

***HEIDEGGER, YOGA  
AND  
INDIAN THOUGHT***



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2007

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## PREFACE

Reading books on ‘yoga’ or ‘tantra’ today, we find references to all sorts of things – ‘energy’, ‘kundalini’, ‘sex’, ‘spirituality’, ‘enlightenment’, and not least ‘health’. The emphasis is on the practitioner’s experienced relation to some ‘thing’ of this sort – what Martin Buber termed a purely ‘I-It’ relation. ‘Self-realisation’ is presented as if it bore no relation to our ways of being with and relating to *others* – to a ‘Thou’ rather than an ‘It’. Technical accomplishment in learning spiritual disciplines overrides relational accomplishment in life. Yet the ancient *guru-disciple* relationship was above all a *relationship*. And the accomplishments of the true *guru* are above all *relational* ones – the capacity to relate to both the human face and divine soul of the other - and thereby behold the divine face of the human other. Today however, the *religious* and *relational* dimensions of yoga have been torn apart. The modern ‘yoga’ practitioner’s relation to the health of their own body has become a substitute for an *embodied relation* to other beings. Just as modern ‘scientific’ medicine defines health as *functionality* and illness as ‘dysfunction’, so are yoga exercises offered as a ‘spiritual’ way of attaining an ever-more perfectly *functioning* body and mind. The true role of ‘scientific’ medicine is to ensure that the individual’s body and mind function sufficiently to enable them to function economically – and thus maintain the overall functioning of the economy. ‘Yoga for health’ exaggerates this ‘scientific’ identification of *health* with *functionality* by positing an ideal of ‘spiritually’ perfect functioning. Which is why today’s New Age *yoga, reiki or chi gong* ‘masters’ tend increasingly to earn their living as *management* ‘gurus’ or as trainers in multinational corporations. A few minutes on the internet shows how ‘yoga’ has today been transformed into a worldwide *industry* for the marketing of exercise regimes, accessories and literature. Yet this industry serves no more ‘spiritual’ purposes than to prop up the functioning of ‘the system’ - the systematic reduction of human beings to functioning units within an interlocking system of functioning systems whose sole goal is their own greater functionality *as* systems. That is why it is no longer possible to guard any ancient spiritual tradition, not least the yoga tradition, unless we first open our eyes to the ways in which all such traditions have been reduced to exercises in technical mastery – and thereby roped into the global framework of a purely functional and calculative thinking that Heidegger saw as the essence of ‘technology’.

## YOGA, HEIDEGGER AND INDOLOGY

The term ‘yoga’ suggests something rooted in an Eastern, indeed specifically Indian tradition. The term ‘new yoga’ does no more than suggest a yoga that is given some form of contemporary addition and thereby simply adds itself to the countless ‘schools’ of yoga, past and present which currently compete for followers in the market place of ‘New Age’ spirituality. In contrast, the definite article in the term ‘The New Yoga’ is intended to reflect an entirely new way of thinking both ‘yoga’ as such and the long tradition of Indian religiosity from which it is drawn.

What Heidegger called ‘meditative thinking’ or the ‘other thinking’ – and that which I term ‘The New Thinking’ - is both thinking understood *as* meditation, and ‘yogic’ meditational practices of a sort that are *thought* in another way. It was Heidegger’s conviction that in an age in which commercial calculation and global technology have put the very survival of thinking at risk, any ‘new dawn’ of meditative thinking must issue “from the same place in the world where the modern technological world originated.” (Martin Heidegger’s *Spiegel* interview).

**“It cannot come about by the adoption of Zen Buddhism or other Eastern experiences of the world. The help of the European tradition and a new appropriation of that tradition are needed for a change in thinking. Thinking will only be transformed by a thinking that has the same origin and destiny.”**

That “origin and destiny” is the Graeco-European ‘Occident’ - that “land of evening out of which the dawn of a new morning, of another world destiny can come.” Yet as J.L. Mehta points out:

**“The thinking of the unthought of this imperishable Western beginning, however, is also the liberation of thought from its parochial mould and its meeting with the unthought of the other few, really great beginnings in human history.”**

Not least of these beginnings of course, is the great beginning of Indian history and its religious traditions. Yet it is my conviction that just as Western metaphysics and Christian scholasticism proved inadequate in comprehending the unthought historical essence of Greek philosophical thinking, so also, with the exception of a few notable

Western scholars of Kashmir Shaivism and a single 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian thinker - J.L. Mehta himself - neither 'Indology' nor Indian scholars and 'philosophy' have so far proved adequate to the task of thinking the *unthought essence* of Indian history and religious thinking.

That this is the case is evident from the superficial way in which the historic *origins* of Indian civilisation and religion are disputed by scholars, archaeologists and linguists. 'Aryan invasion or not?' becomes *the* sole question, argued over through competing interpretations of historical, linguistic and archaeological 'facts', and thus requiring no meditation whatsoever on the inner meaning of 'Aryan' in its root sense of 'the noble'.

