

YOGA AND ZEN, PHILOSOPHIES OF DESPAIR

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INTRODUCTION

Our present period is one of progressive weakening of religious faith and practice in the Church itself and in the mainstream denominations, above all in the West. In their place we are offered a practical atheism, a belief in progress and consumerist materialism. But none of these can ultimately satisfy our inbuilt need for a transcendental belief, a spiritual dimension to our lives, and so, as orthodox belief declines, far too many of us seek substitute creeds - the paranormal, spiritualism, New Age occultism, UFOs and crop-circles, astrology - anything that may seem to fill the "God-slot" that our nature demands. At the same time the strains and tensions of our modern "rat-race" explain why so many seek the calm and relaxation promised by such eastern techniques as yoga, Zen, transcendental meditation and the like.

It is in this context that we propose to examine yoga and Zen in a Catholic context. We shall deal first and at greatest length with yoga, and afterwards supplement this with a shorter enquiry into its Japanese Buddhist parallel, Zen. But before examining either, we owe it to readers to set out certain elements of Indian philosophy, the background from which yoga (and, ultimately, Zen) emerged, and without which they are likely to be difficult to understand.

It may be objected here that we do not need to know about Hinduism to understand yoga, since the latter is a polyvalent discipline, not tied to any particular metaphysical system or religion. But this is an over-simplification, and a misleading one. It is true that western devotees of yoga feel that it is purely a means to an end, a technique for attaining the mental and physical tranquillity necessary for meditation, and that it therefore does not conflict with their Christian belief. But this is to ignore the basic Hindu inspiration of yoga, and its basically non-Christian view of human nature and man's eternal destiny.

I. THE GOAL OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY: AVOIDANCE OF SUFFERING

All Indian philosophies and religions, whether Hindu, Buddhist or Jain, agree that suffering is integral to human life. Man is never happy. Even when he reaches a certain level of happiness, suffering is always just round the corner. Since happiness is unattainable, man cannot avoid suffering, whether little or much. Existence equals suffering.

We should note that we are concerned here not with physical pain, but with an existential suffering, whereby we are never at rest or satisfied.

This being so, Indian religious and philosophical systems have therefore sought for ways to escape suffering, and have elaborated roads of liberation, of which yoga is one.

Yoga, therefore, bases itself on the postulate that life is suffering, and draws the logical consequence that one must liberate oneself from life so as to escape suffering.

II. THE CAUSES OF SUFFERING

Mircea Eliade, one of the most knowledgeable western exponents of oriental religion, gives this explanation in his 'Patañjali and Yoga' (Paris, 1989, p.21):

'Human misery is due not to divine punishment or to original sin, but to ignorance. And not to just any old ignorance, but only to ignorance of the true nature of the spirit, the ignorance that makes us confuse the spirit with psycho-mental experience, that makes us attribute 'qualities' and predicates to the eternal and autonomous principle that is the spirit.'

For Indians, in fact, the spirit (âtman)¹ of each individual is totally distinct from and alien to his body, the same way as the passenger in a car is distinct from the vehicle. Man's body is no more than the house in which he lives. But he is the prisoner of his body, or at least, he believes that he is.

Man's *manas* (which can be translated as his thought, his mental awareness) is part of his physical dimension, but touches his spirit and receives enlightenment from it. In sense it can be seen as the point of contact between the spirit (Âtman or *parusha*) and the body.

Through the mediation of the *manas*, the body, inherently devoid of consciousness, acquires apparent awareness. But this contact of spirit and matter has a dramatic consequence. In identifying itself with the body, the spirit (âtman) comes to feel pain and suffering, although its essence is pure bliss. But since in its essential nature it is contemplative, unmoved, serene, it is not capable in itself of freeing itself from the body, the cause of its unhappiness.

III BRAHMAN AND ÂTMAN

These two notions are central to Hindu philosophy. We take the following definitions principally from the 'Dictionnaire des religions' edited by Mgr. Poupard.

BRAHMAN is the ultimate Self, in a sense the Absolute at the heart of things, prior to them and above them. In another sense it is God: (the Concise Oxford Dictionary gives "Supreme Hindu deity; divine reality of which world is manifestation. [Skr., = creator].")

ÂTMAN is the spirit, the soul, though not in our western sense. For us westerners, the soul is seen as the form of the body, the principle ruling its bodily and psychological functions. For Indians, the *âtman* is a reality distinct from the ego, the individual self, the thinking mind (*manas*),

¹ This and other technical terms are drawn from Sanskrit, the ancient language of North India, now used only in Brahminical religion and philosophy. We provide glossaries of such terms at the end of the article.

as we have seen above. The *âtman* is that in us which makes us identical to others and to the forces of the cosmos. It is our individual "share" of the universal reality or *Brahman*.

Brahman and *âtman* thus stand for the same reality, except that the *âtman*, determined as it is to beatitude just like the *Brahman*, is aware of and undergoes suffering through its identification with the corporeal world, the world of phenomena.

Marie-Colette Sadrin, a long-time practitioner of this 'gymnastic philosophy' explains the matter on p.9 of her '*Yoga à la lumière de la Foi*' (pub. Tequi, 1990):

"The individual soul is a fragment of the divine substance that has become trapped in flux and multiplicity (i.e. in the world with all its diversity and constant change). It must therefore rediscover its divine nature."

Each individual being, indeed, bears within itself the Absolute, but this presence is invisible. It is indeed the Absolute, but is not aware of this, thanks to the ignorance we have spoken of above. The *âtman* believes that "it is a consistent reality, but this is an illusion: there is only one reality, which is that of 'God' (i.e. *Brahman*). In the classic formula, *Âtman* is *Brahman*, but until I have attained 'liberation' I am under the contrary illusion." (R. Girault, J. Vernet, 'Croire en dialogue', Droguet & Ardant, 1978, p.50).

This raises the question of whether the world exists. But we may already note, en passant, that Indian philosophy is built around the awareness that one's self (*âtman*) is divine.

IV. DOES THE WORLD REALLY EXIST FOR INDIANS?

The short answer is 'No', though this calls for more detailed explanation, for which we are indebted to Girault & Vernet (op. cit. supra, pp.45-46):

"For a westerner, what is considered as directly perceived, what is absolutely certain is the external world (the object before me, the clouds in the sky, and the face of the person speaking to me). By contrast, what could be called the spiritual world, the world of the soul and of God, appears as secondary, problematic, in the last analysis even illusory.

For traditional India, on the other hand, the primary object of perception, the only thing one can be sure of is the inner world (the invisible world of the soul and of God...). It is the outer world that is secondary, problematical and, in the last analysis, illusory: it is maya, illusion. And in fact, for a Hindu, spiritual development boils down to an attempt to convince oneself of the existence of a sole reality above and beyond the unreality of the world of appearances, even if this outer world is treated in day-to-day life by the easterner just as by us westerners, as though it really exists."

Thus the Vedanta school of Hinduism declares that the world is a total illusion. By contrast, the Sankhya school holds that it has its own reality. But this belief needs qualification (as Mircea Eliade explains, op.cit. p.14):

*"If the world has existence and duration, it owes this to the 'ignorance' of the spirit (*âtman*, *purusha*): the innumerable forms of the cosmos... exist only to the extent that the spirit, the Self (here *âtman*) is not aware of itself and, as a result of that metaphysical ignorance,*

suffers and is reduced to servitude. At the precise moment when the last Self (âtman) is liberated, at that very moment the created world in its essence will be re-absorbed into the primordial substance."

Thus, even from the viewpoint of the Sankhya school, the world has existence only because the spirit is bound to the body. Once all our spirits have freed themselves from their bodies, the world will disappear.

In fact, phenomena exist only thanks to the âtman, which is none other than the *brahman* (though it does not know this). This amounts to saying (to quote Denis Clabaine's excellent study of 1980, 'Le Yoga face a la Croix', p.64) that "it is the same reality, both one and multiple, divine and created, spiritual and material. The distinction we must not lose sight of is not one between Creator and Creature, nor between Spirit and Matter, but between reality in its condensed state (*âtman* reabsorbed into *brahman*) and the same reality in the diluted state (*âtman* allied to Nature).

The difference is thus just one of degree, "*for at bottom all is the same thing, everything is God, everything is spirit, everything is matter.*" (p.68).

We shall see in a moment the consequences of this conception, but it is already possible to see its implications for the yogin. As the 'Encyclopédie Universalis' puts it, he must "*free himself from the world of phenomena, pass from the existential to the essential, return to the absolute*"

V. THE RELATION BETWEEN YOGA AND THESE PHILOSOPHIC AND RELIGIOUS DATA

It is true that yoga is not tied to any specific Hindu or Buddhist school. But this does not rob it of all danger. It is firmly anchored in Indian philosophy, according to which we must strive to escape the suffering due to our insistence on remaining tied to our individual beings (our metaphysical ignorance, as Mircea Eliade puts it.) The world has no real existence. Our 'ego' is just an illusion. Our true reality is the *âtman*, which is none other than the *brahman* (or *purusha*, as it is called by the Sankhya school).

A. REINCARNATION

Not only is our *âtman* a prisoner of the body; in addition it is tied to reincarnation, and hence to suffering.

Yoga in fact is based on the postulate of reincarnation. According to this, the acts we have performed in previous lives (each of us may have several millions of these) build up for each of us a stock of *vasanas*, roughly speaking, our merits and demerits. These positive and negative acts will affect our next life, building up a fresh set of *vasanas*, leading to new reincarnations, followed by fresh *vasanas* (and so on *ad infinitum*).

Now, for Orientals, reincarnation is to be avoided at all costs. Existence means suffering. One must flee it, and suicide is no way out, for suicide is an act too, producing further *vasanas* whose consequences must be worked out in a further existence. We may note in passing that the tendency (not to say the goal) of yoga is to bring us to cease all activity (both corporal and intellectual, since thought itself is an act.)

Since reincarnation is an evil, man's goal must be to try to escape from it². And this is yoga's *raison d'être*. Its goal is to break the vicious circle of *vasanas* and repeated existences.

B) THE DEFINITION OF YOGA AS GIVEN BY THE 'ENCYCLOPÉDIE UNIVERSALIS'

"Indian tradition, whether Hindu or Buddhist, uses the word 'yoga' to designate an original technique for salvation whose aim is to free the soul from its bodily condition by means of psychic and physical disciplines. It is based on a belief in the existence, within each individual, of an eternal principal (âtman) identical with the universal Spirit (purusha or brahman), that eternal principle (âtman) being condemned to an indefinite series of reincorporations, passing from one body to another. An unwilling passenger on the chariot of existence, it longs to get down from the vehicle", and for that it uses the yoga technique.

Thought (*manas*) enlightened by the spirit has indeed the power to force the body to act against itself. It is a matter of using it (enlightened thought) against our body. Yoga is therefore not just a physical technique. It is a philosophy having gymnastic aspects.

VI. DIFFERENT SORTS OF YOGA

As Mircea Eliade has written (op.cit., p.7): "*there is a 'classic' yoga, as set out in its celebrated treatise the 'Yogasûtra'... but alongside that yoga there exist countless forms of Yoga.*"

The classical yoga here referred to is that formulated in the earliest known document on the subject, the 'Yogasûtra', attributed to Patañjali (variously dated between 200 BC and the 5th century AD), and known as *Râjayoga* (royal yoga) or *jñânayoga* (the yoga of understanding). The "countless (other) forms of Yoga" all set themselves the same ultimate goal as the *Râjayoga*. Most of them are already implicit in the 'Yogasûtra' in any case. Where they differ is in the choice of means, one laying more emphasis on control of breathing, other on affectivity (*bhaktiyoga*) or intellectual activity, etc.

Tara Michaël's 'Clef pour le Yoga' (1975), authoritative in this field, does not hesitate to state (on pp.22-23):

"The Sankhya laid down the principles on which the Râjayoga based its practice, and clearly defined the goal at which Yoga was to aim... The yogin's efforts are quite incomprehensible unless one accepts as one's starting-point the fundamental data laid down by the Sâmkhya."

² Belief in reincarnation is becoming increasingly widespread in the West today. Its adepts find intellectual comfort in the thought that they will be born again. Such a belief enables them to avoid the necessity of thinking about God and their ultimate destination. For them reincarnation is a good.

This is a crashing error. Reincarnation is an evil, and Orientals have clearly understood this. Westerners try to see only what suits and reassures them in reincarnation. This is stupid. If we believe in it, we must accept the consequences. Reincarnation has a goal, and that is not causing individuals to be reborn for their pleasure. But the question is too delicate to be dealt with in these few lines. We may perhaps devote a further article to it.

The Sâmkhya being, one must understand, one of the principal philosophical schools of Hinduism.

SUMMARY

Among the principles underlying yoga, the following are cardinal:

- I. Man's spirit (*âtman*) is divine by nature, but is unaware of this reality.
- II. The spirit is, in fact, a prisoner of the body; it identifies itself with the body, suffers through it and thinks that it dies with it, although the world and our individual egos do not in fact exist.
- III. It is this union between body and 'spirit' (*âtman*) that gives rise to suffering

The goal of yoga is:

1. To suppress suffering
2. By separating body from spirit
3. Through the practice of bodily and psychic disciplines..
4. This will prevent any reincarnation (an evil, anyway), and allow the spirit (*âtman*) to free itself from the body and to become aware of its own divinity.

The fact that there are different sorts of yoga does not affect these principles, since the ultimate goal is the same.

It is only the means that differ. We may sum up by quoting the advice given by Vivekacûdâmani:

"O you, led astray by ignorance, stop identifying yourself with this mixture of unclean things: this skin, this fat, this flesh and these bones! Instead, identify yourself with the universal Self!" (i.e. God or Brahman).

We can hardly reproach Vivekacûdâmani for not making his meaning clear.

A GYMNASTIC PHILOSOPHY FOCUSED ON DEATH³

As we have stated above, it is extremely misleading to see yoga as either philosophically neutral or as a form of relaxation therapy. Yoga is not life-enhancing, it is a philosophy of death. It is precisely because it has good features (some of its gymnastics, its techniques of relaxation and mental concentration) that it is particularly dangerous. The initial well-being felt (or imagined) by the beginner masks the rapid spread of its poison throughout his body, a poison that enters the system gently and imperceptibly and step by step destroys the yogin's individuality without him being aware of it. This is proved by the facts.

