

Non-Dualism

Eastern Enlightenment in the World of Western Enlightenment

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Introduction

Nowadays the notion of Self-realisation is more popular than ever. Many books are devoted to this theme. The time seems ripe to offer a view that is more in-depth than most of the books now available, more informative about sources and intricacies of this issue. Otherwise 'Self-realisation' could be discarded by people more thoroughly inclined, as being something trivial or trendy.

The notion of Self-realisation has been taken from age-old eastern ways of liberation, like Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism. These approaches teach the possibility to be liberated in this life from the identification with latent tendencies which cause numerous emotional repetitions and habit patterns, suggesting to oneself to be a continuous 'person'.

Many schools and teachers of these eastern ways of liberation reached the West as separate movements, each one conveying a message that seems to be different from the other. Investigation based on direct experience reveals that the core of some of these teachings is basically one and the same, being a universal principle, despite the different ways of expression in which is being talked and dressed. Elements that appear exotic may disguise the fact that they are about a universal principle.

What is this universal principle, this core on which some of these schools agree?

This principle is *non-duality*. It is the understanding that reality is not something ‘outside’ the human being, neither only ‘inside’, but unseparated, ‘not two’. One’s true nature is not separate from a higher Principle, whatever this may be called. The notion of ‘Self-realisation’ means the realisation of this undividedness as one’s own nature.

In spite of the fact that non-duality as a ‘view’ has evolved in the East and was reconfirmed and transmitted in an age-long chain of teacher onto disciple (by the way also in the West since some decades), it really is universal, of all places. Hence it is not necessary to have the *form* in which non-duality is transmitted, be interlinked anymore with one of the specific eastern traditions.

That is why in this book it is emphasized that for this era it is most meaningful to consider all different non-dualistic traditions as forms of one and the same NON-DUALISM, and to acknowledge this non-dualism *as such* (which means being stripped of their connection with any specific or exotic atmosphere, pushing the cultural peripheral phenomena of the various schools to the background) as main source of information on liberation.

‘Non-dualism’ can best be defined as ‘the expression of non-duality’. The difference between these two notions shows the difference between the so-called ‘two levels of reality’.

The first level, non-duality itself, only concerns the direct recognition of one’s own essential nature, and precedes and goes beyond all concepts.

At the second level, concerning the *expression* of non-duality, one necessarily uses concepts by which one is able to interpret and translate non-duality towards daily life.

The original Sanskrit terms that have later been translated as ‘non-duality’ are *advaya* and *advaita* (both from *a-dvi*, ‘not-two’). The term *advaya* is not connected to one school or movement in particular; it is used both in a number of Buddhist traditions as well as in the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. *Advaita* is a term exclusively used in Advaita Vedanta. In this book the transmission of non-duality is considered to be ‘the greatest gift the East has given to the world’.

Three non-dualistic traditions

In fact three traditions could be considered as radical, living, *explicit* non-dualism:

- 1) Advaita (in Vedanta as well as in advaitic-tantric Shaivism);
- 2) Ch’an (& Zen);
- 3) Dzogchen (Ch’an and Dzogchen are the two most radical and direct forms of Buddhism, respectively from China and Tibet).

These three traditions distinguish themselves by strongly and explicitly emphasizing, more than other traditions do, the non-conceptual as the ultimate truth, and the necessity of the immediate experience of this truth. In this respect both Buddhist traditions are in fact more related to the ‘Hinduistic’ Advaita than to the more dualistic schools within Buddhism. In this book non-duality is recognized to be the underlying factor in *all* spiritual traditions, and so to be the real basis of all religions, East and West. So the emphasis of this book can be summarized as ‘*Universal Non-dualism*’.

Universal Non-dualism implies that there is only one non-dual tradition, a Great Tradition that could also be called ‘the direct way’. The focusing of the attention on non-duality, without being distracted by all kinds of incidental circumstances silted up in the course of time within the various traditions, makes it possible that non-duality becomes the starting point for evaluating and discussing all events of life.

If not put in the centre of the attention right from the start, the odds are that non-duality remains interpreted as an elevated ideal, as something abstract unrelated to life, which possibly might be ours sometime in a far future at most.

How then can non-duality, which precedes and goes beyond all concepts, become the *starting point* for evaluating events of life, something that indeed is made up of concepts?

That is possible by actually gaining the direct experience of non-duality at first, the recognition of one's own true nature, and to learn to translate this experience to everyday life.

The recognition of a hierarchy

Even though non-duality is ultimately identical to non-discrimination, the way to experiencing the non-dual Understanding goes exactly *via* the power of discrimination. This is our most important tool, also for learning to translate the experience. In fact, 'learning to translate' is a way of training the power of discrimination.

