

Spirituality of Service and Silence: Towards a Dialogical Enrichment between Indian and Western Approaches to Authenticity

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Abstract

What are some of the elements of a spirituality relevant for today? How can we formulate a spirituality relevant to the contemporary times? What are some of the orientations of contemporary spiritualities that can make human life more authentic? These are some of the questions we attempt to answer in this article.¹

In this quest we are basing ourselves on two broad categories of general spirituality – the Eastern and the Western, though we limit the Eastern understanding primarily to the Hindu and Western primarily to the Christian spiritualities. The aim of this article is to draw some orientations from both these spiritualities which can inspire contemporary search for authenticity.

Going beyond the popular stereotypes of the spirituality (and therefore, mysticism) of Indian and Western traditions, this article wants to broadly reflect on the spirituality of the Western tradition as that of service. Then it intends to reflect on the spirituality of the Indian tradition as that of silence. This is followed by giving two illustrations of two great spiritual personalities which may be complemented by “Spirituality of Silence,” of the Eastern tradition. Examples are given of two cotemporary seers to illustrate these tendencies. Finally, we advocate a spirituality that is open to the world and that enters into creative dialogue with other traditions.

Keywords: *Eastern and Western traditions, Indian Christianity, spirituality, mysticism.*

Beyond the Stereotypes of East and West

Stereotypes abound between the Eastern and the Western mentalities or ways of life. In general three keywords may sum up the mentality of the East, as

¹ This article is a revised and enlarged version of an earlier presentation and article on mysticism, which was published as “Science and the Sacred, Silence and Service: Towards a Dialogical Enrichment between Eastern and Western Mysticism,” in *Lifting Up the Spirit, Uplifting the Body*, ed. K. Pandikattu and S. Pathare (Samajdarshan Prakashan, Pune, 2013).

opposed to the West: intuitive, receptive and feminine. The East is considered to be intuitive and experiential, where the reason is relegated to a secondary level. At the intuitive level, they experience reality and encounter life at a deeper level beyond words. They are also receptive, not merely to new ideas and visions, but to new experiences and realities. They can be open to nuances and vagaries of life and can live with surprises and sudden breakthroughs in their daily existence. At the experiential level, they are flexible, open and fascinated at the experiential level by the newness of life and so there is a profound depth in them. Not only are these two qualities more feminine, the East embodies the feminine features of charm (including modesty and shyness), perseverance and even submission or surrender. So in short we may say that the East is both feminine and spiritual.

This makes the East vibrantly religious, deeply spiritual and profoundly philosophical (or intellectual). If we walk across the streets of India, it is obvious that religion is a living business. The normal life of people, including their professional life, is intimately linked with gods, temples, priests and religious festivities. The people are born into religion, breathe the air of religiosity throughout their life and die with religion. Religion in India is a living phenomenon. No wonder, India has given birth to four living world religions, besides the thousands of living religions we find today.²

Closely connected to the religious life is the interiority and spirituality of the people. Moving away from the structures of religious life, there is an inbuilt spirituality that permeates every fiber of an average Indian, even though he may be a non-believer in any particular religious tradition. Spirituality and the corresponding attitudes of peace, tranquility and acceptance of life are part of the Indian ethos as it is lived today.

The world-view that has given birth to the deep religiosity interiority is a profoundly philosophical one. The rich and diverse mythology that is part of the Indian culture coupled with the nuanced philosophical articulations of the various positions with regards to the meaning and destiny of life make India deeply intellectual and philosophical. An average student of philosophy cannot fathom the depth of Indian philosophy, simply because it is too vast and too subtle. Because it is so subtle, it is elitist and is only available to a few experts who have spent years specializing in it. What is interesting is that even today there are people who devote

² Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism are the four mainstream religions having their origin in India.

their whole lives only to study one sub-branch of one of the many philosophical systems.³

Corresponding to the stereotypes of the East, the West may be described as rational, assertive and masculine. Giving emphasis to rational thinking and critical analysis, the West is perceived as calculative, progressive and empirical. So we can understand the growth of science and technology as a necessary consequence of the rational world-view, which has taken the civilization beyond the mythological to the scientific world view.⁴

Unlike the receptive mentality of the Orient, the Western culture prides itself in being an assertive culture that wants to control and enhance nature and themselves. As an assertive culture, they tend to take things in their own hands and be responsible for what is happening around them. Here the emphasis is on, planning, activity and change. The people here feel their uniqueness in being able to change the situation around them and thus being in control.