Here Heidegger has something quite different to say – something hitherto entirely unthought. Instead of endless and often emotionally hysterical arguments over *the historical origins and nature* of these supposed 'Aryans' and their 'invasion' of a native pre-Aryan culture or civilisation, Heidegger turns this *historicist* question round completely – by thoughtfully meditating the very essence of 'the noble' as "*that which abides in its origin and nature.*" Thought in this new and meditative way, the question of 'nobility' or 'Aryanism' in its relation to Indian religiosity is entirely removed from the realm of *historicist sciences*, as it is also removed from the historical ideologies of either Hindu nationalism or Nazi-style racial pseudo-science.

Instead a way is found for the question of what it means to be 'noble' or 'Aryan' to be thought in a new way – not as a historical, archaeological or racial question, but as an essentially *religious question* – the question of what it means to abide in one's origin and in the truth of one's essential nature. And since it is precisely *this* question that can be seen to lie at the heart of Indian religiosity, the question of the *origin and nature* of Indian religiosity and its relation to 'Aryanism' ceases to be a merely historical or 'Indological' one and becomes a *self-reflexively religious question in its own right*. As such, it is a question that can be *meditatively thought* and *thoughtfully meditated* – and in *such a way* as to also help us to meditatively rethink the religious essence of both 'meditation' (a Western word) and 'yoga' (an Eastern word) as such.

## HEIDEGGER'S YOGA SUTRAS

Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking*, first published in 1959, includes two remarkable and profound pieces – his *Memorial Address* in honour of the German composer, Conradin Kreutzer, and his *Conversation on a Country Path*. In his introduction to the English translation of both pieces, John Anderson notes how they carry forward a significant shift in ground from Heidegger's earlier thinking on *Being and Time* - a shift acknowledged by Heidegger himself in his collection of essays, published in the same year, entitled *On the Way to Language*.

**“I have forsaken an earlier position, not to exchange it for another, but because even the former position was only a pause on the way. What lasts in thinking is the way.”**

Anderson summarises the essential nature of the meditative way of thinking that Heidegger introduces in the *Discourse* as follows:

**“... it is a thinking which allows content to emerge within awareness, thinking which is open to content. Now thinking which constructs a world of objects understands these objects; but meditative thinking begins with an awareness of the field within which these objects are, an awareness of the horizon rather than of the objects of ordinary understanding. Meditative thinking begins with an awareness of this kind, and so it begins with ... the field of awareness itself.”**

Openness and receptivity to this field of awareness is described by Heidegger as ‘releasement’ (*Gelassenheit*). Heidegger names the field itself using a variety of related terms such as ‘region’ (*Gegend*), ‘regioning’ (*gegenen*) and ‘that-which-regions’, all of which stand in a dynamic relation to the German word for an ‘object’. This word (*Gegenstand*) implies something which stands over and against (*gegen*) the observer, as opposed to the open ‘field’ or ‘region’ in which it first comes to stand out or ‘ex-ist’ as an object. The question then arises as to the nature and ‘horizon’ of this field or region, a question addressed in the *Conversation* first of all in relation to our visual field of awareness:

**Teacher: We say that we look into the horizon. Therefore the field of vision is something open, but its openness is not due to our looking.**

**Scholar:** Likewise we do not place the appearance of objects, which the view within a field of vision offers us, into this openness ...

**Scientist:** ... rather that [appearance] comes out of this [field] to meet us (*begegnen*).

**Teacher:** What is evident of the horizon, then, is but the side facing us of an openness which surrounds us; an openness which is filled with views of the appearances of what to our re-presenting [in thought] are objects.

**Scientist:** ... But what is this openness as such, if we disregard that it can also appear as the horizon of our re-presenting?

**Teacher:** It strikes me as something like a region, an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests.

The region is therefore that ‘open expanse’ (*Gegnet*) in which things do not even stand over and *against* us as objects but rather “rest” or “abide” in their nature and origin – “the region”. Yet as Anderson notes, the spatial expanse of the region is not a vacuum or a static sphere of emptiness or ‘non-being’. That is because its horizon, as a boundary, must by its very nature have another side to it than the one facing us - a ‘transcendental’ side. The transcendental side of the horizon is the active “regioning of the region” or “that-which-regions”. For it is that which comes to meet us *as* the horizon of our field of awareness, and that which first opens the expanse of that field for us *within* that horizon. But what of the nature or self-being of “that which regions” – what it is ‘in itself’ rather than purely ‘for us’?

**Scientist:** But that-which-regions and its nature can’t really be two different things – if we may speak here of things at all.

**Scholar:** The self of that-which-regions is presumably its nature and identical with itself.

.....

**Teacher:** Because that-which-regions regions all, gathering everything together and letting everything return to itself, to rest in its own identity.

The phrase ‘its own identity’ however, cannot be taken as referring simply to the identity of any given thing, for that in turn consists in *abiding in its own origin* – in *that-which-regions* itself.

No one familiar with Indian religious thinking can fail to hear in this discourse an echo of the Shaivist notion of *caitanya* - that 'self' whose true 'identity' consists in *abiding in its own origin* – the universal awareness field (SHIVA) within which the open expanse and horizon of each individual's awareness opens up. And "to abide in the origins of its nature" is Heidegger's very definition of 'Aryan' in its root meaning of 'the noble'.

Nor can we fail to recognise in this and other parts of Heidegger's *Conversation* a profound restatement of the essence of *yoga* as a path leading the individual back to their true self, and thereby also to freedom, liberation or 'releasement' in this life (*jivanmukta*). Heidegger's 'way' is *kriya yoga* as Patanjali described it, but understanding the renunciation of 'egoic' action and thinking as an active "step back" into an awareness prior to all thought and a renouncing of *willful* action and thinking.

