

Silence, Shunya and Shiva

A Kashmir Shaiva Perspective

By L. N. Sharma

The significance of a field such as Indo Judaic Studies hardly needs reiteration in the contemporary world in which religious hatred and violence have become normal. A dialogue between these two ancient religions would be of great help in removing misunderstanding at a time when forces of fundamentalism and fanaticism have let loose a reign of terror and bloodbath never before seen or heard. A free and fair exchange of views would certainly lead to mutual tolerance and understanding.

Jews and Hindus can learn much from each other. They have much in common between them. They represent the religious traditions which have produced most of the major religions of the world. They may be called the mother religions, which have conceived, nurtured, and nourished world religions. Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam grew out of the fertile culture of Judea and India. Hinduism and Judaism have also contributed immensely to the growth and development of human civilization. They have led to the flowering of the sciences, arts, music, language, and literature. They are not only the builders of the past, but they also represent the future of mankind.

These two religious traditions did not grow in isolation. They seem to have known and influenced each other since ancient times. They had contacts through maritime trade and influenced each other in the realm of culture. Moses ben Maimonides was involved in his family's trading business with India. Many Jews migrated to India and lived in peace and harmony with their Hindu neighbors. Some of the lost tribes of Jews were supposed to have settled in the remote corners of the Himalayas. Some form of contact and mutual influence cannot be ruled out in these circumstances. There is also speculation regarding the relationship between Abraham and Brahma. This shows the possibility of some form of interaction. It is well known that both the Hindus and the Jews have suffered throughout their long histories. They have been hunted and haunted by invaders and oppressors. While the Jews have suffered mostly because of their homelessness, Hindus have been victimized in their own land. Anti-Semitism is alleged to be an incurable socio-pathological disease, which springs from the homelessness of the Jews.¹

It is equally difficult to define a Jew or a Hindu. Due to constant oppression and domination by the invaders, they were compelled to conceal their religious

identities. Consoling the Jews who had been forced to convert to Islam, Maimonides' father held that in order to remain a Jew it was enough to pray, however briefly, and to do good acts. Some hold that a Jew is someone whose mother is a Jew, and so that person remains a Jew whatever he or she does.² Similarly a Hindu remains a Hindu till he voluntarily converts himself to a different religion.

There is much in common between them in the sphere of religiosity. Both discourage dogmatism in matters of faith and provide an environment for open and free discussion, debate, and dissent. They have encouraged intellectual discussion under the patronage of the state. This has created conditions for openness and development in the fields of religion and philosophy.

The Jews claim that they are the "Chosen People," who have a unique and special relation with God. Thinkers such as Rosenzweig hold that the star of Judea dispels the darkness of paganism.³ Judah Halevi highlights the superiority of Judaism and regards all other religions as inferior.⁴ Revealing Himself in history, God chose the Jews, the Hebrew language, and the Holy Land. The spiritual lineage of the Jews thus continues through heredity, land, and environment. Liberal Jews, however, deny any specific and unique possession of the exclusive revelation of Truth. For them, Judaism is only revealed legislation.⁵ Abraham Issac Kook, the Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, claimed that the Jews were endowed with the peculiar gift of holiness or Godliness.⁶ Some Jews assert that a Jew is one who suffers for the sake of others. Israel bears the sins of mankind. According to Moses Mendelssohn, though Judaism is meant only for the Jews, its teachings are consistent with universal religion.⁷ The Jewish belief that the suffering of the Jews has Divine purpose for Israel and, through her, for the entirety of mankind, will prove to be highly significant for humanity.⁸ The existence of Israel is influential for holiness.⁹ God demands that there should be no alien for the Jews. In this, the Jews have accepted suffering as a necessary price to be God's chosen people.¹⁰ In support of their claim, Jews such as Judah Halevi of Toledo hold that in the case of revelation at Sinai, the whole nation of Israel was involved. This open and public revelation is the unassailable foundation of all religious knowledge as well as the guarantee and supremacy of the truth of Judaism. Every Jew possesses the divine faculty, the prophetic spirit, through heredity.¹¹

Such claims have created misunderstanding and mistrust among non-Jews. They lead to serious problems in the context of religious pluralism. Followers of every religion believe that their path alone is true and should be accepted by all mankind. Such claims and counter claims have given rise to prejudice, hatred, and violence in different parts of the world. History tells us that all such attempts to establish the superiority of one faith over others are bound to fail. Any claim of exclusive possession of truth disturbs the peace and stability of society and the world at large.