³ Two good examples are Amarty Sen and John Vattanky. Professor Vattanky is an expert on Gangesa and has spent more than forty years of his life immersing himself into the unfathomable and sophisticated depth of Indian logic, commonly called *navya-nyaya* logic and Gangesa, only a couple of scholars will really understand.

⁴ These stages could be derived from Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a French philosopher and founder of both sociology and positivism. His “positive philosophy” is essentially an anti-metaphysical philosophy of “popular good sense” (common sense). Central to this is the claim that human history progresses through three stages of development [a] (which he compares fancifully to the three stages of an individual’s life — infancy, youth, and maturity). These are, however, general tendencies; he recognises the need for some flexibility in his classification, in the light of actual facts. (1) The theological stage. This is the period when early man, after an animist or ‘fetish’ stage, sought to find ultimate causes of phenomena in the decisions or wills of superhuman beings (later of only one such being). (2) The metaphysical stage. In this stage man no longer thinks in terms of a supernatural personal God but of an ‘abstraction’, such as all-embracing Nature, and looks to such notions as ether, vital principles, forces to explain phenomena. (3) The positive stage. Explanation in the final stage is supposed to be found by bringing facts of experience under general descriptive laws. These are arrived through a process of testing by direct observation — verification shows the hypotheses to be genuine. Such laws will then enable man to predict and control nature. At a higher level philosophy seeks to achieve a synthesis of all the sciences [b]. Positive knowledge, though certain, is only relative in that it is of the world as appearance. It is also confined to the phenomena; we can know nothing of any ultimate causes or metaphysical principles [c]. Comte’s three stages are thus represented as a sequence of progressively more mature or sophisticated kinds of explanation of phenomena.

Corresponding to each of the three periods are also, Comte says, three kinds of social organizations (though again he allows for a degree of flexibility in the application of his classification). (1) In the Ancient world and the Middle Ages we find an acceptance of an absolute authority, divine right of kings, or militarism. The ethos of such societies might be said to be conquest. (2) The Enlightenment era is characterized by belief in abstract rights, popular sovereignty, the rule of law. The emphasis is on defence. (3) The modern period is that of the industrial society, in which the emphasis is on a centralized economy organized by a “scientific” elite. The key word is now labour.

These two qualities are typically masculine and so it is no wonder that the Western society is considered as masculine, where the hero is praised. As an assertive and conquering culture, the West focuses on control, domination and progress of the world and of themselves. So in this world-view humans are responsible for their own actions and pride themselves in their scientific achievements and technological innovations. To sum up we can hold that the Western culture is essentially materialistic and this worldly.

These features of the West make it pragmatic, progressive and anthropocentric. As a practical and pragmatic culture, the emphasis of the culture is on using things and even persons. So the “use and throw” culture that has developed in the West, without any recourse to the collective harm done to the environment is understandable from this perspective. Such a pragmatic attitude is applied to religious groups as well. It is easy for one to give up one’s commitment to a religious organization if one does not “feel at home” there.

Further such a world-view has led to incredible progress, especially in the last two hundred years after the industrial revolution.⁵ Though such progress has brought about overwhelming changes into the life of the people, the perception remains that such material and technological innovations do not necessarily lead to spiritual profundity and philosophical depth.