³ I call it a gymnastic philosophy and not a philosophic gymnastics because the term 'philosophy' is the central one. Contrary to what many people believe, yoga is not a system of gymnastics whose purpose is to enable us to feel at home in our bodies. It is not a purely corporal technique. Yoga is a complete philosophy, having a sacral dimension in the Indian context. Yoga takes place primarily in the head, the mind, and is not directed to the body. Its centre of gravity is above all the mind, even though it uses physical practices.

Its action is somewhat similar to that of a poison without taste administered in a tasty slice of cake, and the result is the same. We enjoy the cake, we eat more of it, and take in more poison until death ensues. The only difference is that the poison is slower-acting in the case of yoga.

Yoga leads to death: the death of the body at first, but also and above all the death of the soul, the Spirit, the principle of life.

Yoga depersonalizes us, as we shall show. It empties us of all life. It is that fact that led Professor Henri Baruk, a member of the French Académie de Médecine, and former chief medical officer at Charenton (France's premier mental hospital in the suburbs of Paris) to condemn it without qualification in this single sentence: "*The philosophy of yoga and nirvana, if taken to its extreme, leads to the production of one kind or another of living dead.*" (I quote from Baruk's 'La Psychanalyse devant la Médecine et l'Idolâtrie', Paris 1978, p.26).

I. YOGA, SYNONYM FOR DEATH

I make no apology for repeating the term. Yoga does indeed carry the threat of death within itself. I shall show no indulgence to such a threat. But let it be clearly understood that our attack is directed solely against the 'gymnastic philosophy', and not against those who practice it. They are just its victims. It is not our aim to attack them, but rather to protect them.

[Readers will find it easier to understand what follows if they have read our introductory section on Indian philosophy, or at least the summary we have printed two pages back.]

Indians tend to compare the effect of yoga on men's minds to a coachman's mastering of a bad-tempered horse, and one can understand this, since at first sight all that seems to be involved is the subjection of our disordered passions to the control of reason, the mastery of mind over body. In fact, it goes much further than this, and not in the right direction.

Not only is yoga's avowed aim destructive of man, but the means recommended for its attainment bear the same stamp. I shall look first at its aim.

A. THE GOAL

I. An end to action and thought

Yoga's basic concern is to slow down and finally bring to a complete stop the processes of thought. This is done gradually reducing our centres of attraction. Yogins do not at first realize how harmful this technique is. In a world in which we take less and less time off to breathe ("Time is money"), yoga in its initial stage brings us a benefit. It teaches us to concentrate. But that recollected self-communion is only a stage in a process leading, through concentration on nothingness, to a total cessation of thought.

Yoga makes no effort to hide this. We merely have to read, for example, Patañjali's 'Yogasûtra' and the commentaries by leading yogis (Vyasa, Vacaspati Misra, Bhoja.. Thus we read in the first two verses of the 'Yogasûtra':

"This then is the teaching.

Yoga is the cessation of the whirlwind of the organs of thought (citta)".

Thought and action must be avoided, say the great yogis in their commentaries. For thought leads to action, and both of them build up *vasanas*, stocks of moral "Brownie points" which must be worked out in a future life. This involves personal reincarnation, and this, as we have said, prevents the *âtman* (individual soul) from freeing itself from its body and becoming aware of its own divinity. This must be avoided.

2. What the yogin must fight against

Since existence equals suffering, we must struggle against the factors that cause and prolong it. What are these factors? The 'Yogasûtra' is quite clear on the subject: "*Nescience, egotism, desire, aversion and the will to live are the five factor giving rise to afflictions.*" (III,3). These terms require explanation.

Nescience (ignorance, *avidya*) is the illusion that the world exists when it is none other than the Great All, the Eternal Principle, God, in short *Brahman*. It is this illusion that gives rise to the aberrant excesses of our passion. The 'Yogasûtra' defines it thus (in its section I I,5): "*Nescience consists in seeing what is impermanent as permanent, in seeing suffering as happiness and the non-self as the Self*"

There is thus a confusion between the spirit and the world of phenomena. The spirit identifies itself with the body although that is not its true nature. This blindness is serious, say yogins, in that it drives us to ignore the salvific truths, those that will liberate us from the cycle of reincarnation.

Egotism is used to signify the preoccupation with one's Ego, one's separate existence as an individual. For Indian philosophy, this awareness must be eradicated. It is the result of illusion, of nescience. We identify our individual awareness with its vehicles (our thought, our senses) and our mind, when we should be identifying it with the *Brahman*.

As for the **will to live**, this impels each of us to hang on to his individual being. Yoga opposes this since it leads to reincarnation. (Cf. our section V.A. above).

Yoga reacts against these afflictive factors by seeking to set up a counter-impulsion by the deployment of a method which may be broken down into the following stages.

B. THE EIGHT STAGES IN THE RETURN TO THE ABSOLUTE

Samadhi, the final goal of yoga (we shall see in a moment what this is), is the last of the following eight stages:

- *Yama* - curbing the passions
- *Niyama* - the observances
- *Asanas* - the postures
- *Pranayama* - control of the breathing
- *Pratyâhâra* - withdrawal of the senses
- *Dharana* - meditation
- *Dhyana* - "concentration" (Zen in Japanese)⁴
- *Samadhi* - "illumination", enstasis.

⁴ Zen may be seen, loosely, as corresponding to a yoga, though it is much more permissive, and much more destructive of individual personality.

The importance of these stages varies somewhat according to the different schools of yoga, though they remain basically the same. We shall examine each of them in detail, and, as we delve further, their harmful effects on devotees will become sadly ever more apparent.

C. RESTRAINTS AND OBSERVANCES

I. Apparent similarity with Christianity

The purpose of these first 2 stages is to achieve better self-control, and make it easier to concentrate on attaining *samadhi*.

They advocate a code of total detachment (abstention from violence, respect for the property of others, chastity (but see our section E, 'Yoga and sex', below) and the renouncing of all possessions (cf. *Sûtra* II,30). This self-renunciation is seen not as self-destructive, but as preventing the yogin from entertaining illusions about a self that does not exist

But by contrast with Christianity, this absolute detachment has nothing to do with charity. For example, we must respect other people's possessions because theft troubles one's inner life, even if not carried out. Envy of one's neighbour's riches, too, constitutes a theft on the psychological plane, and chains us to a world that is but an illusion. The goal of all these observances is purely self-centred. The aim is to avoid wasting one's vital forces on the world outside oneself.

Moreover (as D. Clabaine writes), "*yoga is not concerned with virtue but with technique. The 'purification' it is for ever harping on is not that of the soul or the spirit, but the body*" (p.16). And he continues:

"Insistence on technique means insisting on what is essential to matter and not to spirit. What is essential for the spirit is truth and falsehood, good and evil (...). For matter, on the other hand, all that is unimportant; what counts is quantity... The laws of the cosmos, the laws of sensation, of the nervous system...: all these are intrinsically material realities, governed by or subject to the various appropriate techniques," (p.32).

For Christianity, the intention of such detachment is all-important, whereas yoga completely ignores it; it is the result alone that counts.

2. Supra-normal powers (the *siddhi*)

Further, insofar as these restraints and austerities burn away all impurities, they are claimed to open up the possibility of acquiring mental and physical powers, as we find in *Sûtra* II, 43: "*Austerity destroys impurity: the senses then acquire supra-normal powers (siddhi)*".

These powers acquired by the best yogins (if we are to believe the *sûtra*) are supra-normal but not miraculous (according to western experts in things Indian) since they are subject to laws: the yogin is just awakening faculties lying latent in him. These include thought-reading (*sûtra* III, 19), the perception of distant objects (II, 25-6), bilocation and levitation...

This explanation cannot be ruled out. But the other hypothesis, that these supra-normal powers are more likely to derive from the Devil, seems preferable to my mind. It must not be forgotten that, consciously or not, the yogin's goal is that of self-deification.

"In India a yogin has always been considered as a 'mahasiddha', one possessing occult power, a "magician". India has never been able to forget that man can, in certain circumstances, become a 'man-god' ... Hindus have always believed in the existence of 'man-gods', 'magicians', for they always had before them the example of the yogins. It cannot be denied that all these 'man-gods' and magicians were striving to transcend the human condition." (M. Eliade, 'Immortalité et Liberté', Payot 1977, p.97).

It is true that gurus advise their disciples to waste no time on these extraordinary powers, which distract them from reaching the goal of *samadhi*. But few of those who reach this stage listen to their advice; the temptation to parade themselves as supermen is too strong.

In any case, the condition of 'liberation' of one who has achieved *samadhi* does not seem to me preferable.

It is worth noting here that yoga properly so called insists on the presence of a guru. We shall return to this point nearer the end of our study.

3. An invalid objection

Many yoga adepts will maintain that they have never passed through these two stages and have never acquired *siddhi*. This is borne out by the article 'Yoga' in the 'Dictionnaire des religions' published under the direction of Mgr. Poupard, where we read:

"Western adepts of yoga often (though not always) seem unconcerned with or unaware of the spiritual or liberative aim of yoga, contenting themselves with learning the postures (*asanas*), and often the control of breathing and, occasionally, the first steps in mental concentration. The initial stages are generally ignored."

But I would qualify this by pointing out that the omission of those first 2 stages does not in any way reduce the harmfulness of yoga. As Mircea Eliade notes (in his '*Patañjali et le Yoga*', 1989): "The technique of Yoga properly so-called does not begin until the practice of the *asana* (or postures)."

As to not possessing *siddhi*, this is normal. Only the more experienced and gifted yogins succeed in acquiring them. What is important to bear in mind about these powers is that they can be acquired through the practice of yoga. We can hardly maintain, therefore that this "gymnastic" philosophy is innocent.

D. THE 'GYMNASTIC' ASPECT OF YOGA

I. The postures: description

As normally practised in the West, yoga tends to be little more than a set of physical exercises detached from its philosophical foundations. This westernised yoga is obviously much less

dangerous than true Indian yoga - less dangerous, but not innocuous, since it is inspired by the latter. Indeed, all yoga practices have as their purpose to bring the adept to a state of *samadhi*, and if they are recommended with that end in view, this is proof that they are not neutral in themselves.

As to the postures, they constitute yoga's 3rd step. A suitable bodily posture is seen as contributing to a proper physical equilibrium, and hence facilitates meditation. Patañjali's '*Yogasûtra*', however, does not specify any particular *asana*, merely recommending that it should be "stable and convenient" (II, 46). Orientals generally choose the *lotus position*: sitting cross-legged, feet resting on the thighs, soles facing outward, heels against the pubic region.

2. Criticism

My opposition to yoga gymnastics is not due to any contempt for the body. That is not a Christian attitude. Christians do not reject their bodies; they use them as instruments and they know that they will be saved with them. Cathars (Albigensians, dualists) reject the material world, whereas Catholics consider it as good ("And God saw that it was good.")

The Catholic knows that any prolonged exercise of prayer calls for a good physical and psychic equilibrium. He knows that difficulties in one's prayer-life can arise from physical indisposition or fatigue... He needs his body as an ally in prayer, for it is the whole man, body and soul, that must respond to God.

What then is our objection to yoga here? Not the physical exercise, the "airing" (as one might say)...these are good in themselves. What we object to is the identification of gymnastics and yoga, the attribution to yoga of benefits due to any system of exercises. It is obvious, of course, that we westerners did not have to wait for yoga to appear in our countries to recognize the value of suppleness, relaxation, pacification, concentration... Our objection to yoga is that it mixes its poison with sugar to make it attractive. As Denis Clabaine has put it:

"The 'gymnastic' aspect is the most superficial and the least specific element in yoga. Taken in isolation, and in small doses, it could hardly be considered to have the gravity of the real, intensive yoga, or its specificity either." (op.cit., p.21).

The true yogin does more than just perform gymnastics. At the same time his guru advises him to adopt a new way of living, a new way of being. In addition, we cannot even say that yoga respects the body, for the gymnastics are only a means to the end of self-liberation, to be rejected once liberation has been achieved.

And finally, Cardinal Ratzinger (as quoted in Documentation Catholique No.1997, p.21) observes that yoga gymnastics "*can degenerate into a cult of the body, and can lead to a surreptitious tendency to identify all physical sensations as being spiritual experiences.*"

E. YOGA AND SEXUALITY

We have seen that yoga recommends (but does not insist on) the practice of chastity. It ought to be said straight away that this recommendation has nothing to do with Christian morality; yoga is immoral, even if this sounds surprising at first hearing.

Yoga's recommendation of chastity has no ethical dimension. The aim is not to suppress enjoyment, but to sublimate the sex-drive so as to get more out of it, to give a subtle vibratory content to one's sexual energy.

The recommendation of chastity is motivated by the awareness that nothing causes more problems than sexual conflicts, and that sexual energy is the strongest drive in human nature. The aim is therefore not to destroy it but to sublimate it into a psychic force. Hence D. Clabaine's observation that yoga is "*sexual in its deepest essence, non-sexual in its most usual appearance, since its sexuality was 'subtle' (p. 11)*". In fact, "*sex, however 'sublimated' it is claimed to be, is still sex, whether in the soul or the body, and is no nearer to chastity above than it is below. It is merely more 'subtle in its vibrations', but is just as intense: all that has happened is that the orgasm takes place in the brain rather than lower down. (p. 13)*

The only goal of sexual abstinence is thus to conserve the sex-drive so that it can mount to the brain. We see this in the rise of the *kundalini* from the lowest *çakra*, close to the sexual organs, up to the top of the brain.⁵

Here is the long but particularly detailed testimony of an American businessman, reported by Reinhart Hummel, a German specialist in Asiatic religions and the latest religious trends:

"I was in meditation... inwardly chanting Guoruom, Guoruom (a mantra) when my mind was unexpectedly filled with representations of fleshly desire... When I closed my eyes there appeared within the red aura a ravishing naked girl... I opened my eyes and she was still there, still naked..."

My body was subject to automatic movements... The red aura changed to another colour. No, she was still there, the same woman! I was overwhelmed. This time she was richly adorned, and of fascinating beauty. My thoughts grew confused. My sexual organ reacted strongly... What was this energy that drove me so violently?..."

