Towards a Christian Tantra:
The interplay of Christianity and Kashmir Shaivism

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1 Translated by the author from his Vers un tantra chrétien.
to
Swami Sannyasanand
and
Venerable Lobsang Tendar
Other publications


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   Dr John D’Arcy May, Dublin;
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Foreword

‘A Christian Tantra’? Impossible! What connection can there be between the eroticism of the tantra and the love revealed by Christ Jesus who proclaims, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” And yet ....

‘A Tantra’, but which one? The Sanskrit word ‘tantra’ means just ‘text’ or ‘tradition’, and there are innumerable tantric traditions – Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim. In fact a major theme of this book is the process of discerning between the different tantras. I finally settled on Kashmir Shaivism, which after eight centuries of obscurity is now being recognized as one of the great schools of Hindu thought. Furthermore, of all the tantras which he studies in his encyclopaedic work, Light on the Tantras, Abhinavagupta, the outstanding representative of Kashmir Shaivism, preferred the ‘Kula’ tradition which is the most extreme of the tantras.

The title of this book reads ‘towards’. Indeed, the book is in part the story of the history of a pilgrimage of which the first chapter gives the main stages and illustrates the saying, “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you”. The book may also be of use for others who walk similar paths. There is value in anticipating the detours and dead-ends, the disappointments and the joys, the traps and the guide posts.

‘Towards’ also refers to the ‘discernment of spirits’ and the inner debate which accompanies the hesitating steps made in the dark. The Christian tantra presented here is not just an idea but a lived reality. Must a decision be made between tantra and Christian revelation? Is it possible to admit both?

‘Towards’ also means ‘approximate’. It is not possible to broach in a single book all aspects of the tantra of Kashmir, of which a brief overview is presented in the second chapter; nor the whole subject matter of the Christian mystery. This book is just the start of an attempt to develop a Christian tantra. It does, however, show the possibilities and advantages of such a project.

‘Towards’ introduces the theme of the dialogue between religions, and more specifically the dialogue between Christianity and one of the traditions of India called ‘Kashmir Shaivism’. Several generations and indeed several centuries may be needed for all the riches of these traditions to have their impact on each other. We know that the meeting between the Greek world and Christianity during the Patristic Period and during the Middle Ages required many hundreds of years. The two terms ‘tantra’ and ‘Christian’ in the title of this book raise the complex question of ‘double belonging’.

‘A Christian Tantra.’ How can the Gospel have need of another tradition? Does the title not imply the rejection of Christ as the unique Saviour? What do Christians have to learn? Is it not for others to listen to the good news of the Gospel? Christian proclamation implies, does it not, the duty to speak and not to listen? Why bother about tantra? It must either be down-played or rejected! Such are the reactions of some. And yet the Church is the great tree which receives into its branches all the birds of heaven.

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3 Lk 11.9.
4 Mt 13.32.
Church is able to receive them because its roots are well anchored on the rock which is the Christ.

The ‘Christian tantra’, elaborated in a preliminary fashion in the last chapter, is presented to the readers for their assessment. It seems theologically acceptable, but those who are wiser will provide a valuable service in showing the weaknesses of the argument. Many elements of Christian theology are not directly mentioned; many themes in Kashmir Shaivism remain untouched.

It is legitimate and indeed it is expected, in the Indian tradition, for a person to develop, on the basis of his or her own experience, a point of view which draws together even the most contrary traditions. It is altogether normal to present a spirituality which is at once tantric and evangelical.5

5 The French original of this book is dedicated to Prof. Dr Bettina Bäumer, a Catholic and a tantric. She was initiated into Kashmir Shaivism by Laxman Joo at whose feet Lilian Silburn, André Padoux, Alexis Sanderson and Mark Dyszkowski – to name but a few of the best known Western scholars of Kashmir Shaivism – came to sit and learn. The French version is offered to Bettina in recognition of the important role she played in my pilgrimage, as this book will show.
Chapter 1

A pilgrimage

1.1 Leaving

All seemed calm and clear when, on 1 February 1959, I came to the main door of the Jesuit novitiate in Melbourne, even though several days before, on 25 January, Pope John XXIII, in the basilica of St Paul-Outside-the-Walls, announced his decision to convoke the Second Vatican Council. It was impossible to forecast how all was to change. John XXIII was opening the doors of the Church to the tempest of the Spirit. It was to be a new Pentecost.

I drew near the door to begin the great adventure of the Spirit which I had chosen at the age of fifteen. During the retreat given by Fr Gleeson SJ in the splendid chapel of Xavier College, I took the decision, leaning over the pew, to enter the Society of Jesus and to submit to the divine will; ready, I told myself, to go even to South America, that is, into the unknown.

The adventure had in fact begun at the age of seven, just before First Communion. Fr Daniel O’Connor had come to Mandeville Hall, a private school run by the Sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to meet us before giving us the Bread of Life. The wish burst in me at that time to reach the Absolute; to draw near and identify with the One Who Is, a wish which came as lightning flash. It was my first conscious act. The whole variety of childhood had been experienced, but in this instance the act was totally involving. The meaning of existence, the one thing necessary, the unshakeable foundation, had been found. Though I did not realize it, that experience of consciousness had laid the foundations of the tantra.

My father, René, was a religious man. One night, a few days after my birth, he heard a sound. Waking up and looking into the cot he found that I had gone ‘blue’. Fearing that his child might be dead or on the point of death, he took a glass of water on my mother’s bed-side table and baptized me. Later on he would ask, as a joke, whether it was the cold water or the coming the Spirit which had restored life to his new-born child.

He had been sent to Melbourne as a wool-buyer for ‘Maison Masurel’ of Roubaix. He had come at the young age of twenty-three with the intention of staying just a few years before returning to France. My mother, Reine Hottekiet, whom he married in 1935 in Hénin-Liétard, shared this same hope, but the Second World War intervened and after the war the economic situation in France offered few prospects to their children. It was a momentous decision on their part to remain in Australia which in many respects is the antithesis of France.

They would go back to France every two or three years, by boat to begin with and then by plane, taking their children with them, but they were always exiles. They created a little corner of France, so to speak, in this vast continent. Their children, two girls and three boys, were both French and Australian and so citizens of two countries; neither French nor Australian and therefore citizens of the world. I was international by birth and intensely proud of being French. Yet there were disadvantages: I did not know really how

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6 Now renamed Hénin-Beaumont.
to behave, since the French and Australian ways of doing things are so contrary. I was at the same time awkward and polite. However, without this close connection with France and a good knowledge of French I would never have discovered Kashmir Shaivism.

My father had gone on adventure and my mother too had a taste for travel. Their son also sought adventure, not geographical but spiritual. Tantra was going to provide it.

René, who was appointed head of the Masurel branch in Melbourne at the young age of thirty, gave me a lot of confidence. As a young man he had left for the unknown, and by taking us to all the continents of the world except South America, he had taught his children how to cope with every situation. I had confidence in what excited me, that confidence which proved necessary for facing the obstacles that arise during a pilgrimage.

One summer, in the large garden of the family home I observed those insects which, united sexually, fly through the air without separating. I wanted pleasure and love, but permanently. I rejected death and the ‘petite mort’. I wanted the union to be eternal. Religious life was going to show me how to achieve it. Eventually it was the Christian tantra that showed the way.

I entered the ‘Collegium Maximum S. Ignatii’ without feeling much rapport with St Ignatius Loyola. I identified rather with Francis of Assisi who, for love of the Lady, abandoned his father’s drapery business and was eventually transfigured on Mount Alvernia. The Jesuits, on the other hand, seemed to be more rigorous than the Franciscans and more able to guide me.

During the first two weeks, before entering the novitiate properly speaking, we read together the Discourse on Method where Descartes explains that during the period of reflexion he had continued his normal pattern of life, for he would be wrong to change it before he found the right path. This attitude guided me during the years that followed.

After Easter, at the age of eighteen, we began the ‘long retreat’ of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius. While climbing the stairs with my fellow novices at the start of the retreat, I wondered how it would be possible to last thirty days in silence and meditation. It was not so hard. Every day, during the two years of the novitiate, we would meditate for one hour in the morning and again for thirty minutes in the late afternoon. The meditation was Ignatian in style and discursive. In the evening we prepared the ‘three points’ or topics on which we would reflect the next morning. The purpose of the meditation was to lead to the affectus, that is, to arouse the emotions of the heart, to provide insights, to lead to commitments of the will, and above all to arrive at divine contemplation which was the climactic point. It was a discursive manner of arriving at what is not discursive; a willed act undertaken to arrive at what is spontaneous; a work of the mind in order to transcend the mind. I am in debt to the Jesuits for having given me the habit of meditation. Meditation was discursive, at that time, but with the passing of the years and by natural attraction it became tantric.

John XXIII had convoked the Vatican II in order to bring the Church up to date. He did so with good reason, for the Church had in many respects become fossilized. For example, the main book used in the novitiate was the translation of Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas of Alfonso Rodriguez (1538-1616) of which we read a few pages each day, in private and a publicly during meals. The Roman Martyrology was proclaimed at the evening meal and the dates were announced in terms of calends and ides. We were isolated in the countryside, without radio or newspapers, without ever
going into the city, seeing the family only once a month. It was both a rigorous formation and a brain-washing. Penances, fastings, silence, flagellation, public humiliations were practised under obedience, yes, but friendship, meditation, laughter, study, walks in the countryside were part of novitiate life as well. My friends, the novices, sought The Essential also. We were similar, we were companions. One day, standing on the sunlit balcony of the novitiate, I said to myself ‘these are golden days’.

The commitment to this form of life was total. On 15 August 1959, with the permission of the Master of Novices, I made the ‘heroic act’ which meant something at the time: I entrusted to God all the merit which I might acquire by whatever means, “ut eam ob quaecumque causam adhibeas”\(^7\). It was a complete abandonment. On 17 March 1960, likewise with permission, I pronounced the private vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. I committed myself entirely to the love of the One Who Is. I dwelt in his house; I was simply present to the Presence.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, total obedience, “like a corpse” (sic ut cadaver), humility, generosity, patience: that was the spiritual formation which we received and which derived from the Desert Fathers.

I followed the path that was set out for us, trusting in the superiors. I had taken my decision and would not renege. The many weeks of depression and the days of joy were but waves moving over a deep calm. I was acquiring the stability needed for remaining at peace in the storms that were gathering.

At Mass, on 2 February 1961, after the two years of novitiate, and after the Provincial, Fr Jeremiah Hogan SJ, had presented the Sacred Host and proclaimed ‘Ecce Agnus Dei’ and had turned back to the altar, about twelve of us took simple vows. Afterwards, as all looked on, we crossed the courtyard which separated the two wings of the great building to be greeted by the scholastics who came towards us from their side.

I committed myself to intellectual work. Studying, teaching, writing – they were the ways of expressing one’s love. It was a very agreeable task.\(^8\) As a child I took pleasure in leafing through the encyclopaedias in the family library. The book by Maisie Ward, *Early Church Portrait Gallery*,\(^9\) was memorable. I agreed with the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on Love* of St Francis de Sales, for example, but felt uneasy at the identification, in St John of the Cross and elsewhere, of the soul with the bride. That was just symbolic language, of course, but a language of love had clearly to be invented where the soul is presented as the bridegroom.\(^10\) Kashmir Shaivism would provide it.

After two years of scholastic philosophy, principally of Thomas Aquinas, Fr John Cowburn SJ came to the college. Suddenly a whole new world opened up. He spoke of the Existentialists, of Paul Claudel, of Martin Buber whose book *I and Thou* had a profound impact, and of Teilhard de Chardin. In fact I asked my parents to bring back from France *Le milieu divin* and *Le phénomène humain*, books which were banned from

\(^7\) “that you might use it for whatever purpose you wish”. A set text; source unknown.
\(^8\) Many years later, on the occasion of my first tantric initiation, Pandit Vagish Shastri, former director of research at the Sanskrit University of Varanasi, noticed this thirst and gave me the religious name Jiñānānadanātha, ‘he who loves to know’.
the college library. I sat on the edge of the fountain in the courtyard reading them without really understanding. John Cowburn lent me the manuscript of his book *The person and love: philosophy and theology of love*, a contemplation of the Trinity strongly influenced by Paul Claudel and the French poets.

On 8 September 1963, Catholic bishops from around the world assembled in the Basilica of St Peter. As choir master at the time I arranged that we should heartily acclaim that event whose repercussions few at the time could imagine. John Cowburn went regularly to the French Consulate to read the reports from *Le Monde*, since the Australian papers showed little interest in the Council. The following text, unheard of before in the history of the Church, proved to be of highest importance:

> The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. 
> .... The Church, therefore, urges her [children] to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

The question was put to us whether we should like to go to India, to the State of Bihar where the Australian Province had established a mission. I feared the heat, but above all it seemed that I had something to say and that I would say it best here in Melbourne. It was impossible to foresee that India and its tantra would eventually claim its own. I did not go to live in India; India came to live in me.

I was already feeling out of place. An energy was starting to manifest itself. Something was happening in me which Jesuit life obstructed. I was becoming profoundly frustrated and was ceasing to live. I was following the truth of others and was becoming false to myself. Essentially tantric – I realize it now – I had no way of naming myself. The life of the spirit was profoundly attractive but I did not know how to give value to the body. Indeed, the word ‘body’ meant ‘passing things’, ‘without poetry’, ‘constrained in time’, ‘superficial’, ‘gross’, ‘without intensity or fervour’. The word ‘soul’ by contrast meant ‘freedom’, ‘ascension’, ‘greatness of heart’, ‘eternity’. Body and soul had no place for each other.

The studies in scholastic philosophy lasted for three years. The superiors decided that I should study French and German at the University of Melbourne. I suppose they destined me for a career in theology, perhaps in Sacred Scripture.

I read with pleasure the great works of German and French literature but would come back exhausted from the lectures. Vatican II had profoundly shaken the Church. The ways of thinking and doing which had been elaborated over centuries; were falling apart; a renewed Church was coming to birth. Similarly, a new ‘I’ was making its appearance, but what exactly? I was choking. If I stayed I would be asphyxiated. I had to go, but where? It would be a journey into the night, without any other guide except the confidence I had in myself. The path chosen at the age of fifteen turned out to be a dead-end.

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My father came to fetch me in the car. My friend, Greg O'Kelly SJ, who was the only one I had told of my decision to leave, came to say goodbye. As the car was leaving he cried out, “John, don’t go”. In fact I never really left and feel that I am in some way still a member of the Society of Jesus. Even now, forty years after leaving, people think and say that I am a Jesuit.

I wrote this poem on the day I left. The tantra was beginning to make its appearance.

Of the many happy and peaceful days
Now the course is slowly drawing to an end.
For I was blessed and overflowed with joy:
Each day, without disturbance, order and pleasure were intermingled;
Beneath the sculpted pines a divine presence hovered
And in the sunlit corridors a Face was shining.
I was happy, filled with holy devotion
Seeking to show, by my obedience,
A complete commitment to God.

Nourished since childhood, the desire became overpowering:
to be man, flesh, power,
And to preside by the body.

Must I go?
If I stay, it will be madness ...
If I go, there will be regret …
For I was used to this style of life, to these friends.

I leave, driven into the world and not drawn.
Against my will I leave this cherished place.
I leave one form of happiness, not knowing where to find another.
How find God in the heart of the finite,
Within the maddening chaos?
How will I find that happiness
Which reconciles the eternal and the immediate?

A task of transformation – difficult and uncertain work – is given to me.
I knead the bread, not knowing whether it will be bitter and useless.
I throw myself into the unknown whereas I had known the truth.
I wish to be artist of the world, and artist of God,
Am I am able do it?  

The arrival which had been full of hope stood in stark contrast to a departure into a void. It was a difficult decision, but necessary. In fact, how could I have discovered tantra if I had not had the freedom to travel? The Jesuit superiors did not understand my decision. Neither did I at the time, but now I see it was justified because if I had not left the Jesuits it is very unlikely that I would have discovered Kashmir Shaivism.

13 In 2006 he was appointed auxiliary bishop of Adelaide, and in 2009 bishop of Port Pirrie diocese.
14 May, 1967.
15 Translated from the French.
1.2 The Word

I had left the familiar path and my companions. I was alone. One night while in bed, I turned to the wall and wept. I regretted my decision, I would ask to be readmitted. A Jesuit friend, Peter, assured me that it would be possible but that it might take some time. Another Jesuit friend, Denis, suggested that I should do a Master’s Degree on Antoine de St Exupéry.

With the support of Professor Jackson in the French Department of the University of Melbourne, I obtained a scholarship from the French Government as an ‘assistant’ in the ‘Ecole Normale des Instituteurs’ at Fondettes near Tours, a secondary boarding school with about two hundred boys. After a long journey through Cambodia, India, Iran, Israel and Greece I arrived there in September 1968, a time of great civil disturbance in France. On 20 November I received a letter from the Australian Jesuit Provincial rejecting my request for readmission. I was stunned. For three days I was in a daze, completely disoriented. But the words of Job came to mind: “The Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” and I became calm again. The inspired word, whether Christian or Kashmiri, can powerfully touch the heart.

The priesthood still beckoned. I decided therefore to become a diocesan priest in Melbourne or even in Tasmania which would have been like the ends of the earth.

In between times I continue to prepare the thesis entitled “Ferveur et scepticisme en Citadelle de Saint Exupéry”. I travelled round the regions of France or went to Paris. I wanted to know everything and to be separated from nothing. I wished to be clothed with the world, like those three young men in the fiery furnace who walked among the flames without getting burnt.

The time spent in Paris allowed me to discovery Orthodoxy. The Divine Liturgy in the Russian Cathedral of Saint Alexander Nevsky, Rue Daru, touched me deeply. The chanting, the architecture, the congregation – all worked together to manifest the reality of Christ incarnate in the world, risen from the dead. I read Meyendorff’s Saint Grégoire Palamas et la mystique Orthodoxe. There at last was a spirituality more attractive than those of St Ignatius and St Francis. The Transfiguration as interpreted by Palamas (c.1296-1359) was the key to resolving the opposition between body and soul. By the work of divine grace, the body becomes light, joy, blessing. It was a first clear step towards the tantra.

I had arrived in France in the month of September 1968. The student riots of the preceding May were still reverberating, and communism was the acceptable mind-set. The boys did not talk about sport or music but about political parties, and slipped out at night to attend political meetings. There were three other assistants at the school, one of whom was Jean-Marc, a convinced communist. When I told them one day that on my return to Australia I would become a priest they burst out laughing. They continued to laugh for about twenty minutes. Some days later, when they asked me why I had made such a decision, the reply came as an inspiration, immediate and unreflected: “So as to become a universal blessing”. The purpose of the Christian tantra was beginning to take shape.

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16 He later left the Jesuits and declared he was an atheist.
17 Jb 1.21.
18 Dn 3.
After leaving Tours I went to Tübingen for a few days. In the evening of 9 August, a little drunk on Algerian wine, I walked for hours through the streets wondering how I could reach the God whom I had sought so earnestly. The next day, 10 August, the anniversary of my confirmation by Archbishop Mannix, while seated in the sunlit garden of the Catholic church, I realized that one comes to God not by leaving the world but in working for justice and peace. The world is not a ‘valley of tears’ which must be abandoned but a building-site where the Kingdom of God is being constructed. It was a revelation. I stood up from the bench; the chains fell to the ground: I could at last walk.

Jean-Marc does not know how much his communist ideas had affected me.

After traveling around Europe – the Soviet Union, Italy, Greece, Turkey, the British Isles – it was time to go back to Australia. After visiting the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and New Guinea I arrived at the end of 1969 and told my parents of my intention to continue on the path to priesthood. Once again, it was a great disappointment. My father reproached me, “Au moins tu aurais pu m’en parler”. My mother said nothing but was even more disappointed.

I went to see the Archbishop, later Cardinal Knox, who accepted me. I entered the seminary at the start of 1971, knowing that the step I was taking was right. But it gave me no joy.

What a contrast between the entry into the novitiate with its anticipation of happiness and the sad entry into the seminary! Furthermore, I was a stranger, an outsider, different from the other seminarians. French and Australian, religious and diocesan, hermit and parish-oriented, Christian and tantric – these contrasts nevertheless allowed me to embrace the whole world: I was a stranger to nothing.

The seminarians were able to spend their summer holidays in Papua working with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at Fané-les-Roses, or in the Archdiocesan missions at Bema and Kanabea. Waking up one night, and standing on the veranda at Bema, the valley filled with mist, I felt I was clothed with the whole world. Later, when I contracted malaria, I rejoiced: Papua was in my blood. It had invaded me.

I took the vow of celibacy on 24 August 1973, the eve of the diaconate. After having pronounced the vow I returned to my room to write a declaration, very tantric in orientation as I can see now, of which here is a part:

... now, as I am starting out on this ordained ministry, I recall my opposition to the principle of obligatory celibacy. For while I take on celibacy freely, I do so... unjoyfully. Yet ... I hope and pray that this celibacy ... will ... be chosen ... by the strength of that desire emanating from the Holy Spirit, to wed the whole race of the elect, pouring out my body and blood in sacrifice ... so that all will be joined, ... so that there will be Emmanuel.

The old uncertainty still bothered me: what particular steps should I take? The same reply kept coming back: it is by following the path I had taken that I would find the right way. It is like, when lost in a forest, taking an uncertain path which finally leads to the main road. I did not yet know that by taking these winding paths I was fashioning a tantric perspective.

I had read the *Life of St Anthony the Great* by St Athanasius: the solitude of the desert drew me powerfully. I used often go, therefore, to the Trappist monastery of Notre

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20 ‘At least you could have talked to me about it.’
Dame at Tarrawarra near Melbourne. One morning while walking across the paddocks covered with fog, there came an immense desire for transcendence. That’s it: I will become a monk! But later, in the chapel, I realized that, no, I could never remain in the monastery cut off from the world. I needed a public role. I wished wholeheartedly to become a priest, and to gather the people around me. I wished to become a centre of the divine presence, ‘Emmanuel, God-with-us’. I wished to proclaim the acts of God to the People of God, for the Word was arising in me and could not be kept silent. I wished to receive the bread and wine, symbols of the whole world, and transubstantiate them, saying “This is my body”. At the same time I wanted to be a hermit, withdrawing into God by meditation.

Later, when the fog had given way to a beautiful spring morning, seated on a hillside clothed in yellow Cape Weed daisies, I stretched out my arms and committed myself: I will become a priest and the whole world will be given to me as an inheritance. I had discovered the importance of the Word which tantra would justify to an outstanding degree.

I continued my studies in theology, obtaining two degrees, Bachelor of Theology from the diocesan seminary and Bachelor of Divinity from the Melbourne College of Divinity, the first Catholic diocesan priest to receive a degree from that originally Protestant institution.

In the sacristy of the cathedral on the day of my ordination, 18 May 1974, although once again invaded by doubt, I pulled myself together and presented myself to the bishop, Most Rev. John Kelly, and was ordained priest. I have never regretted this decision. I am a priest and will remain so. The frame was in place, but what was the painting? I would be the Word of God, but what would be the theme?

1.3 Introduction to tantra

In September 1974 I was appointed assistant priest in a suburb north of Melbourne. It was a difficult situation, but it was at that time that the clear light of dawn began to appear on the horizon.

On my day off I would go to town and wander round a large bookshop called The Whole Earth Bookstore. After looking at books on every conceivable subject, I would always finish in the Hindu section. One fine day Michael, from one of the best-known families in Melbourne, also came in. We knew each other through our friendship with Charlotte Hain. Michael advized me to avoid reading books and rather to seek a master, and he recommended his guru, Swami Vijay, director of the School of Yoga in St Kilda. So I enrolled in a course on yoga. India was starting to take up residence in me.

Several months later in a bookshop, Readings in Carlton, I found the word which was going to change everything. The book by Ajit Mookerjee, Kundalini,21 the cover of which showed an image of the body and its chakras, made a deep impression but it was the word ‘tantra’, at the very start of the text, which leapt out. I had not seen the word before but it was immensely attractive. It was the key-word. A music started to resonate; a pedal-point began to sound.

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In 1977 the archbishop of Melbourne, Sir Frank Little, asked if I would go to Christ College, a teacher training college which was in crisis, to take charge of the section on religious education, to teach theology and to co-ordinate the chaplaincy. Having no reason to refuse, I accepted and remained there for nine years.

I continued to read in the field of tantra: *Le yoga, immortalité et liberté* by Mircea Eliade\(^\text{22}\) and *Le yoga tantrique* by Julius Evola.\(^\text{23}\) But little was available in Australia and then only in English. Bhagwan Rajneesh (Osho) and the Orange People were causing a great stir at that time, but their interpretation of the tantra seemed ‘over the top’. The book by Hugh Urban on the history of tantra since the nineteenth century\(^\text{24}\) eventually showed how erratic this whole field could be. Neither the Buddhist tantra whose value I admit, nor the Hindu tantra in the manner of Rajneesh attracted me. Yet tantra in principle was fair and true, I was sure. It’s as though in the forest a perfume can be smelled without our knowing where it comes from. The rotting vegetation cannot hide the subtle aroma.

With the archbishop’s permission I had begun a thesis entitled “Transfiguration in Scripture and Theology”. The contrast between the Latin and Greek interpretations of the biblical account was striking. The Latin writers interpret the transfiguration above all in terms of the passion of the Christ whereas the Greeks understand it as the glory of the Incarnate Word. The interpretation given by Gregory Palamas, the last great Doctor of the Orthodox Church, attracted me enormously. In his writings, as in the Russian Cathedral in Paris, the glory of the Incarnate Word and the transfiguration of the Christian became real. What hope, what happiness lay in store! The style of Palamas’s masterpiece, *Défense des saints hésychastes*,\(^\text{25}\) is tediously polemical, but the struggle between Gregory and his opponent, Barlaam of Calabria, led to the elaboration of one of the greatest syntheses of Orthodox spirituality.

In 1981, during my third year at the college, my father died peacefully at home surrounded by his wife and children. His death was very painful for me. My mother found widowhood very difficult. She was becoming sad and dispirited such that in 1985 I suggested a trip to Europe. Was it not I who was sad and dispirited? The years were passing nevertheless, and I was going round in circles. We stopped off in Tokyo on our way across the North Pole to Helsinki. After traveling through Finland, Sweden, Leningrad, Norway and Belgium, we arrived in Paris.

It was a long journey indeed! But a more important journey was starting. While browsing through the shelves of the bookshop Gibert Jeune on the Boulevard St-Michel, I came across the book by Jean Varenne, *Le Tantrisme*.\(^\text{26}\) Here at last was a clear and objective presentation of the tantra by an author recognized by UNESCO. I needed this chance event, this grace. It was a decisive step. I could at last trust the tantra.

In 1985, Brother David Steindl-Rast OSB came to Australia to give some talks. I wrote to him saying that I wanted to pursue my interest in tantra, and yet apart from the book by Jean Varenne, very little was available. He replied suggesting that I get in touch

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\(^\text{22}\) Paris, Payot, 1983.


with Dom Bede Griffiths OSB who lived in Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu in the ashram founded by Abbé Jules Monchanin and Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB). Dom Bede suggested I get in touch with Dom Thomas Matus OSB who had recently finished a doctoral thesis on Symeon the New Theologian and Abhinavagupta both of whom were contemporaries of Romuald, the founder of the Camaldolese branch of the Benedictines of which Thomas was a professed monk. Symeon is one of the great mystical writers of the Orthodox tradition and a predecessor of Gregory Palamas; Abhinava is the leading proponent of the Kashmir Shaivite tradition. After finishing his thesis, Thomas had written *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition* which eloquently expounds the tantra taught by Abhinavagupta. I wrote to him, therefore, asking if I could spend a year with him, for the archbishop had granted me a sabbatical year. I was starting to find my way.

Although I enjoyed the intellectual life of Christ College, I did not want to make a career of it. The director at the time, Prof. Bernie Daffey, had suggested I go to Rome and do a doctorate but if I had refused wife and family I did not wish to spend my life immersed in books and words: the position of lecturer was not sufficiently prophetic. People ask, ‘Where do you work?’ expecting to hear of some university or institute. When I reply that I am a parish priest, they look away. And yet the Sunday gathering in the parish is the proper context of the Word. The congregation comes precisely to hear the words of love. A door seems to open in them to which I can draw near and enter and stay in communion with them. It is a wonderful relationship, both human and divine.

In 1987, after nine years at the college, it was time to move on. I spent two months at New Camaldoli on the coast of Big Sur in California, a magnificent spot looking out over the Pacific Ocean, meditating, reflecting, reading the works of Symeon the New Theologian. I later followed Thomas Matus to Camaldoli near Arezzo in Italy. In this monastery and in the hermitages among the fir trees, he introduced me to Kashmir Shaivism.

It was a revelation, one of the greatest graces of my life. I had at last found the words which could explain what was happening in me. I had long misunderstood myself and left others equally confused. I had been feeling my way in the dark, but now here was an ancient and clear tradition I could trust. I would like to acknowledge my debt to Thomas Matus for having introduced me to Kashmir Shaivism, starting with the *Vijñānabhaṭṭarā-Tantra* translated with a commentary by Lilian Silburn, research director at the ‘Centre national de recherché scientifique’ (CNRS). Several years later, on 22 May 1991, after having written to her to acknowledge my debt, I had the good fortune of receiving a letter from André Padoux, her colleague, saying that, as Lilian was almost blind, he had read her my letter.

After a trip to La Procure and Maison-Neuve in Paris, to buy all I could find on Kashmir Shaivism, and above all to purchase the translations and commentaries by Lilian Silburn and André Padoux, I returned to Camaldoli and began to read them. Silburn wrote in a style that was both accurate and poetic but she was not easy to understand. Nevertheless, even if I did not understand much, just a single word or phrase would have a huge impact on me. It’s as though a hum were starting to pulsate in me; as if an energy was arising similar to that which I had felt on first seeing the word ‘tantra’.