The main focus of technology, religion and culture is the progress of humanity. So the West is primarily focused on the human person – which has both positive and negative consequences. Because of that the West takes human rights seriously and fosters the individual rights of persons as practiced in political system of democracy. Negatively, it ignores the deep-seated connection between the humans and the rest of the universe and gives too much of importance to the human history in the whole cosmic story of the universe.

Some of the contemporary authors who dwell on these traits of the East and West and attempt creative marriages are Fritjof Capra, Deepak Chopra and Ken Wilber. The New Age Movement, which gains many followers today also subscribe to these stereotypes and try to critique and enrich both the East and the West.⁶

⁵ The Industrial Revolution is roughly the period from 1750 to 1850 where changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transportation, and technology had a profound effect on the social, economic and cultural conditions of the times. It began in Great Britain, then subsequently spread throughout Western Europe, Northern America, Japan, and eventually the rest of the world.

⁶ In a slightly different vein Ken Wilber writes: “In fact, at this point in history, the most radical, pervasive, and earth-shaking transformation would occur simply if everybody truly evolved to a mature, rational, and responsible ego, capable of freely participating in the open exchange of mutual self-esteem. There is the «edge of history». There would be a *real* New Age.” K. Wilber,

Spirituality of Service and Silence

These stereotypes of East and West may contain some traces of truth, but not the (whole) truth. They may be regarded as “points of departure,” for our reflection but not the final dwelling place. We need to admit that these stereotypes are in fact lame imageries needing refinement and nuances.

Spirituality of Service

Before dwelling on the Mysticism service, it may be good to define or at least describe the term “mysticism.” But since it is a deeply profound term with diverse meanings, we want to leave the term purposely ambiguous, so that we may be able to gain better (or deeper) clarity towards the end of our discussion.

Briefly we can hold that Western Approach to Mysticism is based on service or finding God in fellow humans. So God is experienced in these traditions predominantly through love, care, concern for the others. Here helping others – particularly the poor and the needy – is paramount to finding and experiencing God.

The best example for such mysticism in the contemporary world is Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata, who has dedicated her life fully for the service of the least of the poor.⁷ That she has been so much admired, appreciated and idealized reflects our own hidden desire to reach out to the poor as a spiritual practice.

The Western tradition in general and Christianity in particular try earnestly to experience the “trace of Infinity in the face of the Other.”⁸ So the other – especially the marginalized and the vulnerable – are privileged subjects of devotion and of service. The other is seen as another subject, inviting an I-Thou relationship, since he or she is created in the “image and likeness of God.”⁹ From this perspective every human being is essentially created by God in His own image and likeness, implying that each individual shares in the same dignity and equality of God.

Up from Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution (1st Shambhala ed.) (New York: Shambhala, 1983), 238.

⁷ An Indian appraisal of the saint is given by.

⁸ This profound notion is inspired by the Jewish philosophers Emmanule Levinas and Jacques Derrida.

⁹ *Imago Dei* (“image of God”) is a theological term, applied uniquely to humans, which denotes the symbolical relation between God and humanity. It is based on the Biblical verse: And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen 1: 26-27)

Philosophically this implies that the *Other* is constitutive of me.¹⁰ She is not my rival or competitor but my friend, colleague, companion. She gives me my identity and enables me to become what I am called to be. In such a situation human relationship and inter-personal communion count most. From this perspective we can say that our human reality is essentially relationship among human beings. The best way of reaching out to my brother or sister is through service and love.

From such a view, it follows matter is created by God and so is sacred. Together with material reality, our human body is noble and is not to be despised. The material world is significant and the affairs of the world (political, cultural and social) are to be respected.¹¹ From the mysticism of Service we can understand the Biblical challenge: “If I do not love my brother whom I can see, how do I love God whom I do not see?” (1 John 4).¹²

Spirituality of Silence

Contrary to the Western tradition the spirituality of the Eastern tradition may be regarded as predominantly based on silence.

Silence is not merely the absence of words. Positively, it is a pregnant, fertile silence, which enables us to be deeply in touch with oneself and the true reality. It leads to focusing, concentration and self-discipline.