The Vedic approach in which reality is conceived as unity in diversity is quite relevant here. It provides the basis for religious understanding and tolerance. Hindu tradition makes a distinction between Religion and religiosity, between the universal Dharma and the particular path or *panth, marga, sampradaya*. Dharma is universal and common to all religions. It is the ultimate goal of all paths. This approach and understanding of faith has given India a spirit of tolerance and respect for other beliefs.

The Vedic seers and sages arrived at the conclusion that the one Real is understood and described differently by the learned (*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*). This view has led to the growth and development of a pluralistic trend in Indian thought and has enriched Indian culture with variety.

- 2 -

Unlike the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Indian tradition has placed great emphasis on the internal aspect of experience. In their search for the ultimate, the sages realized the significance of the inner reality. The knowing subject is more important and basic to all knowing. The knower, or the *atman*, must be known. Indian thought has been characterized as *adhyatma vidya*, in that it lays greater emphasis on the knowledge of self. The Upanisads hold that the individual tends to be extroverted and looks only outside, because the Lord has created senses which make him outward looking. It is only an extraordinary man who becomes inward looking. Saints such as Kabir emphasize this truth by drawing our attention to the predicament of the musk deer who looks outside for the fragrance which actually originates from the inside of its own navel (*kasturi nabhi base mriga durnrhe van manhi*).

The Self or *atman* is not only the innermost reality. It is all that exists or appears either outside or inside. Accordingly, it was identified with the Absolute Brahman. The sages declared that this *atman* is verily the Brahman (*ayam atma Brahman*). It is the integral unity of the subject and object. It is the knower and the known — that which is inside, the same is outside.

The Sankhya thinkers found this integral unity rationally inexplicable. How can we attribute contradictory attributes to an entity without introducing division in it? Reality cannot be characterized both as being and becoming at the same time. In their attempt at systemization, the Sankhya, therefore, divided the simple monism of the Upanisads into the duality of *purusa* and *prakrati*, being and becoming. The two are absolutely different from each other. Later Indian thought unfortunately succumbed to this divisive logic of the Sankhya. Most of the systems later on fell into the trap of dualism of subject and object, being and becoming. Even the absolutist systems like Madhyamika Buddhists and Advaita Vedantins could not really recover from the dualism of the Sankhya.

The Buddhists initially rejected the being aspect of reality (*purusa*) and pro-

pounded the reality of pure becoming (*prakriti*). But finally they have to negate even change or becoming and formulate the notion of Shunya or nothingness. The Shunyavada Buddhist rightly concluded that if we reject one of the duality as unreal, the other also must be rejected as unreal in the end. Hence the Madhyamika rejected all phenomena as unreal and postulated the doctrine of Shunyavada. The Advaita Vedantins adopted the opposite line and started with the reality of Purusa, the pure changeless being. While the Buddhist found nothing unchanging or permanent, except eternal and universal flux, the Vedantins denied the reality of change and becoming. Reality for them is absolute Being.

Both these absolutist systems fail to bridge the gulf of dualism of Purusa and Prakriti. Reality somehow contains both the unmodified and unchanging spirit and the changing appearances. It is the integral unity of both the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. Whenever we deny the one, we must also reject the other. That is why these absolutist systems fail and finally lead us to nihilism or illusionism (*mayavada*).¹² Both fail to grasp the true nature of integral reality.