I have realized since that the process that triggered this sexual arousal served in fact to cause the seed to move upwards... so that the disciple may reach the level at which physical desires are banished for good from his body, and at which the sex-drive is transformed into a supplementary prana..." ('Mes Gourous', 1984, p.54).

Not all yogins of course reach this stage, particularly in the West. Most of them have been less well counselled (our American businessman's guru was none other than Swami Muktananda), and

⁵ The *kundalini*, loosely, represents vital energy, described as a coiled snake, i.e. dormant, inactive. Yoga tries to awaken it, making it rise up through the various *çakras* (reservoirs of latent power), until it reaches the one sited in the middle of the brain. Once this point is reached, the yogin feels that he has become God by union with the divine essence.

have generally been less gifted; the perverse effects of yoga have thus been less marked among them. Nevertheless, as D. Clabaine remarks:

"all serious yoga adepts set on foot the vibratory process, sexual in essence and 'magic' in its dynamic, intended to lead the kundalini 'serpent' up to the top of the brain. Not to know, feel or realize this is no proof that nothing is happening." (p.13).

Thus Reinhart Hummel does not hesitate to write: "The tantric yoga (kundalini yoga) works upon the sexual forces to channel them to different goals (p.63).

We see therefore that for yoga, chastity is a false chastity.

This claim is not likely to surprise anyone who has some knowledge of Asia, and is familiar with the omnipresent erotic imagery in temples and shrines. The meeting of the *kundalini* with Shiva (the supreme Hindu godhead in his aspect as Destroyer) in the *çakra* of the brain is itself pictured as an act of sexual congress. Hence certain doctrinal and practical deviations, for under pretext of chastity one arrives at its opposite, as Henri-Charles Puech, member of the Institut de France, notes (in his 'History of Religions', La Pléiade, 1970, p.1037):

"While we may consider this conception as a sublimation of the sex-act, the other road (that taken by the deviationists) reveals distinctly erotic tendencies: one can only free oneself from the passions by satisfying them."

This deviationist school is in the minority, but its existence need not surprise us. The symbols, and even the lotus position itself, run counter to the very idea of chastity. Nowadays in the West the *asanas* have become a sort of limbering-up gymnastics. So much the better, for the lotus position can hardly claim to be quite innocent. As Clabaine points out (p.17), "*For anyone with a certain delicacy and sensitivity, the wide spread of the legs must immediately suggest an obvious anti-virginal meaning*", which can in no wise be said of the Christian kneeling position. In addition, we remember that in the lotus position the pubic region is pressed by the heels. It is hard to see why this is so if it is not to urge the sex-drive up into the head.⁶

F. A CRITIQUE OF BREATHING CONTROL

Just as the yoga postures are more than mere gymnastics, so the control of breathing in the same way is much more than just a mere respiratory exercise.

I. Description of breathing control (*prânayama*)

The ultimate purpose of yoga is to cut the bond linking body to soul. To that end, it uses the body as we have seen above, but it also uses our breathing. Indians had indeed long observed the

⁶ The argument that yoga is not immoral since the yogin is free to choose any posture or is not bound to adopt the lotus position, is in itself true but is really beside the point; experience shows that for the most part yogins do adopt the lotus position, or another very similar to it.

close relationship that exists between our states of mind and our breathing. For example, when a man is furious, his breathing is agitated, whereas when he grows calm his breathing slows down of itself. Moreover, according to experts on Indian culture, the air is charged with *prāna* (the universal dynamic principle underlying the force of movement, the universal energy behind all actual energies.)

And so there exists a whole discipline connected with breathing. One must breathe in deeply and slowly, hold one's breath, then breathe out. The holding in of the air allows the *prāna* to spread throughout the body.

The purpose of this regulation of the breathing is to cause "the veil of darkness to dissipate" (I I,52). The yogin thus becomes capable of greater concentration. He becomes aware of "more subtle elements", says Patañjali.

2. From breath-control to the drugged state

In fact, the yogis have realized "*that there exists a close connection between breathing and our states of mind*" (Bhoja's commentary on the *Yogasūtra* I,34). This observation is crucial. It explains the true purpose of this discipline, which is, according to Mircea Eliade, "*to hold one's breath as long as possible*." (op.cit., p.63).

The aim therefore is to produce an effect on the mind, and it must be admitted that the yogins succeed in this. As J. Massui explains, "*by modifying and slowing down the rate of breathing, yogis can enter a state of consciousness different from that experienced by most people in the waking state*" (I quote here from J. Déchanet, 'La Voie du silence', Desclée de Brouwer, 1978, p.43). Indians explain this by claiming that the air is charged with a force (*prāna*) which, remaining within the body of the yogin, kindles the flame that will awaken the kundalini.

The real explanation is much simpler. As Denis Clabaine explains it (p.24), holding one's breath over a period produces "a lack of oxygen in the blood and the nervous system, giving rise to serious impairments in the blood, nerves and glands, etc. The rarefaction of oxygen produces an effect analogous to that of drugs on the brain: faced by the danger of cellular death represented by asphyxia, the vital reserves are over-stimulated, giving rise to secondary states and paradoxal or paranormal effects. But this at the price of an exhaustion of these reserves and the risk of the destruction of the substance of the nervous system. It is true that the organism can, by training, build up defence mechanisms by modifying normal circuits so that they serve the body's primary need to survive." (p.24).

Thus *samadhi*, abolishing the distinction between object and subject, springs from this practice which, we should not forget, is used in the West. Boris Tatsky, an enthusiast for the practice, writes (in his 'Les Yogas, chemins de transformation' pp.142 and 143):

"It lies at the heart of the transmission of one's being; it is breath control that enables us to pass into another dimension." (...) "There is no more breathing in or out; it is a moment outside time."

Drug-takers feel the same about LSD or cocaine. (And see below our section: 'A Comparison with drugs').

Experienced yogins are not ignorant of the dangers of this breathing technique. They are fully aware of it, as is shown by this passage by Svatmarama:

"Just as a lion, an elephant or a tiger can only be tamed gradually, the control of one's breathing must be mastered by degrees, slowly; otherwise it will kill the adept himself."

Nor is this just idle talk. Boris Tatzky admits this (on p.140 of his work that we have quoted above) when he writes: *"There is a formal warning, a warning of mortal danger."*

And so learning to hold one's breath is a gradual process. The exercises recommended seem inoffensive enough at the outset. But once a certain stage is reached, they become more and more dangerous, as for example that known as *mûrcchâ*, presented thus by Tara Michaël:

"At the end of the inward breathing, a very long holding of the breath gives rise to a blissful dissolution of the Self's mental activity, comparable to a fainting fit." (op. cit., p.203).

Given the danger represented by Indian-style breathing control, we may ask why the yogins continue to practise it. The answer is that it enables them to experience mental states that they consider marvellous, and also, for some, because it helps them to acquire supra-normal powers.

In fact, since the breath no longer passes through the nostrils, *"there then occurs* (writes Tara Michaël, p.9) *a sort of inner respiration"*, to such an extent that some yogins succeed in holding their breath beyond what would appear physically possible. It is even said that one of the greatest of them (unfortunately I have forgotten his name) succeeded in getting himself buried alive for several hours without dying of asphyxia.

In this context we may recall that abominable (but alas very successful) film *'Le Grand Bleu'*. Before he stopped breathing and plunged to depths which the human organism ought not to be capable of surviving, the hero had been (guess what!)...practising yoga.

The *'Encyclopédie Universalis'* states that *"There is something there that goes beyond the limits of simple respiration."* If so many do not realize this, it is because the exercise is only entered on gradually.

As for those who tell me that the postures of yoga are not harmful, I would advise them to read Tara Michaël's book. There, on page 208, it is admitted that their effect is *"to seal the breath within the body"*.

3. The use of mantras and ejaculatory prayer

For certain schools of yoga, breathing control is linked to the use of *mantras*, syllables or phrases held to be sacred and possessing power, and which are spoken or chanted repetitively. The classic example is the invocation 'Om' chanted at the beginning of each Vedic hymn. (This was taken over into Buddhism with the recitation at each rosary-bead of the phrase 'Om mane pudme hum', translated by some as 'God the Jewel in the Lotus'.) The constant repetition of such *mantras* is held by Hindu commentators to purify the spirit and lead to certain void from which awakening is supposed to arise.

Repetition leads to the disappearance of the distinction between subject and object. There comes a moment when the subject (the yogin) is no longer aware that he is repeating the *mantra* (the

object); it is repeating itself automatically while he goes into a meditative state. The repetition continues inside him without him realizing it, and it produces its effect.

Thus J. Vernette informs us that in the particularly arduous Krishna school "the young disciple rises each morning at 3.30, and for two hours recites the master-mantra 'Hare Krishna', 1728 times a day, i.e. 16 rounds of a rosary of 108 beads." (See 'Des chercheurs de Dieu hors frontières' pub. Desclée de Brouwer, 1979, p.49).

In the light of the above we can understand why Indian commentators maintain that such repetitive incantation destroys the duality between subject and object. It could hardly fail to do so.

Indians have taken to pointing to the apparent similarity between the *mantra* and our ejaculatory prayer. But any superficial similarity soon breaks down on closer examination.

Christian ejaculatory prayer is purely interior, something that happens purely between ourselves and God inside our soul, without any visible change in our outward attitude or behaviour. Even words are not necessary, a simple look of love is sufficient.

Moreover, as D. Clabaine puts it, "true prayer has nothing to do with mechanical repetition ("And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do..." [Matt. VI,7]) for it is essentially spiritual... It is not through mechanical repetition (in the rosary, for example) that God's heart is softened. But if we think of the importunate widow [in Luke 18,5], much may be achieved through our insistence, our constant spiritual entreaties, to win God's merciful acceptance of our prayers." (p.203). In any case, the important thing about the rosary is not so much the recitation of Hail Marys, but the meditation on the mysteries.

The problem lies therefore at the base. The yogin believes he can attain a state of bliss thanks to a technique...a very sophisticated technique, it is true, but a technique nevertheless.

4. Technique and Grace

For Yoga is a technique. The great Sanskrit scholar Madeleine Biardeau admits (in her 'L'Hindouisme, Anthropologie d'une civilisation', Paris 1981) that "Yoga tends to be a technique, assuring success by its very perfection." (p.35).

From this point of view, the concept of grace no longer has any meaning. One calls on a technique to put one in touch with the Absolute. In short, yoga tends to identify grace with psychological experimentation; it reduces it to the level of natural psychology.

Cardinal Ratzinger himself strongly rejects such an idea. He points out that man is by nature a creature, and as a creature knows he can have no security without grace; he cannot count on the deployment of any specific technique to bring himself close to God. "That (he says) would contradict the childlike spirit required by the Gospel. Authentic Christian mysticism has nothing to do with technique: it is always a gift of God, and one of which the beneficiary knows himself to be unworthy" (p.20).

Finally, although both Christianity and Hinduism see man as working out his destiny thanks to his own action, there is nevertheless a great difference between these two doctrines when we consider the supernatural motors of man's actions. Indian philosophy declares that man can save

himself by his own forces, whereas the Christian affirms that because of original sin he has no alternative but to depend on the grace of God. The first view is evidence of pride -even if unconscious -, the second of humility.

G. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WORLD OF THE SENSES

I. Sense-withdrawal (*pratyâhâra*), description

The yogin seeks to retract his senses within himself and so to cut himself off from the outside world, so that the latter can no longer trouble him.

Yoga commentators compare this attitude to that of the tortoise retiring into its shell. But there is one difference between the tortoise and the yogin: the latter no longer seeks to bring his head out again, that is, to make use of his senses.

The yogin's aim is to bring the mind to the point where it is concentrated totally on itself, to the point where the senses stop functioning normally and are reabsorbed into the thinking matter.

Here is what the *Yogasûtra* says (in 11,54): "*When the senses have been retracted from their objects and transmuted into a mode of awareness, that is called withdrawal of the senses (*pratyâhâra*)*".

In his comment on this quotation, Bhoja explains that instead of being focussed on their object, the senses "remain within themselves". Henceforth the adept knows without the intermediary of the senses, intuitively. And the *sûtra* (11,25) concludes: "*Hence there ensues the most complete mastery of the senses.*"

In fact, the yogin is no longer enslaved by his senses, for there is no longer any connection between the mind and impressions received through the physical senses. The yoga has "withdrawn", has in some manner cut the link between his thoughts and sense-objects. Outside phenomena no longer reach him, or trouble him. This explains why some yogis succeed in walking barefoot on burning coals for several seconds without feeling pain.

The purpose of this withdrawal of the senses is not to diminish suffering. Its aim is solely to allow the soul to detach itself from the body that deceives it so often (so the gurus say) and win its way to ultimate being, in other words pure and unmixed reality.

2. Rejection of God's action and its consequences

This particularly pernicious technique constitutes a flagrant proof of the perverse side of yoga. Instead of recognizing the grandeur and beauty of the world, yoga tries to empty it of all reality.

By saying that existence is an evil, one is rejecting God's creative action. That naturally leads the yogin to reject the proofs of the existence of God, since these last are based on reality, but above all it leads him to refuse the love of God. It was through love that God created the universe. In rejecting God's action, the yogin is indirectly rejecting His love, preferring to turn in upon himself.

Yoga is a philosophy of refusal, a philosophy of 'No'. As Mircea Eliade puts it (in '*Patañjali et le Yoga*', p.60):

"The asana (posture) is the first concrete step towards abolishing the modalities of human existence... It puts an end to the body's mobility and availability, by reducing the infinity of possible positions to one single posture... Its immediate goal is the abolition (or surpassing) of the human condition, resulting from the refusal to conform to the most elementary of human inclinations. The refusal to move or stir will be followed by a whole series of 'refusals' of all kinds..."

Breathing control is the 'refusal' to breathe like the rest of mankind, i.e. arhythmically."

Yoga thus rejects life. It demands the "sacrifice of one's 'life', but also of one's 'personality'" (M. Eliade, 'Le yoga, immortalité et liberté', p.358), whereas in Christianity grace does not destroy nature but raises it to a higher level.

Yoga turns normal behaviour totally on its head under the pretext of attaining a higher life; in fact all it does is to deprive the yogin at the same time of his being and his destiny.

As M.C. Sadrin says, yoga has constructed a veritable "emptiness technique" (p.8). Like Satan, it says 'No' to the action of God.

