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a Winged Bonnet.*

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Editorial

Here and now, in a single moment in the unrestrainable movement of time and space, at the beginning of its fifth year, Spirituality Studies brings to you a new bunch of articles, both scholarly studies and essays, in accordance with its mission to foster the awareness of the importance of spirituality in the academic as well as personal contexts.

On the pages of the 2019 Spring issue, Dr. Jana Trajtelová portrays a fascinating image of a renowned medieval English mystic Julian of Norwich she had been working on for years. The topic of the opening study of the issue is also displayed on its cover – it is Julian of Norwich who invites us to have a look inside.

In the following study, Dr. Michal Kutáš develops his philosophical ideas on reason as a biological function in order to argue for holistic understanding of man. The next paper of Doc. Dr. Gejza M. Timčák opens up an exciting polemic against the conventional religious interpretation of the classical Indian Yoga by challenging its relation to the so-called Hinduism. Subsequently, Sama Fabian turns our attention to the rapidly growing phenomena of online Yoga classes and confronts it with the traditional ways of Yoga transmission. And finally, Barbara Le Pape provides us with a unique insight into her creative process and artistic elaboration of the meditative experiences of energies and forms of selected Mahāvidyās – sacred feminine energies according to the Indian tradition.

All these contributions reflect, each one in a particular way, the fundamental intent of the Journal – to be an interdisciplinary platform for constructive dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

Let me hope, dear reader, that you are going to find inspiration in these texts for your personal inquiry of this captivating phenomenon of spirituality and your effort will be rewarded by an insight going beyond the dynamics of the phenomenal reality.



Cordially
Martin Dojčár

“All Shall Be Well”: Several Phenomenological and Metaphysical Insights into a Spiritual Experience of Julian of Norwich

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In my paper I present several phenomenological and metaphysical reflections on spiritual experience of Julian of Norwich (1342–1416). First, I discuss the meaning of *sin*, which is qualified as pain, isolation, clash of intentions, misperception, having no essence, as inevitable, and as a “reward”. As unnatural and unreal, sin refrains mind from the perception of the real and the natural and distorts intentional relations toward the world, others and oneself. Within this context, I show how the true sense of personal identity is revealed through the process of mystical transformation. Further, I outline certain ontological and metaphysical claims and questions. Was the medieval mystic taught something about the relation of mind and reality? A possible way how to apprehend the analyzed experiential ontological features is to radically employ and expand the Christian notion of *incarnation*.

1 Julian of Norwich: Introduction

Julian of Norwich (1342–1416) is a medieval English mystic, an experienced spiritual teacher and guide. She is also an extraordinary woman with bright and critical intellect, the author of the mystical treatise suitably named *The Revelations of Divine Love*. Julian is an honest seeker who poses essential questions with true philosophical precision. She does not seem to be easily soothed with authoritative and simplifying theological answers of her times [1]. It is not a coincidence that the existential question of sin and evil was in her thinking the most pressing one. She lived in difficult times, went through three sieges of the Black Death (which killed over half of the population of Norwich – probably including her own family), and witnessed executions of heretics and the beginning of the Hundred Year's war between France and England. Julian was fully surrounded by pessimistic moods of the “popular” medieval guilt and sin absorption (John-Julian 2001, viii). Paradoxically, she became well-known for her spiritual optimism and all-embracing hope.

2 Briefly About Methodology

My basic methodological and methodical perspective is *phenomenological*. Being attentive to profound experiences of the mystic, I observe fundamental experiential structures of the given spiritual phenomena, searching for evidentially manifested “how” of the given (understood as the specific content of intentional consciousness). Here we mostly remain in a safe valley of experience, presuppositionlessly describing the *reality of consciousness*, which experiences the world in such and such manner. Only then it is reasonable to make also certain ontological and metaphysical claims. Phenomenological descriptions always implicitly point to certain kind of ontology. I hold the view that metaphysics and ontology are legitimate only if they arise out of *immediate experience*, remain closely bound to and attested by it. In this way, metaphysics, ontology and even theology do not have to become mere deductive conceptual systems, thought narratives, but they may truly represent living teachings. Through reliable experiential insights they keep their evidential force, validity and justification. My own philosophical effort here wishes to sketch a path pointing this direction.



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3 The Problem of Sin

Julian was taught that it is firstly a human person who is responsible for the uneasy sinful condition. Sin, especially in folk guises of the catholic faith, has been understood as “disobedience to God”. There is also the burdening doctrine of original sin. In *Revelations* we follow Julian’s constant plea for better understanding of these problematic issues. As the mystical lover of God, she daringly bothers Divine Wisdom with questions about sin, guilt, suffering, judgement or punishment – patiently awaiting direct answers or insights. She cannot reconcile profound discrepancies she experiences in the world and in herself. The greatest discrepancy she finds between God she mystically experiences and the image of God (and the correlated image of man) she hears about from authorities. How could He, she asks, ever allow the damnation of non-believers? How could Mother Christ [2] bear the eternal suffering of any beloved creature in hell?

As the mystic she experientially knows the divine presence as the unconditioned *goodness*, sheer *positivity*. The mystical teaching, she has obtained through intimate mystical communion, speaks the same loving language. God, she knows, never blames nor angers [3], and remarkably, never responds to her plea to show her something of hell or purgatory (Julian of Norwich 2011, 75–76; Frykholm 2010, 57).

She sees “*no wrath in God*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 115) but sheer life of goodness, which constantly creates, nourishes and permeates all the known and unknown being. For Julian’s God it seems impossible to judge or damn a human creature so intimately bound with His own divinity. We are “*the dwelling city of God*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 180), we are incarnations of His Son (Julian of Norwich 2011, 129).

There is one important mystical lesson, which Julian cherishes the most among all others – the showing of the *Parable of a good lord and a good servant* (Julian of Norwich 2011, 120–122). This image speaks metaphorically of a situation of sin and mirrors the existential experience of humans in the world.

I saw two persons in bodily form, that is to say, a lord and a servant; and with this God gave me spiritual understanding. The Lord sits solemnly in repose and in peace; the servant stands near, before his lord reverently, ready to do his lord’s will. The lord looks upon his servant most lovingly and sweetly, and humbly he sends him to a certain place to do his will. The servant not only goes, but he suddenly leaps up and runs in great

haste because of his love to do his lord’s will. And immediately he falls into a deep pit and receives very great injury. Then he groans and moans and wails and writhes, but he cannot rise up nor help himself in any way.

In all this, the greatest misfortune that I saw him in was the lack of reassurance, for he could not turn his face to look back upon his loving lord (who was very near to him and in whom there is complete comfort), but like a man who was feeble and witless for the moment, he was intent on his suffering, and waited in woe.

In this woe he endured seven great pains. The first was the painful bruising that he received in his falling, which was very painful to him. The second was sluggishness of his body. The third was the weakness resulting from these two. The fourth, that he was deluded in his reason and stunned in his mind to such an extent that he had almost forgotten his own love to do his lord’s will. The fifth was that he could not rise up. The sixth was a most amazing pain to me and that was that he lay alone – I looked all about and watched, and neither far nor near, high nor low, did I see any help for him. The seventh was that the place in which he lay was a huge, hard, and painful one.

I wondered how this servant could humbly endure there all this woe. And I watched deliberately to see if I could discover any failure in him, or if the lord would allot him any blame, and truly there was none seen – for only his good will and his great desire were the cause of his falling, and he was as willing and as good inwardly as when he stood before his lord ready to do his will.

And in the same way his loving lord constantly watched him most tenderly; and now with a twofold attitude: One outward, most humbly and gently with great compassion and pity (and this was from the first level of the showing); another inward, more spiritual, and this was shown with a guiding of my understanding to the lord, and by this guiding, I saw him greatly rejoice, because of the honorable repose and nobility that he wills and shall bring his servant to by his plenteous

grace (and this was from that other level of the showing) and now my understanding led back to the first part of the showing, keeping both in mind.

Then says this gracious lord in his meaning: 'Behold, behold, my beloved servant! What harm and distress he has received in my service for my love, yea, and because of his good will! It is not reasonable that I reward him for his fright and his dread, his hurt and his wounds and all his woe? And not only this, but does it not fall to me to give a gift that is to him better and more honorable than his own health would have been? Otherwise it seems to me I would be doing him no favor.'

In this an inward, spiritual showing of the lord's meaning settled into my soul, in which I was that it was fitting and necessary – seeing his great goodness and his own honor – that his dearworthy servant whom he loved so much would be truly and blessedly rewarded without end beyond what he would have been if he had not fallen. Yea, and to such an extent that his falling and all the woe that he had received from it would be transformed into high and surpassing honor and endless bliss.

At this point the showing of this illustration vanished, and our good Lord directed my understanding onward in vision and in showing the rest of the revelations to the end. But notwithstanding all this diversion, the wonder of the illustration never went from me; for it seemed to me it was given me as an answer to my desire, and yet I could not perceive in it a full interpretation for my comfort at that time.

At another place I was thinking about the parable in a more detailed and systematic manner (Trajtelová 2018). We are in the *situation where sin as innocent non-intended falling defines the very ontological and metaphysical structure of reality (and thus human consciousness)*. The most suitable experiential description of this fundamental situation is simply *pain* – Julian claims that she cannot find the more fitting definition for sin.

The servant innocently gets into a position of suffering and a correlative manner of isolation. We can smoothly link the myth of original sin with the *phenomenon of separation* (Merton 1968). Human consciousness (“soul”, “self”) gets alienated from its own divine source. This grave self-alienation, this

separation from one's true divine identity is accompanied with the birth of an illusory egoic identity and is nourished by fears and self-absorption. Consciousness becomes self-referential in its intentional orientation and unable of transcendence toward anything other than itself [4]. The illusion of autonomy implies *losing the awareness of the broader context* – of the profound interconnectedness of all life and being. It is perhaps no coincidence that Julian emphasizes the divine compassion (Julian of Norwich 2011, 67, 209), since it teaches us to *reconnect*. The reality of sin turns into a battle field of multiple blind, confused, isolated intentions of misperceiving minds [5]. The injuries of sin from the parable are the pains of *conflicting isolated intentions* conveyed by thoughts, aspirations, emotions or deeds – within us and among us. Moreover, we can say that sin is an “optical” illusion related to lack of an important metaphysical *knowledge* – experiential knowledge about the ceaseless presence of the all-embracing divine goodness. Julian's “sin” really refers to innocent ignorance, to lack of spiritual knowledge. She writes: “[M]an is changeable in this life, and frailty and by simplicity and lack of cunning, being overcome, he falls into sin. He is impotent and unwise by himself, and also his will is overwhelmed during this time he is in temptation and in sorrow and woe. And the cause is 'blindness', for he 'sees not' God – because 'if he saw' God constantly, he would have no harmful experience, nor disturbance of any kind, nor the distress that is a servant to sin.” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 110, my emphasis). This means that illusion of sin is a distortion in perception, the *misperception*. Overcoming the illusion through healing our perception is the point of all contemplative praxis [6]. But when sin is the innocent distortion of perception [7], who is then to blame? Julian insistently claims: “*But I saw no sin; for I believe it has no manner of essence nor any portion of being, nor it can be known except by the pain that is caused by it.*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 65). In *Revelations*, God persistently teaches her that *all what is, is good*. God is sheer *existence of goodness*. *Being and goodness are synonyms*. All what exists, exists with-in and because of the *overabundance* of the infinite creative power, wisdom and love (anytime Julian uses these three words she refers to the Unity of the Trinity) (Meninger 2010, 17). The infinite loving perfectly permeates its finite concrete manifestations: “*He is in all things*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 31). “*What is sin?*”, Julian marvels, “*for I saw truly that God does everything no matter how little, and I saw truly that nothing is done by luck or by chance but everything by the foreseeing wisdom of God*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 31). In other words, sin has no essence. It has no reality, it is fully *unreal*. It has no nature, nor it arises out of the nature, it is *unnatural* (Julian of Norwich 2011, 169). Everything else in the creation is natural, which means divine. Nature and divinity, nature and mercy, nature and goodness are the two sides of the same

coin [8]. The lack of true understanding of reality has no substance, it is a mere deprivation.

However, Julian goes on and surprises her readers. She thinks of sin as an *award*, attributing it *positive value*. It is a positive and necessary component of creative divine intentions. She claims that God sees “the falling” in connections with human rewards and praises (Julian of Norwich 2011, 89). “*It is not reasonable that I reward him for his fright and his dread, his hurt and his wounds and all his woe?*” – asks the good lord in Julian’s parable [9]. Julian asserts *concealed necessity* and even *benefits* of our falling [10] (Julian of Norwich 2011, 164–165) and adds that we will see it ourselves, comprehend and rejoice. The most famous refrain from *Revelations* repeats: “*Sin is inevitable, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all the manner of things shall be well*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 64). Later the mystic finds some release in God’s promise that evil and suffering will definitely vanish by the “great deed” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 73–74). It remains unclear what is meant by this expression. Perhaps the remedy of the great deed – regarding the distorted condition of human consciousness – is simply to follow Julian’s perspective of transformative divine goodness. For Julian, the refrain „*All shall be well*” is much more than certain vague promise or hope; *it is already becoming her new reality*. Her eyes are getting used to the new undeluded perspective. The transformation of a sinful mind presupposes the healing *shift in perception toward the awareness of the ever-present divine goodness – the only true reality*.

4 Identity and Transcendence

The sinful consciousness is the innocently fragmented, isolated, perspectivist, and variously conditioned consciousness, experiencing its own multiple contradictory intentions within itself and in relation to perceived world and other living beings. Sin embraces the context of unavoidable violence. However, the most decisive human existential possibility – *spiritual transformation* – can bring along new and liberating perspective right into the sinful situation. Julian’s main advises from *Revelations*, acceptance – contemplation – optimism, seem to be transformational themselves.

Julian believes that *accepting* the tension of inevitable situation of sin is the most honest position and the most effective way how to live through it. However, the true acceptance presupposes a deeper transcendence. The focus on *goodness* leads her “beyond ontology.” She does it in many different ways – contemplating divine goodness, expecting it, creating it, mediating it to and inciting it within others, and thus

bringing it right into the problematic human reality. But of course, the true acceptance also requires the true transformative *knowledge* about the overall situation, which already evokes the transcendence (in sense of *gnosis* – cognition). It is the knowledge of the *nature of the divine reality beyond* – the latter is the *decisive transformative insight*. At the same time, Julian had to radically *rethink the question of sin*, which lead her to new liberated ways of perceptions, thoughts, and emotions; she had to rethink and transcend what we now call “cultural programmings”. For example, she believes that God encourages her to transcend her culturally conditioned emotions of guilt, remorse or sadness as soon as possible toward newly appropriated trust, joy and optimism arising out of the immediate contact with the Unconditioned (Julian of Norwich 2011, 11 and elsewhere). She offers psychologically and biologically much healthier “life strategy” than to be absorbed by guiltful consciousness. From *Revelations* it is clear that God invites her to carelessly even heedlessly transcend antinomies of the sinful reality – also of her emotional reality [11]. She is taught not to be dependent on any of these conditioned emotions because divine presence is not bound to her perception of “*joy or sorrow*” [12].

Julian’s way of transcendence merges with the mystical *transformation of consciousness*. All mystics and contemplatives, in most of the spiritual traditions, speak about the most significant event for human consciousness – the process of its transformation. In our terms, a sinful self-absorbed, dualistic, isolated mind transforms into an open, interconnected, integrated divine mind. In Western tradition, this transformative process is also associated with deep experience of suffering (the “dark night”) within which egoic mind-structures dramatically collapses under intense dispossessive existential tensions (Trajtelová 2013). After the happy collapse of the egoic structures of the self (provided by contemplative praxis or an excessive suffering), the liberated consciousness bears the same divine qualities, it coincides with them. “*I saw no difference between God and our essence, but just as if it were all God...*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 143) – says Julian.

