Vedanta, *nāmarūpa* to describe the limitations that all religions impose on the Absolute.¹²¹ The different religions are all only views of reality. . . “The awakened are only different from one another in relation to the dream from which they awake.”¹²² It was Abhishiktānanda's view that religions change over time, even if the basic experience that is expressed in these religions does not change.

The Upanishadic experience is neither exotic nor esoteric. It is not exotic, because it is absolutely universal. The forms in which it is interpreted, the mental, linguistic, cultural, and even the religious, context in which it occurs, may vary to an infinite extent.¹²³

Abhishiktānanda says that those who are so entirely certain of their beliefs—the speculative *advaitins* and the people of faith (Christians and others) “seem to be deluding themselves terribly.” They do not regard their opinions as opinions (*doxa*), but hold on to them in an *a priori* fashion out of insecurity.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Bettina Bäumer, Occasional Bulletin of the Abhishiktānanda Society, p. 19.

¹²² *Diary*, p. 326 (1.4.71).

¹²³ “The Upanishads: An Introduction”, *Further Shore*, p. 108.

¹²⁴ *Diary*, p. 294 (5.3.67).

Abhishiktānanda says that he learned the relative character of the Scriptures and Christian dogma from Monchanin.¹²⁵ But the process of relativization was actually much earlier for Abhishiktānanda. He says that ever since his youth he was envious of those who did not believe or who had been educated beyond belief. This envy was transferred to saints of Vedānta and to Ramana.

I envied their *autonomy*, in the noblest sense of the word. It seemed to me that they possessed something of which I was ignorant and which I did not have.¹²⁶

But the main influence for Abhishiktānanda's extreme apophaticism is Harilal. Harilal urged him to go beyond his Christianity, and to leave behind all rites and beliefs. At the time, Abhishiktānanda thought that this was the most radical *advaita* he had heard. But it continued to influence him. When Robert Vachon met Abhishiktānanda in 1970, Abhishiktānanda told him how important Harilal had been for him.¹²⁷

Chaduc also influenced Abhishiktānanda to relativize his ideas. When Abhishiktānanda made the comment that there was no abyss between *Brahman* and himself, Chaduc said that it is even an illusion to say that there is no abyss. This caused Abhishiktānanda to be "panic-stricken".¹²⁸ It would seem from this brief remark that Chaduc's relativizing of doctrines was to relegate them to the realm of illusion. This would correspond with Chaduc's strong acosmism.

In some ways, Abhishiktānanda's radical apophaticism is similar to Nāgārjuna's relativizing of all views.¹²⁹ I believe however that there is a difference and that Abhishiktānanda would regard Nāgārjuna's use of logic as going too far in not only denying all dualisms but all cosmic distinctions.

Another parallel with Abhishiktānanda's thought may be found in Jainism. We have seen how Abhishiktānanda believes that Reality is both *advaita* (non-dual) and *aneka* (not-one). Jainism emphasizes both the unitary and the *aneka* character of reality. Because of this, reality is many-sided, and none of our statements can be regarded as absolute.

¹²⁵ *Diary p. 138* (12.1.56).

¹²⁶ *Diary*, pp. 327, 328 (2.7.71).

¹²⁷ Monchanin-Information Mars-Avril 71, Vol. IV, Cahier No. 29, No. 2.

¹²⁸ *Diary p. 350* (11.5.72).

Trapnell (who has also written about Abhishiktānanda) has written about this doctrine of *anekantavada* in Jainism. He suggests that this doctrine is a ground for religious pluralism:

The metaphysical claim within the doctrine of many-sidedness is that any reality itself has many (an-eka, "not one") aspects or expresses itself in manifold forms. In its wholeness, any reality is the coexistence of contradictory elements, such as eternity and transience, or unity and multiplicity. Thus, reality itself, not just truth, is many-sided, preventing any absolute predication. The most that our perception and language can convey is a partial reality; to assume that one particular point of view, including a religious one, is final is indeed to hold as absolute a limited picture of the real.¹³⁰