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I enjoyed monastery life up to a point but I could not stand all that calm! Each month I would go on a trip – to Florence, to Naples and especially to Ravenna to see the mosaic of Christ in the basilica of San Apollinare Nuovo. The look is calm. He knows what he saying for he speaks of himself and by his own authority. He is both the subject and the means of this own teaching; and in this way he manifests the One of whom he is the Word. Seated on the chair of wisdom he reveals to the people of God the acts of God, of whom he is himself the supreme act. But there was more: I was contemplating the icon of which I was the reflection. I stood before the Christ and before my own self.

Seated on the bed of a small hotel near the station I wondered if I was right to be interested in this Indian tradition which meant so much to me. This attraction, was it not a diabolical temptation? Was it right to take a pleasure in Kashmir Shaivism which I did not find in Christianity? At the same time, the joy which I experienced did not seem opposed to the grace of Christ which I knew to be exquisite and delicate, subtle like a vintage wine. There were here two savours, different from each other and yet both attractive. Kashmir Shaivism did not seem to be opposed to the Gospel. On the contrary Kashmir Shaivism seemed to provide the means by which I could more really identify with the Christ whose icon I had come to venerate.

The four months in Camaldoli were followed by two months in Egypt, in the Sinai desert among the rocks of the Raha plain facing the immense columns of the holy mountain. It was a time of intense meditation. A large part of the day was spent in meditation or at least in the attempt to meditate, while bitterness filled my soul. Why was I not appreciated, why was I not encouraged? The demons of unresolved issues were coming out into the open.

After two months in Egypt and six weeks of tourism with my mother and sister in central Europe, I left for India and Shantivanam where Dom Bede Griffith OSB Camaldoli was living. I was in search of tantra and above all of a teacher of tantra, but Bede had nothing to suggest. I was in search of a guru and at the same time rejected all gurus. I was seeking and refusing at the same time. Why, I did not know. Only the texts of Kashmir touched me deeply. I said goodbye to Bede whose later visit to Melbourne would change everything.

After returning to Melbourne I went back to parish life, even though the archbishop had hoped I would suggest some project to him. Assistant at Hoppers Crossing and then parish priest at East Doncaster, I lived the pastoral life to the full for seven years, occasionally reading a few pages from Silburn’s commentaries or a few verses from the Vijñānabhairava-Tantra. The months spent at Camaldoli singing the divine office made me learn Italian so that I was able to read the translation of the Tantrāloka made by Raniero Gnoli, but it was not enough. I taught meditation in the parish but my knowledge of Kashmir Shaivism was slight.

I needed to know. I asked André Padoux if it was possible, anywhere, to do some serious study on the tantra. In his letter of 21 November 1991 he replied that, as far as he knew, there was no such course. The only way to reach this goal, therefore, was to do a doctorate. Books and the Spirit would teach me.

A good friend, Ruth Fowler, a member of the Australian Christian Meditation Community, who practises meditation in the manner of Dom John Main OSB, had

organized the Australian visit of Dom Bede Griffiths in 1992.\textsuperscript{30} I attended his talk in Melbourne and realized that I had to stop ‘beating around the bush’! On leaving Dallas Brooks Hall I spoke to Professor Purushottima Bilimoria, who had responded to the address by Dom Bede. He advised me to get in touch with Dr Greg Bailey, a lecturer at La Trobe University. After explaining my wish to acquire a more accurate knowledge of Kashmir Shaivism, Greg replied immediately, ‘You will have to learn Sanskrit’. To do this I embarked on a Graduate Diploma in Humanities in Sanskrit which I finished in December 1995.

During the course of 1995 I went to see the archbishop to get permission to do the doctorate. His refusal produced a crisis. I went to see my friend, Rev. Fr Ken Petersen O.Carm, to ask his advice but could not speak. For some fifteen minutes I stammered incoherently before I could explain what had happened. That night or some nights later I dreamed that I was walking in the sun, in the north of Australia, pushing a wheelbarrow in front of me, and vomiting into it whole quantities of excreta. I was getting rid of all the rubbish I had swallowed during my life.

Some time later, the bishop who was responsible for the Eastern Region of Melbourne where the parish was located came to see me and for three quarters of an hour questioned me. He presumed and named every weakness, both psychological and moral, which might explain my desire to do a doctorate. It seemed impossible that there might be a good reason. At the same time, he also told me how to write a letter of resignation.

Finally, after having locked the door of the church one night in anger, I made my decision. I wrote to the archbishop saying that with his permission I would resign from the parish in January 1996. He generously offered to pay twelve months of salary. He himself resigned as archbishop some seven months later, and his successor, George Pell, now cardinal archbishop of Sydney, continued to pay my salary.

My family, friends and fellow priests did not understand these steps. My friend, Rev. Chris Barnett, who gave me a roof over my head during the years of study, supported me, trusting without understanding. It is hardly surprising, for I did not understand myself. If I spoke to them on this topic, a door seemed to close and the blinds were drawn. Their lack of understanding was nevertheless an advantage. The lonely path undertaken with joy in the heart is a path of salvation in imitation of St Paul who, after receiving the revelation on the road to Damascus, left for the wilderness of Arabia.\textsuperscript{31}

My supervisor, Dr Greg Bailey, was excellent. He saw me each week for an hour even though Kashmir Shaivism was not his field. I selected to translate chapter 29 of the \textit{TantrÁloka} of Abhinavagupta since, in the opinion of Professor Alexis Sanderson of Oxford whose advice I had sought, this chapter presents the most extreme form of tantra,\textsuperscript{32} namely the Kula ritual. I made the first translation into English of any chapter of the \textit{TantrÁloka} and the first translation into any language of the commentary by Jayaratha, without which the chapter is scarcely intelligible. The introduction and notes which I provide explain a difficult text which is written in code and which can be read at various levels. In doing this work I felt that at last I understood a system of thought which

\begin{itemize}
\item He died the following year, on 13 May.
\item Gal 1.17.
\end{itemize}
had proven so attractive. From that fact that the Kula ritual is an extreme tantra I had reason to believe that I understood tantra as such, whether in its extreme or mitigated forms.

At the end of 1996 after finishing a first translation of the text and having read all the books then available in French, Italian and German, I left for Varanasi in India, passing through Bangalore where I gave a paper at the Tenth World Sanskrit Conference. It is there that I met Dr Bettina Bäumer, a scholar and a convinced Christian who knew everyone in the field of Kashmir Shaivism. Jewish by birth, baptized Protestant, she had been received into the Catholic Church and confirmed by Raimundo Panikkar in one of the Roman catacombs. After receiving advice from Abhishiktananda to continue her university studies she prepared a doctoral thesis under the direction of Karl Rahner SJ. The great pandit, Laxman Joo, who revealed to the world the value of Kashmir Shaivism, initiated her into that tradition. She lived for the most part in Varanasi where she was director of the Alice Boner Foundation, but she also spent the summer months teaching in Vienna and Bern.

I spent three months in Varanasi reviewing the translation of the text with the assistance of Pandit Hemendranath Chakravarti. He was the disciple of Gopinath Kaviraj, one of the most celebrated modern commentators of the tantric tradition. Panditji was at once modest and frank in a topic which could seem scandalous. He had a perfect knowledge of English as well as of Sanskrit.

In the month of October 1998, at the invitation of Bettina, I made the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in Western Tibet with about ten of her Swiss-German and Austrian friends. The journey was very difficult for me due to lack of oxygen. We crossed the Himalayas on foot and spent some time at Lake Manasarovar and made the circumambulation of Kailash: a pyramid of rock, utterly beautiful, reaching to almost 7000 metres, from whose four sides the Indus, the Sutlej, the Brahmaputra and the Ganges are said to flow; Kailash, sacred to Hindus and Buddhists alike; Kailash, the mountain where Íïva dwells either in solitude or with his consort ParvatÍ.

The sight of the immense cliff of Kailash, at night under the full moon, is unforgettable. Next morning, as I stood with Bettina while she celebrated a ritual before the north face, I felt that I was this great rock, this snowcapped liÉgam; I identified with the mountain. I was Kailash, just as I had been the Christ of the mosaic at Ravenna.

1.4 An interreligious community

The thesis was presented on 29 April 1999 but eight months passed before a result was given. In between times I let Archbishop Pell know that I was available. His Vicar General, Most Rev. Denis Hart (now archbishop of Melbourne) asked if I would go as administrator to a parish shaken by a scandal, the same parish where I had been an assistant priest at the start of my priesthood. I stayed there seven months till such time as the crisis was resolved. Some time afterwards Bishop Hart appointed me part time administrator in a parish where the priest was unwell. Subsequently I was appointed to the double parish of Stella Maris, Beaumaris, and St Joseph’s, Black Rock which, after having had three parish priests in the space of two years, was in a state of collapse. At

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last, after all these peregrinations, there was no longer any need to move. But, actually, it is only by living nowhere that one lives everywhere. Only by being without any particular attachment can one become universally available.

The East-West Meditation Foundation which Rev. Michael Mifsud and Fr Ken Petersen O.Carm and Sr Kathleen Murphy OP and I had established in 1995 has since become the Australian Commission of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue whose bulletin I disseminate in Australia and New Zealand. In 2001 I became a member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and in 2003 the chairperson of the Catholic Interfaith Committee of the archdiocese as well as chairperson of the Faith and Order Commission of the Victorian Council of Churches. The interreligious dialogue which was taking place in me was manifesting itself at an archdiocesan level.

In Beaumaris I lived in a large house, alone. That situation was neither right nor pleasant. Already, at East Doncaster, people had come to live in the parish house so as to form a small community but without any specific character. This time it seemed a good idea to establish an interreligious community. Swami Sannyasanand of the Satyananda lineage came first. He practises tantra also, in the yoga of his tradition. One year later, Venerable Lobsang Tendar, a Gyuto monk and also a tantric, arrived. All three of us are practitioners of tantra, each in his own way.

One day, while passing a billboard on a building in Adelaide, Philip Stevens, the future Swami Sannyasanand, saw the word ‘yoga’ written in red letters, in Ariel font, on a white background. He remembers it well. The word itself, whose meaning he did not understand, touched him deeply. He was then eighteen years old. He followed courses on postures and learned the chants, etc. at the Shivananda Yoga Centre. Judith, whom he subsequently married, taught him other techniques including the purification of the pranic channels (nĀô–Ôodana), the lighter form of intestinal cleansing (laghu–prakÂÁlkana), for example. He followed courses given by Swami Ajnananda on the yoga of interior activity (kriyÂ–yoga). In 1978 he went to Sydney to hear Swami Satyananda and was deeply impressed. He received mantra initiation (mantra–dÂkÂÅÁ), his first formal initiation into yoga. In 1993 at Munger in Bihar State in India Swami Niranjananda initiated him as a saÂnyÅsl in the Satyananda lineage. Brought up Anglican and having spent some time in the Assembly of God, he has a high regard for Jesus and understands God as loving and close. He is a certified teacher of yoga and accredited as a fellow and life member of the World Society for Clinical Yoga. He is pursuing doctoral studies on the physiological effects of yoga and gives lectures in Australia as well as overseas.

Venerable Lobsang Tendar was born in the region of Kham in Eastern Tibet. At the age of twelve he entered the Dego Somdupling Monastery. In Lhasa at the Gyuto Ramoche Monastery he continued his studies on Tibetan Tantric Buddhism as well as on chanting, prayers and meditation. In 1989 he went to India and continued his studies at the Tantric University of Tenzingang Gyuto Monastery where he received his diploma as a professor of Buddhist sacred art. In the year 2000 he travelled to Europe as a Chant Master with the Tibet Gyuto Monks of Tibet. In 2001 he came to Australia for the first time, also as Chant Master with the Gyuto monks. He led chant sessions, created sand mandalas and butter sculptures, and guided periods of deep meditation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with the support of the Australian government, arranged for Tendar to migrate to Australia. He settled permanently in 2003 and in 2005 became an Australian
citizen. He teaches meditation and leads retreats; he continues to create sculptures in butter and to make sand mandalas; he teaches the Tibetan language and celebrates the rituals. A Buddhist community has formed round him.

I had left the Jesuit community which I missed greatly, but by establishing this interreligious community, community life was restored. They are my like-mindeds since they too seek the universal tantric dimension.

We sometimes take our meals together. One of us blesses the food while the two others listen in silence. We perceive each other’s spiritual depth and respect the commitment we each have to our traditions. We are sensitive to the indwelling grace rather than analyzing it. The great theological questions can be discussed more fully at another time, although they occasionally come up in conversation. We work together from time to time in the garden and all contribute to the running of the house. The recent renovation of the church was undertaken by Swami. Is it not symbolic, the fact that the church building was renovated by a swami? Tendar has made a butter sculpture of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes in the Tibetan Buddhist style which has been installed near the sanctuary.

We teach meditation together. I do it in a more theological manner, Swamiji in a more scientific manner since he is a neuroscientist, and Tendar through the visual arts and chant.

Through the good offices of Bettina I had made the acquaintance of Harsa Satapathy in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India. Harsa introduced me to his friend Saumya Tripathy. On one or two hectares which Saumya’s family granted to him at Uttara near Bhubaneswar, I have built two houses. In short, we are constructing a very simple sort of ashram. To the east of the ashram there is a circular tantric temple open to the sky dedicated to the Sixty-Four Yoginis; to the west is Shanti Stupa, built by the Japanese on the spot where Ashoka, the first emperor of India, after having witnessed the horrors of all-out war, converted to Buddhism; to the north is the famous LiÉgarÁja Temple, dedicated to Íiva; and to the south, in Puri, is the temple dedicated to Lord Jagannath (Vishnu), one of the four principal sacred sites in India. The ashram is located among the rice fields but near the main road between Bhubaneshwar and Puri. The interreligious dimension is there too.

**1.5 Dwelling**

One fine day Bishop Mark Coleridge invited me to lunch at his house. After having chatted for a long time about interreligious dialogue he asked me what I would like to have. A generous invitation! I made two suggestions: firstly the establishment of a school of prayer, and secondly the establishment of an interreligious centre.

Several months later he invited me to put these proposals into action. The School of Prayer was launched by Bishop Coleridge on the occasion of a visit to Melbourne by Dom Laurence Freeman OSB who teaches apophatic meditation in the tradition of Dom John Main OSB. The purpose of this ambitious project is to present to the faithful the riches of the contemplative tradition of the Church, to promote the teaching of meditation in Catholic schools and to establish meditation groups in parishes.

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34 Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, now Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn.
Bishop Coleridge also invited me to get in touch with Prof. Gabrielle McMullen, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Australian Catholic University. The details of the subsequent process can be left aside. The Asia Pacific Centre for Interreligious Dialogue was established in 2006.

After all these years the things that I value deeply have at last come together. The pilgrimage is reaching its goal. I feel like the tree whose roots go deep into the earth and whose branches reach out to receive “all the birds of the air”.35 Deep roots and extended branches imply each other. It is impossible to stretch the branches wide if the roots are not well anchored; it is pointless to have deep roots if the sap cannot flow freely.

If I am seek the solitude of the desert it is because I wish to find that state where the power of the Spirit and its fruitfulness leap up. Sitting on the floor, still and without moving, depending only on the One Who Is, a spring of water seems to flow, an energy springs up. It is the Spirit who comes from me and is given to me. When I become perfectly calm and tranquil, without pretence and without fear, the Dakti becomes manifest. The will ceases to act, but is able to cease only because the Spirit has already penetrated and subsumed it so as to revive it. That is the triumph of the ‘goddess’. The Spirit comes to enliven the spirit so that it might become what it really is. I become quiet and vigorous at the same time.

There is then a leap of joy, like the bird which spreads its wings. Bad memories and doubts disappear. I breathe an air that is fresh and light, like the perfume of incense. The colours such as blue, red and green which are seen during meditation surpass in richness the splendour of stained glass. There is a sense of discovery and wonder, as when entering a sanctuary. I feel an expansiveness and elevation as though flying in the air. Feelings of calm and confidence sustain the élan; reconciliation and energy accompany it.

Then, during the meditation there is a sense of the relationship between man and woman, which occurs quite naturally. I take, and I let myself be taken; I receive and I am received in the sway of love. It is the union of rest and activity, an eternal embrace, a perfect fusion, an equal savour. I reach the eternal delight which I glimpsed on seeing, while adolescent, the insects flying together in the garden. The pleasure which my parents had for a few moments I know abidingly. I am experiencing the relationship of Word and Spirit symbolized by the eternal union of Īśva and Parvatī.

In this embrace I discover the One who is Love. At the same time a blessing radiates out to embrace the whole world. Wherever the Spirit points, there the blessing is directed, to a particular person or some special need. I take into my arms all that is: the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the living and the dead. I dwell in an infinite silence of which the variety of the world is the expression. I come to the One who is Love.

What I experience in solitude must, I know, be proclaimed publicly. The Eucharistic assembly comes together and as their priest I stand among those who are of like mind and hold them. And, supported by them, I proclaim the words of the tradition which rise up in me as though for the first time. I present to the people of God the riches of the faith unveiled by the knowledge of the tantra. They will judge whether what I say agrees with the enlightenment of the Spirit they have received.

35 Mt 13.32.
Then, taking up the Eucharistic mantra, I consecrate the gifts offered at the altar. I give to the people my body and my blood, and receive theirs for we are one body in the one Body of Christ. The Eucharist is the interplay of love, the mystic marriage. And in the silence after communion we enter into the stillness of Love.

The branches then spread out to receive all the birds of heaven. The act of plunging into the infinite depths of God is at the same time an opening out to all religions. The Church welcomes those who come, as it were, from the ends of the earth, those birds which settle in the tree of the Church and build their nests. Those who welcome them are themselves welcomed into the infinite spaciousness of the divine Heart.

In this way, the words uttered one fine morning at Tarrawarra – “I will be a priest and the whole world will be given to me as an inheritance” – have been fulfilled.

Why tell this story of a pilgrimage? It is because a Christian tantra is not just a matter of understanding with the mind but is the living of a life. Ideas alone will not give knowledge of the tantra, just as reading about the scent of a flower will not communicate its perfume. The Christian tantra is truly understood only when it is experienced.

This first chapter is linked to the third chapter on ‘double belonging’ which is also something that must be lived.
Chapter 2

Kashmir Shaivism

Preliminary remarks
This chapter sets out the major themes of Kashmir Shaivism and its Kula ritual, which is the most extreme form of tantra. It seeks to show that tantra is not to be despised or feared but on the contrary presents a point of view of considerable value. In this way the confusion in the West concerning tantra will be cleared up.

The word ‘tantra’ comes from the root TAN which means ‘to extend’. The word refers in the first instance to the cloth stretched out on a loom. It is then applied to the exposition of a topic. The word ‘tantra’ is thus neither a proper noun nor the name of a school or system. Nevertheless, the West has invented the word ‘tantrism’ and has made it refer to a point of view deriving from a heterodox form of Hinduism or, to put it quite simply, a decadent form of Hinduism, since it seems to promote pleasure as against detachment, licentiousness as against morality, idolatry in contrast to the pure contemplation of the ātman–brahman of the Upanishads.\(^{36}\)

The tantras emphasize the central importance of the guru, of initiation (dikā) and of sacrifice (pūjā). The tantric practitioners make use of the sacred diagram (maṇḍala) and above all of the sacred formula (mantra) which they recite and which they adore as a divinity. The tantric form of yoga, closely linked to Haṣṭāha-Yoga, is a collection of ascetic practices that are mediated by the body,\(^{37}\) and that lead to an awakening of kuṇḍalinī which is the hidden, dormant power. The practitioners of tantra (tāntrika) are to be contrasted with the vaidika, the followers of Brahmanism. The tantras attach little importance to the four castes (varṇa), namely the priestly caste (brahman), the warrior or ruling caste (kṣatriya), the peasant caste (vaiḍya) and the serfs (Ḍūdra). They follow rituals (saṃskāra) other than those sanctioned by tradition.

Although the tantras are very different from the Vedas, they have had a profound influence on medieval and modern Hinduism.

The various tantras, although vastly different from each other, nevertheless have a certain family resemblance. The term ‘tantra’ is polythetic in the sense that it refers to a vast number of topics that have a large number of meanings which cannot be reduced to one only.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Tardan-Masquelier, L’Hindouisme, p. 229.

Nevertheless it is possible to define tantra as follows. The Indian tradition proposes four purposes in life (puruṣa-arthā): righteousness (dharma); the goods of this world (ārtha); pleasure (kāma); and liberation (mokṣa). Usually the first three are set in opposition to the fourth, liberation, which cannot be realized, so it is said, till after death. Tantra, on the other hand, and especially the non-dual tantra, teaches that pleasure and liberation are not opposed but identical. The essence of tantra, therefore is to place kāma – pleasure – (in all the meanings of that term) and the values which are associated with it, at the service of liberation.  

It is a question, therefore, of knowing everything and hiding from nothing. It involves immersing oneself in the beautiful and the ugly, in the pure and impure, in fear and joy, in all the emotions, in all the faculties, in all the aspects of this changing reality so as to incorporate them and at the same time to transcend them, using them as a springboard to arrive at the mystery of the Absolute and to seize its powers. Access to the infinite is obtained by making use of what is limited.

The origins of tantra are obscure. It can be said, however, that tantra reaches its climax between the sixth and eleventh centuries. It spread throughout the whole of India, into Tibet and then into China and Japan. For example, in 655 CE the Indian master, Punjodaya, brings into China an important collection of tantric texts. He was followed by Shubhakarashima (637-735) and Vajrabodhi (671-741).  

In the eighth century, LalitĀditya, king of Kashmir, after conquering a large swathe of northern India, gathers around him a galaxy of learned teachers in every field of knowledge. Over the space of two centuries, the Vale of Kashmir experiences a golden age where the various schools of Hinduism and Buddhism flourish and influence each other. It is from Kashmir as well as from Bengal that Buddhist missionaries propagate their religion for a second time in Tibet, and it is from Tibet that disciples come to Kashmir to copy Buddhist texts and translate them. For this reason Tibetan Vajrayana and Kashmir Shaivism so closely resemble each other.

The variety of Indian traditions is enormous. The spectrum from ‘right’ to ‘left’, that is, from the licit to the illicit, starts with Vedism and moves through Brahmanism and the Vaiṣṇava school represented by the Pañcarātra to reach the PĀḍupata schools (LĀkula, Vaimala, Mausala and KĀruka). This variety is reflected in the hierarchy established by Abhinavagupta, moving from the tradition he least admires to the one he considers most august: Veda, Siddhānta, Left, Right, Mata, Kula, Kaula, Trika. Thus the Trika – that is, Kashmir Shaivism, the tradition which we will present in this chapter – is the system most distant from the Veda.

The variety continues. Sanderson, a noted historian of tantra tradition, states that the tantric trajectory moves away from the masculine and towards the feminine, from the

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‘right’ (dak Ô ña) to the ‘left’ (váma), from the lawful to the unlawful. He sets out the stages of the trajectory as follows:

1. The Mantram Ár g a; the Íaivasiddh Ánta and the Bhairava-tantras; the Mantrap l ò ha and the Vidy Â pl ò ha; the Y Á mala-tantras and the Íakti-tantras; the Trika-tantras and the KÁll-tantras. As the tantra becomes more and more extreme, the practices become all the more antinomian41 and in the context of the rituals the gods give way to the goddesses.42 The gods are not entirely absent but they become increasingly passive. The goddess KÁll dances on the inert body of Íva, as one can see in the chalk drawings on the streets of Kolkata or sculptured on the temples walls of Bengal or on garish postcards for sale.

The tradition which has been called ‘Kashmir Shaivism’ is considered to have begun with the text Íivas Útra which was ‘discovered’ by Vasugupta (c.875-925 CE). The school continues with KallaÓa, SomÁnanda, Utpaladeva and reaches its high point with Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025 CE) who was both a mystic, a poet, a dramaturge and a philosopher. In his masterpiece, the TantrÁloka, he reviews all the tantras of his day and reinterprets them according to the idealist system called ‘Trik a’. The tradition continues with Abhinava’s disciple, KÓemarÁja and, two centuries later, Jayaratha who writes a commentary on the whole of the TantrÁloka, after which the tradition disappears almost without trace. It revives in the twentieth century after the publication in devanÁgarí script of the manuscripts which had been written in DÁradÁ script and which had been preserved in the houses of the Brahmans. The first Western commentaries begin with the translation and presentation of the ParamÁrthasÁra43 by Lilian Silburn. Interest in this school has continued unabated as it proves to be one of the greatest schools of India.

At the time when the great Abhinavagupta is composing his masterpieces for a small group of disciples, it is the dualist tradition of Íaivasiddh Ánta which predominates. and will spread to South India and even to Tamil Nadu. The Íaivasiddh Ánta tradition is dualist: the initiate becomes ‘like the God Íva’. By contrast, Kashmir Shaivism is non-dualist: the initiates recognize that they are Íva. They understands that they are Íva himself.

During the time of Abhinavagupta the system whose modern name is ‘Kashmir Shaivism’44 was called ‘Trik a’ (three) as it was based on a series of triads. There are for instance the god Íva, his consort (DÁkti) and the human sphere (nara) which emanates from that primordial couple. There is the trio of ‘act’ (kalpa), ‘thought’ (vikalpa) and ‘consciousness without any object of consciousness’ (nirvikalpa). There is the ‘gross’ level (sth Ú la), the ‘subtle’ (sUk Ò ma) level and the ‘supreme’ (para) level. There is the

41 Sanderson, ‘Meaning in tantric ritual’, pp. 23 and 79.
44 This term is widely used at present but is inexact since there were many ‘Shaivisms’ in Kashmir at that time, such as Íaivasiddh Ánta.
‘knowing subject’ (*pramÁté*), the ‘means of knowledge’ (*pramÁÆa*) and the ‘object of knowledge’ (*prameya*). And so it continues. This ‘triadism’ is symbolized by the trident which Īśva carries in his hand or by the three horizontal lines traced on his forehead. We will come back to these.

In this chapter we will emphasize the ‘Kula’ which is Abhinavagupta’s preferred ritual within the whole scope of the tantra. Jayaratha underscores his preference:

> And in this way, he esteems more highly the guru who follows the Kula ritual procedure (*kulaprakriyÁ*) — because of [its] restfulness — in comparison with the guru who is devoted to tantra ritual procedure (*tantraprakriyÁ*).\(^{45}\)

The origins of the Kula are obscure. According to Jayaratha\(^ {46}\) the Kula tradition comes from Assam and more precisely from KÁmarÚpa, near modern-day Gauhati. At the start of the *TantrÁloka*, Abhinavagupta praises Macchanda as the founder of the tradition,\(^ {47}\) and immediately refers also to Tryambaka,\(^ {48}\) concerning whom he recounts the following legend: ĪrikaÆÔha, namely Īśva himself, is the guru of the three ‘Perfected Beings’ (*siddha*), Ámardaka, ĪrÍnÁtha and Tryambaka. He commands them to propagate the three traditions: the dualist (*dvaita*), the dualist-non-dualist (*dvaita–advaita*) and the non-dualist (*advaita*) respectively. This last, Tryambaka, teaches the non-dualist tradition to his two children, a boy and a girl. It is the daughter, ArdhatryambakÁ, who propagates the Kula tradition. Women will, therefore, play an essential role in the Kula tradition.

We have already seen that the Kula is to be located at the antinomian extreme. Because the contravention of the *dharma* involved the severest of sanctions, it is easily understood that the Kula ritual was practised in secret. The practitioner is

> secretly (*anta½*) a Kaula, outwardly a Īaiva-[siddhÁnta], but publicly a follower of the Vedas.\(^ {49}\)

### 2.1 Paths to the Absolute

It is impossible in these few pages to present Kashmir Shaivism in its entirety. This is but a brief survey of some major themes.

At the outset the individuals believes they are limited. They are caught up in the infernal cycle of rebirth, but remain unaware of their bonded state and entertain the illusion that everything is normal. They are tormented, however, seek to fill the emptiness which torments him, and gives themselves over to passing pleasures which cannot satisfy. They are the ‘bonded animal’ (*paÐu*) which simply eats grass, head down.

\(^{45}\) *TantrÁloka*, vol. 2, p. 31, lines 12-13. Abhinava distinguishes therefore between ‘tantra’ and ‘Kula’. Nevertheless, the Kula ritual belongs to the wide circle of the tantras.

\(^{46}\) *TantrÁloka*, vol. 2, p. 25, line 5.

\(^{47}\) *TantrÁloka*, 1.7.

\(^{48}\) *TantrÁloka*, 1.8.

\(^{49}\) Jayaratha’s commentary on the *TantrÁloka*, vol. 3, p. 643, line 11 and vol. 3, p. 894, line 5.
In the darkness of this dungeon, the grace (*anugraha*) of Íiva shines forth. The god reveals himself gratuitously and grants his grace in varying degrees. In the case of some, the descent of energy (*DaktipÁta*) is intense (*tÍvra*), in others the descent is middling (*madhya*), and in others it is feeble (*manda*). Whatever may be the level of grace, the individuals begins to come out of the shadows where they spend their days and begin to recognize their identity with Íiva.

In chapter 1 of the *TantrÁloka*, Abhinavagupta summarizes the whole spread of his encyclopaedic work, and in chapters 2 to 5 describes the four means (*upÁya*) for arriving (*ÅvedÁ*) at the Absolute.

The first is of these is more exactly a ‘non-means’ (*an–upÁya*). The three subsequent means are classified according to the faculties of will (*icchÁ*), knowledge (*jñÁna*) and action (*kriyÁ*). These three are not mutually exclusive since the faculties of action, knowledge and will are at work in everyone, but one or other may predominate. Each means leads, in its own manner, to absorption in the Absolute.

In the ‘non-means’ (*an–upÁya*), nothing is to be done. The level of Íiva is attained immediately and without effort, simply by a very intense descent of grace and by a limitless communication of divine favour. This means is called ‘non-means’ because it is totally gratuitous. It is nevertheless a means since there has been a change.

