

CLASS at Wisdom's Goldenrod, Hector, NY
with Anthony Damiani (AD)
August 2, 1984
PB PARAS; PHILOSOPHY; BUDDHISM AND VEDANTA

TOPIC: PB Paras

SUBJECT: Philosophy

SUBSUBJECTS: Buddhism and Vedanta, Epistemological vs. Ontological Perspectives

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KNOWING; NIRVIKALPA AND SAHAJA**

BOOKS READ FROM OR REFERENCED:

- Paul Brunton, *Notebooks*. 16 vols; Vol. 1 entitled *Perspectives* [*Persp.*].
- Paul Brunton, *The Wisdom of the Overself*
- Prince Shotoku, *Yuimakyo Gisho*, Vol. II
- Buddha, *Alagadupama Majjhima*

NOTES:

- Anthony Damiani and WG group met with His Holiness the Dalai Lama Sept. 29, 1984, and therefore many WG classes in Aug-Sept. 1984 had at least a semi-focus on Buddhism.
- There is a duplicate set of tapes for this class which are dated 08/01/84. These differ, in that the copy made from 08/01/84 is slightly more inclusive at the beginning of Tape 1, Side 2. JF's notes indicate this class was actually held 08/02/84 (Thurs.).
- No AD on Audio File 1984 0802b, not transcribed.
- Earlier transcript versions exist (including one from mid 1980s by David Ruth).
- This class is related thematically to WG Classes 1984 0620, 0808, 0822, and 0919.

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AUDIO FILES: 1984 0802a, 1984 0802b. [Note: “Tape” and “Side” refer to original audio cassette tapes that were later digitized into .MP3 Audio Files.]

1984 08/02 at Wisdom's Goldenrod
PB Paras; Philosophy; Buddhism and Vedanta
Readable Edited Transcript

**# DUAL STANDPOINT – STATIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND MOMENT-BY-MOMENT
PRESENTATION OF THE WORLD-IDEA; PB PARAS ON BUDDHISM AND
VEDANTA**

[Audio File 1984 0802a Begins]

AS: . . .

AH: Anthony suggested a theme, and asked for some specific quotes regarding that theme. . . . The topic was the necessity of taking the dual standpoint in philosophy. . . . Two weeks ago Anthony made a comment at the end of the Wednesday night class in regards to one way of speaking about the dual standpoint in philosophy is to see the juxtaposition of what he refers to as metaphysical perspective which he described as Buddhism, and I double-checked with him (inaudible), and juxtaposed with a more psychological view of Vedanta. And I'm not able to articulate what he means by those descriptions except that Vedanta is the static position of consciousness and Buddhism would represent the moment-by-moment presentation of the World-Idea. He said look for quotes that deal with the resolution of those two extreme positions. There are many of them, and I think we found some that were provocative. Let me read a few short ones to frame the issues.

PB: "*Atman*--one of the most important and basic doctrines in Sanskrit learning. To take Atman as self is to confirm and strengthen the very error which the doctrine of Atman seeks to refute! Such a procedure imbues the mind anew with the thought of "I." For in Atman there can be no such thing as a personal entity, no existence of an ego at all. Those who have studied both the Hindu *Upanishads* and the Buddhist *Abhidhamma* sufficiently and profoundly cannot fail to observe that Atman is merely the intellectual parallel and counterpart of Nirvana. And who has more strongly fought the belief in self than Buddha?" (15.2.277 & Persp. p. 192)

PB: "The difference between Advaita Vedanta and Mahayana Buddhism is smaller than it seems, although advocates of both sides have tried to make it seem greater than I believe it really is. A distinguished Indian authority on Advaita has written that the Buddhist doctrine of the momentariness of existence--that is, the moment-to-moment nature of existence--is a great stumbling block to a reconciliation of the two true religions. (These are not his words, but my own.) The concept of a Void has led to some misunderstanding in Western circles. It has been equated with annihilation by some and with nihilism by others. But this is not so, for the world appears out of it. It is neither absolute nothingness nor the All. The Buddha himself said that nothing can vanish from the universe, but nothing new can arise in it; that fundamentally there is no change. We can add, therefore, that there is no cause-and-effect relationship, which is also a teaching of Advaitic Vedanta. A Buddhist philosopher, Aryadeva, observed: "If I neither admit a thing's reality nor its unreality, nor both at once, then to confute me a long time will be needed." This is merely saying negatively what Advaita Vedanta says positively when it declares that only Brahmin IS. After much search, however, I have succeeded in finding, for the first time, a reference by an enlightened Mahayanist to what he called nonduality, which is exactly the same term used by