This same argument can help to explain Abhishiktānanda's relativizing of all religious statements. In the realm of the many, or of *nāmarūpa*, there are ideas that are mutually contradictory and that cannot be resolved, although these ideas may each be partially true in themselves. This is why Abhishiktānanda says that all we can do is to hold differing viewpoints in tension with each other:

The tension between Vedanta and Christianity is insoluble...Above all because we try to judge experiences conceptually, from outside. 'Who is asking the question?' Ramana would say. The danger of everything 'mystical; is that we enjoy it, delight in it, however little our spirit is attuned to this 'beyond mind'¹³¹

In *Sagesse* I attempted a meditative approach within the framework of classical theology. The last chapter shows that the problem is unresolved. The best course is still, I think, to hold on under extreme tension to these two forms of a unique 'faith' until the dawn appears. For *advaita* and theology are on two levels.¹³²

For Abhishiktānanda, this tension was only resolved experientially, when he saw Chaduc have his experience in 1972, and when Abhishiktānanda had his own *advaitic* experience at the time of his heart attack.

¹²⁹ See *Nonduality*, p. 251: Nāgārjuna took all proposed candidates for Reality and demonstrated their relativity.

¹³⁰ Judson Trapnell: "Anekantavada or the Doctrine of Many-Sidedness", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 35 No. 2 Spring.1998, online at <http://pears2.lib.ohio-state.edu/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/judson.htm>.

¹³¹ *Letters*, 209 (OB, 23.1.69).

¹³² *Letters*, p. 239 (OB, 5.12.70).

2. The Challenge for Christianity

Abhishiktānanda's intended audience for his books was other Christians.¹³³ His ideas represent a tremendous challenge for traditional Christianity. Abhishiktānanda reinterprets almost every doctrine: the nature of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, sin, salvation, divinity, resurrection, and even whether we can justify a belief in theism. All doctrines are relativized in favour of immediate experience. Even the names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Spirit' are only images to aid us to reach the real. Abhishiktānanda also views the Scriptures as a record of experience. Abhishiktānanda says that the problem with the Christian Church is that it tries to objectify and to essentialize salvation whereas salvation is in fact an existential decision.¹³⁴ But if salvation is purely an existential decision, then what is there left for the Church to do? As an institution, there is nothing it can do which is not at the level of myths. Abhishiktānanda says that the revolution brought by Jesus was immediately defused from the very first Christian generation.¹³⁵ He says that Christianity lost its mystery and its power when it became a religion.¹³⁶ Doctrines were developed in order to shield people from the force of the immediate experience.¹³⁷ The formulas of the Church councils are an attempt to absolutize.¹³⁸

Abhishiktānanda remained a Benedictine all his life, and continued to say Mass almost every day. But he also says that his attachment was to a monastic ideal "which is scarcely Benedictine and even goes beyond what could be realized within Christianity. An acosmic ideal." He says in the same letter that remaining a Benedictine was convenient. It gave him a foothold, a label, and the possibility of shelter in case of disability.¹³⁹ Abhishiktānanda wondered whether this desire for security was standing in the way of his life as a *sannyāsī*.

¹³³ *Letters*, p. 180 (RP 18.5.66).

¹³⁴ *Diary*, p. 273 (12.5.64).

¹³⁵ *Diary*, p. 307 (2.11.69).

¹³⁶ *Diary*, p. 367 (2.1.73).

¹³⁷ In "Dans Le Centre Le Plus Profond", *Guhāntara* (unpublished).

¹³⁸ "Théologoumenon Upasana (méditation) sur la Trinité", *Intériorité*, p. 221.

¹³⁹ *Letters*, p. 234 (TL, 26.7.70).