But the emptiness sought by yoga is not the right one. There is a good emptiness, the one (as Cardinal Ratzinger puts it, p.19)...

"that can be filled by divine riches. The emptiness God needs is that of renunciation of the created realities He has given us and in the midst of which He has placed us. There is no doubt that in prayer we must concentrate entirely on God and shut out, as much as we can, those worldly things which keep us prisoners of our own selfishness. If you want to find God, said St. Augustine, you must abandon the outside world and retire within yourself. But (he continues), do not remain locked within yourself, but transcend yourself, for you are not God."

The yogin does the opposite of this. He rejects life and turns in on himself, on his Self, and remains within himself whereas the Christian turns towards God, looks at Him with love and embarks on nothing less than a loving conversation with Our Lord. "I look at Him and He looks at me", as the old peasant said to the Cure d'Ars. Here meditation is not an end in itself, but a means to grow closer to God. If we remain silent, it is so that we can listen to Him.

Moreover, Christian contemplative prayer cannot be separated from love of one's neighbour. "Prayer is seen as a personal dialogue, intimate and profound, between man and God. And so it expresses the communion of redeemed creatures with the intimate life of the Persons of the Trinity...There is an exodus of the 'self' outwards towards the 'You' of God" (Cardinal Ratzinger, p.16), whereas in yoga the exodus is one where the individual 'self' moves out towards its greater 'Self', the *âtman* towards the *brahman*, the two being ultimately the same thing.

3. The struggle against one's Self

We may quote here from D. Clabaine's work referred to above, pages 179-180:

"The ego or self can be discussed in two ways: ontologically or under its moral aspect.

Ontologically, the 'ego' is the person as such, in its being...

Morally, we are dealing with the 'ego' from the viewpoint of its behaviour, its pursuit of its own interests in relation to other people and their interests. The moral field is that of good and evil, and there is thus a praiseworthy self and one that can be blamed...

There are therefore three 'egos', one ontological and two moral ones.

Of these three, only one is bad and should be 'destroyed', the morally blameworthy one.

Now, while the Gospel calls for the eradication of the morally bad ego and strengthens the ontological and morally good egos, yoga does the precise OPPOSITE, destroying the ontological and morally good egos and reinforcing the morally evil ego."

As usual, Satan apes God, but in so doing he reverses all values. God does not ask us to renounce any aspect of our selves, but to live to the full extent of our beings, and this implies putting in a great deal of work on ourselves.

The withdrawal of the senses is in fact quite idiotic. It amounts to closing our eyes to the world and contemplating solely our own self. The yogin rejects the limitations imposed by reality on every object. It is immoral. It creates its own universe, and is therefore idealist.

The true Christian, by contrast, is a realist. He has to pay attention to even the humblest realities because he realizes they are God's handiwork, evidence of the presence of the God he loves. Unlike the yogin, the Christian does not reject reality; he loves it as a sign of God's action and proof of His providence.

H. MAN HIS OWN GOD

I. Dharana and dhyana

With these two stages, 'meditation' and 'concentration', we come to the more properly intellectual levels of yoga, which now calls for a very close concentration on a single, precise point. No irrelevant idea must be allowed to break into one's meditation. One is getting very close to *samadhi*, the goal of yoga.

2. Samadhi, or 'enstasis'

It is difficult to give an exact definition of this ultimate stage. We are here on the very edge of the world of intellectual meaning. Personal experience is everything here. Yet we must at least try to give some idea of what is after all the goal toward which all forms of yoga are striving. *Samadhi* can only be known (in any real sense) by someone who has lived it (just as only an addict can know by experience the consequences of a drug on his body). What follows, then, is an incomplete (but we hope) worthwhile description.

The word *samadhi* is here translated by an invented word 'enstasis', formed on the analogy of the Greek 'ekstasis' (our 'ecstasy'). If we take 'ecstasy' as a state of being rapt out of earthly awareness, 'enstasis' will be the experience of, as it were, an ecstasy within the self, a perfect

concentration free from any mental construction, this being the ultimate stage of yogic meditation.

In this state the distinction between subject and object is transcended. The mind has lost all awareness of its selfhood. Subjective awareness has, as it were, been emptied of any personal element, and thought is now concentrated solely on the object. Section III,3 of the *Yogasûtra* sums this up in the sentence: "*When only the object of contemplation remains, and when the proper being of the person contemplating has been annihilated, one may say that identification has been achieved.*"

The state is one in which the subjective pole has come into union with the objective pole. The soul has become pure, transparent, and takes on the colour of the objects perceived. In other words, the spirit takes on the features of the object on which it is focussed and merges into it. *Sûtra* I,41 is explicit on this subject: "*Complete contemplation may be said to have been achieved when all mental fluctuations have been annihilated, and the psyche, like a translucent gem (on a coloured surface) becomes tinted either by the 'colour of the perceiving subject, that of the act of perception or that of the objects perceived.*"

According to the commentators, awareness for the yogin is therefore intuitive. He perceives the very essence of things infallibly. His knowledge is direct and he embraces the whole of knowable reality at the same instant. "*The knowledge born of so-called salvific discrimination is the knowledge that focusses instantaneously on every object and possesses its object in every possible way.*" (III, 54).

We are thus dealing with an intuitive omniscience, supra-phenomenal, synthetic, all-penetrating. It is a knowledge which does not need to have recourse to proofs, which is no longer discursive. It is identical to that of a pure perfect spirit, an angel, God himself even.

And yet this is not the final stage of yoga, for the yogin's ultimate goal is to return to the pure subject, to be absorbed into Absolute Spirit itself (*purusha* or *brahman*, according to which metaphysical school of thought he follows).

The state of *samadhi* must therefore be "*preceded by the practice of the abandonment of all mental content.*" (I,18). In other words, the yogi must lose all awareness of himself and of objects, to the point where he merges with the light of the spirit (*purusha*), becomes one with it, becomes God. The *âtman* (individual self) joins and becomes one with the *brahman* (or universal Self).

At that point all the *vasanas* are abolished, the yogi has freed himself and no longer need fear reincarnation. He has become God (at least, that is what he believes).

Can we explain more precisely just what *samadhi* is?

For some writers (*Vaisesika*, for example) this state of Liberation may be unconscious. It is inactive; the soul no longer feels anything, no longer acts.

For most of the others (among them *Mircea Eliade*, certainly the best-qualified of pro-Indian philosophers), the liberated soul reaches a state beyond that of awareness. With *samadhi*, awareness is dissolved in a psychological unawareness, a sort of super-awareness in the act of being.

By enstasis the yogi transcends opposites, unites emptiness and fullness, life and death, being and non-being. He abolishes the polarity of subject and object. Both are real (and creation is thus ruled out). Henceforth he is only spirit.

Marie-Colette Sadrin, who practised yoga for a considerable time before she became aware of its harmfulness, has left us this encomium of the state of *samadhi*:

"The soul has passed from a dependent, vulnerable and limited life to one that is free, unchanging, universal. It has achieved this awareness; its spirit has torn itself away from the (material) universe...

It can now cry out:

*"I am neither the body, the ego on the world.
I am the spirit! I am the spirit!
Unconditioned, luminous, eternal,
unalterable, inactive, free from all birth,
By reflection from the Infinite " (Hymn of Shankara).*

Henceforth I cannot know death...

"I no longer need to practice good works or go on pilgrimage. Beyond Good and Evil, without desire or fear, I am pure, felicitous awareness, I am the Self! I am the Self" (Hymn of Shankara. P.43).

As these quotations make quite clear, yogic man thinks he is God. Even Mircea Eliade admits that *"the divinization of man, the 'man-God', is a dominant motive in Indian philosophy."* (op.cit., p.121). Jean-Yves Leloup, in the collective work *'Les Yogas, chemins de la transformation'*, writes on page 177 that the yogin must *"free himself from all false identifications, and no longer say, "I am this" or "that". We must realize that we are in fact the 'I am'."*

Here yoga shows itself strangely close to the sin of Adam: "You will be like God", as Satan said to Eve.

We are in fact dealing (as Clabaine says on his p.182) with a *"method for auto-divinization"*, in which the mind thinks it is becoming God, principally through the adoption of all the corporal exercises that have become so fashionable today. As the same writer points out (p.18), yoga develops a veritable *"spirituality of the flesh"*.

A beginner in yoga might object that he had never been told that the goal of these exercises was identification with the *brahman*, and would conclude that I was mistaken. I leave it to Tara Michaël to answer this objection:

"In the initial stages, Divine Reality is seen as something different from the human soul and infinitely superior to it, in view of the fact that at this stage the incarnate being identifies itself with the mental and material limitations proceeding from the Prakrti (i.e. Nature as opposed to Spirit). But as the spiritual discipline comes to its end, the yogin must identify with that Perfection that he had originally seen as exterior to him. He begins to participate ever more closely in all the eminent qualities of the supreme Purusha (Spirit, brahman), and then he has the impression that he is part of the Divinity, and finally he becomes aware of God as his own true identity." (op.cit., p.139).

It is this that makes it possible for Çankarâçârya to say (in his 'Sivamânasapûja'): *"Lord, it is Thou who art myself."* Which is very far from what Jesus Christ said to St Catherine of Siena: *"I am He who is, you are she who is not, for you do not have your raison d'être in yourself, because you receive your being at each moment from Me."*

This is serious, extremely serious." *By going beyond its rank as a creature (writes M.G. Sadrin), by raising itself by an act of its own will to a status to which it has no right, that of a pure spirit, disincarnate,*

outside time, almost that of an angel, the soul condemns itself to confinement in a dimension where grace can no longer reach it." (p.65). In losing contact with itself ('withdrawal of the senses') and with God, the soul is risking nothing less than spiritual death.

3. An initial philosophical error

But how is it possible, at a given moment, for a yogin to identify himself with God? We must refer here to the Hindu metaphysical postulates we set out at the beginning of this study. Over-simplifying a little, we may say that the Hindus make no distinction between the different types of being, but only between their states of being. Matter and spirit, God and creation are all the same reality. *Brahman* equals *âtman*. All manifestations of the world are illusions. Consequently there is only one and the same unique reality. As though a leek was the same as a dog!

By contrast, Christianity makes a distinction between different types of being. A man is not a stone, and even two men are not identical to each other. They share the same nature, but do not have the same physical substance, the same atoms. They are different.

As to the difference between man and God (the word is not even strong enough). As D. Clabaine states (pp.64-65):

"There can be no 'marriage' between God and the creature. There can be an 'alliance', a union and a communion, but not an 'alloying' or fusion... This is so true that even Christ Himself is not and can never be a single divine human nature, as the monophysite heresy would have it; his two natures remain eternally distinct, on the one hand God and on the other Man, two natures united not by the merging of one into the other, but joined by their union in the common existence of the single person of the Divine Logos."

To say that our *âtman* is no other than the *brahman* is a nonsense. Man is a creature; it will never be possible for the human self to be absorbed into the divine self, even in the highest states of grace.

There is thus a difference of nature between God and creatures, whereas for Hindus the difference is just one of degree.

It is strictly impossible to become God. Even Our Lord Himself could not deify us. We were created, and God cannot be created. He is the principle of his own Being, his own cause, and this can never be the case for a creature, however perfect.

One does not become God, one either is or is not God. If one is uncreated, it is for all time; if one is created, the same applies.

The Indian tradition, by contrast, is nothing more nor less than pantheism, since in the last analysis they are saying that everything is God. Even the Indian delegate to the United Nations admitted this in 1952: "*The dominant philosophy in India is monistic, denying the essential difference between the individual soul and the supreme soul.... In its eyes the sole Reality was that of the spirit, not of matter." (D'Souza, 'Hindouisme et Liberte', in the symposium 'Christianisme et Liberté', Paris, 1952).*

It is a pity that, instead of concentrating on their egos and their gurus, yogis do not spend a little time meditating on Our Lord's words: "*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*" (Matt.23,12). Under the illusion that they deifying themselves, they are in fact destroying themselves.

I. ANNIHILATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

I. Reminder

The purpose of this section is to justify the title we have given to our study as a whole.

We have already noted that yoga leads to spiritual death and the death of the senses. But it goes even further, and annihilates man. A logical consequence of Pascal's famous dictum: "*If you ape the angel, you'll end by acting like a beast*". In fact, far from exalting man, as this gymnastic philosophy claims to do, it destroys him.

2. An example

Here is a personal admission, and from none other than the celebrated Ramakrishna himself, describing the state of perfect felicity he achieved:

"I was six months in this state from which men do not normally return, for after 21 days the body breaks free and falls like a dead leaf. Day and night followed each other without my being aware of them. The flies crawled into my mouth and nostrils as into those of a corpse, without producing any reaction from me ⁷. My hair was tangled and dusty. My body could not have survived in this state without the intervention of a sadhu (wandering ascetic) carrying a stick. He immediately realized what was up, and visited me from time to time, bringing me food and beating me vigorously to force me to swallow a few mouthfuls. As soon as I showed signs of returning to relative consciousness, he would place food in my mouth, and thus I sometimes swallowed a mouthful. Six months passed in this state. Then I heard the Mother's command: "Stay on the plane of relative consciousness so as to teach mankind!" I now began to suffer violent intestinal haemorrhages and my body gradually returned to full consciousness..." (Romain Rolland, 'Life of Ramakrishna', 1929).

Faced with such a description, we can only echo J.J. Walter's judgement (in his 'Psychanalyse des Rites', p.138) that yoga is "*a march towards nothingness erected into a concept by the Hindu metaphysicians.*"

3. Yoga and the destruction of personality

Sadly we must face the fact that yoga destroys personality.

Even one of my teachers of Indian philosophy, himself a convinced 'Indianist', admits this in his study 'La face cachée du temps'. For yogis, he writes, "*the effort is to reach a state where they no longer feel themselves as either 'agent' or 'patient'. Their aim is to reach a form of awareness in which their individual self comes to be perceived as a third person, as though seen through the eyes of someone else... The aim of this systematic depersonalization, neutralizing any sort of karman (the wheel of reincarnation caused by the vasanas), is to clear the way to ultimate deliverance.*" (p.386).

⁷ Small wonder that Professor Baruk speaks of the 'living dead'.