**Scientist: Now authentic releasement consists in this: that man in his very nature belongs to that-which-regions, i.e., he is released to it.**

**Scholar: Not occasionally, but – how shall we say it – prior to everything.**

**Teacher: .... Because the nature of thinking begins there.**

**Scientist: Thus man's nature is released to that-which-regions in what is prior to thought.**

.....

**Teacher: And so, abiding in his origin, man would be drawn to what is noble in his nature. He would have a presentiment of the noble mind.**

**... a patient noble-mindedness would be pure resting in itself of that willing, which, renouncing willing, has released itself to what is not will.**

As for worship (*puja*), understood as a mode of giving thanks, this thanking, understood as the very essence of noble-minded thinking, requires no 'being' to thank and no 'thing' to thank for, besides a "being allowed to thank".

**Scholar: Noble-mindedness would be the nature of thinking and therefore of thanking.**

**Teacher: Of that thanking which does not have to thank for something, but only thanks for being allowed to thank.**



This understanding of meditative thinking and thanking must be placed in contrast with its shadow and counterpart – that “calculative thinking” that Heidegger described as the order of the day in the era of global technology. In the *Memorial Address* it is this ‘thinking’ that is addressed and brought to our awareness in no uncertain terms.

**“Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers or uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time ever more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which meditates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.”**

This thinking is above all a *wilful* thinking, aimed at the calculated manipulation of anything and everything. Presciently, Heidegger cites the words of an American chemist, uttered at a meeting of Nobel Prize winners in 1955: “The hour is near when life will be placed into the hands of the chemist who will be able to synthesise, split and change living substance at will.” Heidegger’s comment:

**“We take notice of such a statement. We even marvel at the daring of scientific research, without thinking about it. We do not stop to consider that an attack with technological means is being prepared upon the life and nature of mankind compared with which the explosion of the hydrogen bomb means little.”**

The will to manipulate and exploit living substance itself is however but an expression of the essence of calculative thinking as wilful thinking – not patiently pre-meditated thinking but pre-motivated thinking. Even the simple will to re-present things in thought is a form of willing.

**Scientist to Teacher: ... You want a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this we may release, or at least prepare to release ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not a willing.**

.....

**Scientist: With the best of will, I cannot re-present to myself this nature of thinking.**

**Teacher: Precisely because this will of yours and your mode of thinking as re-presenting prevent it.**

**Scientist: But then what in the world am I to do.**

**Scholar: I am asking myself that too.**

**Teacher: We are to do nothing but wait.**

“Releasement” therefore, does not belong to the domain of the *will* and is nothing that can be *willed* but is a preparedness for a thinking that emerges not from *willing* but rather from patient *waiting*. Yet non-willing or non-action is no mere passive state of inaction but rather “a higher acting than is found in all the actions in the world and in the machinations of all mankind.” And in contrast to all willing, “the region” simply “gathers, just as if nothing were happening, each to each and each to all into an abiding, while resting in itself.” In this it has the essential character of *quiescent awareness* associated with SHIVA, whereas all thought has the character of SHAKTI – an autonomous activity arising from within the field of that quiescent awareness. That is why meditative thinking also does not imply inaction in the world.

**Whilst the unwise act because of their attachment to action, ... so the wise should also act, but without attachment, desiring the welfare of the world.**

### *Bhagavadgita*

Yet whether we speak of *Shiva-Shakti* or of *Krishna-Arjuna*, of the *Vedas* or *Upanishads*, of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali or the *Shiva-Sutras* of Vasugupta, we will find no treatise or *tantra* that more profoundly expounds their unthought essence than Heidegger’s *Discourse on Thinking* – not the work of an Indologist or even an Indian philosopher but of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century German thinker - a European. The *tantric* character of this *Discourse* comes out both in its dialogical character and in its very language. For releasement to “that-which-regions” is an unknowing interpretation of the most basic bearing or *mudra* of Shaivist tantra – *Khecari mudra*.

‘Khecari’, commonly translated as ‘moving in the void’, is a reference to that ‘space’ of pure awareness which is SHIVA - transcending the boundary or horizon of our awareness field and yet at the same time permeating that field. *Khecari mudra* is the meditational practice of identification with *space* itself – not as emptiness but as a field of pure awareness.

**... the power of space is inherent in the soul as true subjectivity, which is at once empty of objects and which also provides a place in which objects may be known.**

*Abhinavagupta*

*Khecari* is recognised in the tantras as the supreme *mudra* that can *release* us into an experience of a transcendently unbounded ‘space’ of awareness that lies beyond and behind the horizon of our own spatial awareness field – yet also moves through or *regions* within its horizon. Released into the awareness which regions in and as our experience of ‘space’, we ourselves become ‘movers in the void’. The hitherto unthought nature of this ‘movement’ is also brought to light in the *Conversation*. The ultimate *horizon* of space is a distant one. Still more distant would seem to be the nature of that ‘field’ or ‘space’ of awareness within which the horizon opens up but which also lies ‘transcendentally’ beyond and behind it. Yet “that-which-regions” can be felt and thought as a “moving-into-nearness” of this distance, indeed its most intimate closeness or ‘immanence’. Thus the essential movement of awareness that is “prior to thought” is a “coming-into-the-nearness of distance” - a distance which, in *nearing* itself to us, not only comes to meet us, but releases us into it, and thereby allows us to dwell and move more intimately within it - to abide in our origin.