5 Reality and the Transformation of Consciousness

There must be another relationship mentioned – the relationship of the transformed consciousness and the world. Not only had the Julian’s inner reality changed. With the change of her perception, the world around has become different. Lady Julian, the famous spiritual authority of her times, has incited the change in perspective in many other people, either personally or through her writing. Her empha-

sis on goodness and optimism was broadly attractive and profoundly transformative even in her times. Julian, first of all, *teaches to see in new ways*. Concentration on divine goodness nourishes the ability to *see* and *await goodness*. Mystical dwelling in the divine presence has transformed her look into the look of goodness. For example, it is well-known that mystics, saints and contemplatives are able to truly love their enemies. This is possible because they *really see goodness* beyond the painful surface of others' behavior and programings. They *see essentially*, and the essence of a person, according to Julian and mystics, is divine. For the transformed consciousness, not only others are divine, but everything is divine. Speaking with Julian, "*everything is well*" (Julian of Norwich 2011, 78).

The mind of the mystic is the *contemplative mind*, already sinless, transformed, which sees reality as it is – without delusions, self-images or arbitrary narratives. *Contemplation* is a way to surrender (e.g. to accept and transcend), it is a way how to see reality in a way it *originally is*, how to reprogram our minds [13]. Thomas Merton claims that it „*is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive... It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source*" (Merton 1968, 1; May 1977, 11). For Julian and mystics, contemplation becomes the source of real and realistic optimism. It is not naïve optimism; it is not a blind belief into some vague heavenly promise. It is the certainty which has the experiential basis – the goodness already *is* the very fundament of reality. And *once our eyes see it, it becomes real*.

However, philosophers should go further and ask: What reality? What consciousness? Was the medieval mystic taught something about the relation of mind and reality? Let me now make a short speculative detour. I am aware that this note would require much more space in order to be elaborated with precision and argumentative force. Let these lines become hints or leading clues pointing at the direction in which my thoughts about mystical transformation, identity, and reality go.

The relation between reality of consciousness and outer reality seems to be very tight, though very blurred and ungraspable. Philosophically and also scientifically, there is no strict line between the reality of the consciousness and the reality of the outer world. Not only we cannot decide about the nature of what we call outer reality itself (though we may speak of *how reality is given* to a human consciousness), not only we cannot apprehend the relationship between the imma-

nence of consciousness and the transcendence of exteriority, but first of all, we know almost nothing about the nature of consciousness itself. Phenomenologically, it is obvious that consciousness *is the only original reality*, the field in which the experience of the world is given as a constant flow – as phenomenology rightly emphasizes. Edmund Husserl, almost hundred years ago, claimed that subjectivity is the necessary and originary source of the meaning constitution (i.e. reality constitution *within* the consciousness). But on the other hand, Husserl also advocates the knowledge of objective structures of phenomena (reality itself *for* the consciousness). The deepest mystery for Husserl was the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, transcendent reality and reality of our mind – hence the mystery of subjectivity [14]. It seems that the old philosophical enigma is even more problematic regarding new scientific research on brain and mind, especially in relation to interconnections found in neuroscience and quantum physics. It is commonly known that our mind, using our physical brain, to a great extent *really creates* the world around [15]. These philosophical-experiential and scientific insights stand out even stronger learning about contemplative and mystical experiences and its widespread current research (Brewer *et al.* 2011).

Mysticism of Julian of Norwich also indicates that *with individual changes in perception, the world is altered*. From the previous analyzes it seems that the *sinful mind incites the persistence of the sinful ontological structures*, where both *mind and ontology are mutually dependent and mutually self-sustaining*. The transformed, sinless mind brings the original goodness into the world, reveals the originally existent goodness within and for the world, and so partly *recreates* its ontological structures. *The mode of consciousness* (sinful or sinless) is *not arbitrary* since it has the *power to co-create the guise of our reality*, forming or deforming it, revealing its true nature or concealing it. Could this mean that the overall spiritual transformation of the human consciousness would essentially affect the whole antinomical reality – including annihilation of all the forms of suffering, which are innocently given by the sustainment of the same antinomical structure? Would the overall transformation of consciousness mean the remedy of the current ontology, the reversal of the fall? The Julian's "*great deed*"? How would reality without antinomies o sin look like for humans? Certainly, the world would look differently. Let me silence and leave these questions open.

6 Peering into Metaphysics: Surprises of Incarnation

In the previous sections I have focused on reality perceived by the human consciousness. Now let me make a small humble step into metaphysics. What is the nature of the relation between the mind and the divine? What is the particular relationship between the transformed consciousness (mystics) and the divine reality? There is still the untouched question posed by Julian: why did God not prevent the “fall”?

After the previous experiential analyzes we perhaps better understand *how* sin is given as inevitable and under what conditions. But let us also ask *why* sin is inevitable. Let me shortly sketch certain direction of a possible philosophical and theological comprehension of this issue.

At some places, Julian surprises her reader with her own daring interpretations of the visions. I focus now on Julian’s important remark about *innocence* of the fall. There is no one to blame for the fall – nor the servant, nor the good lord. The terrain was originally unbalanced, somehow rough, contained “pits”, what dramatically effected the life of the good servant, but also incited the deep compassion of the lord over the beloved servant. We could say, the ontological and metaphysical conditions were (or are) *originally* imperfect.

Let me get back to Julian’s teaching of “*God’s simple loving*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 13). She mystically observes how everything that exists is perfectly soaked and fully submerged in the divine being experienced as goodness (Julian of Norwich 2011, 13). Divinity is inseparable from the whole of creation – creation seen as “*a little thing, the size of a hazel nut... round as a ball*” in the palm of Julian’s hand (Julian of Norwich 2011, 13). She learns that *everything* has its being by the love of God (Julian of Norwich 2011, 23). The whole *Revelations* are led by the mystic’s perspective: “*He is in all things*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 31). If this is so, *what do the innocent imperfections of the finite being mean?* How can the imperfections exist? What do they signify?

Another aspect we have to consider is Julian’s stress on mysterious (and scandalous) identification, even equation of the *servant* with *Adam, Christ, humankind* and an individual *person*. In several places in *Revelations*, these roles are somehow heretically interchangeable. Why does the servant – Adam, Christ, humankind, a human person – incomprehensibly falls into the vicious state of the isolated sinful consciousness, unable to turn sight from pains and imperfections? Julian writes that in the servant “*is included the Second Person in the Trinity, and also in the servant is included Adam, that is to say,*

all men. (And therefore, when I say ‘the Son’ it means Godhead, which is equal with the Father, and when I say ‘the servant,’ it means Christ’s manhood, which is true Adam)” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 129). And in few lines below she writes: “*When Adam fell, God’s Son fell – because of the true union that was made in heaven, God’s Son could not be separated from Adam (for by ‘Adam’ I understand ‘all men’).*” With the fall of the Son she means *incarnation* into the Mary’s womb. She also believes that the meaning of this vision is to show that Christ and Adam, in the eyes of God, are “*as but one man*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 129). At another place, interpreting the symbolism of the parable, she notes “*there was absolutely nothing separating the Godhead and manhood*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 130). And at other place, again, she refers to *incarnation as to an injury* (Julian of Norwich 2011, 132). Elsewhere she hints on the holy “*knot*”, the holy unity between Christ and humankind, which originally dwells in God (Julian of Norwich 2011, 142). Christ, Adam, you, and me – it is still the same servant from the parable. Julian writes that *divinity* is our perfect bliss, ever present to us. But she also writes that *humanity* is God’s great pleasure. He rejoices in receiving the human body, to be expressed as Body and in Body, manifesting His glory through human flesh. In Julian’s *Revelations*, the seeming extremities *deity-humanity* remain in the permanent tension within the incomprehensible divine *unity*. In other words, God is *essentially* and passionately involved in the affair of the continuous creation realized in the concrete incarnate self-manifestations. Julian also speaks of Christ’s Body as God’s Desire, which was with Him from the beginning and has accompanied the whole creation (Julian of Norwich 2011, 71). She herself speaks of Incarnation as the *essential* part of God (Julian of Norwich 2011, 154–155).

At this point, if we were consistent, we would have to radically rethink the Christian theological notion of *incarnation*. In Julian’s Trinitarian perspective, divinity of Christ and of the Father is absolutely equal. But there seems to be the equality also between man and Christ – in the fall, incarnation, resurrection (transformation). These insights are not theoretical but based on contemplative and mystical experiences. But if Christ is incarnate, the very “aspect” of Godhead is incarnate. A Trinitarian divine life itself is somehow dramatically involved in the happening of the sin and creation. *Essentially involved. Christ is the enterprise of the “creation”.*

The notion of incarnation serves us as a metaphysical leading clue to the problem of sin and antinomies of reality. If we further followed the thoughts above, we would need to open and broaden the notion of incarnation, and consider its possible ontological, metaphysical and theological consequences. The rethought notion would lead us from a single

narrative of a concrete historical event of incarnation of the divine Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, towards its broad ontological and metaphysical possibilities. We could perhaps get inspired with the sense of the “*extended incarnation*” by Teilhard de Chardin [16].

One possibility how to understand the problematic ontological and metaphysical deformity of the innocently sinful reality is precisely to employ the radical meaning of incarnation. Incarnation would mean the *Infinity's* incomprehensible messing up with the *finitude* – *originally*, given from the very “beginning”. Let me ponder about this *impossible merge*: The Formless and the Unlimited keeps manifesting itself in the constant process of creation, in concrete forms, *inevitably* limiting itself. Playful and multiple divine self-manifestation are various and many. The divine creativity enjoys to express itself in forms of massive cosmic energy fields and single atoms of a grass or flowers, as well as in the subtlest move-

ments of human emotions and thoughts. The Infinite Being perfectly dwells in and as the finite – *self-restricted* and *injured*; the uncreated divinity breathes within its created and perfectly individualized forms – even at the cost of a strange self-separation given by the inevitability of self-limiting. The idea of incarnation refers to all cosmic affairs as the *affairs of the emerging divine life itself* (without labeling the pantheistic conclusions). This divine life is originally *relational*, *kenotic* and *processual*, thus also liable to antinomic junction of the impossible merge of the finite and the infinite, limited and unlimited, mortal and immortal, formless and forms. Phenomenon of sin (and also desire [17]) is meaningful only within such metaphysical and theological context. Here I close, without making any definite metaphysical or theological conclusions, leaving the meaning of the Julian’s “great deed” open within the challenging theological perspective.

7 Conclusions

I have examined interconnections among the immediate mystical experiences of Julian of Norwich, understanding of sin and guilt, human transformation and the nature of reality. Let me sum up.

1. Phenomenon of sin is qualified as pain and isolation, as having no essence, as delusion and ignorance, as clashes of intentions and disregard of the context, as bearing certain positive value (reveals divine goodness) and promise (sin as an award), and as inevitable.
2. We followed that sin, pain, sickness and dying are synonyms for Julian. The cause of the pain is the lack of knowledge, lack of proper perception, missing of one’s own identity and essence, inability to recognize and enjoy the presence of goodness as the fundament of reality, “*ignorance of Divine love*” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 193).
3. Phenomenologically and ontologically, the notion of sin is bound to the antinomial character of experienced reality. The sinful consciousness is the innocently fragmented, isolated, perspectivistic, and variously conditioned consciousness, experiencing its own multiple contradictory intentions within itself and in relation to perceived world and other living beings.
4. The sinful consciousness and the co-related antinomial reality structure are principally innocent and guiltless.
5. For Julian, the transcendence of the whole antinomial structure is possible. Her approach is specifically “positive” and creates the perspective of spiritual optimism and trust. The way of transcendence merges with the profound spiritual transformation of human consciousness.
6. Her main advises acceptance – contemplation – optimism seem to be transformational themselves. It seems that the mode of consciousness (sinful or transformed) is not ontologically arbitrary since it has the power to co-create the guise of our reality, forming or deforming it, revealing its true nature or concealing it.
7. The reality of sin and its principal innocence could be metaphysically approached by the radical rethinking of the Christian term incarnation.

Notes

- [1] There is vast body of interpretative theological literature on Julian's *Revelations*. Many of these works are valuable theological and hermeneutic investigations, which aim to integrate Julian into a broader picture of catholic theological teaching. In this article, I do not inquire the *Revelations* from theological point of view. I am trying to be an observer who rather sees her work as an integral part of a deeper spiritual *telos* of the spiritually developing humankind, *telos*, which goes beyond its historical guises and theological limitations. Here I am not in discussion with theologians who picture Julian in more traditional catholic fashion. I focus on her spiritual experience and draw out its essential features upon which I built my further conclusions.
- [2] Julian is famous for feminine qualities, which she likes to ascribe to God, especially the motherhood. At some places the terms she uses have even an androgynous guise and aim beyond gender. She disturbs readers' habitual way of theological thinking with expressions like "Our Mother Christ, He..." (Julian of Norwich, 2011, 160). John-Julian nicely notices that Julian does not ascribe anthropomorphic attributes to God (e.g. "God is tender as our mother"), but she completely turns the perspective saying that all the motherhood, fatherhood, as well as all the humanity is preexisting perfectly in God. She divinizes the human reality, including genders (John-Julian 2011, xii).
- [3] "[But] these two things – blame and anger – I could not find in God" (Julian of Norwich 2011, 105). She even claims that God cannot forgive us our sins, simply because there is no negativity in the divine being, so it makes no sense to speak about forgiveness at all. "I saw no kind of wrath in God, neither for a short time nor for long. (For truly, as I see it, if God were to be angry even a hint, we would never have life nor place nor being.)" (Julian of Norwich 2011, 115).
- [4] If the intentionality is fully transcending. If we spoke in a more current terminology, we could speak of mindfulness. For classical articulation of mindfulness, see, e.g. Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (Nhat Hanh 2008).
- [5] Saints and contemplatives in every spiritual tradition are very sensitive toward the pain of the broken bonds and relations. That is why they emphasize *compassion*, which is the consciously and actively lived togetherness. Mystics show how every isolated and isolating movement hinders the vivifying divine flow. This phenomenon I treat elsewhere as idolatry (Trajtelová 2018).
- [6] Contemplation learns to "see" the *real* beyond the mental constructions, to hear the stillness beyond the mental noise, to transcend one's own mind's conditionings.
- [7] Eckhart Tolle speaks about sin as about an inherited dysfunction of human mind. Sin is an inevitable result of human unconsciousness (read unenlightened, usual, normal, everyday "conscious" form of a human consciousness) (Tolle 2005, 108).
- [8] For Julian, human nature is natural, including the body and the sensibility. At the same time, the human nature is the essential part of the divine mystery. The mystic speaks loosely about the natural desire for God or natural love. She claims that the human nature and the God's grace are perfectly concordant: grace is God, nature is God (Julian of Norwich, 2011, 169). Grace and nature present the one and the same efficacy of the divine goodness within the creation.
- [9] However, the notion of an award itself remains mostly obscure and seems to have the weakest experiential power. Perhaps here it comes to Julian's faith – simply embracing this point as God's promise and future reality to come.
- [10] One way of looking at this troublesome point in Julian's teaching is to think about the role of suffering in the process of mystical or contemplative awakening. Mystics claim that the way to mystical union leads through pain of radical dispossession (cf. "the dark night" in St. John of the Cross). Spiritual teachings in all the traditions have always acknowledged the role of suffering in spiritual transformation since abundance of suffering may serve as the vehicle for the spiritual surrender and awakening, which represents the breaking points when habitual egoic structures of human mind collapse.