This "systematic depersonalization" rules out any appeal to love. Love, whether divine or human, implies a person-to-person relationship, one that is in the highest degree "personalizing". It brings out the full potentiality of the person. By urging us to take the opposite path, Satan scores a further victory over souls.

4. Comparison with drugs

A final and flagrant proof of the destructive effect of yoga on the person may be sought by a comparison (a commonplace nowadays) between the state of the 'liberated' yogin and that of a drug-addict.

Researchers have noted a strange similarity between the effects of this gymnastic philosophy and those of drugs. In support of this R. Hummel quotes the witness of an American lawyer who had earlier taken drugs and was a yoga adept. Reaching the point of *samadhi*, he made the following declaration:

"I know it's real, it's damned real. It's not like drugs or alcohol, it's something else, but what comes nearest to it in our experience is a 'high' on drugs." (p.10).

As for Marilyn Ferguson, she admits (in her 'La Révolution du Cerveau', p.64⁸) to being struck by the "family likeness" between the effects of drugs and the mental states of advanced-stage yogins: loss of the frontiers of the Ego, a sudden feeling of oneness with all living beings (absorption into the universe), awareness of light, altered perception of colours, the impression of being freed from one's physical body, beatitude... Drugs, of course, can reduce one to such a state of decay far quicker than yoga.

Yogins, like drug-takers, are in fact imprisoned within themselves, however free they may feel. It is truth, not error, that makes us free. As M.C. Sadrin writes, in trying to deify *man* "Yoga, far from freeing the soul, holds it captive, deluded by the seductive promises made to Jesus in the wilderness: knowledge, delight and power" (p.87).

J. SAMADHI AND SATAN

Unlike *samadhi*, the Christian economy of redemption is addressed to the whole man, not just a part of him. We are saved in our totality, saved by God but not absorbed into God, whereas the goal of the *Samkhya*, the philosophic basis of yoga, is to dissociate mind from matter.

The state of *samadhi*, according to the gurus, makes man a god. But what does he actually become?

Only two solutions are possible: either he is reduced to the vegetative state, or he is the victim of a Satanic illusion. And bearing in mind the successive stages followed by a yogin,

⁸ i.e. 'Révolution in the Brain'. I do not know this title, and am tempted to suspect a lapse of memory by Jean-Pierre Marie, or even a typist's error. M. Ferguson's most frequently quoted work is, of course, 'The Aquarian Conspiracy', in French 'Les Enfants du Verseau', and a typist could have metathesized the V and S consonants of 'verseau' to produce 'serveau', corrected then to 'cerveau' (brain). But it is hard to see how 'Conspiracy' or 'Les Enfants' could have been confused with 'La Rgvolution', and 'Revolution in (or of) the Brain' seems not an unlikely title for a book by this New Age propagandist. Translator

many western thinkers have rightly maintained that yoga is nothing other than a "march towards nothingness", since it rejects external reality and destroys personal identity...

All this is undoubtedly true, but it still does not resolve a further problem: what are the origins of the feeling of bliss and omniscience enjoyed by yogins who have reached *samadhi*?

We have noted that it comes, in part, from the body. If the yogin seems able to know objects other than through the senses, "intuitively", this is explained, claims Denis Clabaine,

"because he is by-passing them and operating on a far higher level, making use of circuits of a subtle vibratory resonance on a level akin to that of telekinesis and telepathy, etc.

It is thus that the yogin directly contemplates the essence of all objects. We are not dealing here with their metaphysical essence, such as can be known by the mind, but with their material, physical essence, their vibratory, subtle formula". In a word, "the normal circuits are short-circuited in favour of circuits deemed to be more interesting." (pp.37-38).

We need not be surprised by this! We just have to remember the breathing exercises or the withdrawal of the senses the preliminaries that lead into this so-called intuitive perception of things. The feeling of omniscience enjoyed by the 'advanced' yogi has nothing miraculous about it.

But, in any case, this feeling of bliss cannot come from the body alone. It must have had help from outside. And when we see what man becomes finally in this gymnastic philosophy, it would hardly be surprising if that extra nudge came from an evil spirit claiming, like the yogin, to take the place of God: i.e. Satan.

This is why those far advanced in yoga who come to repent their mistake are obliged not only to make a general confession and renew their baptismal vows (in simple form), but to submit to exorcism. (Cf. D. Clabaine, p.105).

CONCLUSION

A principal fact emerging from this study is that the goal of yoga is a spiritual one. The gymnastics, the breathing are only means to reach this goal. This is borne out by Jean Déchanet, a Christian priest and monk, by no means hostile to yoga, since he advises us to practice it (in his 'La Voie du Silence').

"The aims of the Yoga for Hindus are spiritual. It would be almost a betrayal to forget this, to concern oneself only with the properly physical aspect, to see it only as a factor for corporal health or beauty." (p.56).

Yoga makes us gods. With that prospect, we no longer need, the world, our senses, our 'cogito'... We have only to retire within ourselves.

"The 'spiritual Hindu' - the man who wants to live according to the spirit - has no need to seek above or outside himself for a primary Reality, an object of contemplation, let alone a model to imitate. He is that Reality. He is sufficient unto himself. To see God, or contemplate Divinity can have no meaning for the Yogi. The only goal he is pursuing is himself, his true 'self', of which a whole world of illusions is preventing him from being aware... His whole aim is to silence within himself the thinking 'ego' so that his spiritual 'ego' may manifest itself to him. This striving does not

find its completion in an ecstasy directed outwards to something else, but in a complete withdrawal into himself.

Denial of a world, of a universe without meaning; denial of a body, a physical nature which is either pain or artificial purposeless pleasure; denial indeed of the soul, of the thinking and acting self." (p.57).

We are constantly brought back to Pascal's inspired dictum: "If you ape the angel, you'll end by acting like a beast'. Never realizing this and believing themselves god, yogis destroy themselves and end up as human wrecks. One only has to re-read Ramakrishna's description of *samadhi* to be convinced of this.

II - SPECIALISED YOGAS

Our critique so far is applicable to all types of yoga. Most of them already exist in embryo in Patañjali's '*Yogasûtra*'. All that differentiates them from the latter is their insistence on certain precise points rather than on others. Their final goal is identical, and we have seen what this is worth.

A. SOME EXAMPLES

1. *Bhakti-yoga*, or the yoga of love

The essential process followed by all types of yoga is the withdrawal of the awareness from the multiplicity of sense-impressions (either because these are held to be non-existent, or because they must be dispelled if our 'soul' or *âtman* is to achieve the realization that it is none other than the *Brahman*). But since any way toward liberation requires an initial stimulus, *Bhakti-yoga* chooses love, since only love, it holds, can concentrate all a man's forces towards such an end.

Absolute Reality, the *brahman*, is thus conceived and adored as the supreme Person. It is in some way personalized, thus making love easier. It must be borne in mind, as Tara Michaël reminds us (p.138) that "the Absolute who must be adored and realized is the same as the Self (*âtman*) present in our hearts.

The goal here is the same as in Patañjali's yoga; the only difference is that of the means whereby to reach it. All must be done by and through love, and in particular the object of one's meditation is a divine person (here *brahman* is symbolized under a variety of aspects), or a divine incarnation (*Krishna, Rama, Siva, etc.*), or one's own Self... so as to identify with this.

We may add that the postures and the breathing-control are practised here as in other yogas.

2. *Jhâna-yoga*, the yoga of knowledge

Here the Yogin must realise that he is something other than his body not by way of love but by that of knowledge.

The disciple of *Jhâna-yoga* will thus pay particular attention to the last three stages described by Patañjali, which does not mean that he will completely ignore the 5 others, for it is essential to pass through these last if he is to reach deliverance, exactly the same deliverance as that of Patañjali. Here is what deliverance represents for Vivekacûdâmani (489-495):

"I am Brahman, the Reality that has existed from all eternity... I am the Truth!... I alone, as pure awareness, reside in the depths of every being. I am what maintains the outer world and the inner world."

As we can see, the final illumination is absolutely identical to that of the *Râja-yoga*, the *Kundalini-yoga* or the *Hatha-yoga*. (See glossary for the explanation of these terms.)

B. A FALSE PROBLEM

It cannot therefore be claimed that there is such a thing as a non-dangerous yoga. There are indeed different sorts, since our world is peopled by a great variety of human personalities, and because there have been many philosophical schools among the Hindus. But the premisses, the techniques adopted (give or take a few variations) and the goals are identical.

Jñâna-yoga, for example, places far less emphasis on breathing exercises or sense-withdrawal, whereas the tantric yogas (*Kundalini-yoga*, *Hatha-yoga*...) insist much more forcibly on these. The results are nevertheless identical, and totally different from those of Christianity. We may say that the other forms of yoga are just refinements or improvements on one or more of the points established by Patañjali. It was thus quite possible for Tara Michaël to write (on his page 163): "The whole of *bhakti-yoga* exists in embryo in the practice of *Içvara-pranidhâna*⁹, already mentioned in Patañjali's 'Yogasûtra'."

For its part, *Jñâna-yoga* is based principally on Patañjali's previously quoted sûtra II, 5: "Take what is impermanent for permanent, what is impure for pure, what is a tissue of suffering for happiness, and what is not the Self for the Self." This is best confirmed in the following from the great Indian commentator Vivekananda: "The goal of the *Jñâna-yoga* is the same as that of the *Bhakti-yoga* and Patañjali's *Râja-yoga*, but the method is different." (Quoted by J.Y. Leloup, in 'Les yogas, chemins de transformation', p.177).

INTERIM CONCLUSION

All forms of yoga should therefore be avoided. They are all harmful to a greater or lesser degree. For example, *siddha-yoga* and its derivative, Transcendental Meditation, are far more dangerous than the *karma-yoga* or yoga of action. This warning is applicable to western forms of yoga, even where they are less strictly applied than native Indian yogas (and this is not always the case).

III. RELIGION AND YOGA

A. The God of the yogin

A few lines earlier we mentioned the practice of *Içvara-pranidhâna*. *Içvara* is the god of the yogin, and particularly of those who follow Patañjali. And the fact that such a figure can exist (for some yogis at least) is used to convince us that yoga is compatible with Christianity.

To accept this would be a colossal error. It is true that yoga admits the existence of a supreme Lord, but that god has nothing in common with the Christian God.

First of all, his role in the 'upward' progress of adepts is either non-existent or so marginal as to amount to the same thing. There are, it cannot be denied, some yogins who concentrate on him;

⁹ For the explanation of this term, see our section on 'Religion and Yoga'.

but this is in no sense obligatory, and it is perfectly possible for them to dispense with him entirely.

Then, even those who do admit his existence seek to transcend their divinity, as though he were in no way an absolute being (however paradoxical this may seem to us). There is no place in yoga for a creator God¹⁰, ruling the universe, awarding punishments and rewards, and even less place for a God of love.

We may well ask what purpose *Içvara* serves. He is omniscient but in a sense 'inactive'. His only role according to *Sûtra* 1,26 is that of having been the guru of the gurus: it was he who taught them the yoga.

We should therefore not compare the god of the yogins with our Christian God. Their god is a cut-price divinity, a sort of abstract entity. As to original sin, it is not even considered.

Finally, let us not forget that yoga is above all a technique (a satanic one, as we have noted) and in no sense a religion, even if its practices correspond to and derive from philosophical and religious beliefs (these, again, being totally incompatible with Christianity).

B. THE GURUS

I. The general case

Yoga is not a thing one teaches oneself. "*It is forbidden to anyone to practise yoga unless he has been initiated by a qualified master (guru)*", we read under the entry "Yoga" in the 'Encyclopédie Universalis', which can hardly be accused of bias.

Why this prohibition? According to M. Eliade (in his '*Patañjali et le Yoga*', p.8) "*What characterizes yoga is not just its practical aspects, but also its initiatory structure (underlined by the author). It is not something one learns on one's own; the direction of a master (or guru) is necessary.*"

The relationship between guru and disciple is therefore one of initiator and initiate; it is not a neutral one. Moreover, gurus must, in general, be considered gods by their disciples, especially in India, though not exclusively there.

In the '*Hare Krishna*' movement (mainly centred in the west, in New York), "*the relationship between guru and disciple is above all an authoritarian one, in which (R. Hummel tells us on his page 49) the master is regarded as in some sort an embodiment of the 'infallible' sacred scriptures of the Krishna cult.*" In India, Sathya Sai Baba, one of the best-known and most influential gurus, has perfected a game which "*aims to suppress the ego and lead the individual to surrender completely to his*

¹⁰ Western manuals on Hinduism rightly name the divine triad (not Trinity! of more recent Indian religion as : Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer and Purifier, each personalized as 'the Lord' by his special devotees, though the more philosophically-minded believers may see each as a form or aspect of the One Supreme Reality (brahman). Such documents as "What is Hinduism?", issued by the Committee for Other Faiths of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, see 'liberation' as being achieved when the âtman comes to fully understand Brahman (as though a supreme God or Reality could be understood!) but fail to understand the destruction of the individual soul involved. Trans.

master" (p.44). Sathya Sai Baba describes himself as "*the All-Knowing, the Omnipotent, the Omni-Present*" (p.44).

The latter may be the best-known, but he is by no means the only one. Among other highly reputed gurus we may mention Swami Muktananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (founder of Transcendental Meditation)...and Swami Sivananda, who had no hesitation in bluntly declaring (I quote Hummel, p.35): "*A disciple must consider his master as God and should not see him as a man.*"

This is the background that enabled P. D'Souza, Indian delegate to the United Nations (and thus particularly well placed to speak here) to write: "*Once Hindus have placed themselves under a guru, the question of sin, of good or evil no longer exists for them. They do what the guru tells them to do.*" Hummel p.33).

As to knowing who is entitled to be a guru and who is not, the task is virtually impossible. Anyone can claim to be a guru; all he needs is a certain influence or ascendancy over people, a knowledge of the mantras and the ability to choose which of these is best suited to each individual disciple.

2. Gurus in the western world

The position in the west has its own special features. In fact, "*so many disciples are flocking to the yoga movement (writes R. Hummel, p.86) that traditional requirements are no longer respected and the periods of preparation for initiation are shortened.*" As a result, many so-called gurus are, frankly, second-rate (not that we need lose any sleep over that).