The revelation [of this Light] is given once and for all, after which there is no means.\(^{50}\)

This ‘non-means’ is described in apophatic terms since full illumination surpasses mental categorisation.

The supreme state is neither ‘being’ nor ‘non-being’, neither duality [nor non-duality], for it is beyond the realm of words. It is located at the apophatic (*akathya*) level. It is with energy, it is without energy.\(^{51}\)

[The Light of consciousness] is not a mantra, nor a divinity whose mantra is recited, nor a reciter of mantras. [The Light] is neither initiation nor initiator nor initiated: it is the supreme Lord.\(^{52}\)

Ritual ceases to be of use, and the conflicting emotions no longer disturb.

For them there is no mantra, no meditation, no cultic worship, nor visualisation, nor the commotion involved in ordinary initiation, consecration of the master etc.\(^{53}\)

[For those who have attained this highest state], notions of pleasure and pain, fear and anguish, disappear completely: the knower has arrived at supremely non-differentiated thought.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{50}\) *TantrÁloka*, 2.2b.

\(^{51}\) *TantrÁloka*, 2.33.

\(^{52}\) *TantrÁloka*, 2.26.

\(^{53}\) *TantrÁloka*, 2.37.

\(^{54}\) *TantrÁloka*, 2.36.
This does not imply that the recipient becomes self-absorbed. On the contrary, the attitude of universal bliss is naturally generous:

They have no other work to accomplish but to confer grace.55

The worldly person works assiduously for himself, and does nothing in favour of others, but the one who, having overcome all impurities, has achieved the divine state works solely for the benefit of others.56

Now, according to Jayaratha, the term ‘non-means’ can also be understood as ‘a very reduced means’ (alpa-upĀya)57 or ‘subsidiary means’ (parikaratva).58 He gives some examples:

The sight of the Perfected Beings and yoginiks, the eating of the ‘oblation’, a teaching, a transition (sapkramaś), spiritual practice, service of the Teacher.59

Even one of these subsidiary means is able to bring the disciple to divine knowledge, suddenly and without having subsequently to undertake the practices which are necessary to those who are less gifted.

This being said, most need to follow one of the other three means, all of which have innumerable techniques.60

… those whose consciousness is not utterly pure receive grace only by following one of the paths.61

The second means described by Abhinavagupta is called ‘the way of Īva’ (DĀmbhava-upĀya) where the will predominates and which is based on the sense of the ‘I’.

…. this way, which is a mystic élan (udyama), can be summed up as a total yet simple and direct identification … of the yogin with the original impetus of the divinity.62

55 TantrĀloka, 2.38b.
56 TantrĀloka, 2.39.
58 op. cit. vol. 7, p. 3420, line 12.
60 See, for example, the 110 techniques described in the VijñĀnabhairava-Tantra. In the TantrĀloka, 4.57b-58, Abhinava mentions some of them: “… knowledge of the circle of the mothers … the rites of purification, asceticism, meditation, yoga, recitation of the mantra, gnosis, adoration of the mantras … observances …”
61 TantrĀloka, 2.47b.
The practitioners are involved neither in activity nor in reflection. They do not seek to do or understand anything but seek to dwell simply in silence where the will, i.e. the orientation which is a gift of grace, transforms all the faculties. The practitioners are confident and assured. There is even a presumption (akasmāh), since they are convinced by grace.

In third place, the ‘way of power’ (Ḍāktya-upāya), involves reasoning (tarka) and knowledge

[the ‘way of power’] ... A lucid vision of the understanding where untuitive reasoning (sattarka) is awakened on the basis of differentiated thought, vikalpa, leading to mystic realisation, bhāvanā. 63

What counts here is understanding. The increasingly clear understanding of the mystery provokes a leap in the heart, for the practitioners acquire that discernment (vijñāna) which allows them to perceive the Self (Ātman). The disciples perceive with increasing clarity their identity with Īrāva. They delight in the reasoning and at length arrive at supreme knowledge and, like īrāva, proclaims ‘I am’. In this way the theologian who has long reflected on divine revelation comes to rest in wonder at the divine mystery.

In the ‘way of the individual’ (Āśava-upāya) the practitioner experiences an expansion of consciousness by celebrating rituals (vidhi), by reciting mantras, by going on pilgrimage or by offering gifts, and so on. In short, action and objectivity are the dominant aspects. By performing these tasks, the practitioners ‘construct’ their identity (tādātmya) with Īrāva. In the same way that the pianist who has reached a supreme mastery of the art no longer thinks of technique but becomes absorbed quite simply in the music, so too the celebrant of the rite becomes absorbed in the divine mystery of which the ritual is the expression.

The purpose of the four ways remains the same: the act of recognition (pratyabhijñā) of the state of Īrāva. The various ways allow the tantrics to arrive at supreme consciousness where they recognize who they really are. They do not simply proclaim that they are like Īrāva or that they participate in the nature of Īrāva but that they are Īrāva. They proclaim ‘I am’. They are present everywhere, universal.

What is the meaning of ‘Īrāva’? The Veda refers to countless gods: Indra, Agni, Varuna, to name only a few, who symbolize the various aspects of the universe. Among them is Rudra, a wild god, who will be identified with Īrāva and as such appears more clearly in the later Upanishads, in the epics and the Purāṇas, and becomes the subject of a vast mythological and philosophical literature. According to the Vedānta, the absolute is presented in another way: everything derives from the unique Brahman, an impersonal and infinite principle. The human being needs to admit the illusion (māyā) of the world and realize also an identity with this universal principle which is called ‘That’ (tāt). The famous phrase states: ‘Thou art That’ (tat-tvam-āsi). When the question was put to the

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63 Silburn, L. et Padoux, A. La Lumière sur les tantras, p. 56.
Buddha, ‘does the Self (Ātmā) exist’ the Master responded with silence, which has been interpreted in various ways by the various Buddhist schools. The question of the Self, the ultimate principle, is put in different ways and receives different replies.

To this perennial question Kashmir Shaivism proposes the following solution. The first aphorism of the Īśvara Sūtra, the text which founds this school, reads: “Consciousness is the Self” (caitanyam-Ātmā). That is, the Self is ‘consciousness without any object of consciousness’. Abhinavagupta explains: a mirror of itself has no image on its surface. Since it is capable of reflecting any image on its surface, in that sense it contains all the images. Similarly, a lump of clay does not of itself have any shape – it can be fashioned into a plate, a vase, a brick or any other object. In that sense it contains all objects. It is all and nothing. Similarly, supreme consciousness can take on all forms (rūpa) but of itself does not have any.

Consciousness is therefore ‘empty’ (Būnya) in the sense that, of itself, it is without any content. It is at the same time ‘full’ (pūrṇa) since in principle it contains everything. This same consciousness (saṃvīti) is the basis of all experiences, acts and words which are like the images on the surface of the mirror. The attempt to deny consciousness is itself an act of consciousness. For that reason consciousness surpasses everything and is ‘without equal’ (anuttara).

According to Kashmir Shaivism consciousness is not impersonal. It is the Subject which is not a subject among other subject, like a god among other gods, but quite simply the Subject which embraces all. Consciousness is ‘I’ (aham), simple subject without objectivity, pure presence. Nothing can define it since it transcends the mind. It is therefore ineffable (anākhya). It is Subject and cannot be perceived as an object. All the words which might try to define it are inadequate since the Subject cannot be the object of discourse. It is always the speaking Subject. Thus, in every individual who speaks it is the infinite Subject who is speaking. Each individual person is the manifestation of the supreme Person. In recognizing one’s own self one apprehends the universal Self.

Consciousness, from the fact that it is void (Būnya), is without limits. It refuses nothing and presents no obstacle. It knows and comprehends, it receives and welcomes; it does not turn away from anything and contains all. It is the ‘cave’ (guha). It is the Heart (hédaya) at very heart of being.

Kashmir Shaivism is therefore non-dualist (advaita). It is not monistic; the ultimate Reality is not the impersonal Brahmā of which the world is the illusion. On the contrary, the Absolute is ‘I’ of which the panoply of the world is the real manifestation. To this I which transcends all names, our school gives the name Īśva (‘the Propitious’). Just as a dancer who takes up a position really is this stance and at the same time is not this stance because he can change it, so too Īśva, the Lord of the Dance (naṉarāja), is all that exists and is not all that exists.65

64 According to legend the text was revealed to Vasugupta by Īśva himself. See Lilian Silburn, Īśva Sūtra et Vimarñī de Kêmarāja, traduction et introduction. Paris, Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1980, p. viii.
65 At the entrance of the famous Elephanta Caves near Mumbai, there is on one side the colossal statue of Īśva the yogi, motionless and calm, and on the other side the statue, also colossal, of Īśva the dancer, Īśva
The I, the personal Subject, is consciousness, emptiness, fullness, presence, is without equal, ineffable and present to all, containing all and surpassing all. Such is ‘िवा’.

A question
िवा, परवती, the gods and goddesses, are they persons66 or personifications? Now, the idea of the person seems to involve the idea of the individual. This in turn can imply an insurmountable atomism, that fragmentation which is vigorously rejected by the non-dualist tradition. In short, the personal and the interpersonal, which are essential to Christian thought, seem to involve an unacceptable dualism.

Nevertheless, in his commentary on the Parātrīṣṭikā67 Abhinavagupta teaches a sort of personalism. He states that Dakti, who is indissolubly united with इवा, is ‘thou’. When इवा contemplates an object, ‘it’, he transforms it into Dakti, ‘thou’. That is, by a process of absorption ‘it’ become ‘thou’; it becomes personal and enters into communion. The absorption continues and the ‘thou’ becomes ‘I’: everything becomes इवा. By the grace of इवा, ‘it’ becomes ‘thou’ and finally all is ‘I’.68 It is as though इवा says: ‘You are not apart; you are not other than me; you are my very self’. The two — I and Thou — are but one. The non-dualism of Kashmir, according to Abhinavagupta, is not opposed to the interpersonal. This sort of commentary, however, is extremely rare.

2.2 Word and words
‘I’
The I is not ignorant, since it is the fullness of consciousness. It is light (prakāśa) without shadow and is not obscure to itself. It is conscious of itself by means of an ‘act of consciousness’ (vimāra). The two — prakāśa and vimāra — are inseparable, not divided or separated but identified. They are non-dual. One is never without the other; the first is the origin of the second; the second reveals the first. The act of consciousness is an auto-illumination, a light upon the light. It is the primordial revelation. The consciousness of consciousness is the supreme Word (वाच), eternal, total, simple.

The ‘I’ says ‘I am’. The ‘I’ expresses itself completely in saying ‘I am’. It proclaims this once and eternally; all is said thereby.69

‘I am’

NaṉarĀj. The two statues portray the same reality. In fact, इवा dances and turns so rapidly that, like the top, he is mobile and immobile at the same time.

66 The idea of the person, पुद्गाला, can be found in Indian thought, but marginally so. See, for example, James Duerlinger, Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons, London, Routledge Curzon, 2005.
69 The yogis, as they perfect their recitation (japa), pronounce the mantra less and less frequently. The repetition and the breath slow down and the yogi becomes like God: he expresses himself eternally and totally, without needing to repeat.
The ‘I am’ is the supreme mantra. Just as one cannot oppose or separate prakāśa and vimarśa, so too the reciter (mantrī) and the recited (mantra) are not dual. For the same reason, ‘the one who says’ (vācaka) and ‘what is said’ (vācya) are one.

These binary terms – prakāśa and vimarśa, mantrī and mantra, vācaka and vācya – form the basis of an extensive reflection on the nature of the word which Abhinavagupta pursues in his principal works. What Padoux asserts concerning India as a whole –

India seems indeed, of all the countries in the world, one – or even the one –
best exemplifying an ageless, unbroken tradition of speculations about the Word

– is true also of the thought of Abhinavagupta.

Now, the Word is the origin of all words; the supreme mantra is the subject matter of all mantras. Every revelation is a prolongation of the first revelation. Later, as we shall see in dealing with the emanation of the world, the ‘I am’ becomes ‘I am this or that person’ but beneath all its expressions, the primordial ‘I am’ is found. In that way all proceeds from the Word which proceeds from ‘I’.

Power

According to Kashmir Shaivism, the supreme Word is not inert but powerful. It is the origin of all words and worlds, of all mantras and objects. It is essentially dynamic and this power is Dākti. Just as fire and its capacity to burn imply each other, the Word and its Dākti are never separated. The Power of the Word is distinguished from the Word and yet is identified with the Word. In the same way that light and its auto-illumination are distinguished but are not separated, so too the Word and the Power of the Word are distinct without being opposed. To see one is to see the other.

Īśvara delights in manifesting himself in the variety of the word, and does so in union with his powerful Dākti. The Dākti is the capacity of the Word which, without that power, remains powerless. According to the famous formula, ‘if sakti is absent, Īśvara is just Dava (a corpse)’. He can do nothing by himself; he can do all in union with his consort. In their embrace they enjoy the play (īlā) of love. The emission (visarga) of human reality (nara) is the loving vibration (spanda) of the divine couple. Given that the Word is manifest in all the words and that the Power is manifest in all the powers, the universe is a vast field of lovers, a gathering (melaka) where gods and goddesses – who are reflections (pratibimba) of the supreme couple – intertwine. Love is found everywhere. The instability of the word is but the changing movement of an eternal embrace, the friction (saghaōō) of a love filled with wonder (camatkāra).


71 From the root ŚAK ‘to be powerful, to be capable of’. 
Just as a man is incapable of procreating a human being without uniting himself to a woman, so too the Word is the origin of the world only by means of the Dakti. The world emanates from the goddess just as the child is born of a woman. The woman, therefore, is the perfect symbol of the goddess.

The word ‘kula’ originally means ‘family’ or ‘clan’. It also signifies the totality of things. Given that all reality emanates from the goddess, the Dakti also is called ‘kula’. Therefore, the god Ṣiva, whose consort she is, has the name ‘akula’, that is, ‘he who is not kula’, ‘he who is not the goddess’, ‘he who transcends the world’. The primordial couple Dakti-Ṣiva bear the title ‘Kula-Akula’.

The word ‘kula’ will take on other meanings as the goddess materializes herself.

The kula is the Dakti of ParameṢa [Ṣiva], his capacity, eminence, freedom, vitality and potency, mass, consciousness and body. The Kula ritual which we will review later in this chapter allows the practitioner to attain all these states.

The world
It is said that the three acts – emanation, preservation and reabsorption – are the work of the Hindu ‘trinity’, BrahmĀ, Vishnu and Śiva. This is a simplification. It is true that the word ‘BrahmĀ’ comes from the word ‘brahman’ which means ‘growth’, and that Vishnu preserves the universe and that Śiva, who is often associated with the cremation ground, is in some sense the destroyer. However, according to Kashmir Shaivism, Śiva is not one god among other gods but the source of all, including all the gods. Śiva emanates the world, sustains it and reabsorbs it; he obscures himself and reveals himself. Those are the five acts of Śiva: emanation (śeśō), preservation (sthiti), reabsorption (saṭhāra), obscuration (tirodhāna) and grace (anugraha). These five acts occur one after the other in the great cycle of the universe and all at once in each particular moment. All things, both mobile and immobile (cara-acara), are the radiance of the eternal embrace, the blessed entourage of Śiva and Dakti. As the famous phrase says:

His Daktis are the whole universe and the one who possesses Dakti is MaheDvarah [Śiva].

By the power and autonomy (svātantra) of his Dakti, Śiva manifests himself in the world. His emanation is not a creation if ‘creation’ signifies the production of something which is not identical with him. Emanation is manifestation, just as the dancer expresses himself in the posture which is not something apart from him. The god without form (niśkala) takes on form (sakala).

72 ṬantraŚloka, 29.4
The manifestation of the god is at the same time an obscuration (*tirodhanā*) or a contraction (*sañkoca*). The infinite is invisible; the visible is finite. Reality unfolds itself, therefore, moving from the invisible to the visible, from silence to sound, from the interior to the exterior, by a process of lessening, just as the singer who decides to sing a song of praise refuses at the same time to intone a ballad.

Íiva ‘contracts’ in the process of projecting the world which is not other than himself. This does not indicate pantheism. We are dealing here not with a philosophy of being but with a philosophy of revelation. This world is not an object but an expression. It is not a thing but a word. The god expresses himself in this world; the world reveals the god. This does not mean that the world is imaginary but that it is the ‘coagulation’ (*mūrti*), the image, of the infinite.

*The stain*

Íiva freely both manifests and obscures himself. He freely deceives himself and this deception is the illusion (*māyā*), which does not mean that the world is unreal but that the understanding of it is false. Íiva becomes individual and becomes mistaken. He harbours illusions about himself and about the nature of things.

The primordial stain (*mala*) is individualism (*Āśava–mala*). One thinks of oneself as ‘such’ and ‘not other’, burdened by limitation (*kalā*), partial knowledge (*vidyā*), attachment (*rāga*), time (*kāla*) and necessity (*niyati*). They are the five ‘coverings’ (*kañcuka*) which constrain and prevent the universality of being. Taken all together they constitute the stain of illusion (*māyā–mala*). The individual thinks he or she is essentially limited. They are subject to a false idea of what they are; their self-image is fictitious (*aham–kāra*). Their deeds are therefore ‘stained’ (*karma–mala*) and at fault: they are guilty. The three stains – individualism, misconception and fault – involve each other. In their wretchedness they find themselves alienated from their true nature and subject to the cycle of births, imprisoned in the absurdity of useless repetition. They are like beasts tied to the mill, bonded animals (*paḍu*) turning round and round without going anywhere. Everything crumbles into fragments (*bheda*). The divine light is extinguished in them and they becomes inert (*jata*), sad and strangers to themselves.

This does not necessarily mean they are inactive. On the contrary, driven by deep anger and greed they seek to fill the emptiness which they feel within, but their busyness only serves to distance them further from their authentic self. They do not see the uselessness of their acts. They may boast about what they have done, but they misunderstand and profoundly despise themselves. They lead a life which is opposed to the just life (*dharma*). It is a state without grace, a state of sin where the divine image is disfigured.

Íiva freely takes his pleasure (*kṛta*). The ‘I’ manifests itself in everything. The totality of things is not other than himself. He does not say ‘I am not this form or this aspect of things’. He says simply and in every respect ‘I am’. At the same time, under the
effect of illusion, he says ‘I am this and not that’. Ṭīva is everything and nothing. He is and he is not (sad-asad). He delights in being at once light and darkness. All the contraries are reconciled in him who is their origin. He takes pleasure in doing ‘what is impossible and improbable’. He manifests his omnipotence by becoming powerless: he is capable of everything.

The mantra
The Sanskrit alphabet consists of fifty phonemes which go from ‘A’ to ‘KÑA’. In the thought of Kashmir Shaivism, as in Indian thought as a whole, the emanation of the world is a pronunciation of the supreme Word through these fifty phonemes. The vowel ‘A’, the first, is Ṭīva himself. The sixteen vowels from ‘A’ to ‘¼’ represent the divine sphere; the thirty-four consonants which follow, from ‘K’ to ‘KÑA’, represent the objective world. The whole of reality, therefore, is found in these fifty phonemes, just as the immense banyan tree already exists in the seed. The Word and reality are one. Objects and sound imply each other. Everything is sound.

Now, the supreme Word and its phonic manifestation are non-dual. They are inseparable and imply each other. The limited word which proceeds from the supreme Word is at the same time the instrument by which one has access to the original sound, just as by listening to ‘divine Mozart’ one becomes conscious of a celestial harmony. By means of words one arrives at the Word. Those who pronounce the fifty phonemes arrive at the Word and finds themselves united with all that exists. They are separated from nothing, since the Word contains all.

The phonemes are arranged in such a way as to form mantras which vary according to the traditions. In the Kula tradition which we are following here, there are four principle mantras: MĀtªkĀ, MĀlinÍ, MĀtªsadbhÁva and ParÁ. The normal series of phonemes, where the vowels precede the consonants and which extends from ‘A’ to ‘KÑA’, has the name MĀtªkĀ (‘the maternal’) since the world is born from her. The series of phonemes where vowels and consonants are mixed is called ‘MĀlinÍ’ (‘the garland’). Given the fact that the vowels symbolize the seed and the consonants symbolize the womb, MĀlinÍ gives rise to the emission of the world and the acquisition of pleasure. There is also MĀtªsadbhÁva (‘the essence of the Mother’, or ‘the essence of the knowing Subject’): KHPHREM. There is also the mantra SAUi which consists of the three phonemes S, AU and i and is called ParÁ (‘the supreme’) and also ‘Trika’ since that threefold mantra resumes the whole of the Trika system.

In emitting the world, the supreme mantra expresses itself in mantras which are increasingly feeble, just as flames lose their intensity as they spread away from the fire. Nevertheless, even a limited mantra, by the fact that it originates authentically from the supreme mantra, possesses its essence. The mantra is a tool, indeed a weapon, whose

73 According to Indian custom, the mantra can be recited in a shortened form by using its first and the last phonemes which are understood to comprise all the intervening phonemes. The shortened form of MĀtªkĀ is therefore A-KÑA.

74 MĀlinÍ, which consists of the fifty phonemes in mixed arrangement, begins with the phoneme NA and finishes with the phoneme PHA. Its short form is therefore NA-PHA.
efficacy is called ‘power of the mantra’ (*mantra-vírya*). When they receive the mantra during the initiation ceremony, the disciples are transformed into the mantra and enjoy all its characteristics. The reciter and the recited are one. Due to the identity between phonemes and reality, those who receive the mantra are made able to transform the world. They can, therefore, consecrate and transubstantiate. The reciters transform the object on which they project the mantra, such that the object acquires the nature of the mantra. Now, since the mantra is the phonic expression of the divinity, the reciters, by projecting the mantra on themselves or on another person or on an offering, divinize them.

Abhinavagupta teaches that the Trika School is superior to the rival traditions of the Vale of Kashmir. Likewise, he states that the principal mantras of the Kula tradition are superior to all others in their power and effectiveness.

Thus, what results in a month with a single [mantra] given in the lineage of the Perfected Beings is not [achieved] over thousands of years with different torrents of mantras.  

In his commentary on this verse, Jayaratha quotes another verse which confirms Abhinava’s teaching:

> The mantras mentioned in the *tantras* of the Siddhánta etc. are all impotent since they all lack the splendour of *Bakti*. The great mantras of the Kaula tradition, by contrast, are splendid with innate fire; they shine with a divine splendour, immediately causing conviction.

Given the fact that these mantras are also goddesses, it is by means of the feminine that the practitioner of the ritual comes to power.

**Words**

The Word goes through four stages: *parÁvÁc, paÐyanÍ, madhyamÁ* and *vaikharÍ*. Strictly speaking, the supreme Word (*parÁvÁc*) is not a stage since it underlies all the stages, just as the oil is found everywhere in the grain of sesame seed. Now, in the tantrics who move out of the infinite richness of the Word, an intuition (*paÐyanth*) takes place: they ‘see’. That is, they have a perception which precedes all verbal expression. Then, by progressive limitation, the *tántrikas* comes to the intermediate stage (*madhyamÁ* ) where words are beginning to form but remain incoherent. Fourthly, they express themselves in ordinary words (*vaikharÍ*) where their perception is at last verbalized. Still, words are never adequate to describe the perception in a complete way, and ultimately do no more than suggest it.  

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75 *TantrÁloka*, 29.3.

76 When I understood this I began at last to understand what had happened in me for so long. I had perceived the tantra but I remained in a state of *madhyamÁ*. That is, I knew, but I was not able to say what I knew: I did not have the words. At last I understood the rush of energy which came when I read even a few words or phrases from Kashmir Shaivism: I was consciously coming in contact with my essential being. I was ceasing to be tongue-tied. I was putting into words what I had long known. I was able to follow the
Those who remain chained by the bonds of ignorance can only rehash banalities without revealing any perception of the supreme Word. Their words and the Word do not reflect each other. One does not perceive in their words that Word which is the foundation of all speech. Their words suggest nothing and remain without poetry. By contrast, in the person where all the levels of the Word are operative, the words resound (dhvani). The words of the guru, for example, have a powerful effect on his disciples and lead them to the fountain-head of all words. Indeed, his words lead to expressive silence. There is, therefore, a constant interplay between Word and words, one leading to the other.

The body

Kashmir Shaivism, and Indian thought in general, sees the human body (deha) as a microcosm of the world. Already in the G Veda⁷⁷ the whole of reality is in a sense the result of the sacrifice of the primordial ‘Man’ (puruṣa) “who is all that is, all that was and that will be”⁷⁸ - The Man contains all that is.

The Saṃkhya, one of the oldest philosophical systems of India, proposes twenty-five levels or categories (tattva) which conclude with the couple puruṣa (‘man’) and prakṛti (‘woman’). Kashmir Shaivism proposes eleven more categories – thirty-six in all – and in this way states that the Trika school is superior to the Saṃkhya and constitutes its heart and essence.

From the head right down to the feet, the whole body symbolizes the emanation of the world in thirty-six stages. The tuft of hair (Dīkhā) at the top of the head represents consciousness, īlā himself, whereas the big toe represents the last stage of emanation, matter (pāthivī), inert and without energy.

The levels of the body are linked with the various worlds of which the one we live in at present is but one example, so that by identifying with one or other part of the body, we can live in a different universe. The person who identifies with the level of the navel, for example, is lord of a world which is more restricted than which is linked to the forehead, and so on. The body is thus a kula which sums up in itself the totality of things.⁷⁹ Why travel? Why go on pilgrimage if the body contains all in itself?

The body is not a confused mass but a structure where there are major centres (cakra). These cakras are networks of energy, ‘lotuses’ (padma) which are ready to open

élan of the heart. I understood the cries and sighs which would issue at the moment of meditation, for they were the expression of a perception which surpassed words. Kashmir Shaivism was giving me the tools by which I could identify with the Word.

⁷⁷ G Veda, 10.90.
⁷⁸ G Veda, 10.90.2.
⁷⁹ I understood, therefore, why I did weight-lifting and understood the important I attached to the body. At the moment of lifting, there is a sort of explosion. The lifter takes hold of the bar and identifies with the weight. Without forcing, quite naturally, almost involuntarily, he lifts it. There is an exchange: the body stiffens like the metal whereas the inert weight moves. It is a victory; the lifter accomplishes what seemed to be impossible and beyond his strength. The dead weight is transformed and does what also seemed impossible: it moves. As a result, the lifter feels linked to all things in each part of his body. For the same reason I had done a four week week course of yoga at the Satyananda ashram near Melbourne.
and display all their beauty. The body is not, therefore, something to be despised but a richness to be discovered. It is not a question of rejecting the body but of allowing it to flourish.

The whole human being, all its faculties (indriya) and limbs (aÉga), its relationships and its memories (smaraÆa), its history and mental attitudes (vÁsanÁ): all form a system, a maÆtala, a complex of interlocking wheels (cakra). From the heart (hét) or from the navel (nÁbhi) 72,000 subtle channels (nÁ±Í) spread out through the whole body. Around the principal centre (mukhya-cakra) subsidiary centres (anucakra) are arranged and relate to each other continuously, one leading to the other. The satisfaction of a subsidiary centre leads to the opening of a higher centre just as the lotus flower opens at the coming of dawn. For example, the pleasure experienced in contemplating a work of art gives us a glimpse of eternal beauty. On hearing the sacred chant, the spirit begins to perceive a celestial harmony. The subsidiary wheels which begin to turn put into motion the central wheel, consciousness, which is sovereign. This interconnection is the reason for the tantric use of pleasure as well as of horror, as we shall see.

The body is a manifestation of the Word. By making use of a mantra the practitioners enliven the cakras. By pronouncing ram or yam, for example, they enliven the navel or the heart. Likewise, the awakening of a cakra results in a particular sound being emitted which the practitioners hear as a resonance that comes seemingly out of nowhere, a music come from heaven. The body and the Word refer to each other.

The levels of consciousness

Indian thought, like that of Kashmir, teaches that the level which is generally considered ‘conscious’ — where words and objects predominate and which all can confirm — is the least significant level. That is the ‘objective world’ (jÁgrat). More personal and more revealing but less accessible to others is the dream (svapna). In fact, psychology justifies this point of view since it holds that the sub-consciousness and its dreams tell more about a person than the factual details of their existence. More important still in Indian thought is deep sleep (suÓupta), the dreamless state. At that level one is like the newborn infant, without formation or deformation and able to receive all manner of impressions. All is known in nuce, essentiality. Deeper still is the ‘fourth level’ (turya) which is the primordial energy (Dakti), the source of all. And finally there is the ‘beyond-fourth’ (turyÁtita) proposed by Kashmir Shaivism. This level is Íiva himself, who comprises all that is. By identifying with Íiva one attains not only consciousness itself but, in principle, all the particular levels of knowledge which flow from it.

The disciples refuse to live solely in the objective world; they go on pilgrimage to the state of Íiva (DivatÁ). When they reach that state, they identify with everything that is and lives at all five levels of consciousness at the same time. Consequently, they have a universal and compassionate spirit. Although they have been formed in a particular culture they are without deformation and without prejudice. Every point of view is familiar to them and they understand it. If they find themselves in some unusual situation
they are nevertheless at ease, since the state of Šiva is stranger to nothing. Fully awakened they feel at home everywhere; they do not cling to anything and remain free.

Similarly, distinction is made between kalpa, vikalpa and nirvikalpa. The objective act (kalpa), however important it may be, is essentially the expression of thought (vikalpa) which itself is surpassed in value by non-thought (nirvikalpa). Acts and thoughts give way to the absolute which contains them and of which they are the manifestation.

There is a constant interplay between these three. The nirvikalpa, that is, the essential orientation of a person, is expressed in various points of view. These in turn give rise to acts which reflect their origin. The expansiveness of the heart expresses itself in acts which open up the heart. Similarly and in the opposite way, sin and error prevent largesse of spirit. In the true tantric, these three states refer to each other and imply each other. The vibration proceeds without obstacle.