In the proper course, we should be able to identify the two aspects of experience as the dual manifestation of the absolute reality, which is the supreme Self. The highest Self is wholly transcendent. It is beyond all description. In itself, it is neither being, nor becoming. Realizing the utter inscrutability and indescribability of the Self, the sages declared "*neti, neti*" and recommended "silence." The wise should become "silent" (*muni*). The silence of the Muni, however, is not empty. It is vocal, and aims at communicating the incommunicable. The silence of the Buddha and the silence of Shiva in the form of Dakshinamurti, aim at conveying the absolute mystery and otherness of Reality. While Buddha's silence gives rise to Shunyavada, Shiva's silence leads to integral absolutism (*purna advaita*). The philosophy of *Sivatva* was revealed through the first *Siva Sutra*, according to which the knowing Self (*chaitanya atma*) is the supreme reality. The Buddhist went on the wrong track when he denied the reality of the knowing subject. The Vedantin committed the mistake of rejecting the object as illusory. The former failed to see the self in the not-self and the latter could not realize unity of the self and not-self. The true reality represents an integral union of 'I' and 'It,' *aham* and *idam*. The real first manifests itself as "I-it" and then as "it-I" (*aham-idam, idam-aham*). The Journey of Indian thought begins with negation and ends with *Sivatva*. It is a process starting from silence and shunya, and culminating in the realization of supreme self-hood, or *svatmamahesvaratva*.

The so-called Shunya is, in fact, the door to the divine. It is the "Gate" through which the seeker must pass. The disciples of the Shiva *marga* also encounter shunya in their journey toward self-realization. Initially it is an obstacle in progress. But the faithful initiate realizes the ultimate oneness of Shunya and Siva. The highest reality appears as Shunya or nothing, when it is free from finite determinations. The realm of duality and difference must be sublated, or burnt to ashes,

in order that the non-dual absolute may become manifest. The Lord of the universe, Viswanatha, is revealed only in the mystic light (*kashi*). It is the great cremation ground, *maha smasana*, wherein all finitude is burnt completely. Death is the starting point of all wisdom and revelation.

With the affirmation of Supreme Self, the initial negation, the *neti, neti*, gives way to *iti, iti*. Historically, it is the culmination of entire Indian thought. It was revealed on the Mountain called Mahadeva Giri, in Kashmir, where both the Buddhists and the Advaita Vedantins had great influence. The votaries of Self are not afraid of embracing duality and difference. They accept the world of appearances as real. Change or becoming is an integral aspect of the Divine. In this view, the Divine first gives rise to difference out of unity, and then assimilates the difference within its unity (*abhede bhedanam, bhede cha abhedanam*). Those who deny non-difference are in ignorance. But those who reject difference are in greater ignorance. The final rest of the individual seeker is neither in difference nor in non-difference, but in the Supreme Self (*Atma Visranti*).

- 3 -

The practice of idol worship has been subjected to severe criticism. Judaism and other religions have condemned and ridiculed it. Some consider it their sacred duty to demolish idolatry and punish the idol-worshippers. Idol-breaking has continued for centuries. The wrath and fury of these warriors of 'monotheism' has been witnessed even recently in the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas.

The inspiration and impetus for this zeal originally came from Judaism, which had condemned idolatry not only as false religion, but also as false morality.¹³ During the days of Roman tyranny, it was decided that one could violate any of the commandments except those forbidding idolatry, incest, and murder.¹⁴ The Jews would not demand even belief in monotheism from others, provided they refrain from idolatry. They also devised a different set of rules for dealing with idol worshippers. Judah Halevi held that the Hindus were the abandoned people, who distressed the believers by their false speech, idols, talismans, and devices.¹⁵

It is unfortunate that there is so much misunderstanding about idol worship. Hinduism lays equal emphasis on the unity and transcendence of God. The idol breaker perhaps chose to remain ignorant about the real meaning and motive behind the practice. The pagan form of worship was demolished in India much before the "Warriors of God" arrived there. The announcement of '*neti, neti*,' not this, not this, closed all avenues for idolatry. The highest reality transcends all thought and reasoning. Even the ascription of lordship and creatorship to it is false.

Hinduism does not regard idol worship as the ideal form of worship. It is also not practiced by all Hindus. Some sects, such as Aryasamaja, do not practice idol worship. They are, in fact, opposed to it. Even those who believe in idol

worship regard it primarily as a symbolic form of worship. The deity alone is worshipped through the idol. The idol is the residence of God, just as the body is of the soul. The concept of unity of being provides the ideological basis for idol worship. God is all and all is God. Existence is a manifestation of the Divine. The world of objects reflects the face of God. It is the mirror which reveals the Divine presence. The devotee may invoke the Divine presence in a form of his choice (*ista*). The divine also responds accordingly. The Vedic myth of creation (*pursue sukta*) is recited by the priest during the invocation ceremony.