Some Christians will reject Abhishiktānanda's ideas as just too radical. Others have already begun to use these ideas in order to develop a deeper spirituality.¹⁴⁰

In India Abhishiktānanda's ideas represent a special challenge. Many Christian converts in India come from low caste (*Dalit*) groups. Some *Dalit* theology has objected to the use of Vedāntic ideas in Christian theology. They see this as elitist, and as a "Brahminization" of Christianity.¹⁴¹ *Dalit* theology tends towards the theology of liberation. Michael Amaladoss writes that *Dalit* theology moves away from the privileging of contemplation over action, and of reason over emotion.¹⁴²

This criticism by *Dalit* theology is certainly valid insofar as the *kevala* experience is emphasized in preference to the *sahaja* experience. Abhishiktānanda believed that what was missing in the society of his day was the Christian *sannyāsī*, and that is where he put his emphasis. But an acosmic experience does not really have anything to say to the dispossessed except that they are somehow included in the *sannyāsī's* own liberation. Abhishiktānanda was inconsistent as to where he thought the emphasis should lie. He did not always emphasize a strict acosmism, but he also refers to the *koinonia* at the very heart of Being. He says that the Church ought to be characterized by the same love. Unfortunately, he did not work out the practical implications of this in reference to India's caste system or to the poor. On the other hand, I believe that it would be a mistake for *Dalit* theology to completely disregard Abhishiktānanda's call for the experience of unity.

¹⁴⁰ See for example Raimon Panikkar: "Mysticism of Jesus the Christ" *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer *Christianity* (Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997).; M. Thomas Thankgaraj: *The Crucified Guru* (Abingdon, 1984); Sara Grant: *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a non-dualist Christian* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991); Wayne Teasdale: *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (New World Library, 1999); K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1996). Two books that does not mention Abhishiktānanda but contains some similar ideas is Andrew Harvey: *Son of Man: The Mystical Path to Christ* (Tarcher, 1999) and Jim Marion: *Putting on the Mind of Christ* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads, 2000).

¹⁴¹ See the references to *Dalit* theology in K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1996), p. 6, ft. 27.

¹⁴² Michael Amaladoss: "Le Projet Théologique", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), p. 294.

3. The Challenge for Hinduism

Some of Abhishiktānanda's ideas are also common to neo-Hinduism. These commonalities include the idea that Scriptures are a record of experience, the *advaitic* source of ethics in *tat tvam asi*, and the evolution of the world towards a goal. As Hacker and Halbfass have shown, many of these ideas are probably more Western than Hindu. Traditional Hinduism still has difficulty accepting them.

Both neo-Hinduism and traditional Hinduism will have difficulty accepting Abhishiktānanda's radical relativizing of all religion, including the ideas of Vedānta and of *advaita* itself:

Just as we cannot confuse the fundamental experience or *anubhava* with any psychic state whatsoever, we also cannot confuse it nor with any of its formulations, even the Vedāntic formulation “Non-duality” itself is only an expression, limited like every expression of the ineffable.¹⁴³

Hinduism today tends to regard itself as inclusive of all other religions. Abhishiktānanda questioning of and relativization of its own beliefs would cause surprise and probably dismay. Abhishiktānanda says that he prefers Hindu thought to Western thought but only because Hindu thought has a built in tendency to go beyond itself. He specifically says that the ideas of Shankara are not definitive:

The *advaita* of Gaudapada and Shankara is not the definitive solution; nevertheless, it is an absolutely unique plunge into the mystery of being which should be integrated by universal human thought and by Christians. The drastic negation of all duality in God and therefore in the world of being, of the real, cannot be opposed. It is the concept of duality itself which must be reconsidered.¹⁴⁴

Abhishiktānanda's methodology of returning to the first Upanishads and his criticism of later developments in Vedānta as an over-use of logic would likely be regarded as a Western approach to the history of religion. Even Westerners like Hacker have criticized the objective exegesis of texts by Westerners. Hacker has criticized the view that texts must always be read in and of themselves, without reference to subsequent developments. He calls this the “positivist obsession” with the original version and earlier stages; rather, legends and myths remain

¹⁴³ “Appel à l'intériorité”, *Intériorité*, pp. 163, 164 (my translation).