Finally, a distinction is to be made between the four levels of knowledge. The first refers to the objective level, to what is visible and palpable; it is the domain of the known (prameya). The second refers to the means of knowledge (pramÀÆa): emotions, faculties, and reason. The third is the knowing subject (pramÁté). The three levels involve each other: the subject, by making us of various means, expresses himself objectively.

But there is also a fourth level which entails and underlies the three others: pramiti. When the subjects who have reached full consciousness realizes that the objective world is in fact their own self, the self knows the self by means of the self. In other words, the knowing subjects are none other than the world which is the expression of their own selves: in contemplating the world they see themselves. Similarly, the means of knowledge which they use are not other than their own selves. The dualism which separates subject, means and object is transcended by the non-dualism where all are one. All is the subject (pramiti).

Those who are tied up in the bonds of ignorance and who identify with what they do or with what other have done to them, remain unaware of the emptiness which devours them. They act without thinking and without understanding. They are automatons, driven. Likewise, those who do not have the intelligence (buddhi) of consciousness limit themselves to ideas and find all their happiness there. By contrast, those who attain the state of Šiva go beyond all these ways of being and reconcile them at the same time. Being aware of the universal self they live essentially beyond any limited knowledge. They therefore have a balanced view of the ideas which come to them and lead a just life and know how to accomplish the ritual in a reflective manner and without selfishness. Their acts ‘speak’; they express the Inexpressible. The celebrants are no longer just functionaries. They accomplish the ritual knowing what they are doing. They are authentic and without bad faith. They perform the ritual consciously because the act

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80 This same idea is found in Gregory Palamas. “[The faculty of sight] becomes itself all light ... If it sees itself, it sees light; if it beholds the object of its vision, that too is light, and if it looks at the means by which it sees, again it is light. For such is the character of the union, that all is one, so that he who sees can distinguish neither the means nor the object nor its nature, but simply has the awareness of being light and of seeing a light distinct from every creature.” Défense des saints hésychastes. pp. 459-460.
proceeds from their very self. Their acts show forth the power of the Dakti which dwells in them and which communicates itself through them. They express themselves in everything and all belongs to them. They are the Lord of the Universe (prabhu).

2.3 Initiation

Preliminary remarks

The TantrÁloka is divided in two parts. Chapters 1-12 present the bases of the system while chapters 14-36 present the rituals of which the Kula ritual in chapter 29 is the high-point. In chapter 13, which links the two parts like the hinges of a diptych, Abhinavagupta describes the initiation (dikÓÁ) which is absolutely necessary since only the tantric who has received initiation is authorized to celebrate the ritual. The initiates alone, who have been identified with the tradition (saÞpradÁya), are authorized to express it in ritual. Thus the tradition, the initiate and the ritual: all three are one. The non-initiated, precisely because they do not belong to the tradition, remains incapable of celebrating it. If they persist in trying to do so, their act is only a pretense.

In chapter 13 of the TantrÁloka, Abhinavagupta describes three general categories of initiation: intense (tÍvra), middling (madhya) and feeble (manda). These three take place at three levels, likewise intense, middling and feeble. There are therefore nine forms of initiation. The great teacher of Kashmir is above all interested in the first three: very intense (tÍvra-tÍvra), intense (tÍvra) and slightly intense. In the first case, the recipients are initiated directly by the goddess and so intensely that they attain the state of Íiva and leave this world without delay. In the second case, the recipients are initiated directly by the goddess and, like Abhinavagupta himself, set about teaching disciples so that they too can arrive at the state of Íiva. In these two first cases, the energy comes on the disciple even without ritual initiation since the goddess is free and acts as she pleases. Suddenly and for no reason consciousness unfolds in the disciple. Such disciples are favoured by the goddess.81 In the third case the recipients need to find a guru and have themselves initiated so that they might arrive at the state of Íiva. The six other forms of initiation are increasingly feeble; Abhinava reviews them briefly.

Chapter 29 on the Kula is also divided into two sections.82 The first section consists of rituals celebrated by the initiate; the second consists of rituals of initiation.83 These two sections refer to each other. Only the person initiated into the Kula is able to

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81 At last I could understand why I wanted to find a guru and also refused any guru. I rejected the less intense initiation which depends on the guru for I desired direct initiation by the goddess, by consciousness. I sought the interior initiation in the depths of the spirit and therefore the most intense (tÍvra-tÍvra) initiation. At the same time I sought a guru for him to initiate me since I wanted the interior and the exterior to correspond. I wished that the guru should recognise my interior initiation and bestow its exterior counterpart. Such an initiation would not grant what I did not already possess but would show what I had already received.

82 TantrÁloka, 29.18-186a, 186b-291.

83 Initiation can be received as ‘ordinary initiate’ (samayÍ) or ‘Son’ (putraka). After that one can be consecrated as ‘Adept’ (sÁdhaka) or ‘Master’ (ÁcÁrya).
celebrate the Kula ritual and to initiate others. This is because the Kula is a tradition and not a philosophy.

Here is the first form of initiation drawn from the *Malavijayottaratantra*. After identifying himself with śiva by practicing the rituals described in the first part of the chapter, the guru, perceiving the readiness of the disciples – one among one hundred thousand – proceeds to initiate him.

After invoking the mantra of the goddess on the disciple, the guru brings him before the god. After looking steadily at the arms of the disciple, the guru sets them on fire with the mantra of the goddess. Invoking the same mantra, he places a flower in the hands of the disciple … The guru reflects on them as being pulled by the mantra of the goddess … Then, after the disciple has spontaneously taken the cloth, he is blind-folded and he spontaneously drops the flower. From its fall the guru ascertains the kula to which the disciple belongs. Then, after the disciple has uncovered his face, the mantra makes him fall prostrate at the feet [of the goddess into whose kula he has been initiated].

It is the mantra of the goddess which initiates the disciple. Reason plays its part, but finally it is grace which gives sudden conviction to the disciple. The guru projects the mantra but it is the goddess in her phonic form who directs the movement of the hands and above all decides where the flower should fall – no doubt on a diagram (*yantra*) which sets out the various kula or subsidiary goddesses. In fact there are several kula or families of *yogins* who rule over the domain that belongs to them. By being initiated into one or other kula, the disciple becomes lord of this domain; the goddess grants him all she has.

This initiation is itself the prelude to initiation as ‘Son’ (*putraka*) where the disciple chooses either liberation alone or both liberation (*mokṣa*) and enjoyment (*bhoga*). The disciple can also then seek consecration (*abhiṣeka*) as Adept (*śādhaka*) whose function is to grant the goods of the earth – victory on the field of battle, success in any domain, women, elephants and so on. Equally one can proceed to consecration as a Master (*ācārya*) with authority to teach and to initiate one’s own disciples and to give them both liberation and pleasure.

Abhinavagupta describes the rituals of consecration as Adept and Master but he does not seem to set much store by them. For him it is the guru who counts. The guru transcends all the variations; he is both Adept and Master and all the rest.

During initiation, the energy descends (*dakṣiṇa-pāda*) into one or other level of the disciple. There are five signs (*cīhna*) which indicate where the energy of the goddess has lodged: bliss (*ānanda*), if the descent occurs in consciousness; a leap (*udbhava*), if the descent occurs in the space (*vyoma*); trembling (*kampa*), if it occurs in the vital breath (*prāṇa*); sleep (*nāḍra*), if its occurs in the internal body (*antā-tanu*), that is, in the

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84 Note that there are other forms of initiation drawn from other texts.
85 *TantraĀloka*, 29.187.
cognitive faculties; a tottering (*ghÚrÆi*), if it takes place in the external physical body (*bahis–tanu*). If the *Dakti* touches a more elevated plane, the result will be more interior and less spectacular. If the energy enters at a lower level the disciple will experience a more visible effect. It is likely to impress the ignorant but it is the sign of a weaker grace.

There is also initiation by penetration (*vedha*) which is comparable to what once happened in Kashmir when a father saw that death was approaching. He had his son brought in and gave him not only his worldly goods but his whole being. He granted him his spirit; he granted him his joy and peace; he communicated his hope and his grace. All that the father was he made penetrate into his son. Similarly, in the initiation by penetration the master has the disciple sit before him. He communicates his *Dakti*; he projects all his faculties into the faculties of the disciple: his manner of seeing things, his manner of thinking and acting. In this way the guru and the disciple fuse and become of ‘equal savour’ (*samaraśh*). The disciple identifies therefore with the ‘centre’, the hub (*kha*) of the wheel, that is, with the supreme reality of which all things are the radiance.

Initiation can also be done by sight. In seeing the *maÆtala* or an image (*mÚrti*), the disciples find they are transformed into what they contemplate. Likewise, the guru who presents himself to public view (*darDanâ*) may inspire the descent of *Dakti*. Or again, the guru can just look at the disciples and in this simple way communicate divine knowledge to them. Even if he is in some other place or even beyond this world, the guru can initiate. In short, the more the initiation is hidden, the more it is intense and goes straight to the heart.

Exterior initiation is not absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, even the tantrics who have been initiated directly by the goddess may seek public initiation, not because they need it but because they wish that interior initiation should be complemented by exterior initiation and that in this way the inner and the outer should correspond.

All these initiations result in the disciples recognising themselves as Íiva. They do not say, in the manner of the ÍivasiddhÁnta, that they are like Íiva. They say that they are Íiva. As regards the limited self, the tantric says

> I am not ... I am only energies

But as regards the true self the tantrics say authentically and consciously, ‘I am Íiva’ (*Ðivo’* *ham*). They recognize their identity with Íiva.

### 2.4 Sexual union

Whether initiated directly by the goddess or by means of the guru, the disciples set about practising the ritual which will best lead to the state of Íiva.

The Kula ritual is best suited to those who follow the second path, the path of Íiva (*ÐÁmbhopÁya*). Abhinavagupta states as much at the start of chapter 29:

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87 TantrÁloka, 29.64.
The Kula ritual is suited to the most advanced gurus and disciples.  

Jayaratha explains that “‘most advanced’ means they dwell at the highest state of undifferentiated (nirvikalpa) awareness.” That is, the practitioners wish to express and develop the non-dual state which they have attained and which does not oppose pleasure and horror.

The ritual is complex. These few pages will bring out some of the main ideas and, finally, examine two rituals: the daily ritual and some aspects of the ritual with the consort.

a. Pleasure

For the adherent of Vedism (vaidika), as we have seen, the three aims – the just life (dharma), the goods of this world (artha) and pleasure (kāma) – are opposed to liberation (mokṣa). For the tāntrika, by contrast, enjoyment (bhukti) is liberation (muktī). Tantrics do not seek to free themselves from this life but to become ‘liberated while living’ (jīvan-mukta), taking part in life in all its aspects, in the pleasant (sukha) no less than in the unpleasant (duḥkha), yet without losing awareness of their identity with Īva. In contrast to the vaidika, the tāntrika achieves eternal destiny in time. That which is limited becomes the means of arriving at what is unlimited.

Pleasures

The tantra of Kashmir proposes, in fact, a spirituality of pleasure which is a foretaste of divine joy. Food, music, family – all give a pleasure which opens the spirit to infinite consciousness. For example:

Consciousness wells up from what the practitioner – the one who possesses Dakti – does in the circle and sub-circle and in the ‘subtle-breath”; it also results from taking the food which pours forth bliss and from external sources such as perfume, incense, garlands etc.

A faculty and its object are like the primordial couple. The relationship of the eye to what is seen is the relationship of Īva to his Dakti. The ear and music, the eye and art, the tongue and flavour, all senses and their sensations are a participation in the eternal embrace. The relationship of Īva and Dakti is found everywhere. In short, it is the relationship of the knower (pramātē) and the known (prameya), and this relationship is called kaula.

The kaula … is quite simply the act of knowing and the object of knowledge, as it is said in the TraiDirasa.

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88 Tantrāloka, 29.1.
89 Vijñāna Bhairava, 71–74.
91 Tantrāloka, 29.9.
Every act which leads to the state of Īva is, therefore, a religious act, whether it is officially recognized as such or not.

*Sexual pleasure*

Sexual pleasure, however, is the most apt for granting access to consciousness.

That which leads to enjoyment is the ‘inner part’ of consciousness. For that reason it is the principal circle. The rest is just a subsidiary circle (*anucakra*).\(^{92}\)

Nevertheless, sex and tantra cannot simply be identified. The *Vijñānabhairavatantra*, which presents 112 means of arriving at consciousness, only presents three which directly refer to sexual activity. Thus the tantra of Kashmir grants an important place to sexual relationship and at the same time relativizes it. Sexuality has its place but to a limited extent and is in no way preponderant.

The second of these three ways refers to the restfulness which comes at the conclusion of sexual union.

At the time of sexual intercourse with a woman, an absorption into her is brought about by the excitement, and the final delight that ensues at orgasm betokens the delight of Brahman. This delight is [in reality] that of one’s own Self.\(^{93}\)

The third verse refers to the memory of a previous liaison.

O goddess, even in the absence of a woman, there is a flood of delight simply by the intensity of the memory of sexual pleasure in the form of kissing, embracing, pressing etc.\(^{94}\)

But we will focus on the first verse:

[The practitioner] should focus the mind — which is pure pleasure — on the centre between ‘fire’ (*vahni*) and ‘poison’ (*viOa*). That mind is simply itself or is filled with subtle-breath (*vAyU*). [The practitioner then] becomes identified with the bliss of love.\(^{95}\)

This verse can be understood in several ways. Here are two of them. The ‘fire’ refers to the stomach, where the food is consumed; the ‘poison’ refers to the throat, where the god Īva according to the well-known myth had swallowed the poison *halAbhalA* which was destroying the world and from which he acquired his title ‘the one whose throat is blue-black’ (*nIlikaÆÔha*). One focuses the mind, therefore, between the stomach and the throat, that is, on the heart and on the joy which arises there, in such manner that this joy

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\(^{92}\) *Tantrāloka*, 29.105b-106a.

\(^{93}\) *Vijñānabhairava* or *Divine Consciousness*. Translation of Jaideva Singh. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1979. verse 69.

\(^{94}\) *ibid.*, verse 70.

\(^{95}\) Translated from Lilian Silburn, *Le Vijñāna Bhairava*, verse 68.
becomes a springboard to the infinite joy of Īvā and his Dakti. This interpretation is the basis of all the other pleasures which are mentioned in the verses 71-74 of the Vijñānabhairava. The second interpretation is this: during coitus the practitioner seeks to stabilize the mind between the arousal of pleasure which is like a fire and the orgasm which terminates it, which is like a poison. When the practitioner is stabilized in this interval, consciousness opens up and the couple understands that they are in fact Īvā and his consort united in the embrace of love. It is clear that these two interpretations imply each other.

Jayaratha develops this second interpretation in his commentary on Tantrāloka 29. 110b-101a which speaks of the practitioner and his partner. He quotes the following text:

This perfect expression of sexual desire, as it is called, is not to be performed for the sake of enjoyment. [It is to be performed] for the sake of considering one's own consciousness: is the mind steady or fluctuating?

Perfect self-mastery is required if one is remain in this state for it can be easily lost, either by repressing the pleasure or by proceeding to orgasm which terminates the pleasure, that is, to ‘the little death’. It is necessary both to assent to the pleasure and to be detached from it. It is a non-dual state. The pleasure then becomes the means to acquiring the state of Īvā / Dakti which is bliss (Ānanda).

False pleasure
According to Kashmir Shaivism, however, not all pleasures have the same value. The criterion for the value of a pleasure is this: will it lead to the unfolding of consciousness?

The sacrifice [that is, the pleasure], viewed externally, is called 'satiation' (tarpaēa); and as a result there is an expansion (vikāsa) [of consciousness].

The lotus flower opens at the touch of the sun. Similarly, consciousness expands under the impact of pleasure. The many interlocking centres, which are like a series of lotuses, open up successively in a great flowering. One pleasure opens the door to another, endlessly. It is a welling up (ucchalana), an upward movement (uccāra) which reaches its climax in a joy which is total and limitless, where rest and activity coincide.

There is the opposite trajectory: a descent into hell.

The states which are in the higher circle, if they go to a lower level, then there is possession by a Piḍāca which certainly produces an obstacle.

There is a choice. One can, by grace, seek a flowering which never ends. One can also choose the disastrous course where pleasure and consciousness part company. The wretched individuals seek more and more excessive pleasures which nevertheless leave them feeling empty. The pleasure is soon forgotten and they seek pleasures which are

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96 Tantrāloka, 3.68.
97 Tantrāloka, 29.107.
ever more excessive. They become obsessed. Instead of finding pleasure in everything they are pleased with nothing. Their spirit and their heart are contracted (sākucita). By pursuing the wrong path they end in illusion, and consciousness becomes clouded over.

It follows that in themselves external pleasures do not necessarily lead to interior joy. In his commentary on Tantrāloka 29.99-100a Jayaratha quotes the following verse:

Without a guru, without a deity, like dullards, O Paramēdvarī, forever consuming wine and meat, they are 'bonded animals'. There is no doubt about it.99

He is “without a guru” because he has not received initiation. He is “without a divinity” for the same reason. He makes a sham of the ritual – “forever consuming wine and meat”– he does not celebrate it. He thinks he is happy and does not realize that he remains immersed in transitory existence (sāpsāra): he is a “bonded animal”. The fact is that if he continues to use such means he proves that he is a fool (moha). Such false happiness is essentially absurd and condemns its followers to the endless cycle of rebirths.

This confusion concerning pleasure has brought tantra into disrepute. Some think that just by using alcohol and sex, they can arrive at the state of Īva. Not at all. It is only by having, by the grace of Īva, already arrived at the state of Īva that a person can practise the tantra. The three M’s (makāra) – wine, meat, and sexual union – of which we shall speak soon, are the means to realize what one already is and not to attain what one has not yet become.

In Kashmiri tantra, the contrast is not between pleasure and absence of pleasure but between the pleasure which arises from consciousness and that which is deprived of consciousness; between the pleasure which allows consciousness to open and that which prevents it. The bliss of the liberated human person and that of the ‘bonded animal’ are totally different.

One can rise to the highest heaven by pleasure or go to the deepest hell by its abuse. One can also become trapped.

The [goddesses] of a person who is centred on himself, because they cease to rule his body, stop still. As a result, his sense of self is not complete nor is it expansive.100

That is, those who are tied to a limited perception of things – the ‘body’ – and above all to a fictitious self-image (ahamkāra) are satisfied to a certain point but progress no further. Their faculties cease to develop according to their natural bent. They become paralysed, as it were. The progressive flowering of the ‘lotus’ stops and the egoists becomes listless even if they does not realize the fact. Their spirit does not expand; they remains narrow and confined.

Pleasure in the Kula ritual

99 op. cit. vol. 7, p. 3357, lines 4-5.
100 Tantrāloka, 29.112-113a.
Classical India proposes four stages \((\text{\textit{\textbf{\textit{\textit{\textit{ÁDrama}}}}}})\) of life. First of all, after leaving the family home, the celibate \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{\textit{brahmacÁrÍ}}}}})\) adolescent pursues his Vedic studies with a guru whom he humbly serves. At the conclusion of his studies he marries, governs the household \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{géhastha}}}})\) and supervises the education of his children. After retiring he goes with his wife to live in the forest \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{vanapraÁrra}}}})\). Lastly, having left all \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{saÁnnya}}}})\), he goes off alone on the road, on pilgrimage to the infinite.\(^{101}\)

However, the Kula ritual understands the word \textit{brahmacÁrÍ} in quite another manner. The term does not mean ‘celibate’ but on the contrary ‘he who practises the brahma’, that is, who uses the three M’s\(^{102}\) wine \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{madya}}}})\), meat \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{mÁÞsa}}}})\) and sexual intercourse \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{maithuna}}}})\).

The [celebrant of the Kula ritual] fills the chalice with the ingredients which are the result and the causes of joy.\(^{103}\)

Wine and meat are the “causes of joy” and contribute to the “result” which is sexual pleasure. By using these three elements, the tantric experiences \textit{brahna}, that is, the supreme joy, the mass of consciousness \((\textit{cid–ghana})\), consciousness fully expanded. It is a complete reversal of the usual meaning of the word \textit{brahmacÁrÍ}.

The celebrants of the Kula ritual use these means, as they do all pleasures, not to arrive at the joy which they do not already possess but to realize the joy which they already know. Having received by means of initiation the illumination of consciousness in the depths of their spirit, they seeks to express its bliss \((\text{\textit{\textit{Ánanda}}})\). They wish to experience externally the joy which they possess internally. Jayaratha explains:

\begin{quote}
He who follows the Kula path uses [the three M’s] for the reason that he is completely committed to manifesting his own bliss, and for no other reason. The [three M’s] cannot be used out of any sense of greed. If that were the case, how would [the usage of the three M’s] differ from worldly usage.\(^{104}\)
\end{quote}

Note the direction of movement: the inner bliss predominates since it is the source. The external pleasure manifests that which exists already. It follows that the yogis who know the internal joy may perhaps wish to express it in external joy. Also, they may not wish to do so. The external pleasure is not absolutely necessary for them. They can do without it and still know the most intense joy. What counts finally is not so much sexual union but the experience; not the act but the sensation.

\textit{Sexual union}

Abhinavagupta attaches importance to wine and meat, but emphasizes \textit{maithuna}.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item This last stage can be chosen from the outset and, as a young man, leave all as did the famous RÁmana MahÁéOî who revealed to Henri Le Saux the holiness of India.
\item Other tantras use the five M’s \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{paÁrcamakÁra}}}})\): fish \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{matsya}}}})\), roasted grain \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{mudrÁ}}}})\), wine \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{madya}}}})\), meat \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{mÁÞsa}}}})\) and sexual intercourse \((\text{\textit{\textit{\textit{maithuna}}}})\).
\item \textit{TantrÁloka}, 29.22a.
\item Commentary of Jayaratha on \textit{TantrÁloka}, vol. 7, p. 3357, lines 7-10.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
When the Kula practitioner unites with the consort whom the guru has prepared for him, he experiences a flowering of consciousness. The consort directly communicates the highest knowledge. Identified with the daughter of Tryambaka, she who at the very start propagated the Kula tradition, the consort is in fact the real guru.

It can happen that in uniting with the sexual companion (dUth), the yogi hears a cry of joy escaping from her throat, that cry which manifests the eternal joy of the primordial couple, Íiva and Dakti. The yogi follows the course of this cry which vanishes into the silence from which it sprang. He then follows into that silence which is not the absence of sound but its original source. He thus becomes the supreme Word.

An inarticulate sound [that is, HÁ–HÁ] comes from the heart and, traversing the breast [of the beloved], reaches the throat and finishes on the lips. He who hears it … at the moment when the sexual agitation finishes [when all audible forms of sound come to an end] the divine Sound manifests itself.

The yogi can also contemplate the fluids which flow as a result of the pleasure and in this way find himself absorbed into the state of Íiva. The cry and the fluids, which pertain to the level called ‘gross’, symbolize and eventually lead to the supreme level. The sexual emission therefore comprises all the categories, from most material to the highest. The emission also is called ‘kula’.

In the first instance, the word ‘maithuna’ means sexual union. It can also signify the use of the fluids (kuETa-golaka) which result, those fluids which a dualist mentality considers to be impure. It is not necessary, therefore, to undertake sexual intercourse in order to practise maithuna: the practitioner can use the fluids which retain all the value of intercourse.

In the DhvÁnyÁlocana Abhinavagupta studies the theme of resonance (dhvani), that is, the art of suggestion, and explains why poetry and theatre can lead the audience to the highest level. But it is the fluids, due to the fact they are natural and not produced (a-KEtrima) and that they come directly from the participants, which are the more powerful.

The yogi can, therefore, either join with a woman or use the liquids. In both cases he attains their origin, the divine Dakti, and acquires the state of Íiva who is ‘the one who possesses Dakti’ (DaktimAn). The yogi goes beyond words which are feeble in comparison, and experiences directly. The yogini’s sex and her fluids are the true ‘mouth’ (vaktra) which pronounces the ‘mantra’; she is the authentic guru who ‘teaches’ authentically. She does not teach with words that come from the facial mouth but by

105 “Due to the fact that she experiences eternal bliss, [the sound] ‘HÁ–HÁ’ is heard in her throat …” Jayaratha, Tantr Áloka, vol. 7, p. 3400, line 8.
106 Tantr Áloka, 29.158-159.
107 According to Abhinavagupta, sexual fluid is “a very pure substance because of its proximity to consciousness.” Tantr Áloka, 29.128a.
direct knowledge communicated by the ‘lower mouth’. She grants her partner ultimate consciousness. By knowing this ‘mouth’ which is the ultimate Reality (tattva), he recognizes that he is Íva.

Bliss
Underlying each pleasure there is the cycle of bliss (Ánanda), for consciousness is a vibration (spanda) which swings between the invisible and the visible, between emission and reabsorption which are like the beating of the divine heart. This blessed vibration inhabits the tantric just as it characterizes Íva himself. The bliss goes through seven stages.

Bliss is first of all experienced simply in the inner self (nija), that is, in the recollected state of mind. But, since the self is essentially a vibration, it exteriorizes itself: the tantrics seek bliss externally. They find it in something which is other than themselves (para), which is the third stage. The transition – the second stage – which bridges the gap between the purely interior joy and the exterior joy, is an intermediary stage described as ‘without bliss’ (nir-Ánanda).

In this world where all is vibration, nothing is fixed. The pleasure that is experienced externally provokes a blissful process of return (brahma-Ánanda), just as those who take pleasure in admiring a work of art feel a surge of bliss within themselves which no longer depends on the object they have viewed. The bliss comes from the self; ultimately the source of bliss is their own being. It is the fifth, the ‘great bliss’ (mahÁ-Ánanda). In sixth place consciousness itself is experienced whose very nature is bliss. The exterior object has aroused in the individual the experience of consciousness as the source of all bliss. It is the ‘bliss of consciousness’ itself (cid-Ánanda). Having set out from the self, one returns to consciousness, but the two stages are different. In the purely interior bliss (nija-Ánanda) the hidden essence of bliss is experienced; in cid-Ánanda the bliss of expanded consciousness is experienced.

The process is not finished. In seventh place there is universal bliss (jagad-Ánanda). One recognizes the world as the expression of one’s own self. The bliss of consciousness and the bliss felt at the sight of some object are the same bliss, since the subject and object are identical. All is blissful; the panoply of the world is a beatific vision. The heart expands, the spirit becomes universal.

The seven stages of bliss begin over again. The tantrics once again look at a particular object and once again experience the upsurge of universal bliss. They are like the swan (haÞsa) which, while moving over the limpid surface of the lake, plunges his beak into the water and drinks.

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109 TantrÁloka, 29.125b-126a.
110 Reality consists of 36 ‘categories’ (tattva). The knowledge of Íva, who is the ‘category’ par excellence, gives bliss and makes the sexual fluids flow. These, therefore, represent all the categories and communicate their powers. For this reason the sexual fluid also is called ‘tattva’ (substance).
111 TantrÁloka, 5.43-52a.
b. Horror
The ordinary person seeks pleasure and avoids what is unpleasant. The Kula practitioners, on the contrary, make use of both pleasure and horror and by these means shows that they transcend all dualism.

The Kula ritual attaches great importance to pleasure since it arises from divine bliss and leads back to it in a constant interplay. The ritual gives equal important to the experience of horror. That is an aspect of tantra which is ignored by the amateurs of tantrism! But why horror? The reason is that the non-dualist attitude does not accept that the tantric should turn away from horror and seek only what is pleasant. The non-dualist attitude surpasses the dualist attitude which opposes pure and impure, good and evil, sin and grace. These oppositions are only artifices of the mind. The disagreeable (duhkha) and the agreeable (sukha) are, both of them, aspects of Īva. In a sense, of course, they are contrary but they are both able to manifest divine consciousness. In fact, by choosing the contraries tantrics show that they transcend them.

Death
In some more ancient tantric traditions, for example the KĀpĀlika and Yogini cults, the cremation ground (DmaḌāna) plays an important role. During the night and in the utter darkness of the new moon, the tantric enters the cremation ground and, surrounded by glowing faggots and dreadful ogresses (yoginī), he sits upon a corpse (Dava) and, while jackals roam around, accomplishes the ritual. It is a macabre scene.

For Abhinavagupta such a ritual was already outdated. He adopts its symbolism but changes its practice and proposes a way which is more effective and more simple. In other words, why go to the cremation ground if one can acquire better results at home? It is a question of becoming more sensitive not of changing location. If it is possible, by a reinterpretation and a more exact perception of the essence of the ritual, to feel all its power within one’s own house, why go to a place outside the town? The domestic ritual is easier but not weaker; on the contrary it is more intense. It is no longer a question of acquiring amazing supernatural powers (siddhi), such as to become very small (aÆimĀ), or invisible, but to possess the best of powers: universal beatitude. It is not a question of transforming the world but of recognising it as one’s own self. It is no longer the yoginī, those ogresses, but the sexual partner (dÚtī) who devours ‘blood’ and ‘seed’. She overwhelsms the individualistic practitioner who is strongly tied to the primordial stain (ĀÆava-mala) and his desires. She eliminates not the body but the fictitious self. The tantric can therefore leave aside the skulls and ashes, the tridents and corpses of the KĀpĀlika cult. The home becomes the cremation ground. It is in one’s own house that the Kula practitioner pours everything into the fire of consciousness, and that he arrives at the level of Īva.

The word ‘citi’ signifies both ‘pyre’ and ‘consciousness’. Abhinavagupta plays on the two meaning of this word, for consciousness – the subject – is a devouring fire. By the force of contemplative consciousness all that is opaque becomes luminous, and all that is inert becomes free. Consciousness reabsorbs the world into its origin. Just as the

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sacrificial officer in the Vedic ritual pours the clarified butter (*homa*) into the fire and makes an oblation of the universe, so too the conscious subjects by their act of contemplation (*bhÁvanÁ*) consume the objectivity of the world. Consciousness is therefore a cremation.