Idol worship presupposes identity between word and meaning, idea and form, mantra and the deity. The idol is not just an inert object. It is first made alive through the performance of rituals (*sajivakarana*). The priest invokes the deity, who pervades all the elements, and invites it to be seated in his own heart. Finally, he transfers it to the idol through the rituals of *avahan* and *prana pratistha*.¹⁶ The idol should be worshipped only after it is established through prescribed rituals. Otherwise, it would be the worship of inert matter.

Two other opinions discuss the role of rituals invoking a Divine presence. Some hold that the rituals really infuse life in the idol and make it the living presence of God. Others, however, believe that they do not introduce any change in the idol, but instead only change the attitude of the devotee. They enrich and deepen the faith and help with concentration and purification of the mind.

Even enlightened and accomplished saints such as Shankaracharya indulged in idol worship to guide and establish people on the path of Dharma or righteousness (*loka sangraha*). Ordinary people who follow the leaders will turn away from Dharma in the absence of proper guidance. These teachers attract the public, which is unable to follow the intricacies of logic, toward religion. It is similar to teaching children numbers and alphabets through gross matter. The enchanting scenes and sight and sounds in the temple easily attract the simple child-like devotees. The dialogue between Uddhava, the great Advaitin, and the Gopis, the devotees of personal God, Krishna, highlights this fact. God is not affected by idol worship. It is only a device to help the devotees. The idol serves a function similar to a battery, which is charged through electricity. The idol is charged with spiritual energy through constant prayer, worship, and chanting in the temple. It is first impregnated with cosmic energy through the rituals. Afterward, millions of devotees infuse it with the vibrations of spiritual energy through long periods of devotion. It thus becomes a store-house of concentrated energy.¹⁷ For thousands of years India has been nourished by the energy drawn from the temples. It has sustained India during critical hours of her existence.

However, if the idol is not established properly, or not worshipped regularly, or if it is neglected for a period of time, it becomes lifeless and useless and must be discarded. When established properly and worshipped regularly, the idol attracts the magnetism of the earth and heavenly bodies, the vibrations of the

unmanifest Divinity and the spiritual energy from innumerable devotees. This way it becomes charged with infinite power.

Even those who do not believe in a personal God admit the significance of idol worship. The followers of Shankara, Buddha, and Jaina Tirthankaras established idol worship in their temples. Shankara insists that there is no alternative to it. All forms of worship and prayer are truly speaking forms of idolatry. All approaches to the indeterminate and indescribable Absolute involve idolatry. The anthropomorphic expressions in different religions are supposed to be mere concessions to human weakness. They are adapted to the mental capacity of mankind who have clear perception of the physical body only. Even the Torah has to speak the language of man.¹⁸ We need adjectives because men need images in order to understand. Verbal prayer is, in fact, a concession to man's weakness.¹⁹ The womb of idolatry is in the mind of men. Even idol-breakers can be idolaters.

- 4 -

Indian thought has been criticized as being pantheistic, nihilistic, and escapist. But such charges are baseless. None of the Indian systems regard God and world as co-equal. The Vedantic declaration that "All is God" only implies the omnipresence and absoluteness of God. It actually rejects the separate and independent existence of all. The two great utterances — "All this verily is Brahman" and "There is no plurality here" — should not be read separately. They convey their meaning jointly. "All is God" because there is nothing but God. As the ornaments made out of gold are not different from God, or as the sun's rays are identical with the sun, so also the plurality of world is non-different from God. Further, Advaitism is not accepted by many sects in Hinduism, which are opposed to the rigorous monism of Shankara. Some are even closer to the Judaic form of monotheism.

The individual soul is not equated with God in any school of Hinduism. The soul is said to be one with God only in the sense that God alone is its support and substance. The individual soul, when it is free from finite limitations, is nothing but the infinite. Accordingly, it is not proper to hold either that the individual loses its identity in the absolute or that it is equated with the divine. The individual and the infinite are non-different because the latter is the highest self (*paramatma*) of the former. The charge that Hinduism denies the identity of the individual is baseless, for Hinduism really affirms its majesty and absoluteness. The individual is not lost — it only recognizes its absolute and infinite nature, and discards the illusion of being finite and limited.