Further, the term 'guru' is not too popular over here. And so it is replaced quite often by a term more acceptable in the West - 'master' for example - or by nothing at all.

Lastly, although teachers of yoga are now very numerous in Europe and America, many of them are really only redeployed physical training instructors or dancing-masters. Their understanding of yoga is rather limited, and they tend to concentrate on the 3rd, 4th and 5th stages of the discipline. This in itself reduces the harmful effects even if it cannot entirely eliminate them. This is understandable. Yoga is bad in itself. Quite apart from any spiritual research, it can endanger the disciple's physical and mental equilibrium. The westerner who practices it purely for relaxation or to keep fit is making a bad bargain; he is not proof against such a danger. "*Do not play the sorcerer's apprentice*" warns Swami Vivekananda, "*you will unleash forces that you will not be able to control.*" (Quoted by M.C. Sadrin, p.28).

We have already established, indeed, that stages 3, 4 and 5 (postures, breath-control and withdrawal of the senses) are dangerous.

Of course, as in all disciplines, some 'pupils' are more gifted than others. The less gifted are lucky in being less vulnerable to yoga, but equally, they are less likely to detect its drawbacks. Let us not forget that yoga gymnastics is based on an irreducible minimum of philosophy; otherwise it would not be a yoga, but purely gymnastics.

Given the lack of critical sense and the loss of common sense so prevalent today among our fellows, it would be advisable not to come into too close contact with such a philosophy. We should be far too likely not to realize how dangerous it is.

IV. CAN YOGA BE CHRISTIANIZED?

We have said enough to demonstrate that yoga should be avoided at all costs. One does not eat a poisoned fruit under the pretext that it contains vitamins. Likewise, this gymnastic philosophy is definitely not one to be indulged in, even if it contains good elements. Experience is there to teach us this.

A. THE EXAMPLE OF FATHER DÉCHANET

In fact, a monk, J. Déchanet, has tried to Christianize yoga in his work 'La voie du silence' ('The way of silence') No one was better qualified than him to succeed in such an enterprise. He had clearly perceived the dangers inherent in its philosophy and in certain of its practices, was well grounded in the Fathers of the Church, and thus felt fully competent to undertake such a role. He showed, in fact, extreme prudence in deploying his arguments. And so a Christian hermit felt able to write to him as follows after reading his book:

"You have approached yoga with the simplicity of the dove and the cunning of the serpent. Simplicity in that you followed the instrument as it was offered to you, and have used it fruitfully for your prayer. Cunning in that you have left on one side the more obscure paths of control of the unconscious to which Indian yoga normally leads." (p.16).

Yet despite all these qualities, he failed.

A tree is judged by its fruit. We are obliged to conclude that this tree fell...that Fr. Déchanet fell too. Yoga did him little good (unless it was his stay in Africa). Since 'La voie du silence', J. Déchanet has published further books. And we note that in his 'Christian Yoga in 10 lessons he has as good as stopped warning us of the dangers implicit in Indian yoga. Above all, in 'Va où ton coeur te mène - Au-delà du Yoga' ('Follow your heart - Beyond Yoga'), a sort of autobiography, he takes up very progressive attitudes to the Church's doctrine, and himself admits to holding "very advanced" ideas.

He failed because the task he took on was an impossible one to realize. In yoga everything is interconnected. It is as though one were trying to scrape off a poison that had been scattered over a cake and has soaked into it.

He failed too because, for all his "prudence of the serpent", he was far from infallible. He seems to have completely missed some of the most harmful elements in yoga. For example, he recommended the practice of the lotus posture, which is by no means innocent, and above all he sees the *Hatha-yoga* (the 'yoga of violence', involving such extremes of self-torture as staring fixedly at the sun) as less dangerous than that of Patañjali (a gross mistake, this).

How, in short, can one speak of prudence when one is recommending yoga to Christians who know next to nothing about it and so are in constant danger of falling into one of its many traps? Father Déchanet and those influenced by him should be warned that "the Devil is not to be trifled with".

B. SOME FALSE OBJECTIONS

It is not hard to foresee the sort of objection people will make. "All I want to do is take advantage of 'what is good in it', what helps me to achieve better balance, a better prayer-life..."

Our answer to this is that it is no use trying to be cleverer than Old Nick himself. If he didn't wave top-quality carrots in front of us donkeys, he would never get his way with us. What is more, he already gets the better of us in fields we have some knowledge of; how do we expect to avoid this in fields we know nothing of? He knows all there is to know about them.

By seeking for grace away from the Church and Christianity, the Christian yogin is wronging Christ and the Church, going to an alien source to find what can only be provided 'at home'.

Some may object here: "*But it is not grace we are looking for in yoga! It is nature; surely the Church has approved and made use of the natural riches of Plato and Aristotle and a whole host of natural techniques!*" Our answer is "*Precisely, but just make sure you are not looking to nature to provide what ONLY GRACE can give, and thus falling into the 'naturalism' condemned by the Church.*" (Clabaine pp.93-96).

C. YOGA TODAY

Unfortunately, J. Déchanet started a trend. Priests, monks, nuns and Christian layfolk have followed his example and are practising yoga. One of his continuers (but by no means the only one) is the monk Jean-Michel Dumortier in his book '*Chemins vers l'oraison profonde*' ('Roads to deeper prayer'). He organizes sessions and prayer-groups. He too has realized that yoga has its dangerous side. We hope he will speedily get back on the right road, for he's taking a great risk.

Christian prudence warns us not to play with fire; it is too easy to get burned.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This expose has been a long one, but this is warranted by the importance of the subject. We have provided a plethora of quotations, most of them from experts on India with a world-wide reputation or sources generally held as unbiased, such as the 'Encyclopédie Universalis', to make it quite clear that our attitude to yoga is not just a bee in our bonnet.

What so many are looking for in yoga is an inner tranquillity, a psychic equilibrium. What they actually find is a philosophy of rejection, a philosophy of death, affecting the mind as well as the body.

The fact that some doctors recommend it as a method of relaxation merely means they know little about it. Ask them to explain what is meant by the *asanas*, *samadhi*, *mantras*, *lçvara* or *Kundalini*, and their answer will be a long silence. Above all, they know nothing about yoga's underlying philosophy.

I may be reproached by some for having never myself practised yoga, let alone Transcendental Meditation, a derivative of yoga even more dangerous than its original. I can only thank God that I haven't; I do not have a death-wish. Likewise I know enough about the results of drugs to know I must not take them. There is no need to become an addict to know that.

In his condemnation of Transcendental Meditation (T.M.), Denis Clabaine (op.cit., pp.98-100) reproaches it with many of the drawbacks we have seen as characteristic of yoga; we may take his criticism of T.M. quoted below as equally applicable to the latter. As he says, if people are looking for relaxation, concentration and meditation in T.M. (and, we may add, yoga), then they have come to the wrong address:

"It's the wrong address for relaxation... True relaxation restores an individual's force, strengthens his cohesion in the face of dissolution and its ultimate state, death. T.M., on the other hand, although it provides some initial benefit through rest, particularly for certain natures suffering an extreme lack of balance in the reverse direction, gradually disintegrates the individual personality, dissolves it... in the interests of another, supra-human unity, that of the devil, who can only 'possess' its subjects by annihilating their personalities..."

It is not the right address for concentration, either, for the rhythm set by T.M. is a mechanical one; its repetitive effect soon becomes automatic, quite the opposite of mental concentration properly so called. What one does mechanically or by an automatic reaction excludes any intervention of the conscious mind.

Finally, it is not the right address for meditation. For a start, that involves concentration... Then, meditation in its true sense, our sense, specifically feeds the intelligence, the will and the heart with its spiritual, divine or religious, or at least intellectual, philosophic nourishment. It involves thought, reflection, whereas T.M. plunges the disciple into the unthinking repetition of mantras whose meaning he does not even know."

In a word, all that seemed at first a positive good turns out to be an evil, in the same way as Satan always shows us the road to Hell under a pleasant guise.

Denis Clabaine is not alone in holding this opinion. Edouard Robillard, among others, is equally insistent on the harmfulness of yoga, for, as he writes (in his 'La réincarnation, rêve ou réalité', Montreal, 1981, p.154):

"If it acted merely to help us relax or concentrate, it could be as useful as anything else that facilitates the work of the mind or the openness of the heart. But it goes far beyond this: it delivers us into the power of the unconscious, into a world of strange internal wanderings and visions and all the deviations that this can lead to. It can even confer on the adept 'undeniable powers' over the material world which will be for him a temptation rather than an invitation to renounce the world so as to seek God."

Yoga is, in addition, a self-love, to the point that one unconsciously wants to be God oneself.

We should therefore reject yoga, and Transcendental Meditation...There are other ways of realizing one's potential and of achieving well-being; for example, through the life of prayer, which, unlike yoga, does not produce as it were 'living-dead zombies', but saints.

Jean-Pierre Marie,
Graduate in Indian philosophy.

(For glossary of technical terms, see at end of following article).

ZEN, OR THE MYSTIQUE OF EMPTINESS

Now that we have dealt with yoga, it is time to say a few words about Zen. These two 'means of liberation' have many points in common, though Zen is by far the more harmful, which is no small matter. A derivative of Buddhism and Taoism, it concentrates far more on the meditative side - the most dangerous one - and pays less attention to the bodily exercises. Hence my title: "Zen, or the mystique of emptiness", but I could equally have written "Zen, or the way of madness".

We shall not make as systematic a critique of Zen as we have done of yoga; that would be merely to repeat much of what we have already written. It will be quite enough if we draw attention to certain of its key features. But this at least we must do, if for no other reason than that numerous convents in the West are recommending this pernicious practice and find it most attractive. By dint of always seeking elsewhere for what they already have at home, they are in great danger of straying from the way of Life, which is that of Jesus Christ. Between Zen and Christianity a choice has to be made. We shall see why.

I. AN INDIAN & CHINESE INHERITANCE

Zen derives from the northern Buddhism of the Mahâyâna (the so-called 'Greater Vehicle'), from Ch'an (a Chinese Buddhism containing many elements of Taoism) and from Taoism¹¹ itself, which was introduced into Japan at the end of the 12th century. It is thus largely a hybrid offspring of two philosophies, Indian (in particular buddhist) and Chinese.

I. Re-discovering one's divine nature

Here, as in yoga, man is God and the world an illusion, void of all reality. Man is God but is unaware of this. Hence the observation of J.K. Kadowaki, an ardent adept of Zen:

"Zen teaches that all men are essentially Buddha (deified by the Buddhist school of the Greatest Vehicle), and all they need – is to teach -the point realizing that state." ('Le Zen et la Bible', Epi, 1983, p.56).

Nor is he the only one to write thus; it is almost a commonplace to find Zen masters making such declarations as, for example, that of Evelyn de Smedt (in his 'Zen et Christianisme', Paris 1990, p.85): "Zazen (i.e. the posture of meditation) is itself God or Buddha."

¹¹ For 'Buddhism', 'Mahayana', 'Ch'an' and 'Taoism', see glossary at the end of this article.
Trans.

Robert Linnsen goes even further in his 'Bouddhisme, Taoïsme et Zen' (Paris 1972): "All is there. We are the Real, but we do not know this, Zen is constantly telling us. From the depths of the spirit to the material structures of our physiological life, we lack nothing." (p.86), and again (on pages 73 and 78): "Supreme reality is not outside us. Not only is it in us, but we are it (...) The Divine is not distinct from us. We are it, but we do not know this."

2. A pantheist philosophy

We are here in the very heart of pantheism, for "from the point of view of Zen, there is no difference between the deepest nature of our being and that of an object, of every object. The only difference is one of 'surface'..." (Linnsen, p.79).

In any case, Indian and Chinese philosophies are by their very nature pantheist. The Indian *âtman/brahman* is broadly equivalent to the Chinese Tao (seen as the First Principle that gives rise to all phenomena and in which all contradictions are resolved when one returns to it).

3 Being and Becoming

Here by implication lies the whole question of the rejection of the real. For Buddhists, the principle of identity is a false principle, since it implies the existence of essences, and these, the Buddhists assure us, do not exist: being is an illusion. It is only the rapid succession of images that gives us an impression of continuity. For them, all is flux, all is in a state of becoming. Nothing is stable, nothing is identical to itself.

This is why Master Suzuki, in his preface to Herrigel's book 'Le zen dans l'art de tirer à l'arc' ('Zen and the art of archery'), defines deliverance as "an insight into the synthesis of affirmation and negation, expressing metaphysically an intuitive grasp of the unity of being and becoming." (p.8).

Such a statement constitutes a dangerous philosophic aberration. In fact, change is secondary to being. One must first have being before one can change. Any change presupposes a stable subject. The acorn becomes an oak because such and such a particularity has been built into its genetic structure from the beginning. It cannot become any old thing. It has the power to be an oak, and the power to be is already being. The acorn is potentially an oak. Whatever we do, it will never become a plane-tree or an elephant.

As for "the synthesis of affirmation and negation", it is easy to see where that can lead.

II. THE GOAL OF ZEN

The Zen adept's aim is to achieve *Satori*, or illumination. This bears a strange resemblance to *samadhi* or *nirvana*, and we have already seen above in our analysis of yoga what to think of these.

Like the yogin, the Zen adept must renounce his "individual ego", since it is this that maintains him in a state of illusion.

It is important to realize that *satori*, illumination, "is not a special state (explains Taizen Deshimaru), but merely the natural original condition of body and spirit. It is a clear vision of one's own nature." (Cf. de Smedt, p.160). It is the awareness of one's nature as Buddha, one's own divinity. It is Truth: "the truth is to be found in oneself, and the answer to all one's questions", in the words of Evelyn de Smedt, disciple of the Zen master Taizen Deshimaru (p.83). The 'illuminated'

or 'enlightened' adept needs no one else; above all he does not need Jesus Christ. He is sufficient unto himself.