Advaitins. But before I give the reference, since it concerns the Void, I must also mention that this doctrine of the Void is a second stumbling block between the two religions. The quotation is: “The insight of the Bodhisattva penetrates into being but never loses sight of the Void. Abiding in it, he accomplishes all works. For him the Void means Being, and Being means Void. He does not stay one-sidedly in either being or non-being, but synthesizes both, in nonduality.” Although I have never seen any other reference to nonduality in the Mahayana texts, this reference is important because of the source from which it is taken. It is taken from a book which, so far as I know, has not yet been translated into English. It is called *Yuimakyo Gisho* (Vol. II, pg. 55-a). The author of this quotation is very famous in Japanese history, much admired and much respected. He is Prince Shotoku. He was the Crown Prince and Regent of Japan and was loved by the people. He wrote some commentaries upon the Mahayana sutras.” (15.2.273)

PB: “During the night when Gautama entered Buddhahood and the great revelation of the Good Law was made to him, he discovered that existence was from moment to moment, discontinuous. The Hindu sages deny this and assert it is *continuous* in the Self. The pity of it is that both are right. For what happens in every interval between two moments? We then live solely and exclusively in the Self, the Absolute, delivered from Relativity and Finitude.

“Many “still” photographs make up a cinema film. The break between every pair of pictures is not reported to the conscious mind because fast movement outruns attention. The symbolism is interesting: see *The Wisdom of the Overself*, Chapter 14, seventh meditation, for a more detailed explanation. Whoever attempts this exercise should practise it with the eyes only slightly open.

“Then why did not the Buddha finish his announcement and give the entire truth? For the same reason he carefully kept quiet on several other points which could disturb men dependent on religion--on its representatives and rites, its customs and dogmas, and especially its past--to the point of enslavement. He likened the human predicament to being in a burning house and directed attention to the urgent need, which was to get out *now* and thus get saved. Here is a key word: the Present, manipulated rightly, can open the practitioner’s mind. Then the Timeless itself may take him out of time (he, the personal self, cannot do it), out of the now into the Eternal NOW. If it is no easily successful way there is always the long detour of other ways found by men.” (19.4.172 & Persp. p. 243)

PB: “The concept of nonduality given by the Advaitins seems impossible to grasp and to accept to the normal Western mind and quite rightly so. This impasse must exist unless and until the situation is clarified and the only way to do so lies through mentalism. The human mind normally functions in a dualistic manner--that is, it identifies itself as a subject with an object of its consciousness outside. This dualism penetrates the practices followed on the Quest and the knowledge gained as a consequence of them. It cannot be got rid of until both subject and object are thrown into and unified by the pure consciousness--Mind--in which, from which, and by which all happens. In this connection a further point must be established. I have written admiringly of two great souls--Sri Ramana Maharshi and Shankaracharya of Kanchi, the spiritual head of South India. Now both these are strict followers of the original, the first Shankaracharya, who lived more than a thousand years ago, and they quote from his writings very frequently. Whoever studies those writings will discover that Adi Shankara, meaning the first Shankara, in his arguments against the Buddhists--especially those of the idealistic Yogacara and Vijnana schools--seems to reject idealism which is an incomplete form of mentalism. But let us not forget that Shankara was engaged in a campaign to reduce the power of Buddhism and increase the power of Hinduism. Let us not forget too that Buddha himself was not bound by any such bias; he was a free

thinker and he did not hesitate to question the authority of the *Vedas* which Shankara followed and accepted. The Buddha rejected animal sacrifices and futile religious rituals, for instance. It is to Shankara's credit that he gave out the Advaitic teaching of nonduality--which is impossible for a Western mind in all its rationality to accept unless it falls into mysticism and yoga. Both the living Shankara and Ramana Maharshi were upholders of Hinduism. As I have said, the doctrine of nonduality is quite acceptable when presented with a mentalistic explanation or through a mystical experience, but not otherwise." (15.2.355 & Persp. pp. 190-191)