Maunavrtta or the vow of silence is something which many of the sages of India practised on a regular basis. Even Gandhi, one of the most active politician or statesman of India had regular days of complete silence. The meaning behind the vow of silence is not really abstaining from words, activities or distractions. Going deeper silence reflects the absence of ego (*ahambhava*) or the lack of self. It is in fact the absence of being.

Once we affirm the absence of distractions and even ego, once we are in touch without deepest self (or non-self), then we abandon ourselves to the power

¹⁰ “The otherness of the other must be each time particular. Since responsiveness is constitutive of me as a subjectivity, Levinas depicts ethical acts, responsive initiatives, done by me as the acts that are genuinely my acts.” Alphonso Lingis, “The Malice in God Deeds,” in *Nietzsche and Lévinas: “after the Death of a Certain God” Insurrections: critical studies in religion, politics, and culture*, ed. Jill Stauffer and Bettina Bergo (Columbia University Press, 2009), 26.

¹¹ Theology of the body addresses these concerns. See especially . Further, theologians have been perceiving the tension between the Kingdom of God and material prosperity. They are neither identical nor distinct!

¹² There are some prominent exceptions to this general classifications. Mystics like John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila of the Western tradition, it may be noted, have a necessarily social dimension (of service).

of nothingness (*sunyata*). Then we are in touch with the powers of the unconscious, the subtle self, the deepest reality. This enables us to acquire tremendous physical and psychological powers.

Thus the mysticism of silence is a call to be truly in touch with the depth of one's being. This is possible though Sustained effort of Meditation and Contemplation and is usually guided by a competent teacher (*guru*).

In this inward journey into the depth of being inner solitude and deep awareness are helpful. Detached observation and compassionate perception are also means to attain this stage of self-awareness. Though works do not play any significant role self-less action (*nishkama karma*) may contribute to reaching this stage of total Silence or *sunyata* (nothingness understood positively). Here *sunyata* is really extinguishing the fire of being and reaching the state of non-being, whereby one reaches the fullness of being.

In this journey towards the absolute fullness, the yogi realizes the ecstatic union with the Ultimate Reality that is Sat-Cit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss).¹³ So the best example for such a spirituality is a yogi who has spent years meditating on the mysteries of life under the foot of the Himalaya mountains who has experienced the Ultimate at the cave of his heart. Ramana Maharshi could be considered an example of this way of life.¹⁴

Two Contemporary Sages

The two streams of mysticism – service and silence – that we have reflected on, are two major ways of reaching human fulfillment and encountering the divine fullness. Though we have been speaking of them as the Eastern and Western approaches, they are not to be seen as two ways which are complementary. I would prefer to speak of the tension that needs to be maintained between the “active” and “contemplative” ways of one persons’ spiritual journey, both of which distinctly and together lead to the deeper mystical experience.

In this section I want to speak of two persons who have attempted such a creative Interaction between these two traditions: Raimundo Panikkar and Bede Griffiths.

¹³ Here the great sayings of the Upanisads or Mahavakya (*Aham Brahmasmi* – I am Brahman –; *Tatvam asi* – That thou art –) which imply the absolute identity of the self with God are relevant. Further it may be noted that there are some great exceptions in India to the spirituality of silence. Though the great Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave were men of silence, their commitment to the people followed from their deep interiority and so they were socially minded sages.

¹⁴ Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), born Venkataraman Iyer, was a spiritual master. He was born to a Tamil-speaking Brahmin family in Tiruchuzhi, Tamil Nadu. “Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world.”

Raimundo Panikkar (1918-2010) was a Christian scientist-priest-philosopher, who was born of a Spanish mother and Indian Father. Roman Catholic priest and a proponent of inter-religious dialogue. As a scholar, he specialized in comparative religion. He made his first trip to India in 1954 where he studied Indian philosophy and religion at the University of Mysore and Banaras Hindu University, where he met several Western monks seeking Eastern forms for the expression of their Christian beliefs. "I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be Christian," he later wrote.