It has been alleged that Indian thought is essentially negative, escapist, and pessimistic. Thinkers such as Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig argue that the Indian tradition encourages the attitude of withdrawal. Unlike Hinduism, Judaism does not support abstention from worldly pleasures. If a person abstains from

any permissible pleasure, he has to account for it in the life hereafter.²⁰ Judaism repudiates fasting and does not condemn wealth and riches. These are the blessings promised to the faithful by God. The Jewish faith about God is determined primarily by their positive attitude toward the world and their emphasis on the meaningfulness of human history and life.²¹ The world is full of worth and must be enjoyed, not rejected. It would enable the individual to be united with God and help in transforming the material into the spiritual.

It is, however, quite wrong to hold that all of Indian thought is otherworldly. On the contrary, it encourages full participation in life. There is no difference between the worldly life and freedom. The two (*sansara* and *nirvana*) are one. The individual need not run away from the world to attain liberation, which is possible in the world itself. Buddha and Shankara both continued to live active lives till the end. The ideal of renunciation or *sanyasa* should not be misinterpreted as escapism. It is not withdrawal from the world. Buddha refused *nirvana* for himself and showed the path of service and piety (*maha karuna*). Similarly, Shankara, the champion of *sanyasa*, walked on foot throughout the length and breadth of India guiding people till his last breath. The institution of *sanyasa* has continued to serve Indian society for centuries. It has illumined the hearts and minds of people and provided spiritual solace to them. Hinduism accepts *sanyasa* only as the last stage in a man's life, when he has fulfilled all his duties toward family, society, and the gods. None is allowed to take up *sanyasa* till he has repaid all his debts.

It is also wrong to attribute pessimism to Indian thought. Although it starts with the recognition of suffering, its goal is the realization of absolute freedom. It is rooted in the awareness of the limitation and finitude of worldly life, and draws our attention toward the ultimate state of release. It does not recommend withdrawal from the world, but encourages enjoyment and involvement in the pleasures of life. The calendar of India is filled with year-long celebrations of festivities. These festivals bring joy and happiness in the life of the individual and society. The marvelous creations like Konark, Khajuraho, and Kamasutra could not be the products of a negativistic and pessimistic culture. Indian culture has shown great interest in the joys and pleasures of life since Vedic times.

However, Jewish thinkers such as Rosenzweig hold that the Indian civilization represents an area of darkness which needs the redemptive light of the star of Judaism for it posits a deity who reduces what is to what is not. The world is a movement from a source in nothing toward an end in something, but Asian religions reverse the direction of thought back to original nothing, a regression.²² It escapes, rather than discovers, the reality of the world, because it lacks courage.²³ Being or Brahman, the reigning God of India, is unable to face difference. It is no coincidence that revelation took the road to the West, not to the East, which lacks the monotheistic reading of history.²⁴

In this context, it is relevant to state the opinion of late Prof. Bibhuti Yadav. He says:

Philosophers, the supposed agents of rational discourse, chase phantoms simply because of desire (*vasana*)...Conceived in desire, the self is chronically erotic. It finds comfort in false consciousness, in altering imagination into perception, wishes into reality. It finds truth in a category mistake, turning the world into an epistemic field where 'I perceive x' is actually a cover for 'I wish x.' There is no point in dreaming or gazing at a transcendent God. The point is to turn the world into an ethical neighborhood.²⁵

Moreover every religion makes similar claims. How is one to decide the validity of varying truth claims?

- 5 -

The uniqueness of the Jewish religion consists in its emphasis on holiness and morality. The God of Israel is a holy God who cannot tolerate unethical speech.²⁶ Judaism is essentially a way of right living.²⁷ There is no separation of ethics from religion in it. Ethics has its source in Judaism. While non-Jews treat ethics only as a subtopic of philosophy, it is fundamental to Jewish philosophy.²⁸ Kaufmann Kohler asserts that Judaism cannot compromise in any sense and in any situation its mission to teach monotheism to the world. Everything else may change or evolve according to time and place except the commitment to ethics.²⁹ The ethical message of the Commandments is divinely inspired and cannot change. Judaism is not revealed religion, but revealed legislation. Some Jewish-Christian thinkers are critical of the Indian unconcern for ethics. The idolatrous cults are the real enemies of godliness and holiness. Idolatry is condemned in Judaism primarily because of its being false morality.³⁰

It is, however, a wrong interpretation of Indian culture to say that it has no commitment to ethical principles. Unlike other religions for which ethics consists of revealed commandments, in India it is supposed to be the very foundation of the cosmic existence. Ethics, translated as Dharma, is not prescribed by external authority. It constitutes the very nature of being. The creator establishes Dharma by first applying it to himself. It is the observance of Dharma which sustains creation and keeps it going.