In this cremation ground whose form is emptiness; which is frequented by the *yogink* and the Perfected Beings; in this playground which is frightful; which is the bodily and passing form of all things; which is illuminated by its own halo of light; where the covering of darkness is destroyed; which is free of all differentiated thought; where the beatific state alone perdures; which is filled with innumerable pyres; in this cremation ground which is terrible because of consciousness: who, on entering this basis of all the deities, would not become perfect?\textsuperscript{113}

The hero offers all the goods of earth to consciousness, that is, to the goddess. Into the fire of consciousness – that cremation ground – he pours his whole being, all his thoughts. The goddess receives not only his blood and seed but all that he is.

**Impurity**

In the Kula ritual the celebrant uses what is ‘*vÁma*’. In the first instance the word *vÁma* means ‘the left-hand side’, but also that which is inauspicious and illicit; the word *vÁma* also means ‘woman’ since the woman traditionally sits on the left of her husband; it also signifies ‘that which is emitted’,\textsuperscript{114} since the woman is the source of the sexual fluids and symbolizes the divine *Dakti* who gives birth to the world. Tantra is therefore *vÁmÁcÁra* – ‘the left-hand path’.

According to *The Laws of Manu*,\textsuperscript{115} Brahmans are strictly forbidden to eat meat, drink alcohol or entertain sexual relations with woman of impure caste.\textsuperscript{116} Note clearly that if the tantric uses the three M’s, it is firstly because these are forbidden; the pleasure which comes from them is of lesser importance. Jayaratha quotes a verse in this regard:

> The lineage [of Perfected Beings in this Kula ritual] is worshipped by using ingredients which are detested by people, prohibited by the sacred texts, disgusting and despised.\textsuperscript{117}

The ingredients are indeed disgusting. In certain situations\textsuperscript{118} the guru presents the ‘oblation’ to the disciple, which, as Jayaratha explains, is an horrific mixture.

\textsuperscript{113} *TantrÁloka*, 29.183-185.
\textsuperscript{114} The word comes from the root *VAM*, ‘to emit’.
\textsuperscript{115} *The Laws of Manu*, 11.91-98, 147-151, lists the sanctions that apply to alcohol.
\textsuperscript{116} The sin consisted not in intercourse outside of marriage but in intercourse with an outcast woman. It was permissible to have concubines.
\textsuperscript{117} Quoted by Jayaratha in his commentary on *TantrÁloka*, vol. 7, p. 3298, lines 3-4.
\textsuperscript{118} For example, in certain forms of initiation, see *TantrÁloka*, 29.198b-199, or at the conclusion of the gathering of yogis and *yoginí*, *TantrÁloka*, 29.282.
Male semen, male urine and menstrual blood; faeces and phlegm; human flesh, beef, goat-meat, fish, fowl; onion and garlic\(^{119}\): such are the dozen beautiful ingredients.\(^{120}\)

Abhinavagupta himself suggests the use of adulterous women, wives of men who do unclean work.

Their husbands are an out-caste, a black, an archer, a butcher, a tanner, a eunuch, a bone-breaker, a fisherman, a potter.\(^{121}\)

Just as he does not reject the women by reason of their caste or status, equally he does not reject them by reason of age or ugliness.\(^{122}\) All are acceptable to him.

What is the purpose of this contravention of the laws? It is not out of lust but for highly spiritual reasons. The tantric practitioners close their eyes to nothing. They wish to use that which others, because of their dualistic way of thinking, refuse. They wish to immerse themselves in what is ‘pure and impure’ (\(\text{Duddhi, aDuddhi}\)), ‘licit and illicit’ (\(\text{Öiddha, niÖiddha}\)), ‘agreeable and disagreeable’ (\(\text{sukha, duhkha}\)) to show that these categories are simply mental constructions and have no value. They seek both the beautiful and the ugly; they wish to know good and evil. They wish to see everything and know everything, because truth is found everywhere. The practitioners comprise all in themselves and express themselves in all the variety of the world.

They do not refuse these things but they do not desire them either. If they use them consciously in the ritual, it is to show that they attach no importance to them: they transcend them, for they are liva.

They are thus the hero (\(\text{vÍra}\)) for whom pure and impure are the same. The \(\text{yoginíš}\), incapable of rejecting such persons, draw near and give them joy and power. They who rule the world submit to the heroes’ control. The heroes can accomplish all they want, and the goddess becomes their consort in an eternal embrace.\(^{123}\)

\(\text{Sín}\)

Nothing is an obstacle to consciousness, for all derives from it and all is reabsorbed into it. The Subject is subject to nothing; similarly the celebrants of the Kula ritual are subject neither to duty nor to sin. They are free from all constraint and, fully conscious, act according to their good pleasure. They do what they want. They do it not because it is good; it is good because they do it. They are subject to no law; they are the source of every law. Living in a society dominated by rules, they break them; in a world that is paralysed they are an oasis of freedom. They give witness to their greatness of heart. They use sin to manifest the highest spiritual state.

The tantric is not, for all that, a libertine. The tantric is not a ‘tethered beast’, subject to the folly that comes from the primordial stain: individualism. The libertine, by contrast, dominated by lust and desire, is caught in the trap of dualism and is profoundly

\(^{119}\) In \textit{The Laws of Manu}, 5.5, onion and garlic are strictly forbidden.

\(^{120}\) Commentary of Jayaratha on \textit{TantrÁloka}, vol. 7, p. 3306, lines 4-6.

\(^{121}\) \textit{TantrÁloka}, 29.66.

\(^{122}\) \textit{TantrÁloka}, 29.101a.

\(^{123}\) Sanderson, ‘Saivism and the tantric traditions’, p. 671.
mistaken. Libertines confuse the free exercise of desire with that which surpasses desire. They are not free from their lusts and, should they not satisfy their desires, they feel empty. They think that by rejecting morality they are masters but, if the use of the three M’s does not automatically make them tantric, the rejection of morality does not make them tantric either.

The Kula practitioners are not altogether free, however. Rejecting all law, they think they are free of all constraint, but they need regulations such as The Laws of Manu. How could they dismiss the laws if there are no laws to dismiss? The proof of their freedom depends on the existence of laws. Their freedom is not, therefore, independent.

In fact, according to the hierarchy of traditions set out by Abhinavagupta, the Kula is not the highest tradition: the Trika is superior to the Kula. The word ‘Trika’ refers above all to that consciousness which is fully expanded. Those who are fully conscious act with untrammelled liberty and whatever they do will be fully comprehensible and luminous, clear and authentic, without error and without greed, without shadow (tamas) and without illusion. They do not experience doubt (DaÉkha) or hesitation (kampa). The Trika practitioners pay no attention to law or morality or mental constructions or dualism. They are fully conscious of what they do. They act as they please and establish the laws by acting as they choose. They are masters of the dharma. In short, the Vedas observe the laws; the Kula disobeys them; the Trika does not even think of them.

c. The Kula ritual
Having reviewed these several principal ideas of Kashmir Shaivism, we are now able to consider the ritual which embodies them.

Abhinavagupta describes six rituals which he calls ‘sacrifices’. The six rituals follow in general terms the pattern set out in the first ‘sacrifice’, which is called the ‘daily sacrifice’ (nitya).\textsuperscript{124} What follows is the short version of that daily sacrifice.\textsuperscript{125}

After entering the hall of sacrifice which is filled perfume and incense

At the very start, at the moment of entering the sacred space, the impact of the perfume sets the ‘wheel’ (cakra) in motion and promotes the upsurge of consciousness. The pleasure of the senses leads to the bliss of consciousness.

facing north-east

The east – the direction of the rising sun – signifies enjoyment (bhukti) and all the goods of this world; the north – where the sun never penetrates in its journey across the sky – signifies liberation (mukti) from this world. The north-east therefore signifies the identity of enjoyment and liberation, the tantric direction par excellence. Having received initiation, the practitioner is already liberated while living and he will become evidently so by practising the ritual.

\textsuperscript{124} Traditionally there are three sorts of ritual: the daily ritual (nitya); the occasional ritual (naimittika) which, for example, is celebrated on the occasion of a great feast; and thirdly the optional ritual (kÁmya) which is used to various ends: a good harvest, the marriage of one’s daughter, etc.

\textsuperscript{125} TantrÁloka, 29.18-23.
he purifies himself by using either ParÁ or MÁlinÍ

Purification is not the removal of a physical stain or ritual fault, but the expansion of consciousness. He purifies himself by using the vidyÁ\textsuperscript{126} which he received at initiation, which are the goddesses themselves in phonic form. The goddesses who are invoked in this way grant him the consciousness of being Íiva. He uses MÁlinÍ if he above all desires enjoyment, and ParÁ if he rather desires liberation. But the two vidyÁ give him both enjoyment and liberation. Similarly, MÁtésadbhÁva, the third of the great vidyÁ, confer on him both enjoyment and liberation. The goddesses transform him.

[He purifies] upwards and downwards. This purification consists in ‘fire’, ‘growth’, ‘enflaming’ and ‘cooling’. He can do this with MÁtésadbhÁva as well.

Starting from below he installs the vidyÁs on the different centres of the body. He starts with the foot or even with the big toe which represents the extreme point of emanation: inert and opaque matter. By going up the whole length of the body to the top of the head and even to the tuft of hair, he reabsorbs himself into Íiva. The reabsorption takes place by the enflaming fire which destroys the seeds of past erroneous acts (karma) and makes them incapable of prolonging the infernal cycle of rebirth. Having become reabsorbed into Íiva and thus identical with Íiva he proceeds to the emanation of the body. By moving from the top of the head down to the feet he projects himself anew but in such manner that he is now completely conscious. The emanation – the growth – is a sort of cooling. The practitioner is regenerated.

Next, by using just rudraDakti, he confers immortality on the articles which must be purified.

He uses the vidyÁ which is called rudraDakti which is MÁlinÍ encased either in ParÁ\textsuperscript{127} or in MÁtésadbhÁva.\textsuperscript{128} By projecting rudraDakti on the instruments which he will use for the ritual, he identifies them with consciousness. The articles are also acknowledged to be Íiva; they too are purified and immortal.

He then places in the chalice the ingredients which are the result and the causes of joy.

He places in the chalice the sexual fluids (kuÆÕa-golaka) which emanate from the body during sexual pleasure; he also places the wine and meat which lead to that pleasure. These are the ‘three M’s’ (tri-makÁra). The chalice contains, therefore, that which is

\textsuperscript{126} Strictly speaking the vidyÁ is the phonic form of a goddess; ‘mantra’ is the phonic form of a god.

\textsuperscript{127} SAUi – NA–PHA – SAUi.

\textsuperscript{128} KHPHREM – NA–PHA – KHPHREM.
intimately associated with pleasure and which at the same time is disgusting and illicit. It contains what is enjoyable and horrible, pleasant and unpleasant. The ‘hero’ (vīra) takes no account of mental constructions: his attitude is non-dual.

The practitioner is purified. The instruments of sacrifice are likewise identified with Īśva. The chalice has been prepared. All is ready.

At that point, having identified himself with the mantra mentioned above, he transforms himself into Bhairava.

The ṛidyaś have made him perfectly conscious, since the mantras of the Kula tradition are radiant and “immediately convincing”. He is Bhairava. The moment has come, therefore, for him to accomplish the essence of the ritual.

He satisfies the Self and the multitude of goddesses in the principal circle and the subsidiary circle. He does this by sprinkling the drops [from the chalice] upwards and downwards and by drinking them.

He consumes what is in the chalice. Whereas the officiant in the Vedic sacrifices presents the offering to some deity, the Kula practitioner offers the three M’s to himself since he is Bhairava. He is the Self. He is the Lord of the goddesses, indeed of the whole world which is the emanation of his own self. He is surrounded by Daktiś.

Having becoming, by his own nature, the unique lord of the Kula, he satisfies the numerous Daktiś by joining himself to them. Everything is consciousness, everything has been blessed, everything is at the same time projected, liberated and satisfied.

In short, the ritual takes place over two stages. In the first stage the practitioner, by the power of the mantra of the goddess transforms himself into Īśva / Bhairava In the second stage, having prepared the chalice which symbolizes divine bliss because it contains that which causes joy and flows from joy, he drinks of it and casts some around himself. That is, he projects and reabsorbs the world; he spreads the universal bliss and in this way shows that he is Bhairava.

The second ‘sacrifice’ is celebrated with ‘the interior Daki’, that is, kuśētalini. It is in keeping with the well-known phrase: “Why do I need an exterior woman if I have one within.” However, it is the third sacrifice, celebrated with ‘the external Daki’, that is, with a woman, which seems to be Abhinavagupta’s preferred ritual. He speaks of it at length in the TantrasĀra which is a résumé of the TantrĀloka. He mentions it in the TantrroccĀya which is an even shorter résumé of the TantrĀloka whereas he passes over the other sacrifices almost entirely.

130 TantrĀloka, 29.79.
131 Attributed to Abhinavagupta by Tardan-Masquelier, L’Hindouïsme, p. 230.
In short, in their sexual union the couple experience (anubhava) the eternal maithuna of Īva and śakti. Their sexual union is also the origin of the world itself, since the movements involved in sexual activity replicate the emanation and reabsorption of the world. Abhinava analyses this sacrifice in great detail and applies it to different sorts of people: the one who seeks liberation (mumukṣu), the one who seeks enjoyment (bubhuksu), the learned person (jñānī), the officiant (karmī), progressing here again from the more ‘interior’ to the more ‘exterior’.

Abhinava describes this sacrifice in verses 96-165 of Tantrāloka 29. In verse 123b, he quotes KallaÔa, the disciple of Vasugupta the founder of Kashmir Shaivism.

[The guru] ritually prepares the [sexual partner] since by her very being she is superior to the guru’s body.

The sexual partner is ritually prepared (bhāvitā) by the guru but her very being (bhāva) surpasses that of the guru. He may well communicate by words which come from his mouth; the yoginī communicates without words (nirvikalpa) and by means of the principal centre (mukhya-cakra). The guru initiates the disciple but it is the sexual partner who, by her ‘lower mouth’ communicates consciousness immediately in a way which is beyond description. It is clear that the sexual partner by her very sex is superior to the guru. She is the living form of the daughter of Tryambaka, foundress of the Kula tradition.

As a result the practitioner perceives the supreme Word, identifies himself with the supreme Bhairava and becomes liberated while living.

Recalling at all times and everywhere the universal pervasion (vyāpti) of the mantra, always detached, liberated while living, he becomes the supreme Bhairava.¹³²

On her part, the sexual partner gives birth to boundless knowledge.

The extraordinary being whose body is procreated at the moment of such a union is called a “yoginī-child”, he is Rudra, the worthy receptacle of spontaneous mystic knowledge. The VīēÁvali-Ḍāstra says of him that, while a child still in his mother’s womb, he is truly Īva himself.¹³³

In the dedication which he places at the start of three major writings – the Tantrāloka, the Tantrasāra, and the ParātritpDikĀvivaraÆa – Abhinava praises his parents by identifying them with Īva and Parvatī. He hints that he himself, conceived during such a union, is the “the worthy receptacle of spontaneous mystic knowledge”, “Īva himself”. Abhinava implies it; Jayaratha says so explicitly in his commentary.¹³⁴

¹³² Tantrāloka, 29.161b-162a.
¹³³ Tantrāloka, 29.162-163,
The sexual act is expressed objectively at the level called ‘gross’ (sthúla). Sexual desire and other emotions constitute the level which is called ‘subtle’ (súkōma). The ‘supreme’ (para) level is the Self which experiences all that is happening. It is the origin of which the two other levels are the expressions.

These three levels relate to each other. The gross leads to the subtle which finally leads to the supreme. In other words, the person who knows physical love can reach divine consciousness. United sexually, the lovers ‘fly in the sky’ (khecārī) of consciousness.

It can happen also that the yogis remain at the supreme level without seeking to know the other levels. It is not necessary for them to express themselves in sexual emotions and sexual acts. They can remain at the supreme level knowing that they could, if they wished, move to the other two. The progression from one to the other is natural; it is not necessary. The yogis recognize the value of the other levels but do not seek them. They identify with all the acts in all their variety and are glad of them but are not obliged to perform them. They do not feel the need to experience them; they are at their source. Their choice of abstaining from the sexual act is not a refusal of sexuality. Remaining stable and calm at the supreme level, they know all the levels which emanate from them. They stay at the highest level and experiences tranquillity (nistaraēga) and rest in their own self (sva-Ātma-viDrāntī). If in fact they do not become involved in the ‘subtle’ and ‘gross’ experiences, they are ready to do so. Their readiness means placing themselves at the mid-point between exteriorisation and interiorisation. There is neither repression nor emission.

By giving free rein to sexuality and restraining it at the same time, by occupying the mid-point (madhya), the practitioner experiences an ascending movement. That is, by balancing (samāna) the outward movement (prāṇa) and the inward movement (apāna), the tantric perceives an upward movement (udāna) which spreads out (vyāna) universally. It is the arousal, the rising of the ‘serpent’ (kuṣāla). One reaches the “splendour of that Reality which is perfectly evident”.

The yogis restrain themselves not out of fear or disgust but on the contrary because they sense already that another impetus is making itself felt. Spontaneously – since everything happens by grace – conscience unfurls and they find that they are like īva united to Parvatī, eternally.

īva is the ‘erotic ascetic’. He is ascetic since he lives alone on Mount Kailash, and from his hair the living waters of the Ganges pour down upon the world to make it fruitful. He is erotic also: according to the legend, īva dances in the forest; the women of the village and the whole universe falls in love with him and begin to turn round and round with him. The whole world, the fruit of his Dakti, joins with him in the dance.

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136 This process which leads to universal expansiveness does not confine itself to the sexual domain, and is found in every context.
137 Tantrālōka, 29.146a.
Similarly, the meditators become universal lovers. All comes from them, all returns to them. They express themselves in everything and find their happiness in everything.

2.5 Absorption into the Self

‘Bhairava’\(^{138}\) is the name for Īva in his fearsome aspect. According to the myth, Bhairava is accused of the greatest sin: the murder of a Brahma. Rejected by the gods, he must wander for seven years, despised by all. He frequents the cremation grounds and freely experiences their impurity. He acts in this way precisely in order to acquire all the powers which, paradoxically, arise from the interplay of life and death, of purity and impurity, of pleasure and horror. He has been condemned as impure but this condemnation leads to a consciousness which is fully expanded, whose fruit is the whole range of supernatural powers. Having become nothing he becomes everything.

Bhairava projects the world. If he looks on the world he sees himself, since this world is the expression of his self. If he looks into his heart he sees this same world, since all comes from him. Whether he looks outwards or inwards he sees himself. Nothing is other than him, nothing is foreign to him. His portraiture shows him looking both outwards and inwards.

He looks inwards, he looks outwards, he neither opens his eyes nor closes them \(^{139}\)

The look is non-dual, since the outer and the inner are one. Bhairava is therefore tranquil and at rest. He dwells in an unshakeable (*sthira*) peace (*Dánti*) which overflows with joy. It is the ‘attitude of Bhairava’ (*bhairava-mudrā*).

The practitioners who acquire the attitude of Bhairava dwell in a non-dual state. They are the motionless *liÉgam* from which the *Dakti* springs instinctively, she who is the source of creativity and blessing. They are liberated while living (*jÍvanmukta*).

The tantric practitioners do not distinguish between subject, means and object of consciousness, since all is consciousness; all is the knowing subject. They do not oppose ‘me’ and ‘you’. They are the ‘I’. They refuse nothing and nobody. They recognize themselves in everything and everything recognizes itself in them.

The dualists, unable to reconcile contradictories, oppose good and evil. Those who do not know divide, but the tantrics unite. They who are Īva reconcile all things in themselves. They are all.

Inasmuch as the tantrics are the ultimate Reality, they find themselves in everything. Inasmuch as they are word they are found in every word. Tantrics do not cease to be conscious even when they seem to be unconscious and inert. They are present in everything and everything is the temple of their presence.

\(^{138}\) Abhinava prefers the name Bhairava.

They are without covetousness. What can they seek since all belongs to them? They distance themselves from nothing since they cannot deny their own self. They are void, for they are without particularity; they are complete because they are all that is.

They do not oppose pleasure and pain, pure and impure, sin and grace, for all comes from them. To recoil from evil would mean turning away from themselves. They are the same, therefore, in sorrow and joy. They do not refuse one in favour of the other. They are both life and death. They are neither life nor death. They surpass life and death. They are not subject to transience but express themselves in this transitory world. They are and is not.

They do not reject the individual rites but transcend them. Those who attain the state of Īśva have no more need of particular means. They are exempt (avadhūta) from all.

Tantrics know all the emotions, fear, humour, but they are always at peace since emotions are waves on the ocean of an abiding tranquillity. They express themselves in every pleasure and all pleasures lead them back to their essential tranquillity. They take pleasure in every particular object since every object is the expression of their infinite bliss. They take pleasure in all and are attached to none. Their bliss is universal. An infinite joy pours out from them and fills the earth. Their joy is generous: it communicates itself. It is fruitful: it manifests itself in the variety of the world.

Jayaratha, the faithful and lucid commentator, quotes a text which sums up the character of the tāṇtrika:

He commits himself to the great path, he who committees himself to moderation; who is ease with regard to [wine, meat and sexual relations]; who, even when he joins himself to the sexual partner, is perfectly conscious, his body altogether tranquil; who is fully acquainted with the rules of forbidden behaviour … who is perfectly enlightened; who indeed is consciousness itself; who is autonomous at every moment; who [uses the three M’s] in order to experience his own consciousness and not out of greed; who is without the mentality of the ‘bonded animal’ … whose conduct shows that he is attentive to his own self, whether he is engaged in worldly business or when he practises the ritual of the left hand …

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140 Quoted by Jayaratha from an unknown source, Tantrāloka, vol. 7, p. 3327, lines 21 ff.
Chapter 3

Double belonging

Preliminary remarks

Seated on the bed of the hotel in Ravenna I wondered whether there was any justification in having this interest in the tantra of Kashmir. Was I profoundly mistaken? To assent to this tantra would it not be a surrender to the ‘father of lies’ and an act of infidelity to Christ? But I felt an upsurge of joy and a feeling of freedom which did not seem contrary to the Christ. It was necessary, therefore, to go through a process of discernment to reach the ‘coincidence of opposites’, coincidentia oppositorum. It was necessary also to reflect more deeply on double belonging. The two terms ‘Christian’ and ‘tantra’, do they belong to each other or do they contradict each other? The question was at once theoretical and a matter of great personal importance.

3.1 Distancing

It was time to go. Many expressions of Christianity ceased to mean much to me. The sentimental iconography of the nineteen century was distasteful. The portrayals of a suffering Christ suited a tormented twentieth century, but I wanted something else. The biblical terms, for their part, were becoming clichés, incapable of opening a way to heaven. ‘Shepherds’, ‘kings’, ‘temples’ – it all seemed meaningless. A new vocabulary was needed.\(^{141}\) It was necessary to escape from a frame of mind that was no longer salvific. It was necessary to turn away from a form of Christianity which had ceased to be Christian.

On the other hand, it was not a matter of rejecting a biblical world which had long since disappeared in order to adopt the medieval world of Kashmir which has also disappeared. The caste system which is so basic to the tantra of Kashmir; wine as sin; adultery as a spiritual path; the complexity of the rituals: all belonged to another era. It is not possible to revive a Kashmir which has long ceased to exist.

On meeting a system which is different yet authentic, such as the tantra, there is a sense of relief, for we leave behind a limited world view. We realize to what extent the perennial teaching of the Church is subject to history. We realize that the Gospel is weighed down by what is not essential to it. In fact, faithfulness requires us to abandon many outmoded ways of being faithful. The branches which bear no fruit must be cut away.\(^{142}\) We must leave Egypt and its delicious melons.\(^{143}\)

The authentic tantra shows to what extent the ‘temple’ – that construct of customs and words – has been put together by human hands.\(^{144}\) That temple will be pulled down so that the Christ might rise. The Christ is capable of resurrection, but he is always resurrected in a way which is barely recognisable.


\(^{142}\) Jn 15.2.

\(^{143}\) Nb 11.5.

\(^{144}\) Ac 7.48.
It is necessary therefore to go to the desert and stay there, living in the vacuum of uncertainty. Discernment is needed. We wait, we reflect, we perceive. We have withdrawn from what no longer satisfies, but we have not yet reached the promised land. We hesitate, observing the play of consolation and desolation which is the principal guide on this pilgrimage to a Christian tantra.

Consolation is a sure guide. We may notice that by reading even a single phrase from Kashmir Shaivism, a deep sonority rises from the depths of the soul. The heavens open more widely; the divine mystery appears all the more enticing. A double resonance is heard. Or rather, it is a single Resonance which comes diversely from two directions – from the Scriptures of the Christian tradition and from the writings of Kashmir Shaivism. A vitality is felt, a freedom, an innocence, a sense of salvation. The tears which flow are tears of joy. It is the unfolding of the Spirit’s wings.

It is not as though we were to adopt any sort of tantra, rashly and without reflection. We discern. We examine the different types and reject what seems false. We seek to understand, clearly and exactly, the value of an authentic tantra. We distinguish between the passing pleasure which is like a poor quality wine that inebriates but sickens, and the deep pleasure which springs from the heart and makes us cry out in a joy both intense and calm.

Secondly, desolation is useful. We notice that an outmoded theology and old forms of prayer no longer bring the same joy. We cannot continue a style of life without love, without hope, where we are absent from our commitments, weighed down by sadness. Depression shows that such ways of acting and thinking must be abandoned.

Furthermore, the thought of not following the tantra would be a sort of sabotage: we would be killing that which has become most dear. We feel it would be wrong to abandon this path, as if we were refusing a divine inspiration. We foresee a great sadness of soul, like that felt by the rich young man who refused to follow the Christ.\textsuperscript{145}

During this long sojourn in the desert of uncertainty, we must remain calm. We are indifferent to the conflicting emotions. We wait, even in our confusion and doubt, knowing that finally all will be well. We abandon all desire, all wilfulness and we wait. A superb confidence is needed, therefore, an immense act of faith, the gift of the Spirit. We have the impression of being a tender shoot reaching towards the sun. We do not change our way of acting during the times of desolation and we remain faithful to the inspirations received at times of consolation. We wait for the clear path to present itself and expand the heart. Reasoning is not absent, but the heart and its expansion are the most trustworthy guides.

How many times indeed, we are frightened, during this exodus, more of oneself than of family and friends. This crossing of the desert takes time, the ‘forty years’. How can we express our thoughts to others; we cannot even describe them to ourselves. We do not understand our own inspirations; we are all the more unable to express them to those whose advice we respect. Courage falters before these obstacles. At the same time we feel a calm and an assurance which show that the path we are taking is true. We notice that we are becoming more authentic, more joyful, less bitter. We are at once confident and flexible, energetic and welcoming.

\textsuperscript{145} Mk 10.22.
Time is needed for perceiving the truth. In the end, discernment is made in solitude, guided by the Spirit alone. It also goes hand in hand with fidelity to the Church. The work of discernment is not justified by itself alone. It is the judgment of the Church which will say if we have acted well.

During the years of study on Kashmir Shaivism, I would celebrate Mass each week at the Christian Brothers whose retreat house was just nearby. While walking down to celebrate the Eucharist – sort of between the desk and the altar – I wondered if I was not falling between two stools: the tantra and the Gospel. Shouldn’t a choice be made between the two? Was there a risk of pouring new wine into old wine skins and losing both at the same time? But, no, it was better for the lights to enlighten each other; it was better to draw “new and old” from the treasure hidden by God in the depths of reality.

As long as I lived in the Catholic environment of my youth I could celebrate Mass without question. As I moved further into the world of the tantra the usual terms – – ‘sacrifice’, ‘memorial’, ‘offering’ – lost their meaning. I was becoming absent from Mass even as I said it. I was becoming an automaton. Yet, if I understood these words in a tantric manner they regained their power. Without changing the words I rediscovered their meaning; without corrupting them I invested them with a greater value. In effect, by identifying myself with Christ, in pronouncing the words of Christ, I became the sacrificer and the sacrificed. It was I who was giving my body and shedding my blood. It was no longer I who quoted the words of another; it was Christ himself who pronounced them. I was no longer in persona Christ dualistically, I was persona Christi. The Mass then become a tantric ritual without ceasing to be the Christian sacrifice. I was becoming more authentically a Catholic priest by becoming a āntrika. By means of double belonging I was identifying myself authentically with the Christ and coming to the Heart.

3.2 Jesus the Īiva

It was necessary to stay there, undecided, observing the play of consolation and desolation, so as finally to perceive the path that should be taken. It was necessary also to understand in a more theological way if the Gospel and Kashmir Shaivism are reconcilable. These following few reflections are a first attempt to reconcile the Christian faith and the tantra.

Christian theology has long meditated on the Christ but in spite of numberless books and discourses concerning him we are only beginning to touch the hem of his garment. If Christ is the God-man we must learn all that humanity has said about God. Only then can all human beings place their faith in him. We cannot neglect the non-Christian religions without denying the Christian faith.

Does Kashmir Shaivism add to the Christ? No, if Jesus is the primordial Word of whom all religions are the expression. No, if he is the Word who became man and who incarnates himself in all human reality. On the other hand, does Kashmir Shaivism add to Christian theology? Yes, since our knowledge of the Christ is inadequate.

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146 Lk 5.37.
147 Mt 13.52.
148 Mk. 5.27.
theology needs the insights of other religions if it is to become complete in itself. Faith in Christ needs faith in what is not the Christ. It is not a question of abandoning the Christian faith in favour of tantra but rather to let one enhance the other. The religions of India help restore Christianity to itself. God will visit his people by means of ‘pagan’ religions. The light of the tantra will bring out more brilliantly the infinite Light, “the morning star which knows no setting, the Christ”.¹⁴⁹

We do not wish to discover the Christ only within Christianity, in familiar territory, but also in the unknown. We wish to explain the known by means of the unknown. In this way we touch both and we unite them inseparably in our own self.