- [11] Eckhart Tolle makes an important experiential distinction between emotions of negativity and desires that arise out of the egoic state of consciousness (mind) and “love, joy, and peace”, which are “deep states of Being, or rather three aspects of the state of inner connectedness with Being. As such, they have to opposite. This is because they arise from beyond the mind. Emotions, on the other hand, being part of the dualistic mind, are subject to the law of opposites. This means that you cannot have good without bad” (Tolle, 2005, 29). Julian’s lesson intuitively demonstrates this distinction, which is mirrors the fundamental difference between the self-absorbed (untransformed) and contemplative (transformed) human consciousness.
- [12] The story I have in mind is even humorous. At the one moment the mystic experiences the highest mystical bliss, at the next moment the deepest pains and sorrows, and “now the one, and now the other, various times – I suppose about twenty times” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 40). She concludes that “it is not God’s will that we submit to the feeling of pains, in sorrow and mourning because of them, but quickly pass over them and keep ourselves in the endless delight with is God” (Julian of Norwich 2011, 41).
- [13] Thomas Merton speaks about contemplative consciousness, which goes beyond the “social and cultural self” – hence beyond all the programmings of mind, and which is the “ground of openness” (Merton 1968, 25). “Zen is consciousness unstructured by particular form or particular system, a trans-cultural, trans-religious, trans-formed consciousness. It is therefore in a sense ‘void’. But it can shine through this or that system, religious or irreligious, just as light can shine through glass that is blue, or green, or red, or yellow.” (Merton 1968, 4). For Sufis, for example, “fana” demands also such “extinction of social and cultural self, which would be determined by the structural form of religious customs” (Merton 1968, 5).
- [14] See for example Introduction of Husserl’s *Crisis*.
- [15] An example of a popularization of this kind of research is the work of the famous neurologist David Eagleman (Eagleman 2015).
- [16] The notion of the extended incarnation we can find elaborated in a poetic way in author’s mystical-intuitive writing *The Hymn of the Universe* (1961). Teilhard de Chardin, in a form of a prayer, expresses that his vocation is to announce the profound unity of the cosmos and God, which is incarnation (Chardin 1961, 36).
- [17] See my article entitled *Desire and Its Paradoxes* (Trajtelová 2018).

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Reason as a Biological Function

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It is plausible that the so called “reason” is a biological capacity of our species and thus is severely limited as to the understanding of ultimate reality or truth. In many fundamental respects it is similar to our senses of sight or hearing, to our body’s ability to metabolize, or to our abilities to walk or use our hands. Since reason is closely connected to our biological senses I start with the description of their limitations. I proceed to the discussion of some fundamental conceptual structures of reason, which may be deeply flawed in the face of reality as it is in itself, such as the concept of possibility, of time and of the beginning of all. I discuss shortly also the status of logic, scientific theories and language because of their close kinship to reason.

1 Introduction

Whether we are aware of it or no, many of us understand reason as some kind of divine entity. It seems to be as if omnipresent, absolute and objective – not a mere biological faculty of a biological organism. In this paper, I would like to present an alternative approach, an approach which will place reason, as well as its kindred – logic, language and their respective imagination – among the equipment of one species of biological organism, which evolved on this Earth under the curatorship – at least to a significant degree – of genes and Earth's environment. I am not saying that we are only this material organism or that traditionally understood evolution was the sole origin of our biology, but we certainly are at least partly biological organisms and evolution understood in this way can clearly tell us much about our biological design.

When we normally use reason – not understanding fully to this day what it really is, in my opinion – we have a tendency to apply it to every problem which we face. But is the use of reason always appropriate? If reason is similar to other faculties, capacities and abilities of us as biological organisms, it should not be applicable successfully to all problem situations. Let us consider, for example, our faculty of sight – it can be used successfully in many situations, but by no means in all. For example, if there is not enough light, or if we are to find out some properties of things which cannot be revealed by our eyes, sight will be of no avail to us. Or take our hands. We can do many things with them, but they certainly have their limits and not all problems can be solved with the help of them. Because of their physical magnitude, shape, structure, functional possibilities and sensory equipment, they are quite limited. If the reason – and logic, language and so on – are also biological like our sight and hands, here too we can expect serious limitations. Let us look to the matter more deeply.

Since the reason stems and originates in some sense and partly from our sensory apparatus, let us investigate it first. Reason and biological sensory equipment are deeply related and dependent on each other in ways not apparent at the first glance.



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2 Senses

Let us start with the sight, which is a pride of our species sensory faculties – at least in comparison with our other sensory capacities. As everybody knows, our sight is able to detect electromagnetic radiation from a very narrow segment of the electromagnetic spectrum (from about 380 to 740 nanometers). Thus, we are blind to very many things which really exist in our environment. Visible light does not inform us even about all properties of the objects we see. Also, resolution of our sight is finite and so we are not aware of vast amount of detail on the surface of objects (not talking about their inside, which is typically unseen) – we as if see only a blurred version of them, an extremely approximate picture. It is as if we looked at the globe which does not picture more than countries and greatest rivers and cities – detailed complexity of Earth's mountains are reduced to simplified patches and many important things are not seen at all: we would not see trees, buildings, people, animals, flowers – we would see practically nothing. And the microcosm of our hand, or of a flower is equally full of important complexity. But before our eyes there appears only extremely simplified object containing almost nothing from what is really before our eyes. This real microcosm, which is really significant for us (through its bacteria, viruses, chemicals), is not seen at all by our sight. Almost all important structural and functional aspects are hidden from us. In reality, we are thus practically blind. We do not live – through our sight – in reality, but in almost completely reduced and impoverished version of it. The picture is, in addition, distorted in a very fundamental way, which we will discuss shortly.

If we examine others of our senses, situation is no better. Our hand passes over the piece of wood almost without feeling, as if dead. It is not sensitive to the actual complex shape and microcosm of the piece of wood – of its “mountains”, ravines, deep abysses and great, strange caves. It does not feel life of small insects, parasites, unicellular organisms. Many physical fields holding together its atoms, mingled together in vastly complicated shapes, are not felt but in a simplified version of its solidity – one datum replaces almost infinite amount of data. This almost unlimited complexity is squashed into most reduced overall shape, property of solidity and its degree, with addition of smoothness or roughness and few others.

Our smell can inform us about the presence of some chemicals, but not all. We cannot precisely determine the quantity even of those we do smell. And certainly, we cannot detect positions of a molecules in the air before us and structure of their dance in time and space. Similar is true of our hearing and taste, and about all of our sensory apparatus overall.

But our illusion is deeper than that. According to theory of relativity, the space itself is not as straight as we imagine it to be on the basis of our sensory input. Time also is different from what we know about it from our ordinary sensory experience: from the point of view of one observer, time goes slower for another observer who is moving relative to the first one. Moreover, time goes faster when we are farther from the Earth's surface than if we are standing on it: in a stronger gravitational field, spacetime is curved more, and time goes slower. We are not aware of any of these things, although they are a reality everywhere around us. Reality is not quite like we imagine it to be. You may object now, that these things we now exactly thanks to the power of our reason. That is true but let us not generalize from this to its universal applicability and boundlessness.

We are talking still about our biological sensory equipment. Quantum physics introduces even more fundamental surprises. According to it, all elementary particles behave differently from what we are used to expect on the basis of not only our senses, but also, it seems, on the basis of our logic and reason. All of the quantum world is fundamentally different from what we are able to imagine. And this quantum world is all that exists – what we see as macro-objects are just massive parts of this quantum reality. According to quantum theory, particle of matter cannot be said to be in an exact position independently of our measurement of its momentum. The more precisely we measure its position, the more indeterminacy will remain in its momentum and thus in velocity. This particle is in some sense not at one definite space location but exists everywhere with some probability before we execute a measurement. And even after that, there will remain some measure of indeterminacy of its position and its momentum, extending beyond inaccuracy in measurement and therefore inexplicable by it. Very strange fact that measurement and thus observation (maybe, in some way, consciousness) enter into picture as irreducible factor is not known from our experience with physical objects as we know them from our sensory experience. A ball is not everywhere if we are not looking, jumping into some position only because we look at it – or maybe because it becomes conscious. Also, in our sensory experience it is not true that we are able to determine where the ball is only at the expense of determining its velocity. We do not know from our sensory experience a law according to which when we see the ball clearly, we are not able to see whether it is moving or no, and how quickly; and, on the other hand, when measuring its speed, its position does not get hidden from us. Let us note here, that the position of the ball, in quantum world,

would not get blurred because of its speed (when measuring its speed), but because we try to measure its speed precisely. So, the ball, which is “moving fast” (but how can we tell?), would not get blurred, if we would not measure its velocity precisely, and the “standing” ball would be blurred, if we were to try to measure its speed with great precision. But in the real world – because all is quantum at some level, there is no exception – situation is rather like that, although we do not sense it. It is very different from what we are able to imagine based on our senses.

So, according to this very successful scientific theory, objects have no precise boundaries, they intersect with each other and mingle with each other, can jump through each other, can be connected in a mysterious ways of quantum entanglement, and are in a sense not “objects” at all – they are not objects in the sense our senses construe objects for us. The reality is not objectified – not in the sense we know the “objects” – and observation seems to *create* the final version of what we see, not only *reveal* what is.

What we see is thus almost entirely wrong, and what is there is deeply different and extremely richer in detail and complexity – it is strange and different. Reality itself, even according to current, in no way final scientific theories, lives and breathes for the most part beyond our imagination, moves in ways unknown to us. Almost completely blind and deaf giants, not knowing even themselves because they are made from the same stuff as is reality, walk here almost without awareness, not knowing what they do – stepping into relations and fields they do not see nor smell, living on an uttermost surface, seeing all from a great distance, not used to the nature of matter, not able to imagine it adequately. They do not live consciously in the only medium which is and in which they daily swim. Literally, we perceive almost nothing of a physical reality in which we live, and even the surface appearing before our eyes is fundamentally distorted – not only extremely simplified and schematized. Do you see the darkness just before our eyes, the unknown world, the mystery?

The limits of our sensory apparatus have bearing on the limits of our reason, language, and even logic. Reason can stretch itself, with effort and long training, to go as far as the relativistic world. But it is not able to digest and understand fundamental nature of matter and energy in quantum realm. It can feed on mathematical objects representing the quantum world before the observation and also to understand the jump from them to what is observed, but he is not able to enter the picture itself and unite these two parts of the theory. That is why we look at the double-slit experiment with a dull look – not able to unite in our understanding the wave function and its reduction. The problem is not in the complexity of equations, but in the question: which quantum object counts as an observer? Thus at least I understand the problem of the Schrödinger’s cat. If there would be a conscious human being in the box, we would have the answer: he will be either dead or alive – just one of the possibilities – long before we peek into the box, because he observed the situation from inside. If there would be a stone inside the box, the system would jump through reduction in the moment of our observation of the inside of the box – and till that it would remain in the state of superposition of hit and unhit stone. But what about the cat?

3 Reason and the Senses

It seems to me then, that in the present state of science, reason is really not able to cope with the quantum nature of matter and energy, which is revealed even in the simplest experiment with two slits. It would also be good to ponder that we do not normally view objects as functions of probability and as in superposition of possibilities which will get a partial definition only after our observation. Our reason has difficulty to picture this state of affairs, and is not able, it seems to me, to overcome the barrier I presented in the previous paragraph. But our understanding of objects as distinct entities which are as they are, with their properties clearly defined and independent of our observation, is a part of our reason itself – part of its presuppositions. Not only our common sense, but also our philosophy and to a significant extent also science, is based on our sensory experience, and this includes also our concepts. Concepts, which are an important part of our reason, are to some extent determined by our sensory experience. It is not a coincidence that when we think about physical objects, we imagine definite and distinct objects with definite shapes, moving in definite speeds and placed in definite locations. We presume they are there independent of our look. They have definite properties, which are connected with a given object. Yes, we can train our imagination to become familiar with a relativistic view, and to some extent also with the quantum one. It is worth noting that this demanded of us to change our concepts and building blocks of our imagination. Maybe you want to say now that concepts are not part of our reason and that it therefore needed not to be changed in the process of such training. We can accept this, if we want, because, even if it would be better to say our reason was changed, he was certainly capable of doing so. Anyway, we were able to change our concepts, including very fundamental ones, like those of time and space. Thus, the reason seems to be potentially very wide in its range of application and in its potential. But – I want to say again – there seems to be, at least for now, one clear sphere of science, in which no amount of training of reason will suffice for us to fully understand the subject matter, and that is the quantum nature of matter and energy, visible already in the most simple version of double-slit experiment.

As an intermezzo, let us consider the question of how it was possible for us to survive, if we perceive so little and in such a distorted way. Let us look at a bee. This is a biological organism, well able to survive and to pass its genes to the next generation. But how much this bee understands of the world around it, and how much it perceives? Sensory apparatus of the bee is extremely limited, just as that of humans, yet it can collect the information needed for the survival of its genes: a bee can find the appropriate flowers repeatedly, fly to and from the beehive, build and repair it, feed the young, and so on. It does not matter that its sensory possibilities are quite limited. It can be unable to perceive almost everything, as long as it can collect the minimum amount of information from the world, if it is just the right information needed for its activities. But, what about its knowledge and understanding? The bee certainly has in its nervous system some representation of the world around it, which is typically sufficient to execute all of the actions it needs for passing its genes. This model and procedures running on it can be called a knowledge or understanding of some kind – it is some kind of internal informational representation of some aspects of reality with a dynamic aspect enabling the adequate action, used for determining these actions; it is also based on its sensory input. But, as we can see, this “reason” of the bee, its “logic”, and also its “language”, are extremely limited – yet they suffice for the genes. Are we different from that? Why should we be? We are – as far as we are biological organisms – also the product of evolution. Yes, we can do much more than bees, and our understanding is much better. But would it not be reasonable to expect that our reason is also severely limited, in ways maybe which we are not able to imagine – just as a bee is not able to imagine its limitations? After all, our reason is, at least to a great extent, if not entirely, based on the workings of our brain, which is, as we all know, just a biological organ, “originally created” by evolution only for the passing of our genes to the next generation – just as our sight, hearing, our legs or our metabolism. It can be expected to be significantly limited as to the ability to comprehend reality as it is in itself.

Our senses and our reason can be thus in a very similar position to those of a bee, and maybe the true situation of our sensory perception and mental categorization is adequately described by a spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle: *“A tree is far more than a tree. Every label reduces it immediately as if you knew what is there. Every mental label gives you the illusion of knowledge. You don’t know what that is. How could you know? It’s a mystery that remain a mystery. It is a beautiful being. The surface – it looks like a tree – perceived through the senses. But it is a mystery, everything is a mystery, and it’s only mental labels [that] give you the illusion that you know. The moment [you say] ‘Oh, that’s a tree’ – What do you know? Nothing. It’s just sound coming out of your mouth.”* (Tolle 2001).

Look at a bee and imagine how incompletely it perceives a flower through its senses and through processing their input in its brain. But if we are a biological organism just like it, it is probable that our perception of a tree is very limited and distorted in a similar manner, so that the tree is really something much more mysterious and rich than we deem it to be if we base our understanding on our senses and our mental equipment.

4 The Concept of Possibilities

Let us look now at some possible shortcomings of reason as revealed by our reasoning itself (as if we were discovering the limits of some tool by trying to use it). Important, although maybe not necessary, part of our reason is the concept of possibility. Possibility splits in our thinking into two categories: empirical possibility and logical possibility. We can step out of the limits of the empirical possibility by considering determinism to be true. It is relatively easy to imagine that all phenomena are determined (maybe by previous phenomena and by some laws). In that case there would not be any real empirical possibility. All of the empirical possibility (an idea that things could have been otherwise while in accordance with the actual natural laws) would exist “only in our head”. Maybe it is only a result of our subjective ignorance: we think it is possible both that the train will be late and that it will come on time not because both of these scenarios are really possible, but because we do not know which one of them is determined to happen in the future.