¹⁴⁴ *Guhāja*, p. 117 (my translation).

meaningful throughout their historical changes later versions deserve as much attention as the earlier the positivist emphasis on finding the original texts.¹⁴⁵

In contrast to Abhishiktānanda's insistence to return to the original texts, Hindu commentators are far more likely to try to see continuity within the tradition. The conclusions of this thesis are even less likely to be accepted, since they look at the development in religious thought. For example, my effort to probe behind the story of Ramaṇa's enlightenment is itself a very Western approach. So is my analysis of which of his views are found in traditional Vedānta and which derive more from *tantric* sources. Ramaṇa's own words emphasize the importance of the *sahaja* experience of the *jīvanmukti* over any trance experience, and this has not been sufficiently explored by his devotees. Another issue that needs to be addressed is whether Ramaṇa's view of the *sahaja* experience provides a sufficient base for ethical action. Should a *jīvanmukti* attempt to take any ethical action in the world, or is the *jīvanmukti* beyond all ethical rules? It is true that some modern Hindus speak of the *jīvanmukti* as doing good in the world, as opposed to the *prārabdha karma* view of the *jīvanmukti*'s continued existence. But as Fort has argued, this idea of doing good is recent and of Western origin.

In his life, Abhishiktānanda's struggled with one of the main problems discussed in Hinduism: whether the world should be considered as illusion, or whether it has some reality, as is asserted by *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism*. Abhishiktānanda's trinitarianism would favour the view of the reality of the world. His finding of a similar trinitarianism within Hinduism is certainly a challenge to the more dogmatic views of Vedānta. The likely response to this challenge will be that Hinduism has known all along of differing points of view, or *darshanas*, and that they are all paths to the Truth. Some *darshanas* have always asserted the reality of the world. Others speak of *māyā* as illusion. But this type of response—that the reality of the world is the view of some *darshanas*—though it sounds inclusive and tolerant, would miss the point of Abhishiktānanda's challenge. For Abhishiktānanda was concerned with the nondual tradition of Vedānta. How has its interpretation changed over the years, and how has it been influenced by

¹⁴⁵ Wilhelm Halbfass, Introduction to *Philology and Confrontation* (State University of New York, 1995), pp. 5, 17. J.L. Mehta also speaks of this Western objective exegesis. He says that in the West we search for what a text "really" means, without asking what is involved in this notion of "really." "The Hindu Tradition: The Vedic Root", *J.L. Mehta on Heidegger, Hermeneutics and Indian Tradition* (New York: Brill, 1992), p. 115.

outside sources? Carrying Abhishiktānanda's ideas a bit further, we can ask, was Ramaṇa really a follower of the *Advaita* Vedānta when we know he was strongly influenced by other traditions? What difference does it make for those who wish to follow his example? I believe that these questions are important in any continuing dialogue between Hinduism and the West.

4. The Challenge to Buddhism

Abhishiktānanda's ideas have many similarities to Buddhism. The most important of these is the sense of inter-relatedness that he says occurs in the *sahaja* experience. I have compared this to the Hua Yen story of Indra's Net. If everything is inter-related, then nothing has its own self-contained existence. This is how I understand Abhishiktānanda's references to going beyond egoism, since egoism is the effort to be self-contained.¹⁴⁶ The inter-relatedness of Indra's Net also ties in very nicely with Abhishiktānanda's *tat tvam asi* ethic of seeing ourselves in the other.

I have also discussed how Abhishiktānanda's view of inter-relatedness does not undermine his idea of a teleology. In some places, Loy says that the world described by Indra's Net is non-teleological.¹⁴⁷ But in other places, Loy admits that, although a linear causation may not exist, another type of causation could be consistent with Indra's Net.¹⁴⁸ Loy's reference to Jung's concept of synchronicity is one way of justifying teleology. It is related to the Taoist idea of order in chance. It is also similar in many ways to Robert Wright's plea for a revision of the idea of randomness in modern science.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, Abhishiktānanda's idea of an order within the world is not necessarily inconsistent with the radical inter-connectedness of Indra's Net. Even Buddhism has teleology in the idea of a Bodhisattva who wants all beings to be liberated.

However, the coherence of Indra's Net is a coherence among beings. Assuming that empirical reality is the same as temporal reality, we could call it an "intra-temporal

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Krüger: *Along Edges*, p. 49: The secret of human unhappiness is the persistent belief in self-contained entities.