PB: "The apparent void out of which the universe seems to have been made, created, born, or evolved, is really the essence, the being, the life-power of God." (Persp. p. 247 only (19z.p))

PB: "The Void is the state of Mind in repose, and the appearance-world is its (in)activity. At a certain stage of their studies, the seeker and the student have to discriminate between both in order to progress; but further progress will bring them to understand that there is no *essential* difference between the two states and that Mind is the same in both." (19.5.7 & Persp. p. 247)

PB: "Students who have come finally to philosophy from the Indian Advaita Vedanta, bring with them the belief that the divine soul having somehow lost its consciousness is now seeking to become self-conscious again. They suppose that the ego originates and ends on the same level--divinity--and therefore the question is often asked why it should go forth on such a long and unnecessary journey. This question is a misconceived one. It is not the ego itself which ever was consciously divine, but its source, the Overself. The ego's divine character lies in its essential but hidden being, but it has never known that. The purpose of gathering experience (the evolutionary purpose) is precisely to bring it to such awareness. The ego comes to slow birth in finite consciousness out of utter unconsciousness and, later, to recognition and union with its infinite source. That source, whence it has emanated, remains untouched, unaffected, ever knowing and serenely witnessing. The purpose in this evolution is the ego's own advancement. When the Quest is reached, the Overself reveals its presence fitfully and brokenly at first but later the hide-and-seek game ends in loving union." (26.4.256 & Persp. p. 368)

PB: "Buddhism points out that although Nirvana *is*, there is no self to perceive it. As Buddhism denies a permanent self, the question of what Nirvana is *experimentally* does not arise. Nirvana is not a state of mind which is to be produced but is what is realized when the long-cherished notion of "I" is given up. Nirvana, in short, is the miracle of egoless being. The Buddha's doctrine of the soul was stated in negative terms because he was controverting current misconceptions. He explained this in *Alagadupama Majjhima*, 1, 135: "Even in this present life, my brethren, I say that the soul is indefinable. Though I say and teach thus, there are those who accuse me falsely of being a nihilist, of teaching the non-existence and annihilation of the soul. That is what *I am not and do not teach.*" (22.3.406)

(Q: student discussion almost to end of Tape 1, Side 1.)

CdA: I have a communique. . . . Anthony can't talk . . . so he wrote this:

AD: (as read by CdA) "Nirvana is a statement of and on Being, that is, it is metaphysical. Atma, the principle of knowledge, true Knower, that is an epistemological statement."

(Q: student discussion continues through end of Tape 1, Side 1.)

(Side 1 of original cassette tape digitized as 1984 0802a Ends; Side 2 Begins)

COMBINING BUDDHISM AND VEDANTA GIVES WHOLE PERSPECTIVE; BEING AND KNOWING; NIRVIKALPA AND SAHAJA

AD: Not conciliatory, PB's not conciliatory. He's saying you only have half of it. If you're a Vedantist you have half, if you're a Buddhist you have half. The two together gives you the whole thing.

RC: . . .

AD: I'm sorry, Randy.

RC: (Q: referring to the first para beginning "ATMAN") You called the Atman the intellectual parallel and counterpart of Nirvana. It seems that both of them are terms that are part of the intellectual expression of some kind of insight. Do you think that they are intellectual expressions of the same insight or different ones?