It is in such terms that we find expressed the very soul of Indian religious thinking. This is not a thinking concentrated on the relation of Thinking and Being, but on the relation of Thinking and Awareness – in particular recognition of the essential identity of the self (*atman*) or bounded soul (*jiva*) with the ‘universal consciousness’ or unbounded awareness field that is named as BRAHMAN or SHIVA. It is this recognition (*pratyabhijna*) that in turn enables the “releasement” of individual subjectivity from bondage to all *wilful* and *objectifying* thought and action. Yet it is not thought itself that brings about the “releasement” but the grace of SHIVA – that which “regions” as the “transcendental horizon” of our own bounded awareness whilst at the same time being immanent within it. Such a way of thinking is the very opposite of any sort of philosophical ‘subjectivism’ which reduces subjectivity itself to the individual’s perception and intellectual representation of a world of objects. In Heidegger’s ‘Conversation on a Country Path’ we see a type of *conversion* to the deeper truth of a religious tradition which knows no boundaries of Country or Region. For that-which-regions within it moves us into the nearness of the very distances,

cultural and chronological, that appear to separate different traditions. The threads or *sutras* of thought that the *Conversation* weaves, mark out Martin Heidegger not just as a European ‘philosopher’ but as a religious teacher or *guru* – anticipating the dawn of a new religious thinking that reincarnates the “secret élan” of its earliest roots.

What are these roots. As J.L. Mehta reminds us:

According to Heidegger, science and technology, themselves rooted in “philosophy” and in “metaphysics” as characteristically Greek forms of thought, are universally triumphant because they are unrivalled instruments of power over that which is, over every being or entity, as presented in the light of the conception of Being implicit in the Western metaphysical tradition. It is when beings are seen in this light that they acquire their character as sheer entities to be measured and manoeuvred.

And yet:

The thinking of the unthought of this imperishable Western beginning, however, is also the liberation of thought from its parochial mould and its meeting with the unthought of the other few, really great beginnings in human history. In no case can it be just a return to those beginnings but only the gathering of resources for a novel beginning in the realm of thinking, for which perhaps, as Heidegger hopes, the initiative and the preparation can come from Europe, “this land of evening out of which the dawn of a new morning, of another world destiny can come.”

## HEIDEGGER'S TANTRIC 'TURN'

*“Being is no longer the essential matter to be thought.”*

Martin Heidegger 1962

As Thomas Sheehan argues in his article on ‘A paradigm shift in Heidegger Research’ the true turning point or *Kehre* in Heidegger’s thinking was not a shift of focus from the ‘there-being’ or *Da-sein* to *Sein* or Being as such, but rather the reverse – what Sheehan calls his ‘Farewell to Being’ and a shift towards a re-thinking the ‘*Da*’ itself, as the ‘Clearing’ (*Lichtung*) that first ‘gives’ or ‘grants’ Being to beings.

In ‘Being and Time’ Heidegger used the notion of the human being’s worldly *Da-sein* (‘there being’ or ‘being there’) to phenomenologically deconstruct the notion of ‘being’ as simple ‘presence’ or ‘presence-to-hand’ of beings, arguing instead that the being (*Sein*) of things in the world, and with it our own human *Da-sein* as a ‘being-in-the-world’, had to do with things ‘being there’ *for* us – as for example, a ‘hammer’ is only present to us as ‘a hammer’ by virtue of ‘being there’ to be picked up, handled and used *as* a hammer. In this sense the hammer only *is* (‘-sein’) within that wider context and nexus of active human *relationships* to things and to each other that first constitutes both their own being and that of the ‘the world’.

Here I argue, in line with Sheehan, that Heidegger’s most truly original turning was not a shift towards thinking the essential nature of Being (*Sein*) in distinction to the ‘thereness’ or presence of existing entities or ‘beings’, but rather a shift towards re-thinking the essence of their ‘thereness’ as such, the *Da* in *Da-sein*. Rather than simply understanding it as things being ‘there’ for us, he recognised that the *Da* (a word which has the double meaning of both ‘here’ and ‘there’ in German) could not be posited except on the deeper ground of a primordial ‘Openness’ or ‘Clearing’ (*Lichtung*) that first ‘makes room’ for things to come to presence and come to view *as* here or there for us. Heidegger’s definitive statement reads; “*Lichtung erbringt Anwesen*” (“The Clearing brings forth Presence”).

In *Conversation on a Country Path* this Openness or Clearing is designated in a different way - as that other side of the 'transcendental horizon' of our awareness which Heidegger names 'the region' (*Gegend*) or 'that-which-regions'. 'That-which-regions' corresponds to the central tantric term 'Khechari' (from 'Kha' – 'void' or 'sky'). The verbal and experiential sense of Khechari is that of a movement *within* and self-localisation *of* an ultimate, *non-local* field of awareness pervading a primordial Openness or space ('Kha'/'Akasha') as the light of awareness ('Prakasha'), and constituting the essence of the divine (Shiva/Brahman) as an absolute awareness field. The relation of the German *Lichtung* to a cleared open space or 'clearing' on the one hand, and the illumination or 'lighting' of that clearing on the other, is made clear by Heidegger by pointing out that the primordial meaning of *lichten* is not to illuminate but 'to open up', just as the meaning of *Gelichtetheit* is 'clearedness' in the sense of 'being opened up'.