¹⁴⁷ David Loy: "The Deconstruction of Buddhism", *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward (State University of New York, 1992), p. 237.

¹⁴⁸ David Loy: "The Difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa", *Philosophy East and West* (Oct. 1983), vol. 33 no. 4, p. 363.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, Robert: *Non-zero: The Logic of Human Destiny*, (Pantheon, 1999),

coherence.”¹⁵⁰ Is there a Transcendent unity outside of that intra-temporal coherence, or is the Transcendent nothing but that inter-relatedness?

Loy emphatically takes the position that there is no Transcendence other than this coherence of meaning. He rejects a distinction between Being/being as dualistic:

...Being/being means security to us because it means a ground for the self, whether that is understood as experiencing something Transcendent or intellectually sublimated into a metaphysical principle underlying everything. We want to meet God face-to-face, or gain enlightenment, but the fact that everything is *śūnya* means we can never attain them.¹⁵¹

From Loy’s perspective, Abhishiktānanda retains a duality of two levels of reality. In Loy’s view, there is still a dualism here between Being and beings, the Unmanifested and the Manifested. Loy says that *nirvana* should not be interpreted as transcendental. He says that *nirvana* is neither transcendental nor signified, and that it is nothing other than “the utter dissipation of ontologizing thought.”¹⁵² But in this view, Loy is making ontological assumptions of his own. His assumptions, seemingly influenced by Derrida, lead him to deny not only any distinction such as that between Being and being, but the common sense plurality of the world. I suggest that he has ignored the warning of Nāgārjuna, and made *śūnyatā* into a “view.” Instead of it merely being a reaction against conceptualizing thought, *śūnyatā* is used to deny all distinctions.

For Abhishiktānanda, *śūnyatā* is a term that he uses to show that nothing can be said conceptually about Being. Abhishiktānanda says that the mission of the Buddha expressed in “drastically negative” terms his intuition *éblouissante* of the inaccessibility of the mystery of Being.¹⁵³ This is Abhishiktānanda’s radical apophaticism. It is what Panikkar refers to as not only an epistemological apophaticism, but an ontical apophaticism.

Abhishiktānanda’s idea that *śūnyatā* relates only to excessive conceptualization has been echoed by some Zen Buddhists. The Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh says that the idea

¹⁵⁰ The term is Dooyeweerd’s.

¹⁵¹ David Loy: “Indra’s Postmodern Net”, *Philosophy East and West* (July. 1933), vol. 43 no. 3, p. 487

¹⁵² *Nonduality*, p. 250.

¹⁵³ *Intériorité*, p. 178.

of emptiness was only intended as a means of liberating us from the dogma and overconceptualization that had occurred in Hinduism. He says that the Buddhist notions of impermanence, not-self, interbeing (relatedness) and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than attempts to give a description of new objects of knowledge. They are methods, not information. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, all that can be said is that the ideas of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) or reality as such (*tathata*) refer to a non-conceptualized reality (not an ontological entity).¹⁵⁴

For Abhishiktānanda, this reality that cannot be conceptualized is the Transcendent. The “overconceptualization” that he wants to avoid includes any view of the Self as substantial, since that would be a dualism. Although Abhishiktānanda may have started with a static view of *Brahman* similar to the One of Parmenides, he moved to a dynamic view in accordance with his trinitarianism. Panikkar says that the notion of a Trinity could by definition not be a substance.¹⁵⁵

Could Buddhism accept a trinitarian viewpoint in the sense that Abhishiktānanda suggests? It could be argued that the Yogācāra Mind-Only doctrine is in some ways analogous. I would also point to the Zen Buddhist idea of enlightenment as seeing into the true nature of the world, as this idea has been popularized by D.T. Suzuki and others. On this view, the true nature of reality is transcendent to our conceptual reality.¹⁵⁶

5. Not a meta-religion

The relativizing of all religious views does not mean that Abhishiktānanda was interested in setting up a meta-religion. In fact, he was critical of Ramakrishna Mission for attempting to do just that. Instead of a meta-religion, Abhishiktānanda encourages a pluralism of religions. But all theologies are on the phenomenal plane, on the level of *nāmarūpa*, how can we choose

¹⁵⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh: *Zen Keys* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), pp. 110. 113.