On the other hand, to deny the logical possibility seems to be very difficult. This kind of possibility seems (for reason) to exist under the empirical layer of possibility: we have a tendency to say: yes, it may be that the coming of the train is determined by the laws of physics and the initial state of the universe, but it is logically possible that the initial state of the universe or the natural laws could be different; we are able to imagine such a (logically, not empirically possible) “state of affairs”. But does this ability to imagine such things prove their reality? What if there is no logical possibility? Maybe, also this, is only a product of our imagination. Its functional reason may be similar to that of empirical possibility: it is practical for us, beings with a limited knowledge, to count not only with more than one possible hypothesis for future scenarios for a given hypothesis of initial state and natural laws, but also to count with more possible hypotheses about natural laws and initial state themselves. We do not know with certainty what natural laws are in operation in the universe and what was its initial state. So, somewhat similar to gamblers, we have to split our bets, in order to be ready for more “possibilities”, although in reality even laws and initial state maybe could have not been different. The realm of possibilities itself maybe split to two kinds – empirical and logical – because of empirical and practical reasons. For example, if we want to formulate empirical laws, we maybe need a language which permits us to formulate many candidates for such laws. And so, it seems that these are in some sense possible. But they can be only the product of our thinking, or of evolution of our language or reason.

Let us examine the concept of possibilities in a more philosophical way. What does this concept probably (e.g. given most plausible formulation of it) imply? In order for possibilities to be real, they should be. But where are they? We are not able to empirically perceive or touch any of them. Is this not suspicious? Would it not be much more reasonable, and also in accord with Ockham's razor, that they are in fact only the product of our thinking, without any real grounding in reality? Introduction of possibilities to ontology presents a significant problem. What is the nature of their being? If they somehow exist, we should probably posit a new kind of being: to so called actual existence we should add potential existence. But the concept of the actual seems to exist for marking which one of potential states of the world is actually real: it serves for marking what exist: the existent is actual. But if what is potential also exists, many questions arise: What does it mean that something is actual and something only potential? Why one – and only one – state of the world is actual? Is it not strange that from the fixed set of possibilities, which exist in some other way than that which is, every moment one is chosen as actual and then instantly discarded in order to be replaced by another? What is the purpose of this peculiar mechanism? And what decides which of these possibilities will become actual? Does this deciding principle exists yet in another, third way? If we look at this whole clockwork mechanism, dynamic part of which works over something like the world of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, or over something like the universes postulated by various logics (like for example propositional or predicate logic), it seems rather like our own tool, part of the equipment of our cognitive apparatus – not as a part of the world itself. It resembles rather our own construct, which is practical for us to use. But the idea of possibilities is very strange both from empirical and philosophical perspective.

We should note that in quantum physics there is something in some sense similar to possibilities: superposition of quantum states. But this is different from our ordinary idea of possibilities in various respects. Superpositions disappear after observation, not after decision. Since observations can take place many times in the universe, superposed possibilities are constantly reduced. On the other hand, they constantly arise due to nodes of possible histories of quantum world. And, after the event of observation, indeterminacy does not disappear altogether, but is only reduced. This idea of possibility, based on real investigation of the world, is nonetheless very interesting: real possibility, as we can find it in quantum physics, seems to be different than we expected. The real world is usually – or always? – different from what we con-

ceived in our mind by thinking previous to observation and experience, and even from what we constructed only based on our unaided senses. Pure thinking (reason without senses) in particular does not seem to reveal the reality, but rather breeds our own constructs, which have very limited use and mirror the reality very poorly, but most of the time not at all. We look at these constructs, products of our own mind, when thinking without experience and observation, and not at reality itself.

In cognitive linguistics, there arisen an interesting outlook on possibilities. Although it is interested primarily in language, metaphysical (ontological) question enters the problem also, although not as a primary issue. Croft and Cruse introduce this approach through introduction of these metaphysical questions: "*In a truth-conditional semantics, the standard way of representing the status of situations is as possible worlds: there is the real world, and then there are worlds with situations that are possible but not (necessarily) actual. Possible worlds are then identified with a person's beliefs or wishes or some other mental attitude. Possible worlds pose metaphysical problems for many people, however. Do possible worlds exist? If so – or especially if not – where are they?*" (Croft and Cruise 2012, 33). In the words of Croft and Cruse, cognitive linguist Gilles Fauconnier "*proposes an alternative model of representing the status of knowledge that is metaphysically more attractive and allows for elegant solutions to a number of problems in semantic and pragmatic analysis. Fauconnier replaces the notion of a possible world with that of a mental space, and argues that the mental space is a cognitive structure. That is, the allocation of a situation to 'Gina's desire,' 'Paolo's belief' or 'The hypothetical situation' is done in the mind of the speaker (and hearer), not in some as yet unclear metaphysical location.*" (Croft and Cruise 2012, 33) [1]. The main advantages of the Fauconnier's approach do not lie in the solution of the metaphysical problem of possibilities (he in fact argues that cognitive structures postulated by him are even more useful as constructs – in ordinary thinking outside of science – than full possible worlds), but, nonetheless, his solution seems much more reasonable also from the point of view of ontology. We see that the difficulty of postulating possibilities as existing outside of our mind is felt by many.

Maybe, in living in the world of possibilities, we do not live in reality, but in illusion. Maybe what is, "have to be" like it is. Maybe it could have not been otherwise: what is, just is.

5 The Concept of Time

Let us look now at what is possibly another problematic offspring of our reason and senses. Let us consider the idea of time. Most scientifically sounding image of time is that of a dimension, as for example in physics. Both Newtonian and Einsteinian theories of gravity present time as a dimension of a mathematical object (the Universe), which is at the same time – according to a given theory – physically real. But this object itself is not in time, nor outside of it. Time is one of its dimensions, alongside those of space. But it is not well imaginable how this object exists, if it is not in time. Whether we say it exists only for certain duration of time or whether we say it exists always, we are introducing a second time, so that a time itself remains not fully explained. This way thus does not seem satisfactory. But if we say that time is only a dimension of this object, we are not really able to imagine how this object itself exists. If we say it exists out of time, I am not sure whether we are able to really understand this. It seems to me that we always, although implicitly and tacitly, presuppose that what exists also exists in time, not outside of it. For how long does this object – the universe – exist? If neither always nor for certain amount of time than does it exist for no amount of time? But that would mean it does not exist at all. Maybe we can say that the duration for which a given space-time object exists is the longest line parallel with time dimension, which can be drawn through it, and that consequently also the whole universe as a greatest possible object exists for a duration which correspond to a longest line parallel with the time dimension, which exists in it. But, even then, I personally quite cannot comprehend how the overall universe-object exists, taken as a whole. And if we return to the thesis that this object exists out of time, the questions arise: What it even means to say that something exists out of time? Does the word “exist” functions properly with the phrase “out of time”?

We are able to imagine this object as containing time as a dimension because we abstract from the idea of time (we see a static space-time object) and we ourselves stand (not being necessarily aware of it) outside of this object when imagining it. Thus, we look at it in our imagination and thinking for certain duration of time, as we would look on a vase. But this object, in itself, should stand outside of time in which we are, and we should be only part of it.

But what about time as a dynamic concept? In this case, the questions arise regarding the nature of past, future and present. How past exists? If it does not exist, then how it is different from that which also does not exist in the present but also did not exist (in the past)? And if future also does

not exist, how it is different from the past, if past also only does not exist? In our ordinary language, we seem to distinguish between what is possible but did not exist, what is possible and did exist, what is actual, what will exist, what can (but not necessarily will) exist in the future, and so on. So, it seems that what is past is not simply non-existent. And if it makes sense to speak about the past as distinct from what could have been but was not, then what is the difference between them? It looks like the “actual” past has some kind of being, but not the being of the kind present has. But, was not the word “existing” reserved for what is, and thus for what is actual and present? What is this new kind of being corresponding to what “is” in the past? And future, since it is different from both the past and present, should presumably get its own kind of being assigned. Suddenly, many kinds of being arise, alongside the being as being possible from our previous discussion. This is little strange and suspicious. Cannot these concepts be only our mental tools for coping with the world, and nothing more? They are very strange and when we look at them more closely, they do not seem to work very well – although they work (to a certain degree) in our practical life. But, when we try to make sense of them or analyze them, they seem rather like tools for handling the world as presented by our senses than like vessels of knowledge, mirroring the true nature of reality. In thinking more deeply about the past, future and present, we get baffled and confused – what are these, exactly? But this does not need to mean that past, future and present are mysterious – maybe they just do not exist as such in reality; maybe they are only our projections, which are to a great extent erroneous, but to some extent practical in the sense that they were able to help our genes to survive to this moment (which, in reality, may not be the moment – the present as we imagine it to be). What if the whole of our mental equipment connected with the idea of time is deeply flawed in the face of reality and catches only the minimal glimpse of it, needed for our survival?

Thus, the mysterious present, as imagined by us, may be to a great extent only a result of our “imagination” too. What if there is no specific “moment”, a “point on a line”, an “intersection”, a “snapshot” or a geometrical object between past and future? What if so-called past has not ceased to exist, but penetrates to a so called present? And what if so-called future, imagined as not yet existent, also trickles down to our imagined “present point” or influences somehow the present moment? We imagine the present as a point on a line, or as a snapshot of a movie. But are such ideas accurate? It is quite possible that past, present and future are much more mys-

terious than I just described – to the extent that something distantly similar to them really exists. Even the idea of connectedness of past, future and present probably presents the reality which we try to comprehend by our concepts related to time-idea very poorly. What is really going on may be well beyond our strangest speculations. When mystics and ancient spiritual texts speak about eschatology, end, final salvation, nirvana and so on, they are not able to grasp properly this reality even with the help of paradoxes, let alone with the capacities of reason. Let us ponder the following statement, for example. In *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, a text from Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, we read: “*But no beings are left outside by the will of the Tathāgatas; someday each and every one will be influenced by the wisdom and love of the Tathāgatas of Transformation to lay up a stock of merit and ascend the stages. But, if they only realized it, they are already in the Tathāgata’s Nirvana for, in Noble Wisdom, all things are in Nirvana from the beginning.*” (*Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Chap. XIII, Nirvana) [2].

The thought that all is in “eschatological time” already, if we only realized it, occurs repeatedly in Eastern spirituality. “Eschatological reality” as if covered from “above” all time like an umbrella and transcended time barriers. Mystics and spiritual teachers often spoke of ultimate reality as being beyond time. Yet, from their reports it seems that reality is not simply out of time in the sense laws of nature presumably are or in the sense in which the space-time object we described earlier is out of time. It cannot be grasped by reason.

It seems that for example Tolle imagines the present moment differently than a point on the line of time or a snapshot of the movie of reality. I speak here of “imagining” only regarding his texts and speeches, in which he uses also concepts and language. I do not claim that his understanding of present moment in his experience is his imagination or mental construct. But in his teaching as embodied in his texts and words we can certainly discern conceptual structure. And in it we can see that his understanding of present, based of course on his experience and feeling, is different from at the first sight rationally easily comprehensible images of point on a line or a snapshot of the movie – or the like. Tolle speaks of present not only as of a present moment (in time) but also as some “active agency with intelligence” from which intelligent and adequate action, words or thoughts can arise. Sometimes his present seems to be identical with “pure consciousness” or “pure observer”. These and similar aspects suggest that he understands by present something in many respects different from our ordinary understanding. It cannot be adequately understood as a point in time or a snapshot, or some mathematical object between two different mathematical objects: past and future. His understanding of a present

cannot be fully grasped by reason. It seems that only experience similar to his can show what he means by present. This does not mean that his understanding does not partly grow from our ordinary experience of a present. But this ordinary experience does not fully and on a whole adequately contain experience which he is talking about. Present moment as ordinarily experienced thus can be the starting point of our understanding of what he means by present, but this experience has to be deepened and developed. And this is done also with the help of other ordinary experiences, like that of a consciousness or observing, which at first seem to be clearly different from the experience of the present moment.

6 The Concept of the Beginning of All

Let us think briefly about another problem connected with time idea, the problem of the beginning of all. Both possibilities imaginable by reason – a universe with beginning and a universe without beginning – are, after deeper analysis, nonsensical to the reason. In the case of beginning, we are not able to explain why anything began, from what, and how it is possible. If we say that time also began with the beginning of cosmos, this does not answer how the beginning was possible. Why beginning happened? If we brand this question as nonsensical, an issue is still unexplained and unintelligible: without reason, from nothing, and without “how”, universe began. If you look at it, it does not make much sense. But the image of a universe with no beginning is problematic too. Although we need not explain now how, why and from what it began, we are not able to imagine well infinity of the past. Every moment of the universe arises from the previous state, but, since infinity means there is no first point in time, it is not determined from what universe arises ultimately. If we say that for every moment it can be said from what it arises, namely from the previous one, and that we cannot speak of ultimate “from what” (it arises), because it just not has a beginning, problem still remains. If infinite amount of time already passed, then universe could have not come to this state, which is infinitely distant from some other past state. And such infinitely distant past state has to exist, because if all past state were only finitely distant, that there would be a beginning. Now infinity means that you cannot go to the end, because there is no end, and thus it cannot be traversed. In consequence, infinite distance between any of the infinitely distant states in the past and the actual state could have not been traversed and universe could have not arrived at this state, so this state should not exist – but it does. And if we say that infinite distance can be traversed, but only in an infinite amount of time, this does not work

either. Just like infinite distance cannot be traversed, e.g. it is not possible to reach its end, because there is none, also the infinite amount of time cannot pass, e.g. it is not possible to arrive at the end of the infinite interval of time by a passage of time, because such an interval just does not have an end.

Thus, it is not well imaginable that past is infinite. And what would it even mean? Do we know? So, both possibilities, that of a beginning and that of no beginning, are indigestible for reason. Yet, according to its logic (or maybe only according to the classical logic), there are no other possibilities. Let us note finally that positing an instance out of time like is for example a God existing beyond time, also does not solve the problem. His act of creation is an act, and act is not imaginable out of time. But he presumably created time too. On the other hand, if he did not create time, but acted in it, the question moves to him: is he eternal or did he also have arisen? Both of these possibilities we already discussed, and with no success as to understanding them fully by reason. To me, both – and seemingly only possible – answers seem nonsensical.

7 Logic

Let us look now at the issue of logic, so intimately connected with reason. Classical logic, in past considered to be the only logic, or *the* logic, is, as we know, not the only possible logical system. To this day, many different logical systems were developed, including intuitionistic logic, many-valued logics, fuzzy logics and so on. Many of these non-classical logics are developed as well and soundly as classical logic is. From this point of view, they are not worse than classical logic; they are not less logics than classical logic is. As logical systems, they can be defined as well and as exactly as classical logic, and also studied in the same manner. Does it even make sense to ask which of the many developed logics is the right logic? In some senses no, and in some senses yes. In logic understood as a study of logical systems, many non-classical logics are equal to classical logic (those, which are fully developed and exactly defined), and it does not make sense to ask which one of them is the true logic or *the* logic. But, if we are interested in what logical systems may be involved (and to what extent) in our actual reasoning and in language (for example in its connectives), or which of them are useful for the description of the world, for example in physics (hidden in mathematics, which is a tool for description of a physical world), the question of the right logic has a meaning. Maybe we should, though, reframe the question from “Which logic is the right logic?” to “Which logic is used, useful or practical and so on, to what extent, and where?” And I think the only

sure thing we can say about the relation of logics to reality in respect of knowing it is just that. We cannot say with much confidence that any logic mirrors some deep or universal aspects of reality, but we can say, for a given logic and given set of problems, whether this logic is useful tool for solving these problems and to what extent.

8 Scientific Theories

This is connected with the question of truth, including the truth of scientific theories, which are the offspring of reason, investigation, experiment and so on. In my view, we cannot confidently say that our scientific theories are true. The only thing we know with a sufficient degree of confidence is that thanks to these theories we were able to do some things which we were not able to do without them: for example to go to the moon, to construct a computer, to travel faster, to see what is very distant or to communicate over great distances almost instantly, and so on. These achievements cannot be questioned. But do we know more about scientific theories than that they enabled us to do these things? I think we do not. We do not know to what extent they are true. Although I do think that if something is useful there also has to be some grain of truth in it, it needs not be more than this grain. It is quite possible, that even our most advanced scientific theories taken together do not reveal more than this tiny grain of truth from what is real.