Heidegger makes it clear however, that what he specifically terms the Openness or Clearing is not, in his view, something 'transcendental' or attainable to human beings only through the type of thinking and meditation that belongs to the Indian tradition. The essential 'being' of human beings consists not in *attaining* a transcendental experience of the *Da* as this Openness or in 'opening' themselves to it but rather in *being Open* (the essential meaning of *Da-sein*) and thus being vehicles or 'guardians' of 'the Openness' as such. The consequences of this for our understanding and translation of *Dasein* are summarised by Sheehan as follows:

"... we should not translate *Dasein* as 'being-there' or 'being-the-there' or 'there-being' but, rather, as 'always-being-open' or 'already-having-been-opened', or 'apriori openedness' ... Openness exists only to take-as and express 'is'; yet there can be no 'is' without openness. In other words;

1. A human being's *raison d'être* is to-be-the-open (= to be able to take-as). The facticity of our "cannot-not-be-the-open" is what Heidegger calls our "belonging" to the open (*das Zugehören*).
2. But reciprocally, the Open or *Da* functions only as long as there is human being. This necessary grounding of the open in the human is what Heidegger calls the Open's "need" of human being (*das Brauchen*)."

It was Medard Boss who, in course of the Zollikon Seminars, first directly questioned Heidegger about the relation between the ‘Open’ or ‘Clearing’ and the Indian tradition of meditation and meditative thinking – in particular Heidegger’s insistence on the Open’s “need” of human beings and the necessary role of the latter as its guardian.

“... in what way is Heidegger’s conception of the matter of being more adequate than Indian thinking, which does not need a guardian of clearedness, because according to it [Indian thinking] the emergence (Brahman) of the clearedness is granted by itself, illuminating itself and everything which may emerge within it independently of any being that would still be needed expressly as guardian and the one who sustains this clearedness.”

Heidegger’s first answer would seem to imply an outright rejection of Indian thinking:

“My understanding is more adequate, insofar as I am proceeding from *Dasein* and from understanding of being, and limit myself to the *immediate experience* of this. I do not need to assert anything about the clearedness in itself. I also do not need to interpret the human being as a manifestation of the clearedness, whereby being-in-the-world and standing in the clearing of being as a distinctive character, as *the* distinctive character of *the* human being would become *non-essential*. Above all, the above quoted Indian insight cannot be realised in my thinking.”

Not content with this answer Boss presses further:

“The Indians, who are experienced in meditation, maintain instead that it is part of just such immediate experience to know, not ‘interpret’ that the fundamental essence of the human being, but also of all other entities, belonging as it immediately does to the clearedness in itself, co-constitutes the clearedness.”

In characteristic manner, Heidegger then makes a wholly unexpected and original, remark, which, though coming from a new and seemingly tangential angle nevertheless hints at a chink or opening in his previously armoured and rejective responses, and a deeper knowledge and resonance with Indian thinking than he is customarily thought of as having:

“*Hellen* [clearing] along with hell [clear], means the same as *Hallen* [to resound] in the sense of ‘sounding’. As its own primordial condition for the manifestation of being, *Hellen* [clearing] occurs fundamentally as *Hallen*, as tone. All other beings fall short of this fundamental tone. How close this is to Indian insights into ultimate truths is best shown by my saying: ‘Language is the house of being’.”

How close indeed? The *Shiva Sutras* of Vasugupta say the same as Heidegger’s saying, understanding the very phonemes of the Sanskrit language as the divine womb and matrix of creation, whilst at the same time retaining the traditional Indian

understanding of all words and all worldly phenomena as self-differentiations of that 'fundamental tone' which resounds in the 'Omkaara' – the mantram 'OM'.

Medard Boss is much clearer not only in his affirmation of Indian thinking but also in his understanding of the way in which Heidegger's own thinking approaches or comes close to it - even whilst not quite far enough, in Heidegger's own words to "realise" it (*Vollziehen*) through "immediate experience".

"Indian thought does not require a guardian for the Clearing. There is clearedness in and for itself. Ultimately and in reality there is nothing but clearedness in and for itself. Human *Dasein* is only a domain of the clearedness itself, which as Absolute Clearedness is the essential being of human *Dasein*, although it is not fully realised in the human being and his view of it is somewhat darkened. The whole meaning of human *Dasein* lies therefore in regaining a full knowledge of his essential self as the Clearedness itself ... all beings have to work their way up to that insight [into their essential being] through their reincarnations."

However Heidegger's negative response to this view stands in contrast to the foundational understanding with which he leads us into his *Conversation on a Country Path* - namely that the essence of the human being is not itself anything essentially human. Instead he opposes the 'humanness' of the human being to its self-transcendence and self-transformation into "pure luminosity", associating this purely with Indian thought, and understanding it not as a liberation (*moksha*) or "regaining" of the human being's *trans-human* essence, but rather as his "dehumanisation" ("*Entmenschlichung*").