The distinction between the object of cognition and the cognisant subject must therefore disappear, as must also the difference between life and death, for they are only manifestations of a deeper Reality. In what we have written on yoga we have shown how the adepts of these philosophies can achieve such an 'illumination', almost identical in the two schools of thought. This may be illustrated by the following poem by San Tchen Kham Pa (alias Dayalshanti Ghose), who himself achieved *satori* (quoted in Linnsen '*Bouddhisme, Taoïsme et Zen*', p.173):

*"... I am the divinity of things...
 In the eternal upspringing of my infinite vision,
 There are no more veils, no more darkness, no more lights.
 The infinite without name, the Eternal without attribute are my
 only dwelling,
 My only natural state.
 ... I transfigure all things.
 In terms of the Eternal Spark that I am,
 I am... I am forever...
What has been... What is... What will be.
 I am... I am forever...
 The infinite beatitude which, in its eternal rhythm
 Cradles the universes and gives life to the heart of things.
 I am... I am forever...
 The joy, the harmony, the ecstasy of the world."*

Zen is a state in which all distinctions between the self and the other, between subject and object and between true and false are abolished. Thus we read in the oldest Zen poem the following surprising declaration: "Pay no concern to just or unjust. Conflicts between what is just and unjust are a sickness of the spirit." (Quoted by Alan W. Watts in '*Le Bouddhisme Zen*', Payot, 1975, p.219).

In fact, that view implies a dualist structure, and Zen rejects this, just as it rejects the idea of the Self called the Ego (as we have said). The attainment of *satori* implies the rejection of all ideas, all thought. Indeed, "*all knowledge represents an acquisition, an accumulation*", emphasizes Master Suzuki in his '*Essais sur le Bouddhisme Zen*', "*whereas Zen's intention is to deprive man of all his possessions.*" (Paris, 1948, vol.2, p.193).

Hence this advice of Master Tipola (quoted by Linnsen, P.52):

*"Do not think, do not imagine, do not analyse.
 Do not meditate, do not reflect.
 Remain in the Natural State."*

Master Tipola's view is logical. The aim of the Zen masters is to apprehend the very nature of things in the way the angels do and not in the human way, that is, by reasoning. They are opposed to any idea of abstraction to such a point that they refuse to define objects (a definition implies abstraction). Realizing their inability to attain such a state by normal means, they prefer to keep silence.

What is more, attachment to ideas, whatever they may be, is seen by them as an infringement of liberty, since they are factors for brainwashing, putting the mind in chains. Hence their attitude to reincarnation through the *vasanas*. Hence also Master Deshimaru's instruction to his disciples (in 'Vrai Zen', 1969, p.42): "*Zazen is silence, absolute silence, silence of thought, zazen is non-thought.*"

We may sum up by saying that the life of Zen begins at the moment when there is no further goal to pursue, nothing more to desire. There is no point in seeking to achieve godhead, for any will, any hope of becoming something in the future can concern only the abstract image of ourself, and amounts to giving that image a significance that it cannot carry.

As Master Taizen Deshimaru, one of the top contemporary Zen authorities has put it: "*Zen is a profound philosophy (...), an art of living, a way of being.*" (op.cit., coverpage).

III. THE TWO SCHOOLS

As we have said, Zen claims that it can make each adept aware of his nature as Buddha ¹². But such an awakening, such an illumination requires the help of a guru and a master-disciple relationship, as we have seen above in the case of yoga.

Two different sects offer methods for attaining the goal; their harmfulness should be sufficiently obvious from our brief account.

A. THE RINZAI SCHOOL

This school emphasizes the suddenness of the moment of illumination. Methods for achieving this blinding but momentary flash of awareness (for it lasts only an instant) are various, and they all aim at being totally disconcerting. It may happen that the disciple achieves illumination as a result of being violently beaten - though it is hard to see why!

More usually he is set to meditate on a *kôan* - these are statements or responses totally devoid of meaning - until illumination is sparked off like a flash of lightning. Here are two examples; we may add that all of them are just as pointless.

1. A monk asks Ma-Tsou: "What is the Buddha?" Tsou replies: "Neither the heart nor the Buddha."
2. Or again, 'What is the meaning of the first Patriarch's visit to China?' Inspired answer: 'The cypress in the courtyard.'

¹² Founded not as a religion but a philosophical system for achieving enlightenment and escape from the chain of being, Buddhism was originally (and still is for many) an atheism. The Sanskrit term 'Buddha' was therefore first applied to its founder Gautama (5th century BC) in its strict sense of 'Enlightened One'. Later developments (particularly in northern Buddhism) produced a whole crop of deified figures, so that 'Buddha' today can mean anything from the individual enlightened soul to 'God' in the cosmic sense. Trans.

We are borne out by the '*Dictionnaire de la sagesse orientale*' when we maintain that "the basic characteristic of the *kôan* is paradox, what is beyond thought, what transcends logical and rational argument. It is not an 'enigma', since it cannot be resolved by the intelligence" (pub. Robert Laffont, article *Kôan*). It must trigger off a psychological shock that transports the disciple onto another plane of awareness. It "acts as an irreducible paradox, overturning and evading the rational constructions of the disciple's mind" ('*Dictionnaire des Religions*' directed by Mgr Poupard, article '*kôan*'). It is therefore understandable that we westerners should be incapable of grasping what is, in Fr. Van Straelen's words, "*pure and simple madness*". (See his '*Le Zen mystifié*', Beauchesne, 1985).

I do not understand how Zen adepts can assure us that they attain illumination through the use of *kôans*. I share Mgr Poupard's view (see his article 'Zen') that the technique is a sign of "Zen's anti-logical bent", a rejection of all we may gain through use of our intelligence.

Moreover, the guru¹³ often advises the indefinite repetition of a *kôan*. So the equivalent of the mantra, that corruption of true prayer, exists in Zen as well as in yoga, and we have already seen the drawbacks of this.

B. THE SOTO SCHOOL

Soto zen is more meditative and more popular than that of the Rinzai school. It knows only one rule for attaining liberation: namely meditation in a seated position, the *zazen*.

The *zazen* posture (sitting on a cushion, legs crossed, knees to the ground, spine very straight) is strangely similar to the lotus position in yoga. It is not surprising therefor if their results are identical. In fact, the '*Dictionnaire Encyclopedique Quillet*', in its article 'Zen', recalls that "This position encourages the subtle currents of energy" and has as its goal "the liberation of the mind from the straitjacket of ideas, images, visions and objects." ('*Dictionnaire de la Sagesse Orientale*'). It must foster an absolute calm for the spirit. To that end, the zen adept in the *zazen* posture tries to remain in a state not focussed on any object, not attached to any content. He must create an emptiness in himself, which will allow him to attain the illumination of his True Nature, or nature as Buddha, identical with that of the universe.

In fact, by the practice of *zazen*, they say, the adept unconsciously puts himself into harmony with the great movement of nature. Now, since "the whole universe is one body and our body is the whole universe (...), union with the absolute means, that man becomes God or Buddha", admits Evelyn de Smedt in his defence of Zen (p.160). It is in the silence rediscovered within himself that the Zen adept is united with the energy that animates both him and the cosmos. "*Zazen means to become one with the whole universe*" said Master Deshimaru (p.32).

¹³ In my view, the great success enjoyed by gurus and other pseudo-psychological advisers today is partly due to the fact that so many priests refuse to undertake spiritual direction of souls. "The sheep look up and are not fed", and so they turn to these unsatisfactory substitutes.

We must realize clearly that it is the *zazen* posture itself, and not the thoughts we may have while in that posture, that enable us to achieve illumination. "*Zazen is silence, absolute silence, silence of thought, zazen is the absence of thought*", Master Deshimaru declares elsewhere (p.42). Its one and only purpose is to facilitate our union with the absolute Self, to help us to become part of the universal order, to bring us back to our true selves, say the Zen adepts.. It must be practised without our setting ourselves any precise goal. "*All one must do is be calmly seated and concentrate exactly on a posture and a rhythm of breathing*" (de Smedt, p.97). For of course, the practice of Zen is linked to certain breathing exercises, though these, it is true, are less dangerous than those used in yoga.

In the light of all we have written, it seems evident that Zen is totally incompatible with Christianity, if only for the fact that it denies and destroys human nature. Our detractors will object that there are other schools of Zen.

We do not deny this, but they all have much in common with the Rinzai and Soto schools, which in any case include more than 75% of all adepts. There is no point in criticizing the two practices mentioned (*kôan* and *zazen*); their very description shows them to be harmful. Only an unhealthy mind could find them wholesome. And yet, as for yoga, their praises are constantly sung, and Christians are urged to practise them.

IV. ZEN IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY

A. ZEN IS MORE THAN A MEDITATIVE TECHNIQUE

We have already stated our view that the practice of Zen gives rise to a new manner of being, opposed to Christianity. This has not prevented Christian religious houses from recommending it. The '*Encyclopédie Universalis*' admits this fact and deplores it:

"Under the guise of research into the comparative philosophy of religions, commentators and propagandists have allowed an excessive desire for syncretism to lead them to discover similarities and even direct links between ch'an (the Chinese form of Zen) and Christianity (...); at the very least this tendency leads to obscurity and the distortion of meanings."

It is the opposite that confronts us more often. Christian Zen adepts assure us that for them Zen is merely a technique for meditation. Now, as we have seen, this is precisely what Zen is not, since its aim is to arrive at the opposite, at the end of all thought. The *kôan*, for example, offers no material for thought, sets no task for our reflective faculty to bite on; it consists merely of a completely absurd answer to a question.

B. IS ZEN A WAY TO SALVATION?

Further (as J.K. Kadowaki reminds us), "*we must not call Zen a method, but a Way, a Way which is at the same time the journey towards the goal and the place where, step by step, the goal is already realized.*" (p.47).

Zen thus sees itself as both Way and Goal. So does Jesus Christ We have to choose between these two different ways.

Not only does Zen claim to be the Way, but it is based on the postulate that we are each of us God. Zen is therefore the Way that reminds each adept of his divinity. This is why (notes Linssen in his *'Bouddhisme, Taoïsme et Zen'*, p.77) "*the masters of Zen consider that the God of the Christians - is only a mental projection of their own minds.*" Similarly, Master Suzuki writes (in his *'Essais sur le Bouddhisme Zen'*, vol.II, p.199): "*In Christianity we seem to be too aware of God (...). It is Zen's desire that the very last traces of this thought of God, should, if possible, be effaced.*"

Why should they want this? Because any idea of God prevents "*a narcissistic withdrawal into oneself*" (van Straelen, p.93), which is the aim of Zen. We catch a glimpse, moreover, of the emptiness hidden behind so deep an egoism, for the cult of self leads to the cult of nihilism¹⁴ since, as Cardinal Bérulle magnificently expressed it: "*Man is a nothingness, but a nothingness that is capable of God.*" If he is robbed of that capability, only nothingness is left him, with its consequence: complete egoists end in complete self-disgust.

"The adept of Zen loses any possibility of personal identity: he is working towards his own disintegration as a person. We have seen this happening frequently among the slaves of Zen." (Van Straelen, p.61).

Only a complete misunderstanding of Zen, or colossal mental dishonesty could make us believe that Zen is compatible with Christianity.

C. CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL LIFE AND ZEN MYSTICISM

We are also asked to believe that the oriental gymnastic philosophies have been known for centuries...and practised by Christians, the name always adduced in this connection being that of the 13th century Dominican Meister Eckhart. What proponents of this argument generally forget to add is that Eckhart was as close to being a pantheist as makes no difference, and that the Church condemned 17 of his propositions as definitely heretical and a further 11 as suspect of heresy. Not a very convincing example!

The example of St Paul is also invoked here: did he not make himself an Athenian when he was among the Greeks? True, but we are not in Japan but in France. It would be more appropriate for us to adopt our own Graeco-Latin civilisation, not that that of the Orient. In any case, St. Paul's motive in acting as a Greek among the Greeks was to raise their culture and civilisation onto the plane of Christianity, not to adopt them unchanged.

We too can quote saints in support of our argument. The great saint and doctor of the spiritual life Teresa of Avila can have had no knowledge of Zen, but in the following words (quoted by Van Straelen, op.cit.p.28) she described and condemned it in advance: "*We are never allowed to try to eliminate the intelligence and to halt our intellectual activity by means of various techniques, so as to await, with our inner minds passive and empty, the onset of illumination.*"

¹⁴ "Psychosomatic training methods that lead to emptiness, to the primordial nothingness (in the sense understood by Hinduism or Zen), are for Christians a cult of nihilism", declared Dr. Klaus M. Becker in his *'Pris d'entre les hommes'* ('Taken from among men' - 1978, p.19).

The Christian mystical life does not consist in the quest for a particular experience. It is a leap, with God's grace, into the unspeakable depths of the divine mystery. It is the full development of the grace of our baptism. There is no need for visions or extraordinary ecstasies. Everything can happen very simply, for it is a very profound and at the same time peaceful awareness of God, an experience of God which will impregnate one's whole life, and mark as though with a seal the person who has known it.

"The mystic experience *cannot be separated from Truth*" said Cardinal Danielou (in *'La Foi de Toujours et l'Homme d'Aujourd'hui'*, Beauchesne, 1969, p.140). "...One of the temptations of the man of today would seem to be that of attaching importance only to inward experience, and making the faith something purely subjective. We reject that utterly. Faith is not primarily a question of inner experience; it is first of all a question of truth. The problem is not that of knowing what I feel, but of knowing WHAT IS."

This is why St. John of the Cross, the mystical doctor, was always less than enthusiastic, and even suspicious, where visions were concerned, since these have nothing to do with the Faith.

The Christian mystical experience points the soul towards God in three persons, and not towards itself (not that we may reject our 'self', the gift Our Lord Himself has made us). It enkindles the flame of charity in us, so that we can bring forth acts of love. Now Henry Van Straelen ¹⁵, in the study we have mentioned above, is quite categorical that the contrary does not apply. He has never seen any sign of people growing more charitable, he has never encountered in them an overflowing love extended to those around them after the practice of Zen. Never, in the whole history of Buddhism, has he found any evidence of victims of persecution praying for or forgiving their persecutors or torturers. For Buddhism, the idea of loving-kindness exists only in an ideal dream-world, he maintains, and this is confirmed by Master Suzuki, "*Buddhists have no intention of doing good*" (quoted in Charles E. Tuttle, *'Zen Way, Jesus Way'*, Tokyo, 1976). They consider themselves above such notions as good and evil. Redemption goes out of the window; one saves oneself by one's own efforts.

As for original sin, its place is taken by a quite different concept: the rediscovery of one's lost divine nature. This has an important consequence: for the Christian the existence of suffering is due to Adam's desire to be like God. The remedy for suffering lies in taking the opposite line. It is through humility that we shall achieve the supreme beatitude, by recognizing that all men are sinners, and ourselves first of all.