9 Language

As to the issue of language, which is also deeply related to reason, I would like to give the word to Geoffrey Samuel, who when describing the Mahayana Buddhism concept of emptiness, explained it like this: “*Mahayana Buddhism holds that there cannot be an ultimately valid and accurate language in which the universe can be fully and definitively described. [...] Phenomenal reality is ‘empty’ or ‘void’ in the sense that our understandings of it are empty and illusory; the ultimate reality that lies beyond it is also ‘empty’ in that emptiness is all that can be positively asserted about it.*” (Geoffrey 2012, 55). But, “*‘emptiness’ is not quite the same as there being nothing there. The universe is not a void in the sense of an absence of anything real, in some ways quite the opposite. It is rather void or empty in the sense of the absence of any specific thing, concept, feeling or state that human processes of consciousness may assume is there.*” (Geoffrey 2012, 55). Here, inadequacy of our mental biological equipment is extended even to our feelings and conscious states. Although the question of our feelings and conscious states is not the focus of this paper, it is interest-

10 Conclusion

ing to consider that probably also our feelings, to the extent they are creations of our biological equipment, do not correspond very well to reality itself; the knowing-potential of our conscious states opens even deeper question, which we will refer to briefly in the conclusion. Anyway, it is quite possible that our language is severely limited in its ability to grasp the true reality of that in which we live.

We looked at scientific language when we considered scientific theories. Ordinary language seems to exhibit additional problems (which can also be its strong side in many respects), which are connected to its vagueness, nature of meaning and categories and so on. It is worth consideration in relation to our topic that cognitive linguist George Lakoff says that so called cognitive models need not be consistent. He and other cognitive linguists postulate these cognitive structures as an explanation of how we understand words and concepts, but also of how our knowledge of the world, or at least that part of it which is connected with the structure of language, is implemented: "*We use our cognitive models in trying to understand the world. In particular, we use them in theorizing about the world, in the construction of scientific theories as well as in theories of the sort we all make up. It is common for such theories not to be consistent with one another. The cognitive status of such models permits this.*" (Lakoff 1987, 118). Lakoff investigates both scientific and folk cognitive models and finds that indeed they do not need to be consistent with one another. This gives them, in my opinion, paradoxically also their strength, because we can grasp some phenomena of the world even if we are not able to construct complete, consistent and exact theories about them. On the other hand, this inconsistency may suggest that our language is really not able to grasp reality in its fullness.

What we said earlier about scientific theories holds also for our philosophical theories, for religious conceptions and so on. Because of that it maybe would be wise not to take them so seriously and to consider them rather to be only the tools which help us – to work on us, to suffer less, to live better and more meaningfully, to be happy and joyful, to be better, and so on. If they work, there has to be some truth in them, in my opinion, but it need not be, as we said about science, more than a keyhole view at what reality really is. Here, the question of spiritual and mystical experiences opens up: Are these experiences of unity, connectedness, peace, unconditional love, stillness or being beyond time a way to experience reality as it is in itself? We do not know, although according to the reports, it often feels like it. But even here there seem to be differences, including maybe the differences in depth and stage. So, looking from outside, we should be humble. These reports also often talk of deep (and peace-bringing) not-knowing, anyway.

Notes

- [1] Fauconnier explained his concept of mental spaces in his works (Fauconnier 1994) and (Fauconnier 1997).
- [2] In this context, the word *Tathāgatas* can be understood as referring to those who realized *Buddhahood*.

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Yoga as a Part of Sanātana Dharma

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The definition of religion is not easy as the views on this point are very different. The Indian *Sanātana Dharma*, the “Eternal Order”, is how Indians call their system that has also a connotation that relates to what we call religion. What we understand as Yoga was defined by Patañjali, Svātmārāma, Gorakhnath, and other Yoga masters. Yoga is a part of Sanātana Dharma and is called *Mukti Dharma*, the “Dharma of Liberation”. Yoga as one of the six orthodox philosophies is free from religious traits. The difference between the Indian and Western understanding of Sanātana Dharma is investigated from a practical point of view reflected in the literature and in a dialogue with Indian pandits. The reflection of the Western (namely Christian) understanding of Indian Sanātana Dharma and its effect on the way how Christians look at Yoga is also mentioned.

1 Introduction

The topic of Yoga and its relation to religion are an issue that is a matter of discussion for some time. For some, religion and *darshan*, “philosophy”, are nearly synonyms, for some they are not. The concept of “Hindu religion” [1] – as will be shown later – is also a relatively vague concept, but this is how in the West and now also in the East, the Brahmanic tradition [2], plus the six philosophical *darshans* are often called. As pointed out also by Siddharth (personal communication with the author, 2019), the need to define “religious identity” of the Indians was originally more needed for non-Indians than for Indians. Still, by now religious identity is a formally acknowledged concept. At times, also the other philosophical and religions systems present in India are included in the concept of Sanātana Dharma [3].

The concept of religion is not easy to define and there are a number of ways how it is done. Thus, in religious studies references (Horyna 1994, 11–15, 18–19), after showing how difficult it is to define religion, arrives at the statement that religion defines the relationship of humans to God (Horyna 1994, 19). There is a number of views on this point. Usually religion links humanity with the “transcendental” or “spiritual” elements (Morreall and Sonn 2013, 12–17), others consider the procedural aspects: “*Religion is a non-divisible system of beliefs and processes related to sacred things, i.e. things set apart or prohibited, that unite to the one and the same moral association called the church*” (Durkheim 1964, 25). Štampach (1998, 30) described it in a way that religion is a socially anchored relationship of human to the numinous transcendence.

Horyna (1994, 18) in his definition of religion in the context of religious studies admits that neither religious studies nor any other science has a generally accepted definition of religion. Thus, religious studies deal with real aspects of religion in various cultures or communities. They are usually studied under three areas: (1) Religiously interpreted realities (“sacred reality”); (2) Experiences interpreted in religious context (e.g. mystical experience); and (3) Religious interpretation of standards (religious rules of normative, “sacred” character). Another concept is faith, which here relates people to the Sacred (Horyna 1994, 23–25).

The broader essence of religion can perhaps be described as human beings’ relation to that, which they regard as Holy, Sacred, spiritual, or Divine. Worship is probably the basic element of religion, but moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious acts are usually also elements of religious life. In practice, a religion is a particular system, or a set of



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systems, in which doctrines, myths, rituals, emotions, institutions, and other similar elements are interconnected.

The definition of Yoga relates either to the process or the goal. Patañjali defined the process saying that it is the cessation of the movements of the mind continuum (Patañjali 1911, 9). Vyāsa, in his commentary to the first verse of the first chapter of the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtras*, wrote that Yoga is *samādhi* (Patañjali 1986, 62).

The Sanskrit word Yoga means “yoking”, or “union” (Patañjali 1968, 73–77). It also refers to one of the six classic systems, *darshans*, of Indian philosophy. Its influence has been widespread among many other schools of Indian thought. Its basic text is considered to be the *Yoga Sūtras* by Patañjali (2nd century BC?). There are, however, almost countless schools and sub-schools of Yoga, which provide an unimaginable wealth of practices and models of Yoga.

As mentioned also in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (n.d.), “the practical aspects of Yoga play a more important part than does its intellectual content, which is largely based on the philosophy of Sāṃkhya, with the exception that Yoga assumes the existence of God”. Further, Yoga of Patañjali defines the state of *chitta* (working space or continuum of the mind) as key factor to success. Yoga holds together with Sāṃkhya that the achievement of spiritual liberation (*moksha*) occurs when the individual self (*Purusha*) is freed from the bondages of matter (*Prakriti*) that have resulted due to ignorance (*avidyā*) and illusion (*maya*). The Sāṃkhya view of the evolution of the world through identifiable stages, leads Yoga to an attempt to reverse this order, as it were, so that a person can increasingly de-phenomenalize himself until the Self re-enters its original state of purity and consciousness. Once the aspirant has learned to control and relax from the obscuring mental activities of his mind and has succeeded in ending his attachment to material objects, he will be able to enter *samādhi*, i.e., a state of union with the absolute consciousness that is a “blissful, ecstatic” [4] union with the ultimate reality (*brahman*). The one ascetic consequence of the Sāṃkhya–Yoga is an emphasis on austere asceticism and a turning away from the ritualistic elements of Hinduism coming from the Brahmanical sources.

There are a few points that would need elaboration. Some interpretations consider Íśvara to be equivalent to the Creator, others – as mentioned below – identify it with the absolute consciousness. Further, *avidyā* (“ignorance”) and *maya* (the “veil” that gives rise to incorrect interpretation of all what is perceived) give birth to *jñāna* (the usual knowledge of the multiple perceivable entities). And as the *Shiva Sūtra* (2007,

l.2) declares: “*Jnanam bandhah – [This] knowledge causes bondage [in maya]*”. Therefore, one has to be able to relax from it (Timčák 2018, 23). *Samādhi* as described by Vallalar is a “*melting into the Absolute Consciousness*” (Vallalar 2016, vii). All this process of “relaxing” from *avidyā* and “melting into Being” through a *samādhi* is not depending on rituals or faith in religious systems.

Regarding the question of process-oriented systems of Yoga and Yoga-darshana being a part of religion, Eliade sees darshans as “philosophies” (1997, 48) and for him Indian religion is Brahmanism. There are, however, other Indian philosophies and religions that do not fall into the category of Brahmanism (or *Vaidika Dharma*). Werner describes Yoga as a classic darshan that was originally a tradition that developed in the forest schools and ashrams where the practical aspects [5] were preferred over the philosophy. Still, it developed its own philosophy. Werner also mentions that Yoga does not need rituals in achieving its aims (Werner 2008, 65). On the other hand, Vedic religion does not rely on Yoga texts or practices. Fišer (in Zbavitel 1964, 39–40) reminds once again, that the term Hinduism was fostered by Western researchers in order to “hide the inadequate knowledge of the jungle of vast cultural, philosophical and religious heritage of Indian society”. Merhaut (in Zbavitel 1964, 43–45) declares that darshans are philosophical ways how to grasp the object of philosophical enquiring. He cites Vreede who holds that the individual darshans are not antagonistic but form a unified order. Thus, Nyāya deals with logic, Vaiśeṣika with physics, Sāṃkhya with classification of parts as well as forms of being, Yoga deals with the method of human personality development, Mīmāṃsā deals with ethics and Vedānta with metaphysics. Neither of them links to what in West is understood as religion. The understanding of the core of all the darshans was gradually deepening throughout the history, also due also to the interaction with “competing”, e.g. Buddhist philosophies.

It can be noted, that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* offers the opinion that is of interest to note, that since the late 19th century, Hindus have reacted to the term Hinduism in several ways. Some have rejected it in favor of indigenous formulations. Others have preferred “Vedic religion” using the term Vedic to refer not only to the ancient religious texts known as the Vedas but also to a fluid corpus of sacred works in multiple languages and an orthopraxy (traditionally sanctioned) way of life. Still others have chosen to call the religion Sanātana Dharma, “Eternal Law”, a formulation made popular in the 19th century and emphasizing the timeless elements of the tradition that are perceived to transcend local interpretations and practice (Baktay 1990, 16–20). Finally, others, perhaps the majority, have simply accepted the term

Hinduism or its analogues, especially *Hindu Dharma* (Hindu moral and religious law), in various Indic languages.

Hindus subscribe to a diversity of ideas on spirituality and traditions, but have no ecclesiastical order, no unquestionable religious authorities, no governing body, nor a single founding prophet. Hindus can choose to be polytheistic, pantheistic, monotheistic, monistic, agnostic, atheistic or humanist (Lipner 2009, 17–18 [6], Kurz 2008, Gandhi 1996, 3 [7]). Because of the wide range of traditions and ideas covered by the term Hinduism, arriving at a comprehensive definition is difficult (Flood 1996, 6). A Hindu may, by his or her choice, draw upon ideas of other Indian or non-Indian religious thought as a resource, follow or evolve his or her personal beliefs, and still identify as a Hindu (Long 2007, 35–37).

Scholars state that Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain identities are retrospectively-introduced modern constructions (Orr 2014, 25–26, 204). Inscriptural evidence from the 8th century onwards, in regions such as south India, suggests that medieval era India, at both elite and folk religious practices level, likely had a “*shared religious culture*” (Orr 2014, 42, 204), and their collective identities were “*multiple, layered and fuzzy*” (Orr 2014, 204). Even among Hinduist denominations such as Shaivism and Vaishnavism, the Hindu identities, states Leslie Orr, lacked “*firm definitions and clear boundaries*” (Orr 2014, 42).

2 Yoga and Religion

As shown above, Yoga means a re-union of the individualized consciousness with the universal consciousness (called also Ultimate reality, Absolute consciousness etc.). From procedural point of view, apart from ascetic observances, Yoga has different tools for achieving *samādhi* than the sāmkhyan way does (Larson and Bhattacharya 2014, 162, 223, 352). It has to be noted that Yoga has a great number of pathways (*tantra, hatha, rāja, jñāna, dhyāna, bhakti, karma* etc.) that use specific processes for achieving *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is of a number of types. Patañjali (1979 33–40, 72–88, 127, 158–172, 249–250) defines *samprajñāta, asamprajñāta, savitarka, nirvitarka, savichara, nirvichara* (these are called *sabīja*) and *nirbīja, samyama (dhāraṇā + dhyāna + samādhi)* and *dharmameghā samādhi*. It is also important to note that Yoga as we know it from the various works on Yoga like Patañjali *Yoga Sutras, Hatharatnāvalī, Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā, Gheranda Samhita, Goraksha Śatakam* etc., do not include elements of religious processes as known from the Vedic religion (see also Werner 2008, 65–66).

Yoga, when practiced by Indians or other nationals belonging to the Vedic religion (“Hinduism”) naturally may be merged into a fusion of Yoga and faith. Nevertheless, Yoga is well distinguishable from faith. Further, as Yoga started to spread around the globe, reference to Hinduism in its context usually disappear.

Ambikananda (email conversation with the author, 2018) notes that “[*T*]he word *darshana* comes from the root verb ‘*drs*’ which means ‘to see’. It is perhaps possibly translated as ‘a view taken’. However, the translation of *theology* is closer to what we understand as such in Hinduism than when it is translated as ‘*philosophy*’. In the West, generally speaking, *philosophy* is shaped outside the boundary of religion. That is not the case in India. So neither *Samkhya* nor *Yoga* are isolated from the religion of India, they were arguments made within the context of the religious thought and tradition of their time and as such are *theologies*. In fact, they are two of the ‘*accepted*’ or ‘*orthodox*’ *theologies* within Hinduism. You mention Patañjali’s *Yoga Sutras* indeed, Patañjali’s *Yoga Sutra* is the *orthodox* and *theologically accepted* text of the *Yoga Darshana* of Hinduism.”

This seems to mean that Sāmkhya and Yoga are part of Hindu theology. It is difficult to agree with this as Sāmkhya is a non-theistic philosophy and Yoga refers to Īśvara but does not refer to anything related to Vedas, even though Indian yogis accept the authority of the Vedas.

In the 1990-ies in Czechoslovakia there was a big (ideologically motivated) discussion about Yoga and its being or not being a part of Indian religion as well as about Yoga being or not being a religion. All, who knew Yoga were of the opinion that Yoga is not a religion as Yoga did not fulfil the criteria of religion – a point that was discussed earlier. In a presentation of Dojčár, a religious scholar, on a Yoga Conference, it was said that “*It is important to distinguish between Yoga as such and the various applications of Yoga in different social, cultural and religious contexts. In the first case Yoga is a spiritual discipline and a path of spiritual development that is based on universally valid principles of spiritual life, In the other case it is a phenomenon of the so called new or non-traditional religiosity. These two meanings cannot be combined or interchanged and mutually non-transferable. Religion is a socially anchored relation of man and the numinous transcendence.*” (Dojčár 2001). In any case religion is a highly complex phenomenon that incorporates myths, rituals, prayers, ethical standards, community and similar aspects (Gálik and Gáliková 2017, 4).