¹⁵⁵ See Panikkar, who says that Trinity is not substance: “The very notion of the Trinity ought to suffice to banish any substantialistic interpretation of the divinity, for such an interpretation would be tantamount to tritheism.” *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 141.

¹⁵⁶ Loy now regards Suzuki as very dualistic. “The usual bifurcations are central to his [Suzuki’s] explanation: intellectual, cerebral, conceptual, conscious, deliberate is bad; existential, visceral, intuitive, unconscious, instinctive is good. Given how much Suzuki criticized dualism, it is difficult to overlook how problematic these ones are.” David Loy: “Is Zen Buddhism?” *The Eastern Buddhist* (Autumn, 1995), Vol. 28, No. 2., p. 274.

between them? Abhishiktānanda encourages each person to stay with the religious tradition in which he or she was brought up.¹⁵⁷ The awakened one can return to the rituals of the Church, or of other religions. The *advaitic* experience relativizes our tradition, and forces us to reinterpret it. After the *advaitic* experience, we return to our concepts and beliefs:

We find ourselves once more Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, for each one has his own line of development, marked out already from his mother's lap. But we also have the 'smile'. Not a smile which looks down condescendingly from above, still less a smile of mockery, but one which is simply an opening out, like the flower unfolding its petals.¹⁵⁸

Two years earlier, Abhishiktānanda had spoken of this 'smile' of knowing in relation to Fr. Oshida, the Japanese Dominican who was engaged in dialogue with Zen Buddhism. He says of Fr. Oshida,

Freed from all formulas, he is 'existentially' Christian at a depth so much greater than that which is reached by rites and symbols. . . but when it is a question of defining how and why he is Christian, it is impossible capture this reality all explanations are elusive. Only he who has reached the depth can understand one who speaks from the depth. A smile, a freedom, which those who do not know completely misunderstand.¹⁵⁹

And yet Abhishiktānanda himself did not just give this enigmatic smile. He actively sought to persuade others, especially other Christian, of the relativity of their beliefs, and of the importance of the *advaitic* experience as he understood it.

¹⁵⁷ Panikkar *Silence of God* p. 102 advisable to renew tradition, not abandon it.

¹⁵⁸ *Letters*, p. 285 (MC 26.1.73).

¹⁵⁹ *Letters* p. 243 (OB, 30.1.72).

I. Summary

1. Abhishiktānanda's idea of non-monistic *advaita* is an affirmation of the reality of both unity and diversity in the world. He is opposed to a monism that would affirm the reality of only *Brahman* and that would regard the world as illusion. That is why he speaks of *an-eka* (not-one). Abhishiktānanda is also opposed to a dualistic view of God as Wholly Other from the world. That is why he speaks of *advaita* (not-two).
2. The main reason for Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic understanding of *advaita* is his Christian trinitarianism. It influenced him to affirm a unity in diversity, or transcendence in immanence. Abhishiktānanda interprets this trinitarianism in an unorthodox way, in terms of Being. The Father, who is *ekam advitīyam*, One-without-a-Second, gives Himself in love in the process of *kenosis* in manifesting the world or Son. This process is the evolution from the One. The Spirit is the unity between Father and Son, and brings us back unity in the process of involution until God is again all in all. Abhishiktānanda calls this the *Pleroma*.
3. Abhishiktānanda initially sees the Hindu *advaitic* experience in need of completion or fulfillment by this trinitarian experience.
4. A separate and inconsistent argument for non-monistic *advaita* is Abhishiktānanda's argument that there are analogues to the trinitarian experience within Hinduism itself. This takes two forms: (a) A non-monistic interpretation of the Upanishads as referring to both a static and dynamic conception of *Brahman* (as emanating the world) and (b) the use of the idea of *śakti* to express the dynamic power of Shiva in the creation of the world.
5. Abhishiktānanda argues that the supple idea of *advaita* contained in the Upanishads was subsequently rigidified by the followers of Shankara, who improperly extended the use of logic to conclude that there is an identity between *Brahman* and the world. This idea of the over-use of logic, or "dialectics" itself assumes the affirmation of both unity and diversity.
6. Abhishiktānanda says that in the *advaitic* experience, we experience the aloneness of the unity of *Brahman*. This experience of *kevala*, or *nirvikalpa samādhi* is beyond all dualities, beyond space and time, and beyond the distinction between subject and object. This is the supreme experience. A person having this experience will no longer fear death because he or she knows the eternal nature of the true Self.
7. A person may die in the *kevala* experience. The enlightened person who survives returns to the world of diversity; this is the *sahaja* experience. A person who is enlightened while still in the body is called a *jīvanmukti*.
8. For Abhishiktānanda, the *advaitic* experience is an experience of wholeness, and not just of a part of our being.
9. Although it can be experienced, the *advaitic* experience cannot be described in conceptual terms. The best way to seek the experience is to be shown it by a *guru*, although Ramaṇa Maharshi obtained the experience without a *guru*.
10. Abhishiktānanda's use of the terms *śakti* and *jīvanmukti* come from non-standard Vedāntic sources like *tantra* and Kashmir *Śaivism*. These traditions affirm the reality of the world while affirming at the same time the unity of the world in Shiva. Ramaṇa Maharshi and