AD: No, they're the same insight. It's an intellectual expression of that insight that the Vedantists are always concerned about--Pure Consciousness. (pause)

Isn't it part of the repertoire that we've built up in understanding PB? He speaks about the Soul as having a dual nature. He speaks about it as having, so to speak, the World-Idea germinate within it. And then he speaks about the Soul as being a principle of intellectuality or consciousness in itself. Now, obviously, if your analysis, if in your analysis the leading--in other words, if you lead your analysis and you're concerned about the nature of "Who am I?" you're going to come up with the notion of a pure changeless consciousness. If in your analysis you're concerned about understanding the nature of the world, in other words, the "WHAT am I?", then you are going to come up with a cosmological or a metaphysical understanding of the nature of the World-Idea and the consciousness which is the substratum of that World-Idea. What other choice do you have? In other words, you either work off the "Who am I?" or the "What am I?". Now PB keeps pointing out that unless the two of them are brought together you are not going to have a philosophic position. You are going to always be shorthanded.

Remember the quotation--he speaks about Atmananda? This person went over and told Atmananda he can go into trance and stay in Nirvikalpa as long as he wants; and Atmananda says yes, but that's not enough. You've got to understand the nature of the world with that mind. Isn't it obvious now? Atmananda's a sage. He's telling him, in order for you to get a complete philosophic understanding, you have to understand the nature of "Who am I?". And you have to understand the nature of what the world is. And one by themselves, or either, is, so to speak, half the picture.

AH: Anthony, this quote on p. 247 [Perspectives] that refers to the Void as a state of mind in repose and the apparent world in its activity. Is that appropriate to what you're discussing?

AD?: Go ahead.

AH: It seems that you just described the content of this quotation, if I follow.

AD: No.

AH: I guess I missed it. Go ahead, Avery.

AS: I don't know if this is appropriate to throw more quotes out onto the floor, but I thought of one in particular.

AD: Well, Avery, to answer his question, for the moment. No, that quotation that you're using--You have mind, and the very nature of mind, the substance of mind is Void. But its activity does produce appearance, a world. Now that's an analysis of cosmology and that is the Buddhist position, like I was trying to point out. That's not the Vedantic position. The Vedantists would go into an analysis of the subjectivity.

AH: That would not be understood as the mind in repose?

AD: I'm sorry?

AH: You could not understand the Vedantic analysis of subjectivity as this quote refers to the mind in repose?

AD: There the analysis IS in terms of cosmology. It's not in terms of subjectivity. It's not in terms of epistemology.

AH: OK.

AD: Now, it's better you take one quote at a time because then you start discussing metaphysics here, you'll get entangled. Try working with one at a time. Later on when you become proficient, then you could do two, three, four, you know?

RC: Do you think any of the ones that have been read would be good?

AD: Any one of them we read.

RC: Any one in particular?

AD: I like them all, but one at a time.

DR: Just the one we were still doing on Atman. If you take the beginning of the quote again where he says, "To take Atman as self is to confirm and strengthen the very error which the doctrine of Atman seeks to refute!" [on Perspectives p. 192, #2, & 15.2.277.] And he's saying that you don't want to reimburse the mind with the thought of I. I can understand if the entire thrust of the statement, is just to say that Atman is not the ego, then I can understand the quote. But if you say that Atman is coming from an epistemological point of view--and I don't really have a difficulty with that, I just want to understand what PB might mean in the beginning of this quote--if you say that Atman is the thrust of going for the epistemological I, then why would he [PB] be saying "To take Atman as self is to strengthen the error which the doctrine seeks to refute"?

RG: . . . what I think he means by the epistemological position there is that the principle of awareness--what is lighting up all your knowledge, not what is--and that includes the ego for the Vedantins, so it would be inappropriate to take the principle of consciousness which lights up all your knowledge, which is a true epistemological position. But what you have to found any epistemology on is: what is--who is that which knows. Anything else you consider as what knows is not the real Vedantic position, and the

confusion of any form of ego with the light of consciousness--and that is what the doctrine of Atman seeks to refute.

DR: Still you're approaching this consciousness through the notion of subjectivity.

RG: Yes.

DR: But then you're saying that this notion of subject is not at all the Self, is not at all the I--

AD: The Self is not the ego!

DR: "Not the ego" I can understand.

AD: You think when they say Atman is Brahman, they're saying the ego is Brahman?

DR: I never thought that.

AD: Well, what do you think they mean by Atma then?