To the eastern ways of liberation the most important discrimination possible is the one between the already mentioned two levels of reality: between the level of the timeless, differenceless, always-present Reality, and the level of manifestation, which continuously is changing, with birth, growth, decline and death. A multitude of definitions is possible for this second level, varying from 'total illusion' to 'temporal reality'.

The order in which both levels are mentioned here is not arbitrary. Although of course terms like 'first' and 'second' level are not true ultimately, one can still say that it is essential for the realisation of one's true nature to first dedicate oneself totally to what is true *always*, to what is 'always already the case': that which is called 'first level' here. The fact is that if you continue to focus your attention on the

particulars of the person simultaneously, this will form an obstacle to the view of your true nature that is always present.

Hence one can say: make the recognition of your true nature the all-important in your life, the main point. From this recognition you can see that the first level *encompasses* the second one. The first level is always present *within* the second one, and this is not the case the other way around.

The training of discrimination between both levels and the nomination of the first level as 'main point' must not be interpreted as a means to deny or neglect the world of phenomena. It is about the recognition of a 'hierarchy', a sequence of importance, in which the essential is investigated *first of all* (and that just until the actual recognition is a reality), so that after that all the non-essential can be interpreted *from* the recognition of the essential. Each reversal of this sequence or order leads to the continuation of the identification with a limited, perishable form.

In view of the great importance of this sequence, this I even call 'Holy Sequence'. The word 'holy' feels to be appropriate because this word shows that it is not about a method here. For the person does not have a say in the matter here anymore, so all methods and kinds of knowledge have been dissolved into no-knowledge. 'No-knowledge' is another term for your true nature: 'No-mind', Conceptless Consciousness.

Love has no method

Repeatedly it appears that some people cannot escape the impression that this is about a certain method all the same. It is not. The direct way is exactly based on the absence of any method. A method is restricted by the personal framework of the creator of the method. Moreover, each method is taking place in time, whereas the awareness of one's essential nature is immediate; it needs no condition,

preparation or time. In the direct teaching there is only the invitation to the immediate recognition of the very first principle, the recognition of That out of which all else emanates: the concept-less, unlimited and self-luminous, which you really *are*.

An important issue concerning the necessity of the sequence mentioned is that the recognition of the natural state in fact means the recognition of *Love* as one's own nature, just like Consciousness. Love is the absence of conflict. Sometimes it is indicated as 'the Heart', the all-encompassing, the permanently present. When looked *from this* to the personal tendencies that still arise, it will not mean a continuation of the critical voice of the 'commenting I'. The fuel is then withheld from this critical voice.

Recognizing that Love, alongside Consciousness, is one's own true nature also means the seeing of the oneness of the two approaches in the various ways of liberation, which in India is indicated as respectively *jñāna* (awareness or understanding) and *bhakti* (devotion). It is the oneness of the two poles of the human psyche, the intellectual and the emotional. The exclusion of one of the poles can never reveal ultimate Reality. Only a convergence, a non-disparity can do so.

Love, in its deepest sense identical to Truth, also is the sustaining power for self-inquiry. This is loving the Truth, a kind of being amorously impassioned by the call of the Supreme.

Real Understanding is No-knowledge, No-mind

The return to the simplicity of your real nature, for instance by means of the question 'Who am I?', is an immediate, wordless Understanding, in which can be seen that No-knowledge or No-mind is the source of all impulses, thoughts and sensory perceptions. Thoughts may arise, and they may dissolve again as well. Immediate Understanding is in fact never absent, during thoughts as well as during the absence of

thoughts. Immediate Understanding is identical to pure Consciousness or Awareness, which is the true nature of all thinking and feeling.

The real absorption in this immediate Understanding, and getting stabilized in it, is realisation of non-duality. This is Self- realisation, the realisation of your real nature, also called 'Buddha- nature'.

Getting stabilized in this Understanding is a necessity, because it has to be integrated into every aspect of daily life. So you can say that Understanding, although it is in fact always the case, has paradoxically to be 'proved' in the body-mind.

Sexual relationship

One of the areas where integration might be needed most is sexuality, the relationship between the two sexes. Why needed most? Because probably there is no power more sticky or attaching than the sexual power, or rather the sexual-emotional one, this whole field where we entrust ourselves emotionally and physically to another human being. This entrustment, to whatever extent we dare to do so, is happening out of the need to end a deep feeling of missing something, of loneliness and pain. When entrusting like this, with all vulnerability that goes with it, one can experience the most intense pleasure, but also deep emotional pain. Exactly the combination of pleasure and pain is the cause for the sexual-emotional to be such a bonding factor; maybe it is the biggest obstacle to liberation. Hence total continence is advised or even prescribed in many traditions.