On the background of the aforementioned explication, Yoga seems to be a specific type of relationship with the numinous transcendence that is based on direct experience and is not

tied to any elements typical for religions of institutionalized or social type. Thus, even though religious scholars research the phenomenon of numinous experience, religions cannot monopolize the “right to such experience”. The absence of the religious elements – according to our view, makes it impossible to put Yoga-darshana into the category of religions.

Various authors like Werner (2008, 64–65) say that Yoga as a darshan was first a method developed in ashrams as a special area of training, but it developed also its philosophical system to give a reference frame to the training.

Werner, does not seem to see a link between Yoga or Sāmkhya and religion. Eliade (1997, 50–51) considers Yoga as a practical system and a philosophy. He states that Sāmkhya is an atheistic system, whilst Yoga is theistic.

Presently, in the UK a new wave of discussion about Yoga as a part of “Hindu religion” or its independence from religion started, due to an emerging pressure from UK government related institutions that would like to have Yoga teaching standardized (IYN 2018). This is in turn due to an exponentially growing wellness and fitness industry that needs simple, formalized Yoga training devoid of any mystical or spiritual elements.

It also brings up the question, who is qualified to teach Yoga (here Yoga means not only *āsanas*, but the whole spectrum of yogic practices). Ambikananda (email conversation with the author, 2018), holds that “*I do not believe we have to be Hindus to practice Yoga nor do we have to be Hindus to teach Yoga. It can indeed, be taught outside of a ‘religious’ context if you are teaching simply asana and a bit of pranayama. Once you go into its theology and start teaching that... well, it becomes more complex and people should know the limitations better than they do now. For example, one of the fastest growing ‘yogas’ in the States is ‘Christian Yoga’. Now, there are some very real and definite differences between the Yoga-darshana and Christian theology. Which one is going to be subverted, do you think?*”

Whilst there is no evidence of the existence of Yoga theology (of the Western type), it appears as if Yoga should be taught by a Hindu, as otherwise the deeper essence of Yoga is incomprehensible for a Yoga teacher not familiar with “Hindu religion”. Thus, even though it is true that many Yoga teachers had not studied Indian philosophy, but this depends on their understanding of Yoga. It is also true that to master the essence of any Yoga system needs a lot of study (theoretical and practical). Nevertheless, it is not a “theological” study, but the study of the processes and aims defined within a given school of Yoga.

The great popularity of Yoga evoked an equally wide spectrum of Christian reactions ranging from concordance to discordance, as many Christians do practice Yoga (Manjackal 2018). Jain (2012, 1–8) investigates the ways of transforming Yoga from its “pre-colonial” forms to the present multifaceted but mainly postural Yoga. She notes that some Christians call Yoga demonic due to fear from eastern influence. Some Hindus call postural Yoga a Yoga designed for business purposes and call for recognizing all the structural aspects of Yoga. She also notices that Christian communities designed a number of applied Yoga types such as Christian Yoga or Holy Yoga, where Yoga is claimed to provide a universal set of techniques that can be used to strengthen a Christian’s relationship with Christ.

Malkovsky (2017, 34–36) relates that he as a theologian gained much from practicing postural Yoga. Then he continues to analyze the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtras* from the point of view of benefits to a Christian. He also expresses a view on *Īśvara-pranidhāna* – the last point of the *niyamas*. The term *Īśvara* which – as it was mentioned above – in fact covers a wide range of interpretations from Lord, Creator to the Absolute Consciousness. *Pranidhāna* also has a number of interpretations from surrendering (our deeds) to *Īśvara*, to acknowledging that we are “players” in the grandiose project of manifested existence evoked by *Īśvara*. He then compares the differences between the perception of God by Christians and Yoga, though he notes that postural Yoga does not deal with other *angas*, “limbs” of Yoga. His conclusion is that postural Yoga and Christianity can be reconciled and practiced one along the other. He recommends to the Christian critics of Yoga that there is little doubt regarding the validity and significance of the Yoga experience of interiority, spirit, and transcendence.

Ambikananda (2018) further notes: “*To deny that Yoga is a part of Hinduism is a cultural misappropriation that is shameful and one that Western yogis have indulged for far too long.*” This view is quite close to the observations of Veer (2009, 263–278) that in India Yoga became a “cultural heritage” and became also a part of nationalist politics.

There have been Catholic monks like Déchanet (1965) [8], who discovered also that practicing Yoga helped them in both health-wise and in their Christian life. Also, it was found that through “Christian Yoga” religious people, who are dissatisfied with the standard tools of their religion, often have the desire to get deeper in their spiritual quest and for that purpose they start using Yoga. At present there is a vast number of publications and organizations that offer support in this direction (like Christian Yoga Association). Still, as Yoga

is not a part of the Christian theology it was met by dislike in the Christian hierarchy. In 1989 though, The Congregation for Matters of Faith issued a document signed by Cardinal Ratzinger (the later pope Benedict XVI.), which admitted that certain spiritual techniques that come from Orient are used by Christians. Here TM, Zen and Yoga were included. They were included because of their non-religious character (Ratzinger 1998).

The Catholic view on Yoga also underwent some changes. Presently Yoga and its position from such point of view is starting to be freed from some suspicion of its being a risk. Kalliath (2016, n.d.) gives that “[t]here are scholars who argue that yoga has nothing to do with any religious tradition, although it should be recognized that yoga is, by and large, associated with the Hindu dharma and way of life. Yoga was a discipline and a way of life for seekers and seers in their quest of the Divine even before organized religions came into existence. We can go so far as to say that it is encrypted in the collective DNA and chemistry of the Indian psyche and is now being accepted globally as a way of life beyond religious bias and geography. Yoga has already become the patrimony of humanity, a unique contribution of India to the whole humanity.”

Kalliath (2016, n.d.) concludes that “[p]erhaps Christian Yoga offers a new methodology for exploring an Asian version of Christ. It is all the more important for the Church in India to explore the promise of yoga since our attempts at inculturation have lost momentum. If the initiative for Indianization comes from the people at the rank and file, it will be more likely to be accepted and to endure. There can be no doubt that yoga has immense potential for being an Indic expression of the ‘Joy of the Gospel’. The promise of yoga is that it would indeed help us live out the identity Jesus ascribes to us when he says, ‘You are [already] the light of the world’, words that are so reminiscent of the Buddha, who says, *atma deepo bhava* (Be a light unto yourself)! It is precisely along these lines that we can present the role of yoga in Christian spirituality as a veritable way (*sadhana*) to the inner sanctum of our being – the Kingdom of God Within.”

Jain (2017, 1–7) offers more information on new “Yoga strains” – there are also *Yahwe Yoga* and *Christ Centered Yoga*, *WholyFit* or *PraiseMovers*. Evidently the opposition from traditionalist churches created a new way of presenting Yoga to various interest groups. She cites a number of Catholic priests, who acknowledge that Yoga brought them closer to God. She suggests that Yoga, has never belonged to any one religion, but has always been packaged in a variety of ways. Thus, history has shown that people whether with or without religious affiliation can practice Yoga without losing their faith. As the question of various concepts of God – they are

not really an issue in a commercial postural Yoga. Those few, who care about the philosophical aspects of Yoga, could decide in what way Yoga could support their quest for holistic health and/or spirituality.

Corigliano (2017, 1–12) considers it natural that Yoga and Christianity not only meet but have vital interactions that may lead to a number of positive effects on Christian people of all ages. She also cites the mobilizing effect of Western Yoga practice to Indians, who seem to have lost enthusiasm for Yoga. Similarly, Stoeber (2017, 1–17) relates that an Indian/Hindu organization (Hindu American Foundation) launched a “Take Back Yoga Campaign” in 2008. This reflects the fear of cultural misappropriation of Yoga by Westerners.

Stoeber cites also that purely physical Yoga may lead to narcissist attachment to body, what is true. He also discusses the doctrinal issues that tend to appear in such a context. He mentions the issue with *mantras*. It is an interesting point, as – in principle – both Christianity and Yoga uses *mantras*. Thus “*O Lord have mercy on me*” is a *mantra*, the *rosary* is used like a *mala*. Still, some *mantras* can be translated in an Indian way (like *Om namo Bhagavate Rudraya* meaning a remembrance of Lord Rudra), or in a Western way – remembering the Absolute consciousness (which is the concept behind Rudra).

In a study related to *Transnational Transcendence* (Csordas 2009), one chapter is devoted to *Global Breathing* by P. van der Veer. The author analyzes the role of Yoga in the rise of nationalism in India and later the spread of Yoga related spirituality in the US and in the West in general. Though his definition of Yoga is very imprecise (“*Historically yoga is an ancient system of breathing and body exercises.*” Csordas 2009, 265–266) and he does not seem to have read the key works on Yoga [9], he makes an interesting point on a possible cause of Indians perceiving Yoga as a national heritage item and that Westerners often took Yoga as a new tool for Eastern type of spirituality as opposed to Western materialism.

He observes that Vivekananda (disciple of Ramakrishna) was able to present Yoga to the Western world as a system of core Indian spirituality devoid of any specific devotional context (thus it does not need temple worships and theologian debates). He also informs that Yoga has become a political tool (“national heritage” issue) (Csordas 2009, 267). This dilutes Yoga and could make it more difficult for Christians to adapt yoga techniques even for its health or spiritual benefits. On the other hand, Indians may feel that Yoga is a part of their religious tradition and can be transmitted only by persons well versed in Hindu religion, i.e., mostly by Indians.

The book *Pensée Indienne et Mystique Carmélitaine* of Swami Siddheshwarananda (1974) was translated into English as *Hindu Thought and Carmelite Mysticism* (1998). So, the translation of the term Indian may affect the interpretation of the inner meaning of the world.

The same book mentions also the difference between religion and spirituality discussed above: “*Religion erects barriers between men because it rests on concepts which are provocative slogans and rallying points. That is why there cannot be amity between particular religions if one considers doctrinal and theoretical values. The word ‘spirituality,’ closer to our ideas, is of a more universal order: it designates this life which expands slowly in the deepest part of ourselves and which is indefinable because it is ceaselessly renewed.*” (Siddheshwarananda 1998, 3).

When investigating the question of who is entitled to practice and/or teach Yoga it is necessary to note that authorities like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda or Swami Rama accepted also foreigners into the population of their followers. Historically many Yoga *āchāryas* transmitted Yoga knowledge to Tibet, Nepal, China and other Eastern countries, where they are practiced even today, but sometimes under Buddhist intellectual environment. Later, many Yoga *āchāryas*, “teachers”, left India for the West and taught Yoga there. They did not demand a conversion to the Hindu religion. This export of *āchāryas* happened in spite of the fact that yogis who were Brahmins were considered polluted if they left India and foreigners a priori were considered as *mlecchas*, “impure ones”. Impurity is considered as a barrier for Yoga *sādhana*. Thus it is more the level of spiritual maturity that is important for Yoga *sādhakas*, “practitioners”.

Yoga is indeed a part of Indian spirituality and culture. Nevertheless, it is also true that it is “an intangible cultural heritage of humanity” as endorsed by the UNESCO (2016). The experience of the last century has shown that Yoga can bring the same effect whether followed in India or in the West, provided that it is not a commercial postural Yoga. In the present, attention has shifted from the non-physical aspects of Yoga to the physical ones (the majority of Yoga practitioners practice *āsanas*, “postures”). We have to say that this also happened in India, where swami Gitananda and others even started Yoga competitions and there are efforts to get Yoga into the Olympic Games (this is also supported by International Yoga Federation that initiated National and World championships in Yoga).

When the present author was complaining against this new tendency to shift the attention even further from the essence

of Yoga, one swami Shankarananda (2003) wrote [10]: “*Here in India we have yoga competition for 2000 years in many Kumbha Melas, where all the yoga masters, yogacharyas, sadhus, yogis come together each year. We have pranayama competition and philosophical competitions because yoga competition is our tradition. The Yoga Competition was born in India. The Yoga Federation of India, Indian Yoga Federation, Yoga Confederation of India, North India Yoga Federation, South North Yoga Federation, World Yoga Congress of Pondicherry, World Yoga Society of Calcutta, Vivekanda Kendra Yoga Foundation, play yoga competition, Indian Yoga Championship, Indian Yoga Cup, States Yoga Championship and World Cup, because for many years is OUR TRADITION, because we are Indians and most of us are Hindu... In our land Mother India, our government supports the promotion of yoga sport in each University and High School by supporting Yoga Competition, because it is our TRADITION. We have in India a very nice book we call Mahabharata. Part of this book is another text, the Yoga Sastra, that most people call Baghavad Gita. In Yoga Sastra, Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna about Life and Yoga. Because Life is Competition. How to fight in the war. Because the war is the big Competition, like Mahabharata. Krishna teaches about attitude in action. Krishna teaches this in the war to be a yogi, and this attitude we teach in the game of yoga sport... Sports is Health and health is Yoga.*”

Thus, it cannot be said that it is only the Western concept of Yoga that shifted the attention from Patañjal’s Yoga or true Hatha Yoga to *āsana* competitions and thus to a commercial approach.

3 Yoga and Science

Swami Ambikananda (email conversation with the author, 2018) wrote: “*My inbox has been inundated with Yogis very definitely disturbed by my referring to Yoga as an intrinsic part of the Hindu religion and my refusal to accept that it is a science. Still, it is something that may depend on the definition of the essence of yoga. The root sci refers to knowing and e.g. Jnana is knowledge. Yoga is about knowing the Self, even though this is imprecise as it is impossible to know the Self as it is the Self who is the sakshi – witness of everything.*”

Yoga was submitted to science-based research and it was shown that it has definite health benefits (Rama, Ballentine, and Ajaya 1976), but is in itself not a science in the Western sense.

Swami Rama of the Himalayas, in a foreword to the book of Justine O’Brien, *A Meeting of Mystic Paths* (1996, ix), wrote: “*The word yoga is much misunderstood in the Western hemi-*

sphere; some see yoga as a fad, and others as a kind of religion. Actually, yoga is a systematic science, a set of techniques, and while yoga itself is not a religion, its practical teachings are an integral part of the great religions of the world.”

4 Conclusions

Because of the difficulties in defining exactly what a religion is and because Yoga is also understood in a number of different ways, it is possible to conclude that Yoga is an precise system of practices, *independent* of beliefs or rituals even though the defined practices always relate to spirituality (i.e. to the relation between the individual self and the transcendental Self).

Yoga is one of the six classic philosophical systems (*darshans*) but seems not to be dependent on the Vedic religion, or Hinduism. When speaking about Vedic religion, the ritualistic part of the Vedic heritage (given mainly in *Yajurveda*) is meant here. The subsequent teachings of Yoga masters known as *Upanishads* the emphasis is shifted to inner ways of discovering the Transcendental reality (Aurobindo 1981, 4). Thus, *Katha Upanishad*, e.g. mentions Yoga in a couple of verses, e.g. I. 2, 12, where *Adhyātma-yoga* is mentioned; II. 3, 10–11, 15–17, where a version of the “*chitta writti nirodhah*” process is defined (Fig. 1.) together with the concept of *hrd* (the spiritual centre) and *nādis* [11] (Aurobindo 1981, Prem 1956, 227–229). *Prashna Upanishad* in II. 2–III. 12 describes the *tattvas* and *pranās* (Nikhilananda 1963, 150–152) as well as the principles of *prānāyāma* (Aurobindo 1981, 304–306). These definitions are given after the ritualistic parts of the *Upanishads* were transcended. The *Upanishads* give also a new meaning to Vedic procedures. Thus, e.g. in *Chāndogya Upanishad* (VIII. 1.) it is said that “[n]ow, what people call *yajna* (sacrifice) that is really continence (*brahmacharya*)... What people call *ishta* (worship), that is in reality continence (*brahmacharya*).” (Nikhilananda 1963, 351). Yoga as such [12] does not enter the area of Vedic cultic practices and processes (Woodroffe 1990, 69–126).