Heidegger's responses to Boss tend to reiterate his oft-repeated emphasis on the temporally bounded, mortal finitude of *human Dasein*, although this itself has another side to it, being also the condition for an Openness that not only *constitutes* human *Dasein* but also *opens* it in a way that exposes, extends and transcends its finite boundaries – this open 'spreading' or 'extension' being the very *tan* of 'tantra' and central to its essential aim - that of attaining an immediately experienced unity of the individual self or Jiva with the "Absolute Clearedness" that is the essence of the divine as Shiva. For as Sheehan notes, the Openness cannot be the property of "...an isolated and self-contained individual", for it is the individual that belongs to the former. In tantric terms, experiencing oneself as 'enowned' by it is the very event or *Ereignis* that constitutes liberation.



As for the transformation into “pure luminosity” which Heidegger refers to as the goal of Indian thinking, this “pure luminosity” is a translation of “*reine Helle*” - a phrase not only resonant of but also an *etymon* of the English phrase ‘pure hell’. For both the German *Hellen* and *Hallen*, and the English ‘hell’ share the same root - though the German adjective *hell* means simply ‘bright’ or ‘light’. Both Indian and Wagnerian thinking associate the human being’s transformation into pure luminosity with the power of fire (fire and light being twin aspects of Shiva), hence the association of Wagner’s neo-Norse god of fire (*Loge*) with the burning of *Vallhalla*, Brunnhild’s Indian-style self-immolation in the burning pyres of her husband Siegfried, not to mention the contradictory Christian association of light, not just with Christ but with also ‘Lucifer’ the light-bringer, and with the fires of hell. Yet what must strike the reader with knowledge of Asian thinking in this connection is the avoidance by both Boss and Heidegger of an even more obvious resonance – between Heidegger’s term *Lichtung* (with its semantic emphasis on the *luminosity* of the Openness or Clearing) and the ‘En-Lightening’ of human being. The very same resonance is hidden in Heidegger’s use of the term *Ereignis*, translated as ‘En-owning’. For up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century this was still spelled *Eräugnis* - a word that has nothing to do with ownership but much more to do with the eye (*Auge*) and thus also with the common meaning of *Ereignis* as ‘event’, for its meaning is something ‘eye-opening’ and in this sense also an *En-lightening* awareness.

These resonances and the above-cited exchanges between Medard Boss and Martin Heidegger in the Zollikon Seminars not only reveal significant differences in their understanding of and relation to Indian thought. They also show the mutual *one-sidedness* of their approach to it – seeking to understand it solely in the language of Heidegger’s own thinking but not even attempting to understand the latter *in the light of Indian thinking itself* - despite the clear and ample possibilities of doing so offered by the language of the tantras and by Heidegger’s own acknowledgement, in *Conversation on a Country Path*, that the essence of his new thinking as a “meditative thinking” and this in turn as “... a thinking which allows content to *emerge within awareness*...” (my stress). For ‘emergence’ is the etymological and metaphysical

essence of *Brahman*, just as ‘awareness’ is interpreted as the metaphysical essence of *Shiva*.

“Now thinking which constructs a world of *objects* understands these objects; but meditative thinking begins with *an awareness* of the *field* within which these objects are, an awareness of the horizon rather than of the objects of ordinary understanding. Meditative thinking begins with an *awareness* of this kind, and so it begins with ... *the field of awareness itself*.” (my stress)

Let us compare the words of Heidegger with those of those great thinkers and teachers associated with the tantric tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. With the words of Utpaladeva for example, who emphasises that “... things that have fallen to the level of *objects* of cognition “... *are essentially awareness*.” (my stress). With those of Kshemaraja:

**Every appearance owes its existence to the light of awareness.  
Nothing can have its own being without the light of awareness.**

And above all with those of Abhinavagupta:

**... the being of all things that are recognised  
in awareness in turn depends on awareness.**

It is in this context that I argue that the essence of the ‘turning’ that Sheehan describes is not just what he calls Heidegger’s ‘farewell to being’, but also his ‘hello to awareness’ – awareness not conceived or experienced as the subjectivity of an isolated individual subject but rather as the foundational reality behind “the being of all things”, as an infinite open field or ‘clearing’ within whose light (*Lichtung*) all things and all thoughts first come to light. I call the turn a tantric turn because the new and other way of thinking that Heidegger sought is one which, in his own words “begins” with “the field of awareness itself”? And going back to the beginning of ‘Being and Time’ we can argue that Heidegger’s whole ‘Question of Being’ itself begins with a recognition that its *human* beginning is a primordial *awareness* of being - one that is not itself reducible to any object, thing or ‘being’, human or divine. Need we be surprised then if, in the final stages of his quest to find a new way of thinking the essence of *being*, Heidegger comes to an understanding of *awareness* as the very ground of such a thinking - indeed of being itself - recognising awareness itself *as* the open field or clearing which first gives or grants Being to beings?

Are we not also justified in *turning the tables* on Heidegger's 'turn' and overturning his *particular* linguistic 'House of Being' - seeing that turn as a 'tantric turn' and translating his later language back into Indian tantric terms – reading *Lichtung* for example as *the light of awareness* ('Prakasha'), the Open as its *infinite spatiality* (Kha / Akasha), and human *Da-sein* as the vibrating threshold between the human being as a limited or finite subjectivity ('Jiva') and *Shiva* – that absolute pure or 'clear' universal awareness field which first *gives* or *grants* being to beings?