It is possible to accept the principal ideas of Kashmir without believing in the Kāls, for example. On the other hand, the ferocious goddess allows us to perceive aspects of Mary of Nazareth which we had never realized. It is also possible that the presentation of Īśā can give us a better idea of who Christ is. The deities of Hinduism can open up new paths to the incarnate Word if we interpret the Word in their terms. We have to immerse ourselves in other cultures in order to understand him who is Master of all cultures.

Īśa is not an historic personage in the same manner as Jesus of Nazareth. The stories concerning Īśa presented in the Purāṇas and elsewhere are myths. That does not mean that they are without importance. Quite the contrary. The myths of Genesis¹⁵⁰ have influenced Judeo-Christianity much more than the exploits of King David. However, if myths have an undoubted impact, facts carry even more weight. The Gospel allows a more real act of faith since it proclaims real events. The Gospel is not a good idea but Good News. It is the proclamation of what has happened, not of what is imagined. What the tantra surmises, the Gospel announces.

Among all the great spiritual figures of human history, Jesus alone was crucified. The Christian faith holds that he knew not only human sadness and human joy but also the extremes of good and evil, heaven and hell. He is the vulnerable Word. But if he is betrayed and put to the death, it is not in spite of him. On the contrary, he foresees his fate and chooses it. It is only by undergoing the extremes that he realizes what he knows and becomes what he is: the universal Truth. He alone is the universal Word addressed to all humanity.

Jesus remains the unique saviour since he died out of faithfulness to the One who spoke him; out of faithfulness to those to whom he was spoken; and out of faithfulness to his own self as well, since he knew that he was the true Word. The bitter conflict between life and death is resolved only by the Christ. He wishes to undergo death so as to be fully the Word, proclaiming himself not only to the living but also to the dead of every age, Universal Lord.

The Word who became flesh reveals the splendour of flesh. His flesh justifies flesh and turns it into the path that leads to heaven. Flesh calls powerfully to flesh, and the one who gives us his flesh as food touches us most intimately. The human heart is moved by his totally human heart. In Jesus, human flesh in its entirety can reach the

¹⁴⁹ Easter Vigil, The Exultet.
¹⁵⁰ Gn 1-11.
Heart. The Word made flesh expresses the Inexpressible, and leads us into infinite Silence.

The revelation in Christ is complete. Yet only Christ can fully know Christ. It is only by becoming the Christ that Christians can truly comprehend the Christ and fully place their faith in him. By recognising Christ dead and risen – the paradox of paradoxes – the disciples become the Christ. They become one Body with him and by him come to the silent Heart where alone the heart finds rest.

Nevertheless, the Christ needs other religions if he is to be better understood. The kerygma of the Saviour needs to be saved. Christ is understood by that which is not the Christ. The Gospel proclaims Jesus as “the Christ” 151 and “the Son of David” 152 and “the prophet like Moses”. 153 Can he not also be acknowledged as the true Śiva? 154 He who was rejected by all takes on the characteristics of all. He who is God-man becomes the salvation of all humanity. God who is Man 155 takes on the traits of Śiva and shows himself to be the tantric par excellence. He who was recognized as the new Adam is also the new Śiva, the true Śiva who lived in time and who exists in eternity. We need not reduce one to the other nor confuse them nor eliminate one in favour of the other: we seek to identify them. Śiva and Jesus are not comparable, nor are they in competition. There is no need to choose. Christ and Śiva are not dual. Jesus takes on the characteristics of Śiva, Śiva is found truly in Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian faith is directed to the person of Jesus; Śiva can be his form. We have faith therefore in Jesus-Christ who is Jesus-Śiva.

The thought of Kashmir gives us the words for re-establishing the great dogmas of the Church on a new base. This work follows in the wake of the great syntheses of the past, such as that between Platonism and the Fathers of the Church, between the philosophy of Aristotle and the mediaeval Scholastics. In this way, Kashmir Shaivism makes room for a greater understanding of Christ. The light of the Gospel needs light from outside.

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” 156 and therefore becomes a student of Shaivite truth, for example; she enters this path without losing her way. Far from weakening the Christian faith, Kashmir Shaivism allows us to appreciate its value.

Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) soon after arriving in India goes to see the famous sage Rāmana Mahāēōi at Tiruvanamalai in Tamil Nadu. The sight of this saint overwhelms him, for he sees in Rāmana the Hindu manifestation of the divine. Without exchanging a single word with the saint, Henri Le Saux feels driven to take up

151 Acts 2.36.
152 Mk 10.47.
153 See Dt 18.15.
155 Jn 19.6.
156 Nostra Aetate, para. 2.
his dramatic interreligious odyssey.\textsuperscript{157} He admits he cannot be just Christian or just Hindu\textsuperscript{158} but he does not see how he can be both at once and puts off to the future the solution to his dilemma.\textsuperscript{159}

For my part I feel able to call myself both tantric and Christian. Jesus the ūṇa is engaging. I can believe in him and identify with him. There is an identity between us and I am one body with him. I am a tantric Christian or, put the other way round, I am a Christian tantric. There is completeness in being both at once. There is an upsurge and a leap. It is though I am once again back home, in the family from which I had long been exiled.

In Kashmir Shaivism I could find the words capable of resolving the principal questions that had been asked during my youth: how identify with the One Who Is; how plunge into the unknown; how become the Expression of the Inexpressible; how teach with authority; how find a limitless and endless pleasure; how become the eternal spouse; how become a universal blessing?

3.3 Initiation into tantra

I accepted therefore a double belonging. I felt an intense pleasure in thinking of myself as both Christian and tantrika: not one or the other but both.

Baptized in fact by my father and officially by Rev. Aloysius Morgan I wished, more than fifty years later, to be initiated as a tāṇṭrika. I recognized myself as such already but I wanted to be recognized as such by others and above all by a teacher (guru). And yet I wanted and did not want, both at the same time. I did not want to depend on anyone and wished to be recognized by the Spirit only or, to take up the terms of Kashmir, by consciousness itself which is the goddess. At the same time I wished to receive tantric initiation since, following the point of view of Abhinavagupta whose teaching I would later discover, I wished that the inner and the outer should coincide; that the hidden initiation by the goddess should be realized by ritual initiation.

Where find the authentic guru? Tantra is an arcane tradition which conceals itself, both so as to put off the merely curious and to test the more apt. I searched but could not find.

During the eighties I used to go from time to time to the ashram of Swami Krishna Gautam from India. During the period of meditation his disciples uttered cries and went into convulsions, so strong did the feeling of kuṭalini perhaps touch them. Krishna Gautam lived for his disciples; would he have died for them? I went rarely and I did not let people know I was a priest, for he made fun of priests. I did not wish to be publicly driven out of his ashram, nor scandalise\textsuperscript{160} the other Christians who went there.

On pilgrimage with a group of parishioners in 1994 I met Pandit Vagish Shastri in Varanasi. Former director of research at the Sanskrit Sampurnand University, he accepted me as a disciple and initiated me. The ceremony was done correctly and I remember the precise moment when, having made everyone else leave the room, he sang in a low voice and very near my left ear, the mantra which signified the precise moment of initiation, the

\textsuperscript{158} op. cit. p. 62.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid. Letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne, 5 December 1970.
\textsuperscript{160} See 1 Co 10.23-30.
imparting of the secret. The next day he asked me what I had dreamed of during the night, since according to Indian tradition the dream reveals the meaning of the experience. He was disappointed with my reply, since nothing had happened. I was happy to receive the initiation, to be received into the ‘clan’ (gotra) of the Pandit\textsuperscript{161} and to integrate myself with the Indian tradition, but that is all. The newspaper report some days later said that a Catholic priest had received tantric initiation. It was official, but not felt.

It was quite different, in 1996, after my first meeting with Bettina Bäumer on the terrace of the Boner Institute. That night, as I slept, it was as though my legs were sparking; there was a sort of tingling. Our conversation was not an initiation but a spiritual meeting between two similar personalities, for Bettina had been initiated into Kashmir Shaivism by the great Laksman Joo and still maintained her Christian faith.

Nevertheless I still searched for that rebirth as a t\'Antrika. In 2002 I asked Harsa Satapathy, a t\'Antrika from Bhubaneshwar in Orissa State whom Bettina had recommended, to initiate me, which he did one evening after midnight. Same result: nothing. But when I went to the Temple of the Sixty-Four Yogin\'s at Hirapur near my house in India, I had the impression of joining the company of tantric couples. I was at home there.

But this initiation, desired if not realized, would it not be an apostasy? Shouldn’t the words of the psalmist be quoted:

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.\textsuperscript{162}

How authentically cry out ‘\'iva’? Would not an evil influence penetrate my soul?

In the long run I did not receive tantric initiation. I am disappointed. Perhaps I am too stubborn, too independent, too uncertain. Perhaps one day I may find an authentic guru. Perhaps it will be only the goddess who initiates me. In the last analysis we must depend on the Spirit alone.

\subsection*{3.4 Interreligious meeting}

It is natural to move from personal intra-religious dialogue to public inter-religious dialogue. The interior dialogue and exterior dialogue involve each other. The double belonging in the intimacy of one’s own being prepares for the meeting with members of another religion. The double belonging and the meeting mirror each other, one is internal, the other external.

An anecdote. While taking tea after a ‘conversation’ where perhaps twenty Catholics and Muslims had gathered, Sheikh Fehmi Naji el-Imam, the Grand Mufti of Australia and highly respected, told us that he felt that “a word has passed between us”. In fact we felt that something profound had taken place. Had the Word, the Word of God, been heard within all the words exchanged that day? We had the impression of belonging to each other because we had shared the Word. We belonged to each other, Muslims and Christians. The belonging was double.

\textsuperscript{161} I had to be received into his ‘clan’ since I was mleccha or a foreigner without caste.

\textsuperscript{162} Ps 16.4
Second anecdote. A lovely photo was published in the diocesan newspaper *Kairos*.

163 It showed, on the occasion of the celebration in Melbourne of the 40th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, two of the participants, a man of a certain age and a young Muslim woman dressed in *hijab*, who were talking over the events of the day. A look of respect and joy enlivens their faces. They commune in the Word of God, and communicate it to each other. An eternal moment takes hold of them. That which is above all authentic makes them authentic. Their attentiveness to the Word makes them able to listen to each other. They have already perceived in themselves an eternal truth which inspires them both. They seek to share it with each other because they already take part in what is indivisible. He who is One unites them.

It is important to understand, in the first place, what the meeting is not. It is neither a monologue nor a dialogue of the deaf. We seek to perceive the truth of another. We listen, without naivety or disrespect, without condescension and without fear. We are free of that unthinking inclusivism which ignores the contradictions, and of that arrogant exclusivism which rejects whatever is different. There is neither confusion nor assimilation. We do not impose; we do not seek to convince. We do not mask our own faults, we do not shut our eyes to what is unacceptable in the other.

What, then, is this meeting? It is not a threat or a surrender but a communication. We welcome the other, and we anticipate revelation. There is a sense of reverence since we presume that divine grace inhabits the other. In fact, if we do not presume that the members of another religion have had an experience of the divine, the meeting is only superficial urbanity and concealed disdain. We suppose from the outset that other religions give access to the divine level, however this level may be understood. We wish to find in the other participants the ancient tradition to which they belong and to discover it lived authentically. We listen to their teachings and attend their rituals, trying to perceive their spiritual depth.

The sharing is not ‘all sweetness and light’. In recognising the value of a tradition which is different from our own we move out, in some sense, from our own tradition. We do not deny it, but we abandon our limited understanding of it. The abandonment is painful, like a grazing of the skin. Nevertheless, the purification is not a loss but a clarification, not a weakening but a confirmation. We belong more authentically to the other; we abandon what is not authentic in ourselves.

It can happen that this process of clarification becomes a crisis since it puts into question points of view which may be very dear to us. It is indeed possible to become all too easily attached to certain expressions of the Word and so turn them into idols, into “temples constructed by human hand”.165 We can refuse to penetrate more deeply into the riches of our own inexhaustible tradition. We can turn our tradition into a museum. It then becomes a showcase where the riches are just ‘jewels’: beautiful and hard.

The expressions of the Word are necessarily inadequate since the divine glory weakens as it radiates. If we remain at the level of words, and if we confuse religions and theologies, double belonging is impossible. We have always to go beyond words, however necessary they may be, in order to arrive at their source. That being said, the experience of unity between religions must also be expressed. We will eventually need to

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164 Vatican II, *Declaration of the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*.

perform an act which manifests externally and publicly that which is mutually felt in the depths of the spirit.

The sharing is enriching. Consider the following analogy: a single eye sees only the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, but our two eyes – which do not see in exactly the same way – allow us to see the third dimension: depth. Similarly, the two ears which do not hear in exactly the same fashion, allow the listener to determine from which direction a sound is coming. In an analogical way, the irreconcilable differences between religions are of inestimable value since they make us go beyond the merely mental to discover the Word which is at the origin. If there were no incompatibility between religious traditions, we would finally have no complete access to the divine source which surpasses all knowledge.

The act of sharing is in fact a proto-evangelisation, since during the meeting we hear a sort of ‘buzz’ which is the Word in its first stage of manifestation. It is a hum, powerful yet delicate at the same time. It is the resonance of the Word which manifests at the level of intuition before becoming explicit in words. The Word reverberates in us and enables us to hear the reverberation which occurs in others. The participants of the interreligious meeting recognize, one in the other and each in their own selves, the supreme Word from which all rites and teachings arise. It is the same Word which is manifest in the prophets of every age, in the Old Testament and in all the testaments, in the glory of the world166 and in the emotions of the human heart, in the ceremonies and the holy places of all religions. To refuse the expressions of the Word in other traditions would mean turning away from the Word itself; it would be an apostasy.

The Word which manifests in countless ways became flesh in Bethlehem and above all on Calvary where the incarnate Christ knows in a unique way the reality of human flesh. It is on the cross that he experiences the extremes of joy and sorrow, but he becomes fully flesh in going beyond the confines of flesh and by rising from the dead. Sin and grace, light and darkness, heaven and hell, all are reconciled in this way. All the barriers are torn down, not only those between Jews and Gentiles167 but those that separate religions. So we all belong to each other with multiple belongings.

Jesus extended his arms on the cross so as to embrace the whole world. His disciples imitate him and open wide their heart and soul. The universal Christ makes them universal. Well-grounded in their faith they have the ability to welcome another tradition and to bless its adherents. The path that the Word had made in them opens their heart to the other. They see what is identical and what is different. The recognition of this identity is made beyond words, at the level where the Word transcends words. The recognition of the value of another tradition is therefore an evangelisation, a good news. Christians do not speak of a Christ who is foreign to another tradition but of the Christ who makes himself known in it. They proclaim that they and the members of another tradition arrive at the same Silence from which the Word springs.

The evangelisation is mutual as well. We recognize in the other the supreme Word which we know in ourselves, and we also become more intensely aware of the Word which dwells in us. By hearing it in the other we become more conscious of the Word in ourselves. In this way, the participants in the dialogue initiate each other more profoundly in the Word. It is a mutual evangelisation.

166 Rm 1.20.
... the other reveals me to myself, and brings me to myself just as he brings me to himself. His presence is a proclamation of myself to myself and vice versa. He reveals himself to me and by this fact he reveals me to myself. He is the manifestation of my inmost self. I recognize him and recognize myself.168

The belonging is personal before it becomes theological. We open wide our arms and welcome the participants of another tradition. We wish to belong to them. They are companions, friends. We wish to receive, we wish to be received, into the depths of the soul where the Spirit acts on the spirit. We hope, we wait for the others to enlighten us with their truth and enter into relationship. We wait for them to save us. We hope that they will respond and that the relationship will be reciprocal so that there might be communion.

In short, the meeting involves a four-fold transcendence, upwards, to the One who surpasses all; outwards, towards the other; inwards, to the depths of one’s own tradition understood now more fully; onwards, towards a future which is still hidden from us.169

3.5 Coming to the Heart

Sensitized by the Spirit, we draw near to the other tradition. Enlightened by the Word we become able to see more clearly, to admire and to love. And then, as we open up to another tradition, Heaven itself opens up in us. By receiving another tradition we feel that God receives us to himself. Being present to another tradition, we sense that we are present to the divine Presence. By ceasing to be turned in on one’s own self we cease to be individual: we become personal. Becoming present to the other we become present to the divine Person. By loving the other as oneself, we begin to love God with all one’s heart. It is the moment of salvation.

When Tendar came to live in my house, I could not say to him, ‘Welcome, but leave your heart and soul at the door’. Similarly for Sannyasanand. I welcomed them and I welcome their truth.

Double belonging is therefore not an infidelity but a double fidelity. It is not a conversion; it is not apostasy. It is not an unthinking mixture but a finer perception of the acts of God. We do not reject our own tradition when we feel drawn by another. Double belonging is an acknowledgement of identity. We see that the essence of one is at the same time the reality of the other. The self of the one is the self of the other. We belong to each other since we have the same nature. “There is a perception of like by like, same by same.”170 Just as the different Christologies of the four gospels allow a richer faith in the one Christ, so too the double belonging allows us to have a more lively appreciation of the non-dual Word: we are ultimately the same reality, the unique Word.

170 Dupuche, ‘The Doctrine of Recognition (pratyabhijñā) and Interreligious Dialogue’, p. 437.
By meeting in this way we plunge together into the depths of the Word so as to arrive at the Heart. We see full well that we have the same heart, the divine Heart. The only adequate response to this sense of communion is silence.
Chapter 4

A Christian Tantra

Preliminary remarks

The following pages link Christianity and the tantric Shaivism of Kashmir. It is not a question of reviewing every aspect of the Christian faith – an impossible task – nor of presenting the whole of Kashmiri thought. Nor is it a question of comparing the two or of reducing one to the other, claiming that this aspect reflects that other aspect or that some tantric term differs from some Christian term. It is a matter simply of looking at both and then of “singing a new song”. The result will be a sort of tantric Gospel or, if you wish, a Christian tantra. This is only a first draft, very incomplete.

One might protest: the tantras should be presented objectively, such as they are, and nothing more! On the contrary, the Indian tradition allows the interpretation of one text by means of another text so as to show all its richness. The guru is supposed to combine the different elements according to the illumination he has received. He must understand his own tradition, clearly and objectively; he must also develop it. The guru takes on unusual points of view and incorporates them into his own tradition, so as to show the heart, the essence of all traditions. Similarly, each school claims to transcend the others and proposes that its ways are more simple and efficacious in the task of arriving at liberation.

This procedure can already be seen in Abhinavagupta who reviews all the tantras of his day and reinterprets them in accordance to the non-dualism of Vasugupta. For him the essence of the tantra, ‘the light on the tantras’, is the Trika.

Just as there is a Buddhist tantra, a Jain tantra, a Vaishnava tantra, it is legitimate to imagine a Christian tantra. According to Indian tradition, such an aim is not only allowed, it is expected. The following pages propose that the essence of the tantra – their source and summit – is Love, understood in a new way. The Gospel reveals the heart of the tantra; tantra reveals another meaning of the Gospel. The lights do not cast shadows on each other but illuminate.

This chapter seeks, therefore, to draw out, on the basis of my experience and a certain understanding of Kashmir Shaivism and Christianity, what a Christian tantra might be. It will be obvious to the reader how often the vocabulary and ideas of Kashmir Shaivism crop up again in this presentation.

4.1 An exodus

The departure

What is that word which whispers,

\[171 \text{Ps 98.1.} \]
Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that
I will show you”.

What is that gentle breeze which comes beneath the wings and lifts us up? Divine grace is at the origin of the Christian tantra. A wish arises in the heart and makes us leave for the ‘desert’. It is as though a captivating music is calling us to leave for the unknown.

This impetus comes in different ways according to the gifts of grace. Is it a word, a sight, a song, a ceremony, which inspires the desire to leave? Is it the family tradition or a religious figure which has exerted a powerful influence? Is it the coherent and telling explanation of the tradition which is now understood in clearer fashion? Is it an experience of peace which settles, as though by magic, in the heart and leads to tranquillity?

The ‘non means’ was granted in all fullness to the Virgin Mary alone. She is full of grace to such an extent that from the very moment of her existence she is illuminated and without stain. She received the most intense initiation, directly, in the depths of her being.

Yet for each and every disciple, in final analysis, there is no means. Grace is a gift. Works are incapable of granting it to them and they only develop what they already have. They set out on whatever way is most suited to bring them to a beyond which, obscurely, they already know.

They may perhaps dwell in the confidence of faith. They desire simply to become fully what in fact they are already. They do not seek to understand but just rests in their own being. They realize their potential by allowing grace to posses them completely. It is the means called ‘divine’. They may also seek to understand what they know. They look for instruction and seek advice so that gradually they might understand the joy which awaits them and know:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what
God has prepared for those who love him”.

It is the means called ‘powerful’. They may perhaps use the means which is called ‘individual’ by which, like an artist, they express by rites and acts what they are already. In this way they become clearly what they were obscurely.

In my case, the four paths presented by Kashmir Shaivism put some order into the variety of my experiences. I love to celebrate the sacraments since in this way I become visibly and officially the persona Christi, despite all my faults. The ‘individual path’ is therefore important to me. The path called ‘powerful’ is important also for I ponder and seek to understand. In fact, if I am going to give my heart and soul to what I experience, I have to understand what is happening. I needed to know, for example, why I had been so affected by the texts of Kashmir. All that being said, I love above all to stay motionless in meditation, like Íiva on Mt Kailash, and to pursue the path called ‘divine’. From time to time also the ‘reduced non-means’ takes place. I remember well the time I visited the tomb of St Thomas Aquinas in Toulouse. The sense of divine grace suddenly struck me, beautiful and peaceful, reasonable and harmonious.

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172 See Gn 12.1.
173 1 Cor. 2.9.
The different means do not oppose each other but are integrated. If I celebrate the ritual it is to express in visible fashion what happens in the silence of meditation. If I want to write it is for the same reason: to appreciate more clearly the gift of grace.

The Presence
The silence of the desert calls softly. The noise of reasoning and planning is stilled. Psychological and social conditioning, mental categories and constructions, all are discarded. We enter the absolute void, without attachments of any sort, without words, without relationships except one: the obscure sense of a mysterious Presence.

It is not through distaste for life that we leave, but because there is already the intimation of a fuller life in store. The pleasures of this life are not abandoned in order to find them in another life. It is not a question of fearing mortality and inventing eternity. There are no illusions; they too are abandoned in this total exodus. We leave because we see full well that the present form of the world is not the only form possible. We leave the world so as to find it fully.

In fact we are able to leave all because we already know all, obscurely but truly. It is the knowledge of faith, “the conviction of things not seen”.\textsuperscript{174} We know that something exists which is of infinite value and which is not elsewhere but here, except that it is now hidden. We feel already a sense of freedom, vigour and authenticity.

We plunge into the unknown, without fear and without ambition. We leave aside all knowing and all means of knowing. We no longer ask the question: ‘Does God exist?’ or ‘What is the meaning of life?’ The teachings of the past are forgotten. We forget our own selves. The ignorance is total. We travel through the night, without “anything that can be touched”.\textsuperscript{175} We move into silence and solitude. We empty ourselves and dwell in Emptiness which, we sense already, is Fullness. We arrive at the beginning, before anything ever was.

It is then, suddenly, that we have a sense of a Presence, open-armed, presenting no obstacles. We are present to the Presence, where it is fitting to be silent. We are empty before the One who is Full; we are ignorant before the Mystery who transcends all and who hides in the depths of the soul. We are there, alone with the Alone, as if Adam were once again standing on the earth, before paradise was planted.\textsuperscript{176}

The arrival is not a spatial movement – for nothing is attained which was not already present – but a perception. That which seemed to be an exodus across the desert is in fact an opening of the eyes. The blinkers fall away. The defences crumble. The mind ceases to obstruct; we arrive at the ‘transmental’. This perception is the result not of some idea or desire but of an unnameable Presence which manifests spontaneously.

There is relief at arriving at the One who alone is necessary. We find peace and rest. There is nothing more to do, nothing to seek. What is there to desire, to think of? It is the moment of arrival, the goal.

The Subject is not sensed to be nothing. It is not an impersonal ‘All’. It is the ‘Self’ who perceives himself in all the ‘selves’. The fountain-head is not a thing but a ‘who’. It is breadth, amplitude, a welcoming that places no obstacle. It is not absence but presence. It is absent from nothing and present to all. It is the starting-point, it is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{174} Heb 11.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{175} Heb 12.18.
  \item \textsuperscript{176} Gn 2.5.
\end{itemize}
‘incomparable’. It is incomprehensible light whose brilliance blinds thought. It is the
darksome splendour. It is consciousness which is conscious of all, ignorant of nothing. It
cannot be an object of knowledge; it is always Subject.

Now, the only way to know the Subject is to become subject to the Subject and
indeed to become the Subject. To really understand water, for example, one must
abandon all rigidity and become fluid and mobile.177 We become perfectly present to the
Presence not by apartness but by identity.

Is this an illusion? The Void which presents itself as Presence, is it just the result
of some anxiety when faced with the void? No, for from the outset all desire is
abandoned and all knowledge too. It is the Presence who spontaneously makes himself
known. To refuse such knowledge would be an arbitrary act of the will. It is by
abandoning all refusal that we arrive at the One who welcomes all.

Let it be said again: this journey is made by abandoning all mental activity. The
work of the philosophers is useful but finally insufficient. Plato, Aristotle, the
Scholastics, Descartes, Kant, Sartre, Derrida: their points of view cannot be reconciled.
We must go beyond all thought and reach that principle from which all reasoning comes.
Axioms cannot be proven; they are evident. Reasoning puts order into ideas, but at the
very start it is intuition which counts. It is a matter of ‘seeing’.

We are present, therefore, to the Presence, and subject to the Subject, such that
there is but one Presence, the one Subject. The relationship is not that of object to subject,
but of subject to subject, both identical and distinct. We become fully conscious of
ourselves by being simply present to the Presence.

This Presence is Light which transforms all into light. The ego, the idea of the
self, thoughts, desires: all disappear in the clear radiance of the Presence. We feel free,
purified and true. Error and sin are seen to be without importance. Darkness and doubt
disappear. There is no competition, no danger, no privation. We fall silent, wondering,
satisfied and at peace. We are present to the Presence, outside of time, without future or
past, dwelling in an eternal present. Like Elijah, who arrives at Mount Horeb after having
walked forty days and forty nights, we bow low before God.178

Contrasting contributions

At the age of seven, I had rejected that form of devotion which seeks to draw God and
human beings close but in fact makes their separation permanent. They remain two and
will never be one. There is participation but not identification. The creature remains
created. The gulf between God and humanity cannot be traversed. That separation which
I had rejected, Kashmir Shaivism shows it to be unreal, and I am overjoyed. Kashmir
Shaivism shows that division is an illusion. It teaches that finally all is Īiva, all is aham,
‘I’. Dualism is apparent; monism is lifeless; non-dualism explains the true nature of
things.

The Gospel, for its part, reveals clearly and without the ambiguity which is found
in Kashmir Shaivism, that the individual I can address the ‘I’, which address is the
essence of prayer. The individual I is present to the Presence. There is personalism which

177 This is the classical teaching of yoga. Jayaratha quotes a verse to this effect, “The yogi who penetrates
into any object, by reason of the fact that he is attentive to his own self, becomes that object.” Tantrāloka,
vol. 7, p. 3372, line 5.
is not an opposition between individuals, a dualism. The Love proclaimed by the Gospel allows both identity and relationship, unity and multiplicity. Identity and communion imply each other.

4.2 The Word made flesh

a. God and the Word

God is not self-absorbed but expresses himself. This is seen in the episode where, in revealing himself to Moses, God declares “I am”.\(^{179}\) This expression of the Self, “I am”, is the act of consciousness, the Word, made in all simplicity, fully, without any lack of knowledge, without holding back, without deceit.

The “I am” is the perfect expression of the I who is Subject. The three phrases of the Creed are magisterial:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God from God,} \\
\text{Light from Light,} \\
\text{true God from true God.}^{180}
\end{align*}
\]

If the Subject is called “God”, the Word is “God from God”, God revealing God to God. If consciousness is Light, the Word is “Light from Light”.

It sometimes happens, at the end of a film, that we remain seated and as though entranced by the beauty of what has just been seen. The film which comes out of the silence of the screen, to so speak, leads us back to the silence whence it came. It is because the relationship between silence and the word is profound. “Out of silence God said but one word”.\(^{181}\) The word suggests the silence from which it proceeds; the effable manifests the ineffable. God is Silence. This is magnificent. The Word is said in order to lead into Silence. The Word, as mediator, grants an immediate experience of the Presence, like a window which opens to a vast panorama.

The Silence empties itself, so to speak, by expressing itself totally, for nothing is held back, nothing is hidden; all is said. In the same way, the Word gives knowledge of that which words are unable to describe. Inasmuch as it is the resonance of silence, the Word refers back to Silence. Silence expresses itself completely in the Word; the Word for its part manifests Silence in complete clarity. Word and Silence go together, equally.

According to Kashmir Shaivism, consciousness and the act of consciousness are distinct but not separate. Consciousness does not exist without the act of consciousness; and this act does not lessen the original clarity. The act of consciousness is all that consciousness is, but differently. Similarly the Word is not opposed to Silence but is distinct from it. They are *advaita*, neither monistic or dualistic: they are non-dual.

The Subject expresses himself fully; this expression cannot be other than a subject. We will see later that the Subject expresses himself in objects – the variety of the world – but these expressions are partial and limited. The full expression of the Subject

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\(^{179}\) Ex 3.

\(^{180}\) Nicene Creed.

is a subject who is free, autonomous, equal to the Incomparable and at the same time subject to the Subject from whom he proceeds. If the Presence is Subject, ‘I’, the ‘I am’ is subject also, distinct but not separate.