By contrast, for the Zen adept the remedy lies in his recognition of his (claimed) divinity.

¹⁵ We may rely on Van Straelen to know what he talking about. As a Ph.D. from the university of Cambridge, who has spent more than 40 years as a missionary in Japan, has lectured on comparative religion in Japanese and preached the retreats of St. Ignatius, he was ideally placed to observe the harm caused by Zen.

It must be emphasized that his opposition to it is not one of principle. He practised Zen for a period and, at the beginning of his apostolate he made some effort to Christianise the eastern religions and to replace Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, etc., by oriental sages... only to realize finally that what he was trying to do was impossible

Hence these two statements by Fr. Van Straelen (underlined by the author): "There is nothing in either Zen or yoga that could be considered as Christian mysticism." (p.147), and "I have never encountered in Zen Buddhism even the merest whisper of a supernatural world or a supernatural order."(p.166).

D. CHRISTIAN SAINT AND ZEN SAGE

Comparisons between the Christian saint and the Zen sage are therefore meaningless. The saint has not renounced his selfhood; he has purified it. His prayer is that of a dialogue between him and God. He remains fully aware of the impassable (because infinite) gulf separating his nature from that of Our Lord, while the Zen adept rejects the world's dualism and identifies himself with the divinity.

To use Ruysbroeck's terms, the saint is one in love, but he is not one in being and nature, since Christian mysticism is one of "communion" with the personal, and even tri-personal God revealed by Jesus Christ, and not a mysticism of "fusion" in an impersonal absolute.

In Christianity, man does not himself acquire wisdom; he receives it from God through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

E. SATORI (i.e. ILLUMINATION) AND SATAN

In the light of what we have written, it is hardly surprising if *satori* - which bears a strange similarity to yoga *samadhi* or the Buddhist nirvana - should show signs of a satanic presence.

As we have already made clear in the case of yoga, we do not believe that Zen adepts claiming to have received illumination do in fact attain nothingness. What they do receive is rather a satanic enlightenment aping the pure intelligence of God.

Here are two items of evidence that are all the more interesting in that they are quoted in '*Chemin de l'illumination zen*' by H. Dumoulin, an author who recommends the practice of Zen:

1. *"During meditation, in a squatting posture, I was tormented by all sorts of diabolic apparitions."*
2. *"A nun, temperamentally prone to ecstatic phenomena, who meditated on the kôan night and day, and was subject to the strangest psychic and physical states, was suddenly awakened one night by a loud noise: her feet grew rigid and began to describe a dancing movement under the blanket. Her body was filled by an intense feeling of indescribable pleasure. She later underwent the backlash in the form of intense pain. Para-psychical phenomena such as levitation and cessation of breathing marked her development to the threshold of illumination."*

An even more tangible proof occurs in the initiation rite. As Father van Straelen writes (p.61):

"The right of initiation into Transcendental Meditation, the puja, is a truly idolatrous act of worship: offerings of flowers and fruit are made to the photo of Guru Dev, accompanied by a formula of consecration in Sanskrit. The secret mantra given to each disciple is usually the name of a Hindu divinity. This fact alone should arouse our suspicions as to the spiritual harm wrought by T.M."

Nearly all Oriental practices contain similar ceremonies. We may remember that the first Christians were martyred for their refusal to worship the emperor. The act of worship was nevertheless a simple one: one merely had to burn a few grains of incense before one of the imperial statues. For refusing to perform that act they suffered persecution after persecution. In view of this I do not see how our Catholic Zen adepts can see their use of such rites as other than an indirect renunciation of their Christian faith.

It is perhaps also for this reason that Fr. Van Straelen concludes his excellent study with the following question: "One may wonder whether eastern meditative techniques are not a more subtle and more dangerous form of a wealth, powers and possession than money itself." (p.191). His opinion of Zen is shared, moreover, by most Japanese clergy and religious.

F. THE VIEW OF CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

It is a pity that western Catholics who have taken up Zen are not aware of the opinion of Japanese clergy and religious. Placed as they are in the front line, the latter are better able than most to assess the pros and cons.

Now, Fr. Van Straelen affirms (and backs the point by quotations), that almost all the Japanese bishops and at least 90% of priests and missionaries (those who have lived there for longer than 20 years) forbid Christians to use Zen as a method of meditation.

Even "*Fathers Arrupe, when he was Jesuit Provincial in Japan, had forbidden the introduction of Zen prayer techniques into the noviciate.*" (p.110). As we know, Fr. Arrupe later became Superior General of the Jesuit order, and gave it a very progressive tendency (he was by no means hostile to liberation theology).

Cardinal Taguchi, too, when he was in Holland, accompanied by the secretary of the Japanese Bishops' Conference, said to Fr. Van Straelen: "*Father, I beg you, don't make any propaganda in Europe in favour of Zen. I want nothing to do with it. Almost all, we Japanese priests think the same.*" (p.64).

Such hostility to Zen is easy to understand. When Abbot du Phare (a Japanese Trappist) was asked to explain such an attitude, he just answered: "*Zen is a life...It is not a method, but a complete all-embracing life-style... Citeaux is a whole way of life, too.*" (Quoted in the report of the Trappist general chapter in Rome, 1974, pp.120-122).

Between these two ways of life a choice must be made. And the Japanese abbots have rallied round the standard of Jesus Christ, following the example of Abbot Theobald Mizuno, who confided to Van Straelen:

"I shall never authorize the use in our abbey of Zen techniques, whatever they may be. It is quite simply impossible to separate them from their religious and philosophical background. If, despite everything, the attempt were to be made, the true Faith would sicken and die as a result." (p.63).

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4,9).

G. ZAEHNER'S VIEW SUMS UP OUR OPINION

Thanks to Louis Bouyer, Zaehner's friend, we have full knowledge of that eminent person's opinion on these eastern practices. We reproduce it here as reported in Louis Bouyer's book, since it seems to sum up perfectly what we have written.

"Zaehner himself... considered, on the basis of many contacts, enlightened by a rigorous study of the different traditions the scientific value of which no one has yet equalled, that the practice of yoga for westerners was in general extremely dangerous.

As for Zen, he did not hesitate to denounce it in the most formal terms, backed by closely studied experience, as a truly diabolical enterprise. As he put it, their active involvement in the world and its activities means that the personality of westerners is superficially over-developed; as individuals they tend to be rootless, or insufficiently rooted in their own deeper spiritual traditions, and when such natures are exposed to yoga, after an initial stage of blissful pacification, the long-term result is a schizoid state which, in the case of the less stable or over-driven minds, can end in incurable schizophrenia.

With Zen it is much worse. A sort of fearful magic is at work inside the soul, striving with devilish skill to produce the illusion of mystical experiences of all kinds, and with undeniable success. But these successes have to be paid for by the development of an arrogance of the self, or rather of the super-self, leaving the adept at the risk (frequently realized) of falling a defenceless victim to obsessions, and in the last analysis, to states of possession in which Satan must appear to him as an incontrovertible reality." (Quoted from Louis Bouyer in 'Mystiques cosmiques et mystiques interpersonnelles', on page 150 of the symposium "Des bords du Gange aux rives du Jourdain".)

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Zen is dangerous for body and soul. It cannot therefore be considered as a way or as an aid towards Christian spirituality, nor as a means of satisfying the deepest aspirations of the heart. At bottom it is only a way of avoiding problems or running away from them. It puts in doubt our vision of reality and radically alters the mode of awareness of the human mind.

Writers who praise the merits of Zen are, to use Van Straelen's words, "*enthusiasts for Zen rather than initiates of Zen, and this robs their arguments of objectivity in the matter.*" (p.17).

Christianity possesses its own very rich mystical traditions (those of Carmel, of St Francis de Sales, of the Franciscans and Dominicans...). We should adopt one or more of these, and not espouse an eastern mysticism that is considered even in its homeland as a "mysticism of the void".

Jean-Pierre Marie

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY FOR YOGA AND ZEN

[Yoga terms are in Sanskrit, so the language is not stated; for Zen words we state whether they are Chinese or Japanese, etc.]

ADVAITA: "non-twoness", denial of duality, strict monism; the highest Vedantic truth, as taught by the school of *Saṅkara* (q.v.).

ASANA: posture.

ÂTMAN: soul, self, ego. (See MAHÂTMA).

BHAKTI: piety, devotion, love.

BHAKTI-YOGA: the yoga of love.

BRAHMA: supreme Hindu deity (= 'creator').

BRAHMAN: world-soul, ultimate divine reality of which world is a manifestation.

BUDDHA, BUDDHISM: see article on Zen, footnote 12.

Ç: words beginning with Ç cedilla can often be found also with initial S, Sh, Ch, q.v.

ÇAKRA: reservoirs of latent power in KUNDALINI-YOGA (q.v.).

ÇANKARA, SHAÑKARA: probable founder (8th c. A.D.) of ADVAITA (q.v.) VEDANTA (q.v.) school of philosophy. (SAÑKARA)

ÇAKTI, SHAKTI: female divinity, "energy".

ÇASTRA, SHASTRA: code(s) of law.

CH'AN: a Chinese adaption of Buddhism containing many elements of Taoism (q.v.).

ÇRATI: revelation.

DARÇANA: philosophical System(s)

DHARANA: meditation.

DHARMA: custom, virtue, justice, the moral law.

DHYANA: 'concentration' (becomes 'zen' in Japanese).

GURU: spiritual master, teacher.

HATHA-YOGA: a tantric (q.v.) yoga; yoga of violence.

HINAYANA: 'Lesser Vehicle' Southern Buddhism (of Burma, Thailand, Ceylon) -less 'religious', more philosophical.

JÑÂNA: knowledge

JÑÂNA -YOGA: yoga of knowledge, awareness, wisdom (= RAJA-YOGA, q.v.).

KARMA(N): action, law of merit and reward.

KARMA MÂRGA: disinterested action.

KARMA-YOGA: yoga of action.

KÔAN (Jap. = 'public plan'): meaningless riddle used in Zen to teach inadequacy of logical reasoning. See above 'RINZAI SCHOOL'.

KUNDALINI: vital energy in a dormant state.

KUNDALINI-YOGA: a tantric (q.v.) yoga.

MAHÂTMA: "great soul".

MAHÂRISHI: "great sage".

MAHÂYANA: 'Greater Vehicle, Northern Buddhism (China, Japan, Tibet).

MANAS: thought, mental activity.

MANTRA: repeated word or phrase used as incantation.

MÂYÂ: difference, appearance, illusion, the irrational.

MOKSÂ, MUKTI: liberation (from chain of rebirth).

MUDIA: ritual gestures.

MUKTI: liberation (from chain of rebirth).

NIRVANA: Beatitude attained by extinction of individuality and desires; release from effects of KARMA (q.v.).

NIYAMA: observances.

PATAÑJALI: supposed author of YOGASÛTRA and thus 'inventor' of yoga (2nd-1st c. B.C.).

PRAKRITI: original matter.

PRÂNA: universal dynamic principle underlying all forms of energy..

PRÂNAYAMA: control of breathing.

PRATYÂHÂRA: withdrawal from world of senses.

PUJA: Hindu religious rite, act of worship.

PURANA: ancient Hindu legendary or mythological text.

PURUSHA: the ultimate Spirit, = Brahman (q.v.).

RÂJA-YOGA: 'royal yoga' (= jñâna-yoga q.v.) as formulated by Patañjali q.v.

RÂMÂNUJA: a theistic Vedantist, less monist than Sañkara q.v., (12th c.)

SAMADHI: 'Enstasis', the ultimate realization of the oneness of âtman and brahman.

SAMSÂRA: transmigration of souls, reincarnation.

SAÑKARA: founder of strict monistic Vedanta (8th c. AD).

SÂNKHYA (also SÂMKHYA): a dualistic philosophy.

SATORI: (Jap.) Illumination, sudden enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. Cf. samadhi in yoga.

SHAKTI (ÇAKTI): female divinity, 'energy'.

SHAstra (and ÇASTRA): code(s) of law.

SIDDHA YOGA > Transcendental Meditation.

SIDDHI: extraordinary, 'miraculous' powers.

SIVA: third of divine triad in modern Hinduism. See note 10.

SMRITI: tradition.

TANTRIC: mystical, magical (types of yoga).

TAO: (Chinese = 'Way'): the principle underlying universe.

TAOISM: Chinese religio-philosophic system, a mixture of animism, ancestor-worship, the doctrines of Lao Tzu (5th c. BC), etc. The Taoist strives by thought, contemplation, finally ecstasy, to be united with the Supreme Reality, the Tao, and is then freed from the world of Illusion and achieves immortality.

UPANISHADS: philosophic texts (c. 800-500 BC) exploring significance of Vedas (q.v.).

VASANA: the result of our acts in each incarnation, the total of merits & demerits inevitably leading to new reincarnation. The object of yoga is to transcend our vasanas, break chain of actions & their consequences & so achieve final liberation from rebirth.

VEDA(s): ancient Hindu scriptures (c. 1500-500 BC).

VEDANTA: (= 'end of the Vedas'). Monistic philosophy based on UPANISHADS (q.v.).

VISHNU: Second member of divine triad in modern Hinduism. See footnote 10. The gods Rama and Krishna are seen as avatars of Vishnu.

YAMA: curbing of passions.

YOGA: philosophy tending toward realization of unity of *âtman* (q.v.) and *brahman* (q.v.).

BHAKTI-YOGA: yoga of love.

HATHA-YOGA: tantric yoga of violent asceticism.

JÑÂNA-YOGA: yoga of knowledge (= RÂJA-YOGA).

KARMA-YOGA: yoga of action.

KUNDALINI-YOGA: a tantric yoga.

SIDDHA-YOGA: e.g. Transcendental Meditation.

YOGASÛTRA: basic text of the yoga, attributed to Patañjali (q.v.).

YOGI, YOGIN: an adept of yoga.

ZAZEN: (Jap.) the meditative posture adopted by the Soto school of Zen. By extension, the meditative process itself.

IÇVARAPRANIDHÂNA: a relatively minor devotion to Içvara, a divinity who according to the Yogasûtra first communicated yoga to men. ■