Panikkar authored more than 40 books and 900 articles. His complete works are being published in Italian. His 1989 Gifford Lectures were very well appreciated and they speak of his anthropocentric vision of reality.¹⁵ The letter he wrote to his friends a few months before his death on January 28, 2010 from Tavertet sums up his own life. He wrote:

"Dear Friends... I would like to communicate with you that I believe the moment has come, (put off time and again), to withdraw from all public activity, both the direct and the intellectual participation, to which I have dedicated all my life as a way of sharing my reflections. I will continue to be close to you in a deeper way, through silence and prayer, and in the same way I would ask you to be close to me in this last period of my existence. You have often heard me say that a person is a knot in a network of relationships; in taking my leave from you I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for having enriched me with the relationship I have had with each of you. I am also grateful to all of those who, either in person or through association, continue working to spread my message and the sharing of my ideals, even without me. Thankful for the gift of life which is only such if lived in communion with others: it is with this spirit that I have lived out my ministry."¹⁶

Bede Griffiths (1903-93), born Alan Richard Griffiths, (also known by the end of his life as Swami Dayananda - "bliss of compassion"), was a British citizen of Anglican tradition. He became a Catholic and then Benedictine monk and came to India in 1955. There he embraced a Indian Christian theology and lived in ashrams in South India and became a noted yogi. He has become a leading thinker in the development of the dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism. Griffiths was a part of the Christian Ashram Movement.

¹⁵ R. Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010).

¹⁶ R. Panikkar, *Letter to Friends* (2010), <http://www.raimonpanikkar.it/index.asp?L=2&H=26&M=13&P=&ie=&idp=> .

When he set out to India, he wrote to a friend: “I am going to discover the other half of my soul.” In 1968, he moved to Shantivanam (“Forest of Peace”) ashram in Tamil Nadu along with another Frenchman, the Abbé Jules Monchanin. The two had developed a religious lifestyle which was completely expressed in authentic Indian fashion, using English, Sanskrit and Tamil in their religious services. They had built the ashram buildings by hand, in the style of the poor of the country.

“Mere dialogue can be and often is a casual matter, but the deeper, more substantial type is governed by an intrinsic commitment to finding the point of unity between the two traditions, finding the common ground that permits them to be related in a direct way. Bede Griffiths describes this profounder sort of dialogue, what I call existential dialogue: «The primary purpose of inter-religious dialogue is mutual understanding, but this means understanding the other religion from *within*, that is, by sharing the other person’s experience of his religion. This comes about not only through shared conversation but also through sharing in religious rituals and prayer together.» Existential dialogue is this inner openness to the other in mutual trust, respect and sympathy. But existential convergence goes even deeper.”¹⁷

Though his life and inner experiences, he was convinced that today “inter-religious dialogue is a necessary religious activity”. His basic quest for dialogical encounter with other spiritualities could be autobiographically summed up in his own words:

“I think we have now reached a stage of (long-overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet to learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience. I believe that some of us need to do this in order to improve the quality of our own monastic life and even to help in the task of monastic renewal which has been undertaken within the Western Church.”¹⁸

Spirituality Orientations for Today

Drawing from both the traditions and inspired by the two personalities we have just described, in this section I want to highlight six features, which I hold could be the leading orientations for a spirituality in consonance with our

¹⁷ W. Teasdale, *Toward a Christian Vedanta: The Encounter of Hinduism and Christianity According to Bede Griffiths* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corp, 1987), 178.

¹⁸ E. O. Hanson, *Religion and Politics in the International System Today* (Cambridge UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

contemporary sensibilities. Here I am purposely being eclectic and also. I draw three features each from the Western and Indian traditions, without in any way claiming to be exhaustive. They may be summed up as: Marketplace, Margins and Materiality from the Western traditions and Basics, Bottom and Beyond from the Indian spiritualities.

a. From the Western Tradition

In terms of three M's we can generally describe them as follows:

Mysticism of the Marketplace: As the name implies the mysticism of the market place is one that deals with ordinary or mundane events, including the trivial aspects of our life. Moving beyond a new age spirituality for the elite, such a mysticism caters to the ordinary people, the hoi polloi or the average human being in their simple, naïve and average existence.