I believe we are so justified - not least since 'giving' or 'granting' is the very *meaning* of the syllable 'Da' in the 'House of Being' that is the *Sanskrit* language. As for the relation of the German *Da* to the Open and to Openness, the very essence of *Da-sein's* en-lightened *liberation* of its own essence can be understood as being Opened to the Open by and within the Open - not owning it as 'our' awareness but allowing ourselves to be 'enowned' and 'enknown' by awareness as such, an awareness not yours or mine but the essence of the Divine. In tantric terms of Kashmir Shaivism this is the liberation from the *apparent* finitude, mortality or need of reincarnation that is bestowed on individual beings as the grace of the universal awareness that is Shiva.

An interesting and - in this context - significantly worded citation on the word 'Openness' comes from a contemporary internet encyclopaedia of psychotherapy.

This word is now common in American English to describe a desirable and refreshing human quality of acceptance, trust and curiosity about the mysterious workings of the human spirit.

It is derived from a concept put forward by Martin Heidegger, called 'Der Lichtung' or the 'clearing'.

The clearing refers to the open space one finds in a deep forest, *a breathtaking awareness* of all that is, in which one realizes something wordlessly beyond language about the deeply intertwined relationships that mark the phenomena of existence.

Explicit in Martin Heidegger's thinking of Being is the understanding of the human being as a being whose own being – and/or potential non-being - is experienced as a *question*. The human being, as a being that 'ex-ists' or 'stands out' in a definite relation to beings - and thus to the very 'Being' or 'is-ness' of beings - is therefore a being for whom 'The Question of Being' is no abstract philosophical question but rather one that is *constitutive of their very being*. Implicit in Heidegger's thinking therefore is the understanding of the human being as a being whose very *awareness of being* is *constitutive of their being*. Perhaps this itself can point the way to a reconciliation of the Graeco-Western thinking of *Being* with the Indian thinking of *Awareness (cit)*. This other way of thinking achieved one of its highest expressions in the *Shiva Sutras* of *Vasugupta*, and the commentaries thereon, notably that of *Kshemaraja*. The *Shiva Sutras* are a major foundational 'scripture' or treatise of 'Kashmir Shaivism'. Their very first line or 'thread' (*sutra*) is but a single compound word in Sanskrit – but a word that in itself makes a quite extraordinary statement - an infinite statement. The word is *caitanyamatma*. What this word says is that the awareness (*caitanya*) of an aware being (*cetana*) is the very self (*atman*) of that being. *Caitanyamatma* can therefore be translated as 'awareness being' or 'awareness self'. Its profound message is: 'being a self' means 'being aware'. Our ultimate selfhood or 'self-being' consists in *being awareness*. The same message is echoed in the *Vijnanabhairava* – perhaps the single most important treatise or *tantra* on yogic meditational practices. "The same Self characterised by awareness is present in all bodies ...". Here 'all bodies' is synonymous with 'all beings' – for the very selfhood of all beings consists in their being *self-embodiments* of absolute or divine awareness.

The second *sutra* consists of two words: *jnanam* ('knowledge') and *bhandhah* ('bondage'). It implies that *knowledge is bondage*. The 'bondage' referred to is that of the limited, empirical or experienced self as opposed to the awareness self (*caitanyatman*). The 'knowledge' referred to is that specific mode of cognition that we ordinarily call 'consciousness' – awareness *of* something rather than *awareness as such*. The traditional Western identification of subjectivity or awareness with the finite consciousness of the empirical or experienced self - with 'awareness of something' – is perhaps the major reason why Heidegger avoided the phenomenological language of 'subjectivity' or 'consciousness' in favour of an ontological discourse around Being and beings. From an onto-phenomenological

perspective however, there nevertheless remains a central question surrounding the relation of Awareness and Being – for since Awareness also ‘is’ in what does the very ‘is-ness’ or Being of Awareness consist? The question is also central to the distinction between, on the one hand, Heidegger’s attempt to think the fundamental ‘ontological difference’ between *Being and beings*, and, on the other hand, the understanding of this difference in Indian thought as one rooted in a more primordial ‘onto-phenomenological’ difference – the difference of *Awareness and beings*.

**Every appearance owes its existence to the light of awareness.  
Nothing can have its own being without the light of awareness.**

*Kshemaraja*

Put in other terms, since awareness is the primordial *field-condition* for our experience of any beings whatsoever, including our own being, it can no more be *reduced* to any being nor *explained* by any existing thing than can ‘Being’ as such. But whereas Heidegger’s questioning addresses the essential mystery of Being in a way that takes as its starting point the human being’s own awareness of existing, the tradition of thinking expressed in the *Shiva Sutras* affirms the primordial reality of awareness itself, as that ‘light’ in which all beings first arise and come to stand out or ‘ex-ist’. The two traditions meet in Heidegger’s notion of Being as a primordial ‘clearing’ or *Lichtung*, for this is a term resonant with *the light of awareness* designated by the Sanskrit *prakasha*. Yet whereas Heidegger *implies* that Being is essentially Aware Being or Awareness of Being – he does so without positing Awareness itself as the ultimate and divine reality. The New Thinking is an onto-phenomenology that explicitly *grounds* the very Being of Awareness in the *Awareness of Being* – that is to say, in Awareness as such. It is in this way that The New Thinking makes the transition from the thinking of Being to the Thinking of Awareness. It does so through the first of the *Shiva Sutras*, through the word *caitanyamatma*, understood as saying that the Being of all beings, indeed the very Being of Awareness, consists of Awareness - awareness of Being and of beings.