DR: Well, I didn't want to deal with Atman as Brahman here.

AD: But you've got to come out front with this here--otherwise you don't understand what the Vedantists are talking about.

DR: Well, if you take them to be saying an underlie, a consciousness that . . .

AD: What do you take it to mean when they say Atma?

DR: Let's say this Principle of Awareness.

AD: OK. Mind. Alright, sure.

DR: Now the difficulty that I'm going to have is: take that principle of awareness and try to juxtapose that against egoless being. How am I going to distinguish the principle of awareness from egoless being?

AD: But even in philosophy, you have things like epistemology, axiology, ontology. OK? Now, what does ontology mean?

DR: The study of being.

AD: Alright, what does epistemology mean?

DR: The study of knowledge.

AD: Of knowing. OK. So then, if I say epistemology, I'm referring to the analysis directed towards knowledge. If I say ontology, the analysis is towards being. I'll be analyzing the nature of the world, not the nature of KNOWING the world. So when the Buddhists are speaking about egoless being, they're speaking about the nature of the World-Idea. They're not speaking about the KNOWER of the World-Idea.

DR: So you're not making a hierarchy between the principle of awareness and the principle of being. You're just speaking of two complementary principles. Is that correct?

AD: I'm speaking, yes--and they're not even complementary, that's only one way of looking at it.

DR: What would be a better way of saying it?

AD: Well, they're different ASPECTS of the total picture that philosophy can give you. You can approach it through value. You can approach it through knowing. You can approach it through being. Any of these approaches are legitimate. So the Vedantist is approaching it through knowledge; the Buddhist is approaching it through being. You end up calling it Nirvana; the Vedantists will end up calling it Atma.

RG: But it's the same insight.

AD: Well, it's not quite the same because one is working through an analysis of the World-Idea and the other is working through an analysis of subjectivity. It is true that ULTIMATELY you're going to come up with Mind. Yes, ultimately. But you can see that the immediate analysis is going to take you through the realm of subjectivity or epistemology, or through the realm of ontology.

RG: But in taking one through the realm of ontology in the Buddhist analysis, when they're describing Nirvana as this state of egoless being, is the experience any different when the Buddhist gets there than for the person who's going the Vedantic way through epistemology?

AD: Well, that's something you have to answer, and I think it has to be answered according to the context, because the reference may be, on the one hand, to the difference between Nirvikalpa and Sahaja.

RG: Well, in this quote, what would you say?

AD: I have to hear the quote. I heard too many to know which one.

AS: Can I interpret?

AD: Sure.

AS: That last statement? The difference between Nirvikalpa and Sahaja meaning that in the Nirvikalpa--his experience of reality, that wouldn't be the final understanding or insight into mind. But that in the Sahaja state both of these two aspects would be reconciled into one mind. In other words, if we said his insight is derived from Nirvikalpa experience then he would only get one side of the picture.

AD: Yes.

AS: And that in going through to the Sahaja state, he would have within the grasp of his insight both the World-Idea and the Soul.

DR: But would you say that the approach through awareness would take you to one experience, and the approach through being would take you to another experience, but to get Sahaja, you would have to be able to understand both, or as many others as you could glimpse.

AD: Well, the example that we gave before about Atmananda? When one of his students told him he was capable of Nirvikalpa? You have to bring that to bear in the analysis of WHAT, the WHAT, the World-Idea in order to evolve Sahaja. So if you wanted to have a hierarchy you would say you first have to acquire the ability to concentrate and interiorize your attention so that you can become aware of the soul

per se. In other words Nirvikalpa--thoughtless being. And then and only then can you bring that to an analysis of the World-Idea and evolve the Sahaja or the natural state, the state of peace which is natural. So you could think it as that having that kind of a hierarchy. I can't conceive of a person having won, let's say, Sahaja without having evolved Nirvikalpa. (inaudible)

RG: Would you say, Anthony, though that in this quote, the first one, "For in Atman there can be no such thing as a personal entity, no existence of an ego at all. . . . Atman is merely the parallel and counterpart of Nirvana." Now is that quote referring to the same experience, described in two different ways?