तां योगमतिमिन्नयन्ते स्थरिमन्द्रियधारणाम्।
अप्रमत्तस्तदा भवत्योगो हि प्रभवाप्ययौ॥११॥

Verse 11. The state unperturbed when the senses are imprisoned in the mind, of this they say ‘It is Yoga’. Then man becomes very vigilant, for Yoga is the birth of things and their ending.

Fig. 1. Katha Upanishad II. 3, 11 (Aurobindo 1981) defining the state of Yoga as defined in verse I. 2 of Patañjali Yoga Sutras (Patañjali 1911, 9; 1986, 93).

The Yoga *sādhana* can be practiced independently of the religious stance of the practitioners, even though it is beneficial to know the Indian cultural context of Yoga, as shown above, e.g. by Corigliano (2017, 1–12), Jain (2012, 1–8). Kalliath (2016 without pagination) or Malkovski (2017, 33–45).

Whilst at present, Yoga is often identified with *āsanas* (“postural Yoga”), and there is a movement towards “Yoga competitions”, where the basic principle of Yoga practice – *sādhana* is disregarded, Yoga can help to experience *samādhi* – i.e. the culmination of efforts to transcend the state of *avidyā* only if all the eight limbs of Yoga are practiced – as defined by Patañjali (1911, 1–320), or by Gheranda in *Gheranda Samhita* (Gheranda 2007, 11–92). This is a far greater “result” than the effects of postural Yoga.

A coexistence of Yoga and religions (Christian and other) is beneficial to Yoga practitioners inasmuch as Yoga can help to discover the depths of human spirituality. It is regretful, though; that nowadays Yoga became mostly postural Yoga and that it is being transformed into a sports-like appearance. Hopefully this will change in the future.

Further, there is a “fight” between Hindus and Westerners as regards who will own Yoga as a commodity. Vivekananda as well as present day activists called on Indian youths to re-own Yoga, otherwise they will have to learn Yoga from Westerners, which seems to be politically unacceptable.

Thus, there are a number of vested interests present in Yoga as we know it at present. Some seek to find the essence of Yoga as described, e.g. in the Patañjali *Yoga Sūtras*, *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā*, *Katha Upanishad* and other sources. Some would like to see Yoga as a globally accessible postural Yoga for health improvement, others would like to bar some religious people from Yoga, still others use Yoga for political purposes etc. It can only be hoped that an understanding will come as regards Yoga being a key to spiritual development of humans regardless their faith, race, culture or *varna* (cast; social status).

Notes

- [1] There used to be a difference between the Hindu (Aryan, Northern) and Dravidian (Southern) understanding of *dharma*.
- [2] As the term “Brahminic tradition” may have a *cast (varna)* related colour, when possible, the term Vedic religion is used. This is used in spite of the fact that Western researchers see as Vedic religion only a past form of Sanātana Dharma.
- [3] Sanātana Dharma as an expression of Indian dharmas is also only >200 years old.
- [4] Ananda is an expression very difficult to translate, but “bliss” may be close to it.
- [5] Presumably training – *sādhana*.
- [6] See: “one need not be religious in the minimal sense described to be accepted as a Hindu by Hindus, or describe oneself perfectly validly as Hindu. One may be polytheistic or monotheistic, monistic or pantheistic, even an agnostic, humanist or atheist, and still be considered a Hindu.” (Lipner 2009, 8, also pages 17–18).
- [7] According to Gandhi, “a man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu”.
- [8] His views were originally written in French under the title *La Voie du Silence* and published in 1956.
- [9] He declares that Ramakrishna was a Tantra Yoga practitioner (which is incorrect), the *bijā mantra* resembles for him the reproductive cycle (what is incorrect), he considers Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* as the fundamental Sanskrit Yoga text and continues asserting that Yoga consists of bodily and breathing exercises. Patañjali does not elaborate on bodily postures (he refers to principles that relate to sitting positions). He, however, omits the Hatha Yoga texts, where bodily postures are inherent. He states incorrectly, that bodily postures were developed as parts of religious procedures, what is doubtful. Thus, his insight into Yoga is very limited and somewhat distorted.
- [10] The text lacks perfection in English, but it is a citation.
- [11] Verse IV. 16 of the *Katha Upanishad* on *nādis* is similar to the verse III. 6 of the *Praśna Upanishad* (Nikhilananda 1963).
- [12] With the exception of *bhakti*, later forms of Vedānta influenced by the *Āgamas* and the traditions inspired by Vaishnava masters or some Tantra Yoga branches, where rituals may occur (Siddhath 2019).

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The Uberisation of Yoga

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Yoga, Yoga online, consumer
culture, consciousness

In her essay the author introduces, explains and discusses her concept of “uberisation of Yoga”. The metaphor is designed to depict the current trend of consumerism spreading into the area of Yoga, particularly through online Yoga classes. The main objective of the article is to address limits of virtual Yoga teachings as compared with traditional ways of Yoga transmission.

In using online applications to practice Yoga, are we actively participating in the automatization of the human body or is this part of the democratization of Yoga and its accessibility to all? By asking this question I would like to introduce a reflection on the practice of Yoga online. No so much to polarize opinions about whether this might be good or bad, but to offer facts as well as subjects for reflection.

There is an economical and political aspect, and then I question the medium of the digital screen itself its effect on the nervous system and the philosophical questions that this generates. We all know the story of UBER. The American application, which connects taxi drivers to their potential clients (recently diversified into delivering food). What distinguishes UBER taxis is that there is no money exchange and the charge is visible online. There is usually a bottle of water and some sweets available in the car. What's relevant here is that the manner of the delivery of the service is dictated by the app, the driver is no longer the provider of the service, Uber is, but the mere executor of it, in other words, becoming automated. What we have to understand is that the value and profit are no longer in the service provided but in the interface between consumer and supplier, the application.

This de-humanization of people in both the "service and the cultural industries" is now happening on many levels of the socio-economical strata. In the next few years we are to see a massive automatization of all manner of work. So you might ask what has all this to do with Yoga?

The proliferation of online Yoga over the past few years has followed the logic of the market. Targeted advertising and competitive posturing. Apparently, we can "do yoga anywhere", we don't have to worry about cool outfits, expensive studio fees, big classes, annoying teachers, the state of our hair or the smell of our breath.

We are supported in being the center of our own universe, unquestioning the new forms of oppression distilled by the technological super-powers or GAFA, i.e., Google, Amazon, Facebook and Apple, the matrix on, which these apps depend, and that will make use of anything that it can find a market for.

It so happens that Yoga is in great demand in these times of uncertainty and despair. All manner of spiritual practices are traded on the internet, previously hermetic teachings are made available to all. Yogis and thinkers of all kinds are bringing value to these apps, mostly in good faith, but I suspect, utterly unaware of the economic and ideological consequences they are participating in propagating. It matters no



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longer what the content might be, anything goes really, even the most radical ideas are appropriated, what matters now is the frame work within which these ideas are delivered.

Yoga anytime, anywhere through the medium of screens has the potential to destroy temporality, the dance of intermittence. The alternating rhythms of life. Time to work, eat, relax, sleep and dream, time to practice. It can also blur seasonal rhythms. All of which are essential for us to be able to take conscious action.

The singularity of the human brain is that it can disorganize itself completely and reorganize itself throughout in relation to its environment and the "screens" it has invented, from cave paintings to digital tools. How does the current addiction to screens reorganizes the brain? What makes our brain

human is that it is capable of experiencing “revelation”. We all know that a true revelation is a call for action.

The general idea in the *Bhagavad Gita* is that awareness is the mechanism of transformation, and is manifested through selfless action (Ravinda 2017, 59). Sri Aurobindo develops this in the synthesis of Yoga where he introduces the notion of Chit-Shakti, “consciousness-energy”, explaining that consciousness is not only Chit, the power of awareness, but also a dynamic creative force of manifestation (Aurobindo 1939–1940, 82). But screens, by nature both reveal and occult. Of course, like all exo-somatic organs, they are both beneficial and toxic, depending on our consciousness.

We are now witnessing a reorganization of the human brain in relation to advanced technologies. The question is: Is this helping to support and evolve our consciousness or is it producing a regression and a blunting of the senses? What the French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler calls “*a general cretinisation*” (Stiegler 2004).

When we practice from a screen, we enter into relationship with the screen. In front of a screen we experience a re-orientation of our desire for self-revelation towards the consumption of a new good, which is now the Yoga teacher. The nature of a good is that it can be consumed. On Yoga online sites, we witness a standardization of presentation. Smiling, on top form, automatons, not changing human beings, negotiating a bad cold, the death of a loved one, or a breast surgery! The teacher becomes de-humanized.

The teacher does not see, feel or hear you. Equally, the practitioner emits nothing towards the teacher. There is no body to body resonance. You are on your own attempting to make sense of a refined and difficult technology, Yoga, which requires a strong connection with our endo-somatic capacities like attentiveness, focusing, breath awareness, the felt-sense out of which an intimacy with the self, a knowing evolves. This I would like to contrast to “information/knowledge”, which can be gathered exo-somatically.

To transform “impulse” as in “on demand” into “desire”, which requires an investment of time, resources and love, we need education and we need time. According to human development neurologists, this apprenticeship takes from 12 to 20 years. In replacing social relationships, cultural industries are eroding educational processes and the adaptation processes that these require. In Yogic education the transformation goes further still, desire is transmuted into aspiration, inspiration, a new breath, an expansion of the practitioner’s field of experience, a new way of being in the world. Patanjali re-

minds us that this is brought about by diligent practice in the spirit of non-attachment over a long period of time (Ravinda 2009, 19).

The current culture of immediacy and instantaneous results is slipping into the world of Yoga. People don’t want to learn; they expect to get what they want and have paid for as fast as possible. There appears to be a general reluctance for the effort of learning. Much is made of “effortlessness” of “following the flow” (one can but question which one?) forgetting that the effort of attentiveness is at the root of all practice. There seems to be palpable loss of the capacity to stay attentive, to keep the mind focused. More and more the mind jumps from one object to the next, from one practice to another, with little or no discernment as to the effects that Yoga’s powerful practices have on the central nervous system.

The web becomes an adipose matrix where we can find all manner of information, but which provides us with no lasting experience of “knowing”. The time for assimilation and integration is non-existent. The knowledge is dis-embodied. This might well be why the notion of “embodiment” is becoming a fast selling point in the “health” industry. The very language used on these applications is revelatory of the mind set behind them. We are told: “*A notable issue for new yogis is the selection of a teacher.*” (Schmidt 2014).

Whatever happened of the sense of the teacher crossing our path when we are ready to receive the teachings? This has more to do with a psycho-spiritual alignment than the click of a button. Then the site proceeds to guide us to a page where we are literally told how to select a teacher and what is important in this selection process. The danger here is the automatization of the decision-making process. We no longer rely on our felt-sense, our intuition, our connection with the *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, but on someone else’s criteria. So how will this affect our bodies and consciousness in the longer term?

Of course, I am not suggesting giving up the internet, I am myself using it all the time for my research. And I find it a wonderful information resource, but can the highly refined technology of Yoga be reduced to simple information?

This refined technology of the inner workings of the human being that is Yoga includes a set of subjective tools that can bring about singular experiences of clarity, integration, peace, wholeness. But Homo Sapiens is not only a biological being but also a technological one. From the dawn of time we have been creating objective tools that bring us convenience and comfort.

With the flooding of Yoga applications on the internet we are led to believe that Yoga is part of this objective set of tools that bring comfort and convenience to our lives. This obviously misses the point and insidiously plays into the consumerist ideology, which, as we all know, produces enormous amounts of toxicity on many levels.

One must observe carefully what our mind set is when we reach for the computer screen to get into our practice and what is the difference when we sit or lay down with the intention of internalizing our attention making ourselves receptive to the tides, waves, vibrations, undulations, beats and rhythms that our nervous system, our fluid body our mind register and translate as the inner life. The internal ecosystem of our embodied being. But we are told that we can do whatever we want whenever we want. And only be concerned about fitting in a cool workout in the midst of our busy lives.

Contemporary neuroscience has been researching the relationship between the human brain and current technology prompting us to take perspective and question the notions of “knowing” and “not knowing”. Is not-knowing bad in itself or is not wanting to know that we don’t know where the problem might lie?

As Yoga has now fully become a consumer’s product, peddled by teachers who have unknowingly also become products, our communities have to increase their vigilance. Yoga apps want to reassure their users that yoga demands no effort on their part. All we have to do is choose, with the click of a button or the swipe of a finger. We can ask what has multiple choice got to do with the freedom that Yoga promises? The underlying concept here is freedom *for* the self as opposed to freedom *from* the self, Yoga.

The practitioner is reduced to a mere consumer and the teacher to a mere executor of a service. The provider of course, is the one that picks up the cash, the application.

If Yoga is to be guided from within and trusting one’s own reference system, how does this work in front of a screen, which demands an externalization of our awareness? We can ask ourselves what is our action in the world, both individually and collectively and does that give us the measure of what Yoga is?

The narcissistic culture, in which we practice and teach is now given full rein to dictate what constitutes good Yoga and how it should be delivered according to a set of values rooted in a particular ideology.

To conclude I would like to suggest that we need to question this ideology for it is toxic and can render us sterile. Let’s not allow Yoga practitioners and teachers to become technological sheep.

We need to THINK. We might believe we think too much, while in truth, what passes for thinking is mere rehashing, repeating, memorizing, remembering, sorting our immediate needs, easing anxieties and negotiating fears. Thinking is a creative effort, it is not a calculation. It is the ability to change direction, to shift. To think intelligently is to liberate ourselves from automatic responses dictated by the ‘free market’ so that we may be able to create new models.

My question is: As a community are we up to the task of producing potent thoughts, thoughts that can generate powerful action and bring about the changes that are so desperately needed?

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Dhūmāvātī, Kālī, Shodashī: Searching for Three Faces of the Sacred Feminine

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The essay provides an artistic elaboration of the meditative experience of energies and forms of selected Mahāvidyās – ten aspects of Adi Parashakti, sacred feminine energy according to the Indian tradition. Textual descriptions are complemented by visual expressions realized by the author herself.

1 Introduction

Six years ago, the Goddesses came into my life. Over the past six years I have painted and drawn them (Fig. 1). Certainly, they were already at the heart of the subject of my Yoga graduation thesis, but the scope of this work quickly expanded over this scholarly frame.



Fig. 1. Kālī Clad in Space » mixed techniques

I had to learn to recognize their presence, to feel their energy, to open myself to their meaning. It came to me rather spontaneously and effortlessly; gradually everything I engaged in was granted a new dimension. Kālī the Black was the first to come to me. I had barely begun the work on Kālī's image, when Dhūmāvātī, Goddess of the smoke and the dissolution, stood out. Then, I returned to Kālī, before beginning the work on Shodashī, the everlasting sixteen-year-old beauty.

In the tantric transmission and spirituality, Kālī, Dhūmāvātī and Shodashī are part of a group of ten Goddesses known as the *Mahāvidyā*, "Ten Great Knowledges", who are manifestations of *Mahādevī*, the "Great Goddess". Each of these ten



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forms represents a special approach to spiritual awakening and Self-realization. However, the *Mahāvidyās* show us not only the way to knowledge, but they are knowledge, and wisdom themselves through the hidden messages of their bodies, their attributes, and appearances.