## HISTORICAL POSTSCRIPT

Lest it be thought that a reframing of the Heideggerian ‘turn’ in terms of Indian tantric metaphysics is a purely philosophical exercise, let us not forget the historical background and context that lends it a deeper significance. This has to do with a decisive turn in the historical notion of an ‘Indo-European’ or ‘Aryan’ cultural and linguistic tradition. This tradition was initially understood by those German thinkers who drew from Indian sources and saw India as historical mother culture of European civilization. Later however, this understanding was turned round in a way which found expression in the racist Nazi ideology of the ‘Aryan’<sup>1</sup> - which was no longer understood as a name for pure ‘nobility’ of spirit, but instead identified with an imaginary Northern *race* which invaded and ‘civilised’ the pre-Aryan or Dravidian races and culture of India – the so-called ‘Aryan Invasion Theory’. Part of the purpose of this and other essays of mine is to reverse the marginalization of Indian thinking, not least the neglect of its closeness too and influence on German thinking, and its replacement by a romanticisation of Greece as the cradle of European civilization, science and thinking as such – not least in the thinking of Martin Heidegger. For though he rejected Nazi racist ideology outright, and emphasized himself that the very notion of ‘philosophy’ derives from Greek language and thinking, it seems he was not concerned that this fact might conceal from view other, older and more primordial sources and languages from which thinking can draw. This turns what I call Heidegger’s ‘tantric turn’ not only into a move towards an “other thinking” but a *re-turn* to an tradition of thinking quite *other* than the Greek tradition he drew on.

... if “philosophy” is a synonym for the mode of thinking arising from the Greek venture, as Heidegger insists, what happens to the concept of “comparative philosophy” itself? ...[It] would then be the name for the task, infinitely open, of setting free, bringing into view and articulating in contemporary ways of speaking, in new ways of speaking, the matter of thinking which, in what has been realised in thought, still remains unsaid and so unthought in the traditions of the East. Otherwise comparative philosophy will amount to no more than an unthinking attempt at perpetuating Western “philosophy” by translating Eastern thinking into the language of Western metaphysics, taken as the universally valid paradigm.

J.L. Mehta *Philosophy and Religion* Indian Council of Philosophical Research 1990

1. "Indian texts do not use the term Arya or Aryan as a race, only as a culture of nobility. There is reference in the Manu Smriti where even the Chinese are termed Aryas, proving that it was not a race. South Indian kings called themselves Aryas as did South Indian travelers who took Indian civilization to Southeast Asia. But European scholars invented the mythical Aryan 'race', and established the disciplines of Semitic and Indo-European studies. The purpose of much European intellectualism was to reveal the secret of the Christian West's nobility, and to bestow upon it the privilege to justify its religious and political domination of the world. Although 'Arya' never had a racial connotation in the texts, these scholars insisted on that interpretation. It was further assumed that Aryan meant the European race, allowing Europe to claim for itself all of the "Aryan" civilization as its own heritage. Europe combined the civilization of the mythic Aryan and the monotheism of the Hebrew as its own. This dual inheritance was seen as the mark of its imperial destiny.

The term Aryan 'race' came mostly after 1870, and mostly in Britain. It was first applied to the Indo-Europeans mostly as a British fashion persisting well into the 20th c. In the second half of the 19th century, India was not seen so positively when the home of the Indo-Europeans (by then considered as "Aryans") was sought outside India, from the Caspian Sea to the Baltic. Racism emerged in this late 19th century Victorian period amidst a mixture of: (1) the linguistic shift from Sanskrit as the oldest Indo-European or even parent language to sister status with Greek; (2) upcoming Darwinism; and (3) development of "Race Science" by the Frenchman Gobineau, the British H.S. Hamilton, etc. Aryanization was only one factor behind the subsequent Nazism, and more important ones were the "race science" started by Gobineau and Hamilton. Also, anti-Church attitudes, anti-Semitism, increasing Darwinism, and belief in the teleology of scientific progress, were all strong sentiment around 1900. The West thought that it had discovered everything to be discovered and that it was master of the earth.

By 1900, Aryanisation had been firmly established in some German academic circles just as elsewhere in Europe ... German thinkers first glorified India as their cradle. Later, the need for indigenous German roots meant that "Aryans" were declared to be Germans and Indians as less pure relatives. Their interpretation and condemnation of a 'world negating', inferior and poor Indian society caused many scholars' U-Turn to Christian exclusiveness, and to assert German nationalism. It is amazing to see so much German study of India from 1700 till 1950, including many writings by some of the most famous German thinkers of their time, and yet India's influence is barely mentioned in today's textbooks on European History ... Few westerners understand that India's swastika was the symbol of this appropriation, the result of a made-up race theory to intimidate and suppress Jews in Europe and Indians in Asia."

From *Language Hegemony and the Construction of Identity* by Rajiv Malhotra

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