AD: Well-- (pause) "The intellectual counterpart of Nirvana." Ah, again, I would try to explain it without recourse to the quote. Remember we speak about the mind as having this dual aspect? That is, it has to be understood in this dual way or it can't be understood at all. And one of them was that it was a principle that was self-abiding, pure consciousness, and the other was that it germinates or unfolds the World-Idea and these two aspects--we could think of it as the I AM principle, and to reach that you have to go into Nirvikalpa, a thoughtless state. Now, could we say that that is the counterpart, or that is the PATH of the aspect, the other aspect? The other aspect of course being that once the person has evolved or developed the Nirvikalpa, he could go and understand the nature of the "What am I?" In other words, the "WHO" is the intellectual counterpart of the "WHAT". Could we look at it like that?

RG: Just one further question. If you pursue the "what" before you pursue the "who" what kind of experience would that give you? If you said that you needed--in other words, if the Buddhist approach, if you weren't first a Vedantist, and if you didn't get to that I AM consciousness prior to your looking at the World-Idea aspect, but you followed that through and got to that state which they're calling Nirvana, is that possible without first having the Atman experience?

AD: Ah--Do you got a quote on that?

AS: I think he has an answer to that too--

AD: Let's hear it.

AS: He talks about--the one on the bottom of page 263.

PB: "The highest contribution which mysticism can make is to afford its votaries glimpses of that grand substratum of the universe which we may call the Overself. These glimpses reveal It in the pure unmanifest non-physical essence that It ultimately is. They detach It from the things, creatures, and thoughts which make up this world of ours, and show It as It is in the beginning, before the world-dream made its appearance. Thus mysticism at its farthest stretch, which is Nirvikalpa samadhi, enables man to bring about the temporary disappearance of the world-dream and come into comprehension of the Mind within which, and from which, the dream emerges. The mystic in very truth conducts the funeral service of the physical world as he has hitherto known it, which includes his own ego. But this is as far as mysticism can take him. It is an illuminative and rare experience, but it is not the end. For the next task which he must undertake if he is to advance is to relate his experience of this world as real with his experience of the Overself as real. And this he can do only by studying the world's own nature, laying bare its mentalistic character and thus bringing it within the same circle as its source, the Mind. If he succeeds in doing this and in establishing this relation correctly, he will have finished his apprenticeship,

ascended to the ultimate truth, and become a philosopher. Thenceforward he will not deny the world but accept it.*

“The metaphysician may also perform this task and obtain an intellectual understanding of himself, the world, and the Overself. And he has this advantage over the mystic, that his understanding becomes permanent whereas the mystic’s rapt absorption must pass. But if he has not passed through the mystical exercises, it will remain as incomplete as a nut without a kernel. For these exercises, when led to their logical and successful issue in Nirvikalpa samadhi, provide the vivifying principle of experience which alone can make metaphysical tenets real.

“From all this we may perceive why it is quite correct for the mystic to look undistractedly within for his goal, why he must shut out the distractions and attractions of earthly life in order to penetrate the sacred precinct, and why solitude, asceticism, meditation, trance, and emotion play the most important roles in his particular experience. What he is doing is right and proper at his stage but is not right and proper as the last stage. For in the end he must turn metaphysician, just as the metaphysician must turn mystic and just as both must turn philosopher--who is alone capable of infusing the thoughts of metaphysics and the feelings of mysticism into the actions of everyday practical life.” (20.4.115 & Persp. pp. 263-264) (Q: this quote was discussed in depth on 08/22/84.)

(Q: * commentary follows first paragraph of above; about 3 minutes commentary follows second paragraph. The paragraphs were read separately, with student discussion occurring between the paragraphs, and after the completion of the quote, through the end of Tape 1, Side 2.)

*AD: That’s quite an answer to the question. That’s the answer to the question.

*RG: It is? How?

*AD: You argue the point. I just don’t have the wind.

*AS: . . . I thought the point was partly in the next paragraph, so I’ll read on.

*AD: Sure. Go ahead.

[Audio File 1984 0802a Ends. No AD on Audio File 1984 0802b, not transcribed.]