Gnānānanda had both been influenced by these sources. Abhishiktānanda is not always aware that these ideas are not universally accepted in Vedānta.

11. Abhishiktānanda believed that the *kevala* experience was a necessary stage for the *sahaja* state of the *jīvanmukti*. He understood this to be the position of Ramaṇa Maharshi. In fact, Ramaṇa position was that the *kevala* experience is not necessary.
12. Abhishiktānanda interprets the stage of *kevala* as a stage of purification comparable to the Dark Night of the Soul of the Western mystics. He interpreted the *sahaja* stage as the resurrection from this “death”. This is a distinctly Christian interpretation of *sahaja*. The predominant Hindu interpretation is that the only reason that the *jīvanmukti* is still in bodily form is due to his or her *prārabdha karma*, the inertia from past *karma* that continues despite enlightenment.
13. For Abhishiktānanda, the *advaitic* experience is an experience of Being, and he relates it to the revelation of Jahweh, “I am that I am.” He says that in our own *advaitic* experience we can have the experience of Jesus, who recognized his nondual relation with God when he knew himself to be a Son of God. It is often unclear whether Abhishiktānanda is referring here to a static conception of Being or the more dynamic one of his trinitarianism and *tantra*.
14. Based on my reading of Abhishiktānanda’s descriptions of his experience, he did not achieve the *kevala* experience in the sense that he described it. His disciple Chaduc may have experienced it, and Abhishiktānanda may have had a vicarious experience of it. His own experience was not until his near-death experience in his heart attack in 1973. That does not appear to have been an experience of *kevala* in the sense of Pure Consciousness. That does not mean that Abhishiktānanda did not achieve an *advaitic* experience in the sense of *sahaja*.
15. Abhishiktānanda believes that the *jīvanmukti* sees *Brahman* everywhere. This has ethical implications, since the one who has returned knows his or her inter-relatedness with others and the world. Abhishiktānanda adopts the *tat-tvam-asi* basis of ethics. He does not seem to know that this neo-Hindu idea is itself a Western idea. There is also a conflict in Hinduism as to whether the *Jīvanmukti* is beyond ethics. Neo-Hindu views that the *jīvanmukti* is involved in doing good are probably more influenced by Western traditions, or by Buddhist traditions of the *bodhisattva*.
16. There is in any event a conflict in Abhishiktānanda’s ethics between the acosmism associated with seeking the *kevala* experience and the relation to the world and others in the *sahaja* experience. In my opinion, Abhishiktānanda emphasized monasticism too much, and did not develop an ethic for the *jīvanmukti* except in very general terms. I believe that Panikkar is correct in his opinion that Chaduc was responsible for Abhishiktānanda’s reversion to a more monistic view.
17. If Abhishiktānanda did not achieve the *kevala* state, but nevertheless had an *advaitic* experience, this raises questions regarding the purpose of meditation. If an experience of Pure Consciousness is not necessary, how is meditation still useful? My preliminary answer is that it is still useful in achieving an experience beyond our concepts, in the sense of the Yogic Model. This is a state where the ego is transcended, and there is a sense of inter-relatedness with others and the world, and of seeing *Brahman* everywhere. It is a state where distinctions are still seen in this inter-relatedness. It is not a loss of distinction between subject and object, as in Pure Consciousness. If one does go to the level of Pure