**Word and Spirit**
The Word is not powerless and inactive. It is energetic and effective. This power (śakti) is perceived as distinct but inseparable from the Word, in the same way that the fire and its capacity to burn are never separate. It is pure capacity, without particularity, omnipotent. The Power comes and goes at it wishes.

The wind blows where it chooses … but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.\(^{182}\)

If the Word – the ‘I am’ – is the light which illumines consciousness, the Power is the autonomy of the Word.

The ‘I am’ is as though passive and confident, clear and without ambiguity, sure and straightforward, true and authentic, conscious of the immensity of its power. The tranquillity itself of the Word allows its forcefulness to emanate. Just as Kālī dances on the dormant Īśva, so too the Spirit springs from the Word. Total restfulness and infinite activity go together. The Power is the authority granted to the Word. It is the infinite realm of possibilities. It will eventually be the author of all particular acts, the mother of all that is.\(^{183}\)

The Word is conscious of its Power which is profoundly sensed and welcomed; and in this welcome there is a sense of wedding. According to the teaching of Abhinavagupta who describes the relationship between Īśva and śakti,\(^ {184}\) if the Word is ‘I am’, its Power is ‘You are’, such that the ‘I am’ says ‘You are my very self’, ‘I am for you, you are mine’.

Thus there is ‘consciousnesses’ which is God, and ‘the consciousness of consciousness’ which is the Word; and the autonomous Power of the Word, the Spirit: all one, without division, without duality.

**Contrasting contributions**
Tantra introduces a sense of wedding into the divine Reality itself. The innumerable commentaries on the *Song of Songs* present the love of God towards humanity as a mystical marriage, but this marriage takes place only between the Creator and the created. The value of the tantra consists in its perception of wedding within the very being of the Holy Trinity.

It is what happens in meditation. Seated, motionless and at peace, present to the Presence, identified with the ‘I’, an energy springs from the meditator, the waves of

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\(^{182}\) Jn 3.8.

\(^{183}\) God is neither male nor female, we know. Similarly, the Spirit is not female. Nevertheless the woman and the feminine symbolise to a surprising degree the role of the Holy Spirit. At the conception of the Word, the Holy Spirit overshadows the Virgin of Nazareth. Mary, the Woman blessed among all women, is present, tradition holds, at the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit comes to enlighten the apostles. It is as though the Woman and the Spirit involve each other.

\(^{184}\) See above, chapter 2.1.
grace. The meditator contemplates the joyful rush of the Spirit\textsuperscript{185} which springs from him, and which is for him.

However, the tantra of Kashmir which rejects the limitation of individualism has an undeveloped sense of the person. It is the Gospel and above all the dogma of the Trinity which permits the development of the sense of the person. In fact, Love is revealed in its totality only by the paschal mystery.

\begin{quote}
God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
\end{quote}

The Word is the declaration of love, for God is Love.\textsuperscript{187} It is the good news of the Gospel. The Word, which is but love, is addressed to the Spirit who receives this declaration ‘wholeheartedly’. Is not the Spirit the perfect disciple? The hearing of the message of love, is it not also love; the reception is it not loving? The Spirit evokes the Word. The Spirit is the gift of God to the Word so that the Word might declare love. The Proclamation of love and the Hearing of love coincide. In short, Love addresses the Word of Love to the Listening love. The Trinity of Love is one.

\textbf{b. The Word and the world}

The thrill of joy felt in this exchange of Love manifests itself in the emission of the world. The world is the fruit of the divine Trinity of love; the whole universe is a cry of joy.

Just as the image on the surface of the mirror exists already in a certain sense in the mirror, so too the world exists essentially in God. That which exists in time pre-exists somehow in eternity. The infinite Silence which expresses itself completely in the Word takes pleasure also in expressing itself partially in the cosmos. The ‘I’, whose self-consciousness is ‘I am’, expresses itself in ‘I am this and that’, that is, in the objective world. The Word, which is the original revelation, is the foundation of all revelations. It is the truth at the heart of all truths; it is the primordial mantra at the heart of all mantras.

This world is the free work, the play\textsuperscript{188} of him who is essentially free. In this sense God is indifferent to the world; for what can he need, he who is fullness itself? To what would he be subject, he who is the supreme Subject? Then again, from another point of view, God is not indifferent to what he projects. He who says quite simply ‘I am’ could not say ‘I am not’ or ‘I am not this or that’. The Word, which is the proclamation ‘I am’, surpasses all limited things and, at the same time, all exist in him. He who says ‘I am’ contains in himself the infinite realm of possibility. The ‘I am’ is all and nothing both at the same time. He is and is not the forms which he adopts.

The ‘demiurge’, according to Greek philosophy, introduces order into ‘chaos’ so as to transform it into ‘cosmos’. The Bible, by contrast, proclaims that God is the origin of all. He does not create on the basis of a pre-existing chaos but \textit{ex nihilo}. There is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[185] It explains what had always happened in me. Already, when very young, I stood at the entrance of the sea baths at Brighton Beach during storms and rejoiced at the sight of the waves hurling themselves at the piles. For the same reason, the crises in the parishes and at Christ College did not bother me.
\item[186] Rm 5.8.
\item[187] 1 Jn 4.16.
\item[188] Pr 8.30.
\end{footnotes}
nothing of which God is not the cause. Indian thought, by contrast, proposes neither demiurge nor creation but emanation. This world is not separate from God; it is the expression of God. The universe is not an object but a manifestation.

The Word is the perfect expression of God, and every limited expression is an aspect of the Word. The biblical account of the origin of the world sets out the progressive limitation of the Word. God who proclaims ‘I am’, also says “Let it be”.189 The fact that God ‘says’ is already a limitation since he could just as well have done nothing. Again: God says “Let …”, in other words he commands, but he could easily have said something else; it is again a limitation. Then God says “Let there be light” whereas he could have commanded something else. And so on through various stages. God manifests himself and limits himself at the same time. Reality, therefore, proceeds from the Word. The prophetic proclamation is at the origin of all. Heaven and earth are the revelation of the divine Word and at the same time they are its concealment.

All is done by the power of the Spirit, which as śakti, is the mighty storm that presides at the origin of the world. It “[sweeps] over the face of the waters” before God prophesies the world. The Power of the Word functions without effort. In its generous spontaneity all is born. For this reason we can compare the Holy Spirit to a woman, as St Paul does when he speaks, in connection with the Spirit, of the earth being in travail.191

The Holy Spirit is ‘wind’, ‘fire’, and ‘water’, in biblical symbolism. It is both creative and destructive at the same time. Sovereign and free, it does not obey human plans, and all mental constructions are relativized.

**Contrasting contributions**

Tantra shows how, by our identifying with the Word of which the world is the expression, we are at home everywhere. Nothing is foreign to us since all is the manifestation of the Word. The world and the self are one.

Equally, by being one with the Word which is the source of all words, there is no separation from all the words that have been uttered. Those thousands of books which will never be read: we are not for ever cut off from their substance, distanced from the worlds which they present. Information and consciousness merge here. By identifying with him who has known all the paradoxes, we become like the still surface of the lake which reveals the depths and mirrors the stars: all that is.

Similarly, tantra shows that the world is in fact one with the human body.192 Every aspect of the human being is tied to every aspect of the world. The person who is aware and conscious is incarnated everywhere.

The Bible avoids the somewhat impersonal aspects of Kashmir Shaivism. It is out of love that God fashions Adam and gives him all the goods of the earth and introduces the partner to him so that he should no longer be alone but know the joys of loving companionship. The New Testament teaches that God gives heaven as well: the heavenly

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189 See Gn 1.3.
190 Gn 1.2.
191 Rm 8.22.
192 I understood why the book of Ajit Mookerjee, *Kundalinī*, had struck me so much. It showed how all could be contained in one’s own body.
Jerusalem comes down to the earth, the holy city which is beautiful as a bride.\textsuperscript{193} According to tantra all emanates; according to the Gospel all is gift.

I had a taste for travel. I needed to know everything and to experience all. One night in Papua, seeing the mist in the valley, I felt clothed with the whole world. Kashmir Shaivism justifies this point of view. The world is mine, I am the world’s, and in the silence of meditation the feeling arises in me of being united to all. Yes, the $\textit{sakti}$ which emanates from me is the mother of all that is.

c.

\textit{The Word becomes flesh}

All possibilities are contained in the Word. By the power of the Spirit the Word limits himself freely and, without ceasing to be the primordial fullness, takes on all the forms of the world. Like $\textit{Īśa Naṭarāj}$, the Lord of the dance, he takes on all forms and is essentially none of them. He retains his identity, whatever stance he may adopt.

The divine Word wishes to see in reality what exists in principle. He comprises in himself all possibilities: to refuse to be all only in principle would be effectively to be nothing. The Word limits himself in lesser forms and experiences them really. It is the divine humility.

Thus he was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited\textsuperscript{194} …

... but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.\textsuperscript{195}

The Word becomes flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. The whole world speaks of God, it is true, but the Word takes flesh as a definite individual who is, in keeping with the phrase of Abhinavagupta, “the receptacle of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{196} The Word, who is the simple and infinite proclamation ‘I am’, becomes individual and says: ‘I am Jesus’.

The two phrases, ‘I am’ and ‘I am Jesus’, do not contradict each other but refer to each other. The ‘I am’ – which is often found on the lips of Jesus – manifests himself perfectly in ‘I am Jesus’, and finally on the cross in the feeling that ‘I am nothing’.  

\textsuperscript{193} Rev 21.9-10. 
\textsuperscript{194} Ph 2.6. 
\textsuperscript{195} Ph 2.7. 
\textsuperscript{196} Tantāloka, 29.163.
Let us remember that the ‘I am’ is the expression of the primordial Subject. When therefore the Word takes flesh, it is God who manifests himself in this manner. The Word is incarnate but this is so that the Subject might be perceived. Jesus is the Word who leads beyond himself. The ‘Son’ does not focus the attention of his listeners simply on himself but enables them to have access to the Subject whom he calls ‘Father’. Jesus is the mediator and not the final goal.

The Word manifests as ‘flesh’, which means humanity and even all living creatures. ‘Flesh’ also means ‘weakness’, ‘mortality’, ‘ignorance’ and ‘the sinful state’.

The Word manifests himself, therefore, and the clear awareness is dulled. By becoming human, Jesus forgets his limitless being and in the end is conscious only of his limited nature. He is unaware of his infinite capacity and thinks he is powerless, marginalised and time-bound. As a result of this ignorance, desire and ambition arise in him. He is bound by the negative consequences of illusion and experiences all manner of misfortune. The world appears to him as other than himself. He is unaware that he is Lord. He who is the life of all the living becomes mortal. Jesus is truly ‘flesh’.

There is, nevertheless, a vigour in Jesus which comes precisely from his unbounded fullness. As a result he wishes to sum up in himself every possibility and every paradox. He wants to experience both the fullness of knowledge and complete ignorance. He wants to know all and know nothing; he wants to know the limits of good and evil, of time and eternity. He wishes to know the glory before all ages and the humiliation of the cross, the divine presence and abandonment. He is grace and becomes sin; he reveals the glory of God and becomes a slave. He knows the high and the low, the extremes, everything. By means of these paradoxes he wants to manifest the infinite Subject who surpasses all.

Without ceasing ever to be the Word, Jesus is conceived and born. He learns a language; he takes on a certain culture and becomes a member of a particular community. He reaches adulthood and identifies himself with his people whose story becomes his own, and he knows human friendship.

His true nature is known to him essentially, for he is the Word; but he must find the words to experience and to express it, which he does gradually and progressively by going through the various stages of the word: perception, discovery of language, and vocabulary. Inversely, the shepherds, after hearing the message of the angel concerning the birth of the Saviour, seek out the manger and then recollect themselves in silence before the Word made flesh. In the Temple, at the age of twelve, at the threshold of adolescence, Jesus proclaims his divine sonship. At his baptism in the Jordan, the Voice proclaims: “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased”. He recognizes that he is the Word of God and that he resumes in himself all the expressions of the Word. He is the exodus of his ancestors from Egypt; he is the Temple and the sacrifices; he is the Torah; he is the people of God; he is the world and all humanity. He is in solidarity with all and draws all to himself.

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197 Jn 17.24.
198 Lk 2.49.
199 Mk 1.11.
200 Jn 12.32.
He is welcomed by the outcasts of society and shares their condition, and it is they above all who understand the exquisite quality of his love, "full of grace and truth".\textsuperscript{201} Being one of the oppressed among the oppressed, Jesus hears their cry. He will not turn away from human wretchedness or the curse that lies on sinners. He is as though powerless to resist the cry of the powerless and cannot refuse to share their lot. Out of compassion he comes to their aid. He will not accept to hear from the unfortunate ‘You do not know my misfortune’ but recognizes the wretched as the expression of his very being. He does not say to them ‘Go away’ but ‘You are my very self’.

Recognising himself as the Word, Jesus speaks to the people. He prophesies by his words and acts. His word is fruitful. He chooses the Twelve to show that, more even than the virility of Jacob, the father of the twelve patriarchs, his words are able to bring to birth.\textsuperscript{202} When he speaks, it is of himself that he speaks, and he speaks by his own authority. He is the one and only master: he who speaks and what he says are identical. The master and his words are one, non-dual.

Jesus shows his power, but not to impress the incredulous. It is true that Jesus touches the sick in order to heal them\textsuperscript{203} and that he commands the storm to be still\textsuperscript{204} but it is in order to manifest a greater power, that of enabling the disciples to become children of God\textsuperscript{205} and heirs to the kingdom.\textsuperscript{206} They too will become the Word of God. They too will know the joy which he has known from the beginning\textsuperscript{207} and they will above all know the love of the eternal Father.\textsuperscript{208}

He knows pleasure. He appreciates the beauty of flowers;\textsuperscript{209} he looks with love upon the man who has kept the commandments since his youth,\textsuperscript{210} and when he sees the Samaritans coming towards him he feels the joy that farmers experience at the harvest;\textsuperscript{211} he loves Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary.\textsuperscript{212} He rejoices in his own body also. He finds therein a life which is both divine and human to such a degree that he offers himself as food. At the very moment of going to his suffering he speaks of his glory.\textsuperscript{213}

The light of divine grace, when at last it manifests itself in this world of confused, jealous, ambitious and frightened individuals, is not recognized. Ignorance can only see what reassembles it. Immersed in their folly his opponents do not recognize the manifestations of the Light. Even among those who have received the revelation of the covenant at Mt Sinai, there are some who do not recognize him. The master may well set himself to teach; they are few who wish to hear him.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{201} Jn 1.14.
\item \textsuperscript{202} The four gospels often present the Christ as the bridegroom. There are any number of churches named ‘Christ the King’, or ‘the Good Shepherd’, or the ‘Sacred Heart’. Is there even a single church in the whole world named ‘Christ the Bridegroom’.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Mk 7.33.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Mk 4.39.
\item \textsuperscript{205} Jn 1.12.
\item \textsuperscript{206} Rm 8.17.
\item \textsuperscript{207} Jn 17.13.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Jn 17.26.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Mt 6.28-29.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Jn 4.35-36.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Jn 11.5.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Jn 17.13, 22.
\end{itemize}
There is worse. The glimmer of grace, when it makes its appearance in the gloom of ignorance, provokes a crisis. The foolish prefer their ignorance and the satisfactions which come from it. It may be also that those who are blind, when they realize that they are blind, refuse to admit it. Folly become malice: it is intentional ignorance, sin. The darkness becomes hellish.

Jesus knows weakness. He experiences all the contradictions and suffers from them. He is no stranger to doubt. In the Temple, not knowing what path he should take, he cries out, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour’?”. In the garden he draws back from the repulsive cup of death.

Jesus the Bhairava also knows sin and horror. He lets himself be touched by the woman with the haemorrhage and lets the lepers draw close. He makes himself the friend of the treacherous tax-collectors and heals the sick on the Sabbath day, so that finally he is ranked as a sinner. Without hesitation he proclaims his divine sonship. In fact, he will be put to death as a blasphemer. Judged impure he is expelled from the Holy City.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

He is crucified. In his very being divine justice and infernal injustice oppose each other. He knows fear and suffering, he experience despair and damnation. Horror is fully felt in him: he is infinitely sensitive because of his utter truth. He knows what no other person can know, for only he who is perfectly pure has strength enough to immerse himself in the totally impure. Heaven alone can choose to descend into hell.

God pronounces his Word in the incarnation and he pronounces it fully on the cross. Jesus, by his words and deeds, does indeed reveal the hidden God, but it is above all the last cry on the cross which leads us shockingly into the presence of God. The cry of Jesus is the voice of God.

The Holy Spirit, too, demands sacrifice. The Holy Spirit, who listens eternally to the message of love, wishes to hear the word of love expressed in most striking fashion on the cross. The anointing at Bethany, six days before the Passion when Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus pours perfume on the feet of the Christ, indicates that he is consigned to sacrifice. The Holy Spirit who drove Jesus into the desert to oppose Satan

\[\text{Jn 12.27.}\]
\[\text{Mk 14.36.}\]
\[\text{Mk 5.21.}\]
\[\text{Lk 5.12.}\]
\[\text{Lk 6.6-11. Jn 5.}\]
\[\text{Mt 26.66.}\]
\[\text{Ph 2.7-8.}\]
\[\text{The first and last cry: an examination on the first and last moments of Jesus of Nazareth in the light of the four levels of the word (v\text{A}c) in Kashmir Shaivism’, in ‘Void and Fullness in the Buddhist, Hindu and Christian Traditions; An Interreligious Retreat-Seminar’. Delhi, D.K. Printworld, 2005. pp. 243-252.}\]
\[\text{Jn 12.3.}\]
\[\text{Lk 4.1.}\]
commits him to the cross so that the most exquisite essence might be spread over the earth.  

Mary, the mother; Mary, the wife of Clopas; and Mary of Migdal: all womanhood is there. But it is to his mother that Jesus speaks. He calls her “Woman”, for she is quite simply The Woman. Pedigree and purity of race: Mary shows the powerlessness of these bases of male pride, for it is from her uniquely that the Christ is born. It is to her, among all women, that the crucified saviour speaks and to whom he gives the Church of God as child. She is, like the divine Power, the mother of all the living. It is from her on the unclean hill of Calvary that the Church is born. Mary is the Kālī who shudders with pain and joy in receiving the Spirit of Jesus-Īvā at the moment of his death. Mary, the living one, gives life to the Church. Annihilation and fruitfulness coincide.

Jesus seeks to be sacrificed. He becomes sin so as to free humanity from sin. Evil does its worst but it is essentially limited and cannot constrain the infinite. On the contrary, it gives Jesus the opportunity to manifest himself perfectly. Jesus, the Bhairava who ‘takes pleasure in doing what is impossible and improbable’, effectively turns evil into a benefit and turns the Friday of sin into Good Friday. The infernal darkness becomes the occasion for the full manifestation of light. It is the redemption.

Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb but of his body, three days later, there is no trace. The Word becomes fully flesh when it ceases to be just flesh and becomes spirit. The revelation of the flesh is complete when there is nothing to be seen. Jesus is the holocaust, the sacrifice wholly consumed. Nothing mortal remains, for all has been resurrected. “God … highly exalted him”. The tomb is empty.

Jesus is no stranger to the dead for he has really died; he is no stranger to the living for he is in fact resurrected. Dead and living, he draws to himself all the living and dead, those who were such and those who will be.

[God] gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus, therefore, is the universal Lord.

It is by the Holy Spirit that God raises the beloved Son. The descent of the Spirit is a sign of the divine approval, which is not just an emotion but a conferral of authority, not just words but a Person, the Third Person.

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225 Mt 1.16.
226 Mary is the Kālī. It’s what I said one evening in 1987 to Mark Dyczkowski, the author of several books on Kashmir Shaivism, as we drove through the market in Varanasi, to the sound of innumerable rickshaw bells ringing out like a carillon in the night.
227 2 Co 5.21.
228 1 Co 15.45.
229 One Faith – Multifaith, p. 18.
230 Ph 2.9.
231 Mt 28.18.
232 Ph 2.9-11.
The works of Jesus foreshadow the Kingdom of God. While still alive Jesus allows his disciples to catch a glimpse of his power; he now receives all authority in heaven and on earth. By the resurrection Jesus becomes what he has always been, the Christ of God. Jesus experiences all paradoxes so that the Spirit might emanate from him.

While still alive Jesus allows his disciples to catch a glimpse of his power; he now receives all authority in heaven and on earth. The Spirit emanates from Jesus; the Spirit is given to Jesus. The Spirit, who freely came down on Jesus at the moment of his baptism in the Jordan, comes down freely and fully on him as he lies in the tomb. To Jesus, dead, abandoned and stripped of all, to this ‘hero’, the Spirit comes as a gift. Like Eve who draws close to the sleeping Adam, the Spirit in perfect freedom comes to Jesus and bestows omnipotence and fruitfulness. Limitless expansiveness is given to the one who died in every way. Without the Spirit, the Christ can do nothing; with the Spirit he is all powerful. He rejoices in this Spirit who is like an intoxication. He receives the Spirit ‘who gives life’ and he takes pleasure in the Spirit’s vitality. Joy pours out of him, fills the whole world and leads him to heaven. In his joy he is rapt out of the world and placed at the heart of the cosmos. Seated at the right hand of the Father, he has reached his goal, he is in peace. He takes his rest in the Father’s heart whilst the Spirit proceeds in emanation, furious as wind, fire and flood, poured out on the world.

Contrasting contributions

Jesus rises from the dead, really and for ever. He has known the paradoxes, really and not mythically as in the case of Ííva/Bhairava. He lived at a precise moment in history and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. The incarnation and the resurrection are not the stages of a cycle which is endlessly repeated. The incarnation is not a passing thing; the resurrection is a definitive event. Whereas, according to the tantra, the human being is condemned to an almost endless cycle of re-births and re-deaths, according to the Gospel the victory of the Christ constitutes a reality which is at the disposal of all. It becomes the permanent and universal means of salvation.

It follows that the principal means of reaching the full flowering of the self is not action or knowledge or will – the three human faculties emphasized by Kashmir Shaivism but faith, which is identification with the Christ and which is the work of the Spirit. Faith is the simplest and most effective means. Even those who are unexceptional in talent or unstable in character, are able to identify with Jesus.

This whole process does not occur independently of the community of disciples since it is through them that the believer is brought into contact with the Risen One; it is in the context of the community that the grace of the Spirit is the most intensely received.

The identity which follows is expressed quite naturally in works which show the reality of this identity. Faith and works – the interior and the exterior dimensions – imply each other.

The believers are therefore freed from absurdity even in this life-time; they are to take up a term from Kashmir – ‘liberated while living’. In consequence, all aspects of their life have value. Their abilities, experiences, life-story, emotions, relationships: all are resurrected and made divine. Human flesh and human acts acquire an eternal value.

We contemplate the passion of the Christ with good reason, and we rejoice in his resurrection but it must be admitted that many spiritual guides dwell overmuch on

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233 Mt 28.18.
suffering. In the domain of spirituality, pleasure therefore becomes a problem. We need to develop a spirituality of pleasure. The value of tantra consists in this: it emphasizes the importance of pleasure and above all of sexual pleasure as a means of reaching divine consciousness. It emphasizes also the importance of immersion in sin as a means of reaching the One who surpasses all. The use of wine at Mass symbolizes perfectly the coincidence of joy and suffering. We will come back to this.

Tantra such as it is described in the texts of Kashmir honours women on the one hand but dishonours them also. Women are but a means. Kashmir Shaivism is developed by men and is addressed to men. By contrast the Christian Gospel teaches that men and women are of equal value.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.\textsuperscript{234}

\section{4.3 Initiation into Christian tantra}

\textit{Inner initiation}

The two disciples, Andrew and his companion, follow Jesus after John the Baptist has pointed him out as the “Lamb of God”:\textsuperscript{235} Jesus turns and asks them what they want. They reply, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He invites them to come and see. They spend the afternoon with him and realize that he is the Messiah. They have seen, and they have believed. What happens to those two disciples at that time happens also to the other disciples during the three years which follow.

The disciples ultimately recognize that Jesus is the Expression of the Inexpressible. They see also that he who is crucified is the glory of God manifested in all completeness. They proclaim therefore that he is the Holy One of God\textsuperscript{236} who gives access, beyond himself, to the Holy of Holies. By means of his words and signs they arrive at the supreme Silence.

The disciples recognize Jesus. It is not just knowledge, as if they were learning for the first time, but – to take up the important term from Kashmir Shaivism – it is ‘recognition’. It is as though they had long known him but had lost sight of him. The two disciples traveling to Emmaus do not at first recognize Jesus who accompanies them on the road. They begin to recognize, when their hearts burn as he elucidates the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms, that he is the one whom they already knew in the Holy Scriptures. But it is above all when he breaks the bread – the Master’s typical act – that they consciously recognize the Christ of God. They identify with him and follow him along the road of the paradox of life and death.

The recognition is the moment when the ‘guru’ of Nazareth and his disciples fuse together. The distinction between their persons is not separation but union. The presence of the master to the disciple implies not distance but identity. They receive Jesus in such fashion that they become one body with him. Duality disappears and universal communion takes place. And yet, the essential being of the disciples is not eliminated: they becomes non-dual from their master. They recognize that their own self is nothing

\begin{footnotes}
\item[234] Ga 3.28.
\item[235] Jn 1.35ff.
\item[236] Jn 6.69.
\end{footnotes}
other than Jesus himself. The love they feel towards Jesus ceases to be a form of devotion toward someone from whom they are separated; it becomes identification after the manner of St Paul who proclaims, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”. 237 The disciples understand that the being of their master is the foundation of their own selves. They are the manifestation of their master, a branch of the vine.238 The essence of the master is the very heart of the disciples. The being of the ‘Friend’ constitutes their own being.

The disciples recognize their master, and the master recognizes his disciples, just as shepherd and sheep recognize each other.239 Likewise, in seeing their master the disciples recognize themselves. The recognitions imply each other. It is not possible for the disciples to recognize Jesus without them also recognizing themselves. The sight of the master makes the disciples able to see themselves. In recognizing themselves, therefore, they recognize at the same time the folly which blinded them and made them sinners. When, finally, they recognize each other, there is neither guru nor disciple but quite simply the non-dual ‘I am’. The master and the disciples are not just like each other; they are the one ‘I am’. Recognition is redemption.

God can be known in all he has made240 but this knowledge is but partial. Even Moses, protected by the rock, can see only the back of God: “you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen”.241 The disciples, like Peter, John and James,242 fall as though unconscious at the sight of Jesus transfigured. It is as if they were dying. The disciples abandon all things of the mind which till then had been dominant, and they arrive at the Light. They are transfigured at the sight of Jesus. Enlightened by the Light they become Light. On seeing Jesus the Man, the disciples become human. On seeing the God-Man they are divinized. Only those who are divinized are able to see the Divine in all clarity. At last the disciples are satisfied.243 They become what they contemplate. Their own being is that of the God-Man. Those who see the Christian see the Christ; those who see the Christ see the Father.244

This takes place because the Spirit is active, the Spirit who is at once the instrument of the Word and autonomous freedom; the gift given by God and freely self-giving. The Spirit comes, free and sovereign; sent, certainly, but independently also, for the Spirit is God.245 The Spirit chooses the disciples, making them able to recognize Jesus. Reasoning is not enough; the Holy Spirit must come upon them. Recognition is a grace;246 the human will cannot of itself accomplish such an act. We do not initiate ourselves; we are freely initiated by the Spirit into whose heart we penetrate. The act of recognition is knowledge of the faith247 which allows us to see obscurely yet truly. The act of recognition is the initiation from within. This recognition is the moment of

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237 Ga 2.20.
238 Jn 15.5.
240 Rm 1.20.
241 Ex 33.18-23.
242 Lk 9.28.
243 Jn 14.8.
244 Jn 14.9.
245 “The Lord, the Giver of life”. Nicene Creed.
246 “For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.” Mt 16.17.
247 Heb 11.1.
salvation. Wherever we look, our sight is a *visio beatifica*. We realize that everything derives from us; all belongs to us. We are strangers to nothing since the Word and the self are not foreign to each other. All is grace; all is grace upon grace. \(^{248}\) Heaven and earth, nature and grace, faith and reason, time and eternity, God and man: all the dualisms disappear, leaving place to non-dualism. We become Bhairava. God is “all in all”. \(^{249}\)

In short, there is grace upon grace. The Holy Spirit is grace freely self-given. The Spirit is equally the grace of the God and the Word. The Word pronounced by the Silence is also a grace. Surprised by grace, the disciple hears Jesus and perceives the Silence from whom all emanates. By means of grace, the disciple moves out of the confines of reason and glimpses the Ultimate Subject reached by means of grace upon grace.

In my case I like to see Jesus as the one who does not recoil from anything, who with a sense of courage and universality knows every aspect of everything. With vigour and confidence, aware of himself as the Word of God and conscious of the divine Presence whom he adores, he opens his arms to welcome his friends as well as the whole world, and in this way he unites heaven and earth. No one who has ever lived or will live can be compared to him. I identify myself with him who knew good and evil in a way that I am incapable of doing. I recognize him because he has recognized me. He reveals me to myself, this Jesus who is the īvā, Jesus who is the Bhairava. I recognize myself in him and identify with him.

**Outer initiation**

It can happen that the Spirit initiates someone into Christ independently from the message of the Gospel, without that person even knowing the name or work of Christ. The Spirit can freely and without constraint of any sort have someone identify with Christ without knowing it.

That being said, the Spirit initiates most often by means of the Church’s proclamation, fragile and sinful though the Church may be. In any case, interior initiation makes the exterior initiation real. If a child is baptized, for example, the exterior ritual, important thought it is, must wait till the Spirit comes, we know not how, to give it life and make it bear fruit.

Initiated by the Spirit in the depth of the soul, the disciple wishes to experience outer initiation also. The inner initiation requires its outer expression in the ritual of baptism. Inner and outer need each other.