Here the ordinary and normal concerns of the people become the focus of our spiritual life. So one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the last century, Karl Rahner, speaks of a "theology of everyday things."¹⁹ Such an attitude is an invitation to perceive the extra-ordinary in the ordinary things of life. So Rahner calls for a new age in Christian spirituality when he wrote that "the devout Christian of the future will either be a «mystic»... or he will cease to be anything at all."

Mysticism of the Margins: Connected to the spirituality of the marketplace is the rediscovery of the margins. A spirituality of the margins appreciates the deeper life of the superficial.²⁰ Here the insignificant and the outcasts becomes the centre of our mysticism. In fact the very concept of centre itself can be taken out of our spiritual world. The superficial, the unimportant and the everyday realities of life, as opposed to the important, fundamental or central issues, are brought to be surface and celebrated. So the real depth of one's life may be equated to the depth.²¹

It is here that we can appreciate the Self-emptying or kenosis of Jesus Christ. If he becomes a "sign of contradiction," it is precisely because he has overturned the values of this world and established that the marginalised are as much loved and accepted by the Father as the privileged or the elite.

¹⁹ The theologian Ronald Modras reflects on Karl Rahner's writings. "It provides as clear an insight into the man as he ever wrote and a key to what lies at the heart of his theology... Writing on such mundane matters as working, sleeping, laughing, and eating, he created as well a "*theology of everyday things*." Ronald Modras, *Ignatian Humanism: A Dynamic Spirituality for the 21st Century* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004).

²⁰ This idea is inspired from postmodernity.

²¹ Perceived thus the "Sermon on the Mount," (Matt 5: 1-13) makes sense. For there. "Blessed are the poor in spirit «who come unto me,» for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

From such a perspective, we realise that ultimately everything in our religious life is graced. It is a gratuitously given gift, over which we do not have any right. We cannot achieve it, nor can we demand it. So we can appreciate Paul Knitter's significant insight: "To be deeply religious is to be broadly religious."²²

Mysticism of Materiality: Contemporary spirituality also gives importance of this world, without absolutising it. It prices our body without idolizing it. It looks at the significance of Being human with its bodily dimension, without neglecting the spiritual aspect of life. In fact it acknowledges that we are called to be "being-in-the-world" (*Dasein*) and our body our world are essential constituents of life.

This calls for respecting the material and the bodily aspects of our life. Modras describes materiality as advocated by Karl Rahner as follows: "Human beings are not made up of separate bodies and souls; even less are we souls laden down with bodies like so much baggage. From the beginning of his theological career, Rahner argued for the essential unity of spirituality and materiality in the human person. Our loftiest, most abstract ideas are rooted in our sense experiences and imagination. The same is true of our most sublime moral decisions. Ours is a sensate spirituality, which must exist in matter in order to be spirit. We exercise our spirituality not by trying to escape the material world and the persons around us, but by reaching out to them".

That enables us to commit ourselves to the environment, to the cosmos and to this worldly concerns, without in any way reducing spirituality to this world.

b. From the Indian Tradition

From the Silence tradition we may draw the following key ideas (in terms of three B's) for contemporary men and women.

Focusing on the Basic: We need to relatives at least some part of our reality. As such we cannot run after everything that glitters or be fascinated by it without any boundaries or limits. Since certain limits are necessary for proper growth and maturation, we also need to acknowledge some broad and flexible "checks and balances" or boarders. This urges us to set our priorities properly in our spiritual quest and to be able to discern the various choices given to us. We need to discern the real from the unreal, the just from the unjust, the good from the evil. In that sense, we need to focus on the basics so that at the individual and collective level, we can grow within bounds.