Consciousness in meditation, then a return to the world of diversity is required. It is this *sahaja* state that is important, as Ramaṇa has emphasized.

18. Abhishiktānanda's ideas do not fit neatly into any one religion. He relativizes all religions, just as he relativizes all our concepts. And yet he acknowledges the necessity of myth and religion, as well as concepts. Like neo-Hinduism, Abhishiktānanda regards Scripture as the record of the *advaitic* experience. He also relativizes all doctrines as being the result of conceptualization in the real of *nāmarūpa* (names and forms).
19. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* challenges Christianity in that he reinterprets almost every doctrine, including creation, sin, salvation and the uniqueness of Christ.
20. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* challenges Hinduism to interpret *māyā* not as the illusory nature of the world but as the *śakti* of *Brahman*.
21. Abhishiktānanda's non-monistic *advaita* has some similarities with some forms of Buddhism. His view of the inter-relatedness of all things is similar to the analogy of Indra's Net. His view of the nature of reality as nonconceptual is similar to some interpretations of Zen Buddhism that emphasize the 'Suchness' of Reality (*tathata*) as nonconceptual. It is also similar to Thich Nhat Hanh's view that the Buddhist notions of impermanence, not-self, interbeing (relatedness) and emptiness are means aimed at revealing the errors of knowledge rather than attempts to give a description of new objects of knowledge
22. Abhishiktānanda believes in a Transcendent, although not one that can be conceptualized. This does not mean that we are back in a dualistic view of form over matter, or of substance over accidents. Reality [God, *Brahman*, the Tao, Suchness, *Śūnyatā*] is transcendent in the sense that it is beyond the empirical aspects of being. Reality is on a different level from these empirical aspects of being. It is not transcendent in the sense of being a separate reality. It is transcendent as the true nature of the reality that we experience. The Transcendent is not a Wholly Other; it is related to the world as the Unmanifested is related to the Manifested. The true nature of Reality is therefore nondual with the empirical reality that we experience. There are similarities here to Heidegger in Abhishiktānanda's view of conceptualization, and in the view of a distinction between Being and beings.

In Abhishiktānanda's idea of non-monistic *advaita*, unity does not swallow up diversity. Abhishiktānanda says in *Guhāja*: "Never have things been as real and their distinction as real and their harmony as real as in the Emptiness which is the Real itself."¹⁶⁰ This applies to Abhishiktānanda himself. In attempting to live out this kind of non-monistic *advaita*, his own individuality was revealed. Alan Watts says "one of the most interesting traits of mysticism is that those who have experienced most keenly their union with God are intensely real and unique

¹⁶⁰ *Guhāja*, p. 21 (unpublished).

personalities.”¹⁶¹ Abhishiktānanda was certainly someone with a real and unique personality. What is so fascinating about Abhishiktānanda is that he lived out many of the issues and contradictions that he wrote about. His honesty and integrity in the search for the *advaitic* experience are evident, and he expressed his doubts and anguish along the way. It is this integrity that makes his story so compelling. It was a heroic quest for enlightenment, which he himself compares to the quest for the Grail. He questioned his most fundamental beliefs, both about his own religion, Christianity, and about the Hinduism that he was investigating. The record that Abhishiktānanda has left is a record of this search, and a pointer to the experience that he says is both non-monistic (*aneka*) and nondual (*advaita*).

¹⁶¹ Alan Watts: *Behold the Spirit* (New York: Random House, 1971, originally published 1947), p. 144.