Thus, the community which recognizes those who are of like mind, immerses the disciple in the waters of grace. The divine Power takes pleasure at the sight of the ‘hero’ who plunges into the waters of death. The Power comes and communicates herself. Like the dove at the Jordan, the Spirit comes down “in bodily form” \(^{250}\) on the candidate who rises from the baptismal font. To those who place their faith in Jesus and identify with him, the coming Spirit shows that their self-emptying is worthy of God, that their faith is worthwhile. The disciples who join themselves to Jesus in the tomb, supported on the void like “supreme īvā who is without support”, \(^{251}\) experience the rising of the sākti.

\(^{248}\) Jn 1.16.

\(^{249}\) I Cor 15.28.

\(^{250}\) Lk 3.22.

\(^{251}\) Quoted by Jayaratha, *Tantāloka*, vol. 7, p. 3385, line 18.
They are purified of every stain of ignorance and its disastrous effects. They are freed from the tutorship of the Law, from social and religious constraints, from mental constructions and all vices. The hidden, paralyzed capacities are given their freedom. All the faculties, will and mind, body and emotions, memory and vitality, are regenerated. The ‘lotuses’ begin to flower. The ‘wheels’ begin to turn and the effects of grace manifest themselves. There is expansiveness and a heightening. The ‘heroes’ feels that they are taken out of this lifeless world; they spread their wings to fly in the infinite expanse of the sky and identifies with the whole earth, with great and small alike. The divine Power gives them power. The divine Freedom gives freedom. The Spirit grants gifts and vitality, freedom and confidence. It is the outpouring of the fountain of life.  

Contrasting contributions
The supremacy of the goddess in the extreme tantric tradition such as the Kula gives a better idea of the role of the Spirit. We understand more clearly that the Spirit – who is “Lord and giver of life” – is free, both in the communion of the Trinity and in the work of salvation. The divine Power chooses who shall be enlightened. It grants the surge of faith. This choice comes from the Void, completely outside human control. And this choice, which is totally free, allows us to glimpse the utter Void, immense and overwhelming, who plunges us into the divine Abyss and draws us into the immensity of his Heart.

According to Kashmir Shaivism, recognition is liberation. At the moment of recognizing that we are Īva, we are freed from the illusion of individualism. The limited self is recognized as the expression of one’s true self: the Īva-nature. The Gospel shows that what is glimpsed in the tantra is realized in Jesus the great tantric. Īva, whose myths are astounding in their depth, is fully realized in Jesus.

The disciples, for their part, recognizing that Jesus is the Īva, truly become what they are essentially. They are able, in the intimacy of the filial relationship, to cry out in all truth, “Abba! Father!”

4.4 Mystical marriage
Preliminary remarks
Only God can know God completely. Only God can glorify God fully. Similarly, the full gift given by God is God; the full gift of God can be received only by God. In short, God gives God to God; God receives God from God; God joins God to God. The divine Reality is essentially a marriage.

Love proclaims itself eternally. That which takes place in eternity is expressed in time. In time the Word proclaims the message of Love to the whole universe. The Word made flesh, Jesus, declares Love to the chosen People; and he sacrifices himself in order to manifest Love in every time and in every place. At every moment, too, the Spirit receives this message. Proclamation and reception go together. Word and Spirit refer to each other.

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253 Rm 8.15.
The Spirit comes to the Word, just as Eve is presented to Adam. This Power of the Word is free, independent, the apex of the Holy Trinity, loved by both Father and Son.\(^{254}\) The Power proceeds from the Word just as Eve derives from the side of Adam. This projection occurs of itself, quite naturally. It is the expression of complete confidence. All is projected from the Word and all is given to the Word. The Word is pleased to submit to this freedom, to this Power who is the Spirit. At the same time, the Word is Lord. There are therefore both projection and reception, authority and submission, impetus and expectancy, all of which imply each other. The relationship of Word and Spirit is a vibration, an oscillation of love. It is the nuptial relationship.

These preliminary reflections are at the basis of this section on the mystical marriage.

The disciples who are initiated into the Word wish to perform the same works as the Word. They do not perform these tasks simply out of slavishness or by imitation. They do it of their own free will. By their own authority they do as they wish; and their wish is to be the message of love. Similarly, they wish to receive this Power who comes towards them like Eve and who gives birth to heaven and earth.

Nevertheless, the disciples feel the dislocation between their true Self and their actual self. Their act of recognition is weak; their deeds are at variance with their true nature. They are torn this way and that. Even as they try to purify themselves from their ‘stains’, illusion continues its baleful work.

The disciples seek, therefore, every means to reach final bliss. They find that one means suits better than another. They choose that which allows the blossoming of the spirit and rejects that which prevents it. They prefer that which leads upwards and reject what leads downwards. The goal is the same but the ways and the risks are many. Wisdom tells them which path they should take.

Even so, the disciples are afraid to purify themselves of their ego, that stain which is so hard to remove. They give an absolute value to the individual self, and fear the emptiness which devours individualism. By opening themselves to the transcendent they feel vulnerable. Yet, by accepting to become “poor in spirit”,\(^{255}\) to abandon all acts and thoughts in favour of ‘divine ignorance’, they become rich in the knowledge of the Self.

This progressive abandonment is at the same time an ascension. It is a long journey. By experiencing the cross which is the perfect reconciliation of good and evil, of holiness and impurity, the disciples also experience glorification. By abandoning all things and even their life\(^ {256}\) they become sannyāśī and follow their master. The

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\(^{254}\) Richard of St Victor proposes that the Spirit should be considered as ‘condilectus’. “Shared love is properly said to exist when a third person is loved by two persons harmoniously and in community, and the affection of the two persons is fused into one affection by the flame of love for the third. From these things it is evident that shared love would have no place in Divinity itself if a third person were lacking to the other two persons. Here we are not speaking of just any shared love but of supreme shared love – a shared love of a sort such that a creature would never merit from the Creator and for which it would never be found worthy.” Richard of St Victor, ‘Book Three of the Trinity’, in Richard of St Victor [The Classics of Western Spirituality] London, SPCK, 1979. Translation and Introduction by Grover A. Zinn. Preface by Jean Châtillon. p. 392.

\(^{255}\) Mt 5.3.

\(^{256}\) Mk 8.35.
crucifixion, that moment when Jesus feels completely abandoned, is at the same time his elevation\textsuperscript{257} to the right hand of the Father.

All this is possible if, from the outset, the disciples recognize not only the exterior guru but also their own self. They cannot abandon the visible if they have not already come to the Invisible. It is divine grace that enables this journey to the Heart. The confidence which comes with faith allows the journeying beyond time to reach the Most High. The end is found in the beginning. In a sense the disciples go nowhere but simply understand where they are. Recognition is a pilgrimage to oneself. The ultimate guru is the Self recognized in the depths of the self. The Heart which is within the heart leads to the Heart.

Having described this process in general terms, we will now examine more in detail the two contrasting paths of tantra: pleasure and horror. Both of them are an integral part of the Kula and both are found in the Gospel.

\textit{a. Pleasure}

\textit{In general}

Human nature is constructed in such manner that the satisfaction of the subsidiary faculties allows the opening of the superior faculties and finally the opening of the supreme category. Pleasure, which is the satisfying of the faculties, is therefore a means.

The pleasure that is found in music and food, in work and sport, serves as a springboard. The fine eyes and the cry of love, conjugal fidelity and children are steps along this way. Similarly, the pleasure which accompanies the ritual ceremony performed in the sacred precinct or the deeper understanding of the mysteries that surround us, and finally the pleasure of the ‘\textit{docta ignorantia}’: all these help lead to divine bliss. All pleasure – that is to say those which allow the opening of the superior centres and not those which prevent it – are steps on this sacred path. The practitioners delight in a particular sensual pleasure and stay there as long as they please, yet without depending on it. They accept pleasure upon pleasure just as they receive grace upon grace. Pleasures are rungs of the ladder which join earth to heaven. Those who take part in pleasure cry out like Jacob, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!”\textsuperscript{258}

It often happens, nevertheless, that those who experience this opening are unaware of its importance. They seem to live outside the religious sphere, but they know it nevertheless. They have not learnt to recognize the divine glory which opens in them. They sense it perhaps but cannot say why. They do not realize that everything which leads to divine consciousness is a religious act. The religious dimension cannot be restricted only to what is officially religious. We could hope that these different ways of approaching the divine might recognize each other.

\textit{Sexual relationships}

The lovers remain united, still, fully conscious, sensitive one to the other, penetrating further and further, from level to level, plunging deeply one into the other, in the depths of the body, of the soul and of the spirit, infinitely. They know how to love because they feel loved. They notice the centres opening and revealing other centres: it is the great corridor of love. They know how to allow the opening and at the same time go beyond it,

\textsuperscript{257} Jn 3.13, 12.32, see 19.37.

\textsuperscript{258} Gn 28.16.
without refusing it and without remaining attached to it. They penetrate further and further into the unknown so as to know its delights and then plunge on further, eternally.

The relationship intensifies. They cease to be particular and become universal. They become Īva and śakti, the spouses whose union is eternal and whose embrace is the origin of the world. They realize then that their reciprocal love is founded on Love quite simply. They communicate this Love which dwells in them and which constitutes their very essence. They say: ‘You are my Love’, ‘We are Love’, and finally quite simply: ‘Love’.

From their love a light radiates in every direction. Physical union is transformed into unbounded joy. The bliss established in the depths of the soul spreads out on every side. They recognize their own self and recognize equally that the whole world is the manifestation of their self. They look on the word and see themselves; in contemplating their own selves they see the world. They are at the same time universal and individual, unfathomable and understood, in relationship with all that is, with the stars and the depths of the sea; everything is their very own body. They are at home wherever they are. It is the attitude of Bhairava where the inner and the outer coincide and cease to be dual.

The process continues. There is no longer any need to touch, and no need to be touched. Even if separated by time and space they are united sexually. Union gives way to abstinence which is not lack of sexuality but its completion. They seek that permanence of joy which does not depend on anything limited; they seek that endless pleasure where everything becomes the spouse. They spread out their arms to receive the whole world. They know and feel that they are eternally united with the consort. They become the universal spouse.

They realize that this eternal embrace is the foundation of all particular sexual activity. Even the relationship of a faculty and its object – the seeing eye and what is seen, for example – is an analogy of sexual union. The whole universe and each pleasure, even the most simple, are the expression of the pulsation of the communing Trinity. Sexuality is universal and is found in heaven as on earth.

Contrasting contributions
Christian tradition has always attached great importance to pleasure – witness the beauty of the chants, of church architecture, of the liturgical ceremonies – since joy leads to heaven. Too often, however, sexual pleasure has been rejected. A certain spirituality of the desert, faced with the excesses of the Roman Empire in decline, exaggerated the importance of penance. Asceticism and holiness were tied together. Manichaeism and Jansenism, amongst others, produced a divorce between body and spirit with disastrous results, for in fact they incite a rush towards pleasures which are increasingly unrestrained. Jansenism and hedonism, both of them, like “beasts of burden” tied to the mill, go round and round without going anywhere.

The scenes of the Book of Revelation,²⁵⁹ where the heavenly choirs eternally sing the glory of God and the Lamb, touch us deeply but are insufficient. Where is love? If marriage is the sacrament of God, how can love-making be absent from heaven? We cannot accept that physical love should be for just a time; we want the embrace of love to be eternal.

Kashmir Shaivism teaches that ultimate Reality is essentially a sexual relationship. That is the great value of tantra. Equally, Shaivism teaches that each pleasure – that which expands consciousness and does not restrict it – leads to the experience of infinite Reality. In the light of this teaching, the Christian tantra seeks to reconcile pleasure and spirituality. It proposes that pleasurable union is found not only between the faculty and its object or at the level of the body and the mind but also between persons. In the love (agapē) proclaimed by the Gospel persons unite and discover that they are non-dual. It is because God is Three and One. The consummative pleasure is found therein.

There is more. All the commentaries on the Song of Songs present God as the bridegroom and the chosen people as the bride. Kashmir Shaivism for its part shows how to become the husband. The Christian, who is the Word, receives the world as a bride. In this fashion celibacy and eroticism are reconciled, and it is possible to reach an everlasting sexual union.

I understood why I need to know the joys of earth: travel, arts, knowledge and friendship and why I cannot withdraw into the permanent isolation of the monastery. I want to know everything and travel through the whole world, for all is my companion. It is above all, however, in the solitude of meditation, when I sit motionless and attentive, united to the world which in a certain sense emanates from me, rejecting nothing, embracing all, peaceful and confident: it is then that the Spirit descends. The whole world becomes the well-beloved. “His śaktīs are the whole world ...”260 I take pleasure in all. Being the Word, I feel authorized to embrace the whole world which has been formed from my own self. In the silence of meditation I dwell in the bridal chamber. And in this union of Word and Spirit, the infinite Consciousness unfurls. I am both material and spiritual, non-dual.

b. Horror

After an abominable twentieth century – with its world wars and genocides, famine and unemployment, ideologies and lies, dictatorships and abortions – how justify sin in any way at all? Failure and old age, treachery and loneliness, hatred and pride, anxiety and fear: how find anything of value in those? It seems absurd to speak of divine justice or of divine Presence.

Distinctions are needed. Egoists seek pleasures which only plunge them into darkness. They are locked in the hellish cycle of the absurd. Their pleasures, based only on illusion, only add to human misery. The Christian tantric has nothing to do with that sort of pleasure which, really, is only a form of suffering.

On the other hand, those who cut themselves off from sin, like Simon the Pharisee,261 do not know grace. They feel oppressed by their own laws. They see temptations arise in their soul. St Paul speaks at length about this in his Letter to the Romans. These temptations show that the righteousness of such people is in fact limited and illusory. Their sins or omission or of commission, private or public, personal or social, become a means of reaching liberation. To surrender to the temptation is therefore

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260 Quoted from a text of ÍrkaÆÔha, in TantrÁloka, 5.40.
261 Lk 7.36 ff.
a means of rejecting legalism. At the same time, they perceive, dimly perhaps, that there is a higher level which surpasses all distinctions between good and evil, sin and grace, virtue and vice. Nevertheless this means is problematic. St Paul exclaims that he is a wretched man, tormented by the conflict between Law and sin which are at war in him. But the Christian tantric seeks another path.

An anecdote. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to go to the rubbish dumps to take in her arms those who were dying and she would look after them and feed them. Abandoned by all, they at last found someone who loved them. A man who lay dying said to her as he expired in her arms, ‘I don’t know if I believe in God, but I believe in you’. Despite the spiritual desolation in which she lived most of her life, she gave witness to an incomparable love. There is no question of justifying or explaining evil, yet it is the context where love manifests itself in astounding fashion. Indeed, we can imagine only with difficulty how the splendour of love could reveal itself so clearly except in the darkness of evil. In the end we rejoice in the disaster which has become a blessing.

If Christian tantrics do not visit the cremation ground, they yet descend into the tomb by means of the waters of baptism. Having died with Christ who knew every paradox, they seek to share in human misery. They attach no importance to classes and conditions but on the contrary take pleasure in befriending the wretched and the dishonest. Ritual purity and impurity have no importance for them. They show they are tantric both by enjoying pleasure and by mixing with the impure. They reveal the freedom of Christians. In this regard the Christian disciples follow the example of their master who drew near to the demoniac who lived among the tombs and allowed himself to be touched by the harlot and to be addressed by the pagan woman. Recognizing that they are now the Word who sanctifies all things, tantrics do not reject what others call impure. They attach no importance, either to virtue or to vice, neither in themselves nor in others. They draw near to those who afflicted and put themselves at their service without asking whether they are sinners or not. They do not fear, in the presence of those who suffer and whose self is their own self, to share their lot. They struggle on behalf of the oppressed in order to free them from their oppression. The oppressors also are oppressed. They too need to be freed from the folly which binds them. By immerseing themselves in human misery, without any sense of virtue or holiness, quite simply because it seems quite normal for them to do so — it is then that Christian tantrics transcend the dualistic constructions of the mind and that the divine light becomes manifest. They come to know the divine consciousness, Love. Christian tantrics are the supreme tantrics.

Both are advantaged: the Christian tantric becomes truly universal and the wretched person becomes a means of grace. Evil thus becomes the path of salvation; it is transformed and become a good. “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!”

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262 Rm 7.14.ff.
263 2 Cor 3.17.
264 Mk 5.1ff.
265 Lk 7.36ff.
266 Mt 15.22.
267 Easter Vigil, the Exultet.
Contrasting contributions

The Kula tantra consciously tackles the problem of horror and sin. It uses these, in ritual fashion it is true, in order to arrive at supreme consciousness. Therein lies the value of the tantra. Its practice throws a new light on Christian revelation. Christian disciples are advantaged by the fact that their Master has known and surpassed the extremes of good and evil, but they are not excused from the requirement of following in their Master’s steps. St Paul says it clearly: in his own flesh he completes what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. Christian tantrics too seek to know the paradoxes. Being awakened they do not copy those who remain in their folly but yet seek to share their company, without pride, because Truth is found in them also.

During the seminary years I would spend Saturday night in the refuge set up by the sisters of Mother Teresa. By sharing their lot I could see the heavens open more widely. An immense divine compassion made itself felt.

A L’Arche community has just been established in the parish, where persons who have a physical or mental handicap and those who have no such handicap live together in friendship. But who are the handicapped? That is precisely the question put by Jean Vanier, the founder of L’Arche. We are all handicapped if love has not become fully developed in us. In fact, those who are generally called ‘handicapped’ allow us to discover real love. Jesus says this in reference to the man born blind: he was born like that so that the glory of God might be made manifest. That which was a misfortune is transformed into a grace. The members of L’Arche help justify the parish.

c. Ritual

Every church is a place of horror, for the image of the crucified is placed there in public view. The cross is the liÉgam planted in the earth. Holiness and sin meet there. Horror and pleasure are reconciled there. In fact, to the extent that the Word was annihilated, the perfume of grace spread throughout the world. The life-giving blood and water spring from his side. Silenced, motionless, abandoned, he goes beyond all limitation and shows completely that he is the Word. From the one who is reduced to nothing, power streams forth in every way. The ugliness of the cross is a strange beauty.

It is in that place, in the church which is both impure and holy, that the baptized gather. The Word proclaimed among them comes from the deepest depths. Arising from the freedom of God and going the various stages of the Word which we have noted above, the Word is revealed as words. The preacher proclaims the acts of God to the people of God. He is the Word in the midst of the assembly, not dual, no separate but the expression of the Inexpressible. It may be that the people, on hearing the inspired words, will be transported into God so that the one who proclaims the Word and those who evoke the Word might all join together in an eternal communion.

Renewed by the Word, the tantric assembly takes, by means of the priest’s hands, the bread and the wine. The priest, having himself become the Word made flesh, proclaims “This is my body”. The words and the actions of the celebrant work effectively and do what they say. The bread and the wine acquire the very being of the Christ who pronounces these mantras.

268 Col 1.24.
269 See Jn 9.3.
270 See Is 53.2-3.
The assembly feeds – it is shocking – on the body and the blood of its master. When his opponents argue among themselves, Jesus insists,

Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.\(^{271}\)

By doing what seems at once impossible and atrocious, the Christian tantrics have access to divine life.

He who has such esteem for his disciples that he offers them what is both disgusting and appealing at the same time – the human flesh which is divine – commands them to do the same.

**Contrasting contributions**

The relevance of the tantra is found in this: it helps the communicants to receive the Eucharist more consciously, for indeed the communicants really eat of the body of the Christ and drink really of his blood. Christians need the tantra to rediscover the scandalous teaching of the Christian tradition.

The tantric tradition, and especially the Kula, was practised in secret. There was never a question of working for a reform of morality or social mores on the basis of tantra. The practitioners conformed to the norms of society; they accepted the lack of consistency between their life in society and the private ritual. The Christian tantrics by contrast have a prophetic role and raise their voice to challenge all that dehumanizes. They protest against all that entraps people in their state as ‘bonded animals’. The Christian tantrics demand that the social environment should encourage the pleasures that are able to awaken divine consciousness.

**4.5 Coming to Love**

When the long journey comes to its end, we cease to see as “in a mirror, dimly”.\(^{272}\) We leave behind the fabricated self which defines itself as ‘black’ or ‘white’, ‘rich’ or ‘poor’. We know how to be successful or a failure, honoured or despised.\(^{273}\) Going beyond will, knowledge and self, we sink into sleep,\(^{274}\) the curtain is drawn over the multiplicity of things. Yes, night falls gently when we sink one into the other. The mind is dissolved; there is nothing but the fire of love. If we contemplate the panoply of the external world or the intimacy of the self, it is the same love which is seen. There is not longer ‘outside’ or ‘inside’. The outer and the inner, the individual and the universal coincide. Nothing is foreign. Nothing is rejected. We are linked to all and dependent on none. We receive all particular states since we rest in the heart. We are expansive and recollected at the same time, active and at peace, committed and detached. All contrasts imply each other.

Those who recognize the Self as the true self are already risen from the dead while living. They are ‘liberated while living’. It is the rebirth from above.\(^{275}\) There is nothing but the Subject, ‘I’. The disciples are the expression of God. Identified with the ‘I am’, the disciples are also ‘I am’. They live no longer in a vale of tears, seeking only to

\(^{271}\) Jn 6.53  
^{272} 1 Cor 13.12.  
^{273} See 2 Cor 6.8.  
^{274} Gn 2.21; Gn 15.12; Lk 9.32.  
^{275} Jn 3.3.
escape so as to find happiness in the beyond. They avoid the fundamental dualisms: God, man; heaven, earth; sin, grace; pleasure, horror; church, state; life, death; creature, creator. They reconcile all points of view. They are non-dual. That is what St Paul proclaims concerning the Christ

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

For those who are identified with the Christ, heaven and earth, present and future, belong to them, to whom they recognize themselves now as the origin and destiny of all things. In all freedom and by their own autonomous authority, they recreate the heavens and the earth. There is no need to leave this world since this world itself is paradise; the Kingdom is here, come in all fullness; sin is made holy. Every word that they pronounce is mantra and every gesture is a sacred mudrā. The Christian tantrics are both Emptiness and Fullness. They are without law, without constraint, without fear, without compulsion, for they are blessing, they are Love.

The Word is the message of God who is Love. The Spirit receives this message, but is not the Spirit also Love since only Love can hear Love? Love, the word of Love and the Hearing of Love, all penetrate each other and identify with each other. How distinguish between Lover, Loved, and Loving. All is Love.

Love is not petrified. In arriving at Love we do not arrive at a straight-jacketed Reality but at the beating of the divine Heart, the eternal vibration. The great furnace of Love manifests itself unceasingly in infinitely varied ways. Its radiance gives rise to this world so that human love might come to the triune Love and reflect it.

The lovers draw near, therefore. They allow themselves to be captivated and wonder-struck. Love gives them courage to abandon all that is not love. The lover and the loved give themselves one to the other and in giving themselves reveal unexpected capacities of love which open endlessly. They become more authentically themselves by becoming the other. They spiral upwards, beyond time and into the deepest recesses of themselves. They go beyond all differentiation. Who is the lover, who is the loved? They cease to think ‘I love’ or ‘You are lovable’. Their compenetration is a perfect fusion, not indifference but total communication. They succumb in Love which alone can guide them through the manifold paths and detours till they reach Love itself. The access to love stretches forever onwards in the Love beyond all knowledge. How differentiate,

276 Col 1.15-20.
therefore between lover, loved and loving. In the end the lovers know that there is but Love. From the swelling heart one single word of recognition reaches to the highest heaven: ‘Love’.

The One Who Is manifests himself as the One who is Love. If God says ‘I am’, it is because he says ‘I love’. Consciousness is the Self (caitanyam–Ātmā), because God is Love. The essence of tantra is Love.

**Epilogue**

This book is an attempt to re-emphasize several aspects Christian theology: the non-dualism of the Christ; the interplay of Word and Spirit; the primary role of the feminine; the spirituality of pleasure; authority and autonomy; the freedom of the Christian; the centrality of the body; the value of other religious traditions.

Some might think that the author is proposing practices that are incompatible with Christian teaching. Not at all! The shock of certain aspects must not obscure the checks and balances placed throughout.

This work is an invitation to ‘launch out into the deep’ and ‘cast the net on the other side’. A rich catch is awaiting us.

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277 Śiva sutrā, 1.1.
278 1 Jn 4.16.
279 Cf. Lk 5 ff.
Observations:

Dr John D’Arcy May, Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin, at the launch of *Towards a Christian Tantra* at Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, said:

“Autobiography is the best medium of theology but seldom is it as candid and courageous as in this book. John Dupuche’s personal story is essential for understanding what follows: a gripping account of travels between countries and cultures, of the changes sweeping the Church in 60s-70s Melbourne, of his decision to join and then leave the Jesuits because he was seeking a spirituality without duality. In this his key guide was Bettina Bäumer – Austrian and Indian, Christian and Hindu, immersed in tantra of Kashmir Shaivism – a unique person.

Christian tantra – surely Dupuche can’t be serious! Tantra is at the opposite pole from the Vedic tradition of Brahmin orthodoxy (not to mention Buddhism!). The secret tantric ‘left-hand path’ (vāmācāra), where pleasure and liberation are identified, is deliberately shocking, especially when it presents sexuality as a means of enlightenment. Yet it is proposed here as a complement to Christian spirituality as others propose Zen. This is made plausible by John’s transparent honesty, scholarly expertise, and theological passion.

Key terms: overcoming dualism, rehabilitating the body, in/through ‘lower’ to ‘higher’. Crucial themes: dimensions of pleasure + horror; the body of the consort within the context of corpses in the charnel field – no dualism! Śiva’s Śakti as Kula/Kālī; Self as Consciousness (caitīnayam-ātma); the Primordial Word: ‘I am’, to point of identification where a person is liberated while still alive (jīvan-mukti) and says: ‘I am Śiva’.

For the Christian, this point of view implies double belonging. Is there a danger of losing both? Dupuche would propose that this is not the case. He examines the intricacy of the relationship. “The religions of India help restore Christianity to itself”. “What the tantra surmises, the Gospel announces”. He studies the relationship of myth to reality. And again, he proposes that the ‘not-Christ’ helps to understand the Christ. He arrives, by ‘mutual evangelisation’, at a ‘double fidelity’: ‘I am Jesus-Śiva’. I am Christus: and he expands on this by seeing oneness with Christ in the Eucharist….

This book is not a work in comparative religion, a theology of religions (inclusivist?) which is neutral and distanced. John has staked everything on this path to liberation after his personal pilgrimage. He sees tantra as grace, its essence as love as a non-dual personalism, achieved through intuition, for seeing is greater than reason.

He makes some connections between Christianity and Kashmir Shaivism. He links ‘God’ to ‘consciousness’; the ‘consciousness of consciousness’ is connected with the ‘Word’; while the ‘Power of Word’ is linked with the ‘Spirit’. The Word limits itself as ‘flesh’ in the incarnation. Trinity is seen as ‘marriage’ so that “Ultimate reality is essentially a sexual relationship”. All is grace, mediated by suffering and sin as well as pleasure. There are echoes here of Graham Greene and de Sade…!

Christian tradition, like tantra, is also a “scandalous teaching” for the assembly feeds on the body and blood of their Master, while the crucifix is a portrayal of torture… In this way tantra opens our eyes to own tradition through the shock of both pleasure and horror.

Dupuche provides scope for ‘collaborative theology’, that is theological reasoning from very different premises to address same or similar problems such as the polarities of feminine/masculine, soul/body, suffering/joy. Yet this investigation inspires lyrical theology: “If God says ‘I am’, it is because he says ‘I love’”. This tantric Christianity can throw more light on ‘God without Being’ (Jean-Luc Marion), on the primacy of ethics (Emmanuel Levinas). Dupuche’s approach provides unsuspected possibilities of collaboration.”
Bettina Bäumer, Professor of Religious Studies at the Universities of Vienna and Salzburg, and Director of the Abhinavagupta Research Library, Varanasi, India, writes as follows:

“This work by Father Dupuche is the frank and honest account of a spiritual search which, starting from the Christian tradition and without rejecting it, leads to a Hindu tantric spirituality. Hindu tantra, largely misunderstood and misused, is discovered in all its depth and also in its complementarity to a Christian spirituality that has become desiccated and deprived of a sense of the body, in fact disincarnated.

This account shows that interreligious dialogue is not an academic luxury or an item on an institutional agenda but a spiritual necessity. We need the Tantra if we are to go beyond the dualism that has weighed so heavily on Christianity for centuries.

May this book clear the way for an ever deeper appreciation of the ground-breaking phenomenon of interreligious dialogue.”

Colette Poggi, Université catholique de Lyon, and Institut des Sciences et Théologie des Religions, Marseille, France, writes as follows:

“How is it possible to reconcile two facts which seem irreconcilable: a precocious Christian vocation which has never been rejected, and an immersion in the world of Tantra even to the point of initiation?

This intriguing account describes an unusual spiritual journey which responds honestly and deeply to this mysterious experience. It looks at the interplay of knowledge and experience, of spirit and body, of discernment and grace, of divine energy and love in all its aspects, during the course of an adventure which links a person to what is essential, unveiling the whole scope, both cosmic and divine, of Life.

The author shows how, beyond their obvious differences, the Christian themes of the Word which is expressed as an eternal I am, or of the divine Energy, find striking correspondences (vāc, ḍakti) in the Tantra, allowing them to resonate together and enrich each other. This work, therefore, follows in the wake of other pioneers such as Henri Le Saux or Christian de Chergé as regards the dialogue with Hinduism and Islam.

John Dupuche, a priest in Melbourne and a notable specialist in Kashmir Shaivism, is working at the forefront of interreligious dialogue, and witnesses to a double belonging which is successful. He has authored several works in this field. His credo is expressed in the following terms which take up key words of the two traditions which sustain him: Consciousness is the Self because God is Love. The essence of tantra is Love.”