Getting to the Bottom: Since we need to set priorities in life, we also need to be open to experience the depth dimension of our be existence. In a world where we are constantly bombarded by external stimuli, it is challenging to get to the

²² P. F. Knitter, "One Mysticism - Many Voices," *Interreligious Insight* (October, 2003).

roots of an issue or even a cause. We need to discover that unwavering aspect of our life, which along can give us roots. To be grounded in reality and so connected to the whole demand that at least sometimes we can get to the bottom of ourselves and be unwavering in our convictions about the non-negotiable aspects of our lives.

Being Beyond: Connected with getting to the bottom of things is also the urge to free oneself and go beyond all boundaries. The longing to take wings and to soar high is equally part of our spiritual quest. This longing for the Infinite embedded deep within us enables us to “pilgrims” on the way, who are always open to the otherwise.

Since God is believed to transcend all names, forms and categories, it is easy for us to realize the need to go beyond our concepts and imaginations, which in a way are limiting the Ultimate. Thus the God we surrender ourselves to is beyond our conceptions and we take wings and reach out to the infinite various ways.

Conclusion: Dialogue as Way of Life

We have studied the two different types of mysticism and traced some orientations from both of them. We plead for a dialogue or convergence between the two types of mysticism, without eliminating any one of them.²³

We need to accept that even through dialogue and interactions, the basic differences in spirituality won't and shouldn't be removed. They are here to stay, basically because human beings are essentially different. At the same time, we need to be sensitive to other ways of relating to God, to fellow human beings and to nature, which should in turn purify and enrich our own spirituality.

Despite the need to maintain their difference and identity, there is also a religious need to enter into a creative dialogue of silence and that of service. In this dialogue, we not only sit in meditation together, we act together. Such action begins first with identifying the forms of suffering – human as well as ecological – that are calling each of us. Who or where, in our own context or in our own world, is the child about to fall into the well whom we all want to help? And then we will deliberate together about what can or must be done. Then, we will roll up our sleeves and act together, struggle together as we try to listen to and work with the victims of this world. In such acting and struggling together, we will become

²³ “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West* (New York: Alex Grosset, 1889), the opening line. Here, Kipling is lamenting the gulf of understanding between the British and the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent. More of it is elaborated in the book .

aware of the bonds that unite us as brothers and sisters; we will hear the same Voice that is calling us in the voices of the victims.

But, in such a dialogue of service, we will also become aware of our differences. For although there is one voice calling us to serve, each of us – Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews – will have different views of how to respond to suffering, how to confront injustice, how to deal with hatred and violence, how to change society and the world. But, as has been my limited experience, these real differences between us will usually turn out to be more complementary than contradictory. We will learn from our differences. Why? Because what is animating and guiding us in this dialogue of service is not the desire to prove that our view is more true or better than yours, but how we can all help the victims who have called us together – how we can help the children who are about to fall into the well.

In such a mystical dialogue that respects both silence and service we can deepen the spiritual unity of our religious communities and at the same time, further the worldly well-being of all creatures. Truly such a dialogue takes into considerations the yearnings of human beings from all aspects of life, of all living beings as well as the whole cosmos.

Finally, such an engaging and respectful dialogue may enable each one of us to realize our own spiritual strength and realize that we are all intimately related to each other and to the Divine. For we are all sons and daughters of God. All of us are moving towards authenticity, fulfillment and redemption. Without realizing it we are mystics. As the mystic Teasdale holds:

“Every one of us is a mystic. We may or may not realize it, we may not even like it. But whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not, mystical experience is always there, inviting us on a journey of ultimate discovery. We have been given the gift of life in this perplexing world to become who we ultimately are: creatures of boundless love, caring compassion, and wisdom. Existence is a summons to the eternal journey of the sage - the sage we all are, if only we could see.”²⁴

²⁴ W. Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions* (Novato, Calif: New World Library, 1999), 4.

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