Although the three non-dualistic traditions mentioned, Advaita, Dzogchen and Zen, do not necessarily prescribe celibacy, they are by no means explicit regarding the sexual side of life (and if they are, it often is in a negative way). The result is that there is a lack of teaching on the non-dual Understanding of your nature in the most vulnerable place, where the identification with the personality is the strongest,

where you can get hurt with body and soul by someone else and where you can come across your childish patterns of dependency and power.

In this book attention is paid indeed to the sexual-emotional in order to sincerely highlight something that tends to lead a life of its own in secret. As a person you always experience yourself as a 'man' or a 'woman': this is always the starting point at the dualistic identification with the body. This can not be ignored. Being a man or a woman must be fully embraced and connected to truth and love.

The sexual encounter as such is no obstacle to freedom; only thinking and fantasizing turns it into something impure, something that may go along with compelling and lying, so that freedom remains covered. Despite the possibility of limitation in freedom through the sexual and emotional, I see a sexual relationship as an aid rather than an obstacle for liberation. In particular, I see a relationship as help if there is a mutual commitment, a mutual pledge where the devotion is as total as possible to truth, to genuineness. In this way, a relationship can work as a place where the most intimate things may safely become visible. In this way the sexual can take the form of *satsang*, a meeting in Truth. Man and woman can then, due to their differing ways of looking, help each other to look through those differences and fall into No-mind. Certainly, when love is no longer confused with romance, partners can be each other's helper on the way to liberation.

I regard this kind of help as the most meaningful of an intimate relationship, helping the other to see through their childhood conclusions, to see them as untrue. This help can only happen in contact by letting yourself free from your own childhood addictions, and to draw from No-mind.

Real maturity means the end of power. Hence the end of sexual power, the pushing and pulling around a possible encounter, with all the things that can come up, such as humiliation, tyranny, lies, fantasy

and so forth. No more games. Everything is surrender. Simply, to give yourself as completely as possible to each other.

'Enlightenment' and its different interpretations

Even if someone has recognized who he really is, it is still necessary to pay some attention to the power of the latent tendencies, which together constitute the 'person'. The discovery of someone's true nature can give rise to the idea that after that there would not be anything left that needs to be seen. That 'enlightenment' has taken place already and that attention for the tendencies would be beside the point. This idea has been emanated from statements like "Enlightenment is always already the case", which is an hallmark expression of real, radical non-dualism. The non-dualist traditions mentioned in this book agree on 'being primevally enlightened' (*âdi-buddha*).

Your real nature indeed is always free. Nevertheless, a statement that enlightenment has taken place could also be a source of confusion, possibly caused by an idea about enlightenment as some desirable object. Then 'enlightenment' can easily become something to brag about. This shows an ignorance about the real, original meaning of the term 'enlightenment'. What has often been forgotten is that this term, being just a western translation for specific terms like *bodhi* and *moksha*, does not point to something that can be claimed like that. This claiming could be called a new, subtle kind of 'colonialist' trend of appropriating something that is desirable, without trying to figure out what is originally meant by terms like *bodhi* and *moksha*.

Very often the power of the tendencies, thoughts and emotions carried along from the past, is so strong that identification with it can happen again and again. Denial of this phenomenon is one of the pitfalls in non-dualism, especially in the approach of some modern forms of Advaita Vedanta. With regard to this the Buddhist view of Dzogchen and Zen is a more realistic one, emphasizing the fact that the

recognition of the true nature of thinking and feeling (that is Consciousness *as such*, always already free) is not a once-only matter, but something that is just the starting point for enfeebling the credibility of the tendencies completely in the course of time.

The emphasis on compassion in Buddhism can be a help in this respect. Compassion towards the imperfect parts of ourselves, and compassion towards other people, even though there is Understanding of the unreality of there being something or someone 'different' from pure Consciousness. Emptiness and compassion must indissolubly go together, otherwise arrogance and egoism can still prevail.

What we need right now is that non-dual Understanding is getting *integrated* in our modern western context – which by now has become a global context. It means integration of two completely different interpretations of the term 'enlightenment'. The western interpretation, which has its origin in the eighteenth-century Age of Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason and mental understanding, is at odds with the eastern one, which is based on an Understanding that *precedes* the mental one.

Such integration is entirely new. Two completely different world views are colliding with one another. Of course such a thing is not accomplished overnight. So, the invitation is to let exactly this happen.