Each Goddess embodies herself on one side in a *mantra*, her sound form, on the other side in a *yantra*, her geometrical form. For the devotees, these representations are the Goddess herself and are situated on a more subtle level than the anthropomorphic representation. However, the meditation or the pondering over the body of the Goddess and her attributes is one of the first ways to enter in connection with the deity. David Frawley remarks (1996, 90): "If we meditate upon strongly enough, the form will come alive and teach us, and reveal the deeper aspects of its reality."

Kālī and Dhūmāvātī are connected with all that is heat and destruction: to fire (light), lightning, Sun. Shodashī is connected to the refreshing elements; the water and the Moon. The important point of the approach was the search for the material that would best convey the deep nature of the Goddess.

As I began to work on the Goddesses, I soon realized that it was impossible for me to restrict my understanding solely to the traditional perspective. I would have found this too confining. Thus, the presented images link to the age-old tradition, but meanwhile breathing a contemporary air. You will see that I took my liberties with respect to the tradition and I treated the subject with my European sensitivity.

2 Dhūmāvātī

Dhūmāvātī is the grandmother, the ancestor, the guide. She transmits the knowledge that comes from the harsh experiences of life. She is the widow, feminine principle unassociated with the masculine. Linked to potential, unmanifested, and latent energies, she governs the end of life.

In Hindu iconography Dhūmāvātī is represented as an old wrinkled woman, tall and thin, with ruffled hair. She arouses fright, her complexion is dark, her stare hard, her nose long and crooked. Dressed in rags that reveal her withered, sagging breasts, she seeks quarrel and is always hungry and thirsty. Sitting on a cart that goes nowhere, accompanied by crows, she gathers in herself all that is bad omen. Her representation joins the archetype of a witch, the Baba Yaga of the Slavic tales. However, some representations show her with an understanding smile and her right hand in *abhayamudrā*, a gesture that dispels fear.

With her ugly and repulsive appearance, Dhūmāvātī teaches us to look beyond the illusion of ephemeral beauty. The wicker screen she holds in her left hand invites us to discern the real weave of the world. Under ugliness, beauty lies. We must not stop at appearances but seize the deep nature of things. Open the door of the unmanifested. The outer beauty fades, but our divine Self remains intact.

Dhūmāvātī is our guide in failure when everything falls apart. She shows the way to letting go. She is the emptiness in which all forms are dissolved, the cessation of the agitation of the mind, the ultimate silence. On the cosmic level, Dhūmāvātī is Mahāpralaya, the Great Dissolution.

2.1 Dhūmāvātī Creation Notebook

Here is the rough description of how my creative process had been proceeding when I was making an attempt to depict Dhūmāvātī. There was one of the myths of Dhūmāvātī's birth at the beginning. She is said to be born from the smoke of Satī's body, consumed by the flames in the sacrificial pyre set up by her father. As such, she maintains the aspect of the insulted and outraged Satī. As smoke, she would be an extension of Satī's physical form.

Dhūmāvātī should be shown as hiding, obscuring space in order to get open access to another reality, through dissolving forms. This means the portrayal of a dissolving shape, giving importance to voids and white highlights, to imply climbing, flying and disappearing movements as the underlying energy is stirring the space between the solids. It has to look like a staggering approach, she is not going anywhere; this is about spiritual elevation.

I had to find the material and the technique to tell the dissolution and chose that Dhūmāvātī would be drawn from smoke. To get in reliance with this particular state, I practiced Yoga nidra, to reach the state where we no longer perceive the outer world, invoking the Goddess: *Dhum Dhum Dhūmāvātī Swahā*. Smoke involves movement in every direction but mainly upwards, before it dissipates. So verticality had to be the principal trait of her silhouette. In order to find the inspiration for elevation, I looked upon Giacometti's sculptures and drawings and chose for her to be vertical and slender, like a Gothic cathedral, carrying away our sight towards the sky.

What a joy to note that on a smoky background, it is possible to create forms by taking away the smoke with an eraser! At the same time, the gesture being symbolic, when I erase the smoke, an empty space appears. By this technique I get even closer to the nature of the Goddess.

Once again, I feel a connection with the cathedral: the importance of empty spaces inside as well as outside. The choice of BLACK and WHITE with shades of gray is essential: the color would prevent me from going to the essential. I use charcoal (which is a branch of charred wood) and pencil. Light touches, wavering. I use the bread crumbs' eraser. Sometimes, a touch of bold pastel (Fig. 2–4).



Fig. 2. She Who Resides in Smoke »
smoke, eraser, pencil, bold pastel



Fig. 3. Dhūmāvati's Smile
» mixed techniques



Fig. 4. Staggering Dhūmāvati » pencil

3 Kālī

One of the myths about the birth of Kālī sees her appearing from the Durgā forehead on a battlefield. She embodies Durgā anger and fury. Her skin is night-blue, her hair luxuriant and wildly ruffled. On a battlefield in the midst of corpses and mutilated bodies she shows off her nudity under a skirt of human arms.

Around her neck, a skulls' necklace. She inspires fear and terror. Her body is young and beautiful, the bosom generous, firm. She is beautiful, a beauty that hypnotizes. Her four arms symbolize the rhythm of the universe: on the right, the gesture of protection (*abhayamudrā*) and the gesture of giving (*varadamudrā*), on the left: the upper hand holds a bloody sword, the lower hand grasps by the hair a freshly-cut head. This is the cycle of birth and death, of creation and destruction.

Kālī is frequently represented dancing or walking on Shiva's body lying on the ground. The Goddess right foot (most of the time) takes support from Shiva's rib cage. Shiva is lifeless, Kālī, his life energy, his Shakti left him. The background of the scene is a crematory field. Fires and jackals devouring corpses. The face of the Goddess is red, her eyes filled with blood, her tongue hanging. Sometimes the fangs are represented. On other representations she is shown in full sexual intercourse seated on Shiva's body, in a dominant position.

Kālī is the Goddess of creation and destruction. She teaches us that for the new to be born, the old must be destroyed. The saber and the severed head symbolize the destruction of ignorance, of all misconceptions that prevent us from recognizing our true nature. It is also the abandonment of all attachment, but especially the sacrifice of the ego. Kālī's sword opens the door of spiritual liberation.

Kālī is the feminine of time (Kālā). Time does pass and overcomes all things, destroying, consuming everything. It is in time that the world develops, that we are born, live our life and it is the time that takes us to start again the spiral of another cycle. Time is the rhythm of our lives. Their origin and their end. It is the mother who swallows her children; one of the terrifying aspects of Kālī (Frawley 1996, 66). The night-blue, the color of her skin, is also that of space and infinite time.

Kālī is also the angry and expanding female principle – formidable principle, who has the audacity to transgress social norms, who laughs upon taboos and prohibitions, who freely displays her sexual appetite, which asserts herself with violence. Fierce and uncontrollable, Kālī dominates Shiva, and it is she who incites him to destructive madness.

3.1 Kālī Creation Notebook

My creative process had been initiated by a notion of Kālī associated with time, transformation, violence, explosion, revolution and fire. She is the force of liberation through a radical change. Through her dances, the movement transforms itself, bringing rhythm, freedom, evoking the frank and captivating beauty of femininity.

She will be movement; she will be trance. To represent her twisting, the shapes will come in circles and spirals. For this effect, I had to start from a central point, then spread out this exploding energy towards the limits of the sheet. It is a concentrated energy that bursts and unfolds on all sides.

I was inspired by the work of Cao Guo Kong, a Chinese artist who works with canon powder; and listened to *Dead Can Dance* music during the creation process. I also experienced the power of *kālimudrā* and of *kālīāsana*.

I chose to associate deep black, black gray, midnight blue with red, yellow and mauve fire colors. I experienced with materials such as acrylic, soot mix, ash, pastel bold, pencil on linseed oil, so the line is thicker, stronger, the pencil slips and its movement is faster than the thought. The shapes came in circles and spirals.

So transgression and acceptance of uncontrollable overflows were the key to the drawing gestures: no hesitation, they had to be spontaneous, free, fast, decided and sharp. No desire to master the gesture ever led me during this act of creation.

Kālī is sticking-out her tongue. In the dictionary of symbols: "*The tongue is considered a flame. It has its shape and its mobility. It destroys or purifies. As an instrument of speech, it creates or annihilates, its power is unlimited.*" (Ronberg and Martin 2011, 561). David Kingsley (1997, 87) sees in Kālī's stucked-out tongue the symbol of the conquest of rajasic power (the red tongue) by the sattvic forces (the white teeth). Kali is purely sattvic, having passed all the impurities of the two other *Gunas*. This organ of the body as a symbol contains all the nature of the Goddess.

Now, I often realize that my best paintings are those that came to me spontaneously. Their execution usually takes only but a short time. Everything leading up to execution is not too intellectualize leaving space for randomness. As a matter of fact, it is as if all of a sudden, I was charged with an energy and I released myself in the act of creation. Questions that find unexpected answers, that seem self-evident.

Time is suspended and becomes very dense. A state of total presence. The knowhow is there, but only as discrete frame. The field to new experiences is wild open.

The image of Kālī was created thus. At the end of the work session, I started scribbling on a sheet of paper. I spread linseed oil on it and, before the oil was dry, the pencil began to slide leaving a dense and thick line. Circular movements, circles and more circles. Strongly pressed. Then, sharp streaks. And, she was born that way, this vision of Kālī, the fruit of an energy that directed my hand letting not the mind interfere. Nothing was planned or organized. Things were done by themselves. Certainly, the drawings that came before could already predict it, but, for me, it came out of nothingness, silence, a condensation of energy that, by itself, had to unfold itself. I was just a performer at the service of this energy deployment. It was a moment of bliss (Fig. 5–6).



Fig. 5. Kālī » pastel bold, pencil, linseed oil on paper



Fig. 6. Kālī » mixed techniques

4 Shodashī

With Shodashī we depart from the energies of fire, destructive energies, to enter the refreshing world, related to water and Moon.

Shodashī sits at Mount Peru, mythical mountain, the axis of the world. Her complexion is rosy as dawn and shines with the brightness of the rising Sun. She wears a crescent Moon at the top of her head. Her body is like pure crystal. The hymns sing her exceptional beauty, her sweetness and grace, emphasizing the erotic character of the goddess. Endowed with purely sattvic qualities, she is bliss herself.

Shodashī means “one who is sixteen” or “one who is sixteenth”. According to David Kingsley (1997, 121), this would refer to the fifteen phases of the Moon (*tithis*), fifteen in the rising phase and fifteen in the descendant. In the Indian pantheon each phase is personified by a Goddess. As the sixteenth, Shodashī is beyond these phases, beyond the rhythm of time.

She is also called *Balā*, “Child”, “Girl” or *Lalitā*, the “Charming”, or *Tripura Sundarī*, “Beauty of Three Cities” (Suryanarayana-murti 1975, 59, 84, 98, 143). With her four arms she holds a bow made of a sugar cane, five arrows in the shape of flowers, a noose and a hook. The bow symbolizes the mind, the flower arrows, the five senses which allow us to know the manifested world. The noose is the power to capture us by its beauty (Harshananda 1986, 137). It can also be interpreted as the link of attraction that assembles matter on several levels, from atoms to cells and even to human beings to form a couple (Kempton 2013, 282). The sting is anger or aversion that hurts.

Shodashī also reigns over the whole universe as *Rajarajeshvarī*, “Queen of Kings”. Her first role is to ensure cosmic stability and to ensure the preservation of the Dharma. She has a warlike aspect. She is an emanation of Kālī, purified after a long asceticism. The myths tell of the battle in which she fights and kills the demon Bhandā and revives Kāma, God of love and desire. From the tips of her nails were born the ten avatars of Vishnu. The whole universe was created with a grain of dust from her feet. She is associated with the land and its nurturing aspect. She is the Goddess of Vedas and Vedantic knowledge.

Shodashī commands the universe and her commands are based on love. The wisdom of Shodashī is to find happiness, joy, rapture in all that life brings us. The world takes on the look full of freshness and wonder, as if we were only sixteen years old again.

4.1 Shodashī Creation Notebook

It is hard to free yourself from Kālī’s energy to meet Shodashī, she who is bliss, divine beauty, the queen of radiance and effulgence. Vibration of beauty, youth and freshness are her features while also suggesting the erotic aspect of Tripura Sundarī the cosmic rose.

During this period of creation, I endeavored to look at the world with amazed gaze, contemplating beauty, developing love in myself. I practiced at dawn, meditating, with *yonimudrā* and *sahasraramudrā*, bathed in the sweet greeting of the Sun.

To express this force of attraction, desire and love, one has to resort to an easy and elegant pencil line. Graceful, curvaceous curves would need to show a delicate being more in shapes than in lines, expressing together the softness and the strength.

The season of roses was starting; contemplating and smelling the scent of rose at sunrise inspired me for the line that would be at the bottom of the drawings: a curve of soft colors, acidulous, that say the light of dawn, that express freshness.

The choice of the material that would connect us to the nature of Shodashī came as soft pastel and watercolor, using paper mad of flower petals. I watched beauties in the works of Sandro Botticelli including *The Birth of Venus*, felt the energy of Shodashī, which is manifested in the smile of *Ife’s Heads* (one of eighteen copper alloy sculptures that were unearthed in 1938 at Ife, Nigeria).

I only took a few notes when creating the images of Shodashī. Is it because with this Goddess we are more we are more in the feeling and the perception than in analysis and the intellect?

The contact with nature, especially on the Full Moon evenings, inspired me. A small group of us used to meet once a month to walk under the Full Moon barefoot along the coast. I still remember the sensations of the soil under my feet; the texture of sand, earth, rocks, moss, the softness of bamboo leaves. Strong connection with the energy of the Earth and the beautiful, generous presence of the Moon. Facing the sea, facing the wind, we sang mantras. All our senses were awake. I have imagined Shodashī connected to the Moon. Playing with the Moon. Extended in space. I saw in her “*the experience of the flow of Soma or nectar of bliss*” (Frawley 1996, 90).



Fig. 7. Shodashī » soft pastel

5 Conclusion

Is the Goddess depicted on the first illustration of the present article really “Kālī Clad in Space”? Wouldn’t she rather be Shodashī, the experience of the Soma flow? Why is Dhūmāvātī, the grandmother (Staggering Dhūmāvātī) displaying one breast in agreement to her nature, while the other breast is like a young woman’s?

In some representations, the Mahāvidyā can look alike and adopt some marks or an appearance similar to one of her companions. The idea I wished to translate, in visual language, is that all the Vidyā are the manifestations of Mahādevī, the Great Goddess.

Mahādevī also lives in a young woman, called *Venus of the Plastics*, whose picture taken by photographer Channi Anand, in an industrial waste dump in North India was shared worldwide. Proud, dignified and covered with jewels, as the Goddess Matangī, the young woman rises not from the food crumbs of divine couples (as told by the myth), but from a sea of plastic bags. Her hands and arms are covered with a toxic white insecticide powder. The noble pose of the Rag

lady strongly opposes with the dirty and polluted environment. The often-expressed idea of the tantric texts finds here a beautiful illustration. We should consider not only the Ten Mahāvidyās but every woman as the manifestation of Mahādevī. Every woman carries herself a teaching and reveals to us the “Great knowledge of the subtle things”.

During the work on the representations of Kālī, Shodashī and Dhūmāvātī, at times, I had the impression of being just “a channel”, “a tool” through which the energy of the Goddess was expressing itself. I felt this energy flow in me, through my own body, through my own nervous system. I felt this energy living in me. Creating images has become a form of Yoga practice. An experience of the bond woven with the Divinity. The subtle link, spiritual, but also material, is experienced in the body.

At present, after all this journey, I feel that I have more and more things to discover, new ideas about the Goddesses are coming to me and the desire to explore them does not dry up. I feel that the door to the Vidyā is only ajar.

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