Hinduism regards Dharma as supreme. The governing of Karma is autonomous. The sovereignty of Karma has been accepted by all systems in India. It can not be violated under any situation. Even gods are governed by its laws. The

trinity of the highest gods, the king of gods, sages, and saints, all are under the sovereignty of the law of Karma. Every being must suffer the result of karma. There can be no exception to it. Even the *sanyasi*, who is supposed to have broken out of the chain of worldly existence (*sansara*), has to undergo the effects of his previous actions.

Mahabharata, the great epic which revolves around the problem of Dharma, highlights the mysterious nature of ethics. It is the battlefield on which the working of Dharma is being enfolded. Here the Supreme God fulfills His promise to defend Dharma when it is in danger. The epic brings out the truth that none can escape the law of karma. Yudhishthir, the great upholder and an incarnate of Dharma, also suffers the consequence of his karma when he indirectly supports untruth. Bhishma, the patriarch of the fighting forces, laments that the mystery of Dharma is beyond human comprehension. Different sources of its knowledge, such as scriptures, tradition, authority, reason, and so on, are unreliable and lack unanimity. The source of Dharma is 'within' the individual, the manifestation of a little of which activates the Dharma. When it is manifested, dharma gives rise to attitudes of compassion, concern, sympathy, and understanding.

To establish holiness, greater emphasis should be laid on changing the individual. Those who try to establish dharma through coercion and violence forget that it is revealed only within the hearts of men.

Whatever be the nature of Dharma, it can not be limited to a particular group of people, sect, or society. It must be applicable to all mankind, irrespective of color, creed, community, or race. Those who apply different laws to different people, such as believers and non-believers, are really ignorant of the true nature of holiness. One is not really following Dharma if he applies one code for the faithful and another to the *kafirs*. The sovereignty of Dharma demands that no one should leave its path on any account. It can not be conditioned by fear, temptation, greed, etc. For pleasure and pain are transitory, only Dharma is eternal.

- 6 -

It is in the sphere of mysticism that there is much in common between Judaism and Hinduism. Mysticism lies at the heart of these traditions. The Kabbalah and the Tantra both derive their names from tradition (*agama*). They have evolved out of the teachings which were handed down orally from generation to generation, as received and recorded in the remote times.³¹

Scriptures are regarded as the blue-print of creation in both. The holy word represents the body of God, as embodied in the scriptures. Infinite mysteries are hidden in the letters and words of the sacred texts. Both systems recognize the cosmic importance of letters. The creation was brought into existence through the Divine utterances.

The mysteries were carefully kept secret. The mystic beliefs and practices

were hidden from the public. It was strictly forbidden to reveal them to those who were not initiated into the system. Hidden mysteries are the soul of Judaism. God is the hidden of all hidden. He is called 'All' as all things are in Him and He is in all. He is both manifest and unmanifest (*vyakta* as well as *Avyakta*); manifest in order to uphold the whole, and concealed, for he is found nowhere.³² This view is similar to the Tantric concept of *sarva* and *anuttara*.

Maimonides' assertion that 'Truth' must be communicated only orally from master to disciple, as only a few men are capable of comprehension, would find full support from the Tantric. It is neither necessary nor good to reveal the secret truths. Men differ greatly, as regards their capacity, inclination and temperament.³³ Both the systems hold that if the 'secrets' are revealed to the vulgar, society would be endangered. The mystic, therefore, uses the language of allegories and metaphors. At the training stage, the disciple undergoes some terrifying experiences, such as fear of death, drowning, and darkness. The Tantric initiate voluntarily chooses death and prefers to live and meditate in the cremation ground. The beginner experiences a frightening loss of self. Abulafia regards anguish, fear of death, and the threat of madness as characteristic of progression through lower stages.³⁴ Only the Divine grace can protect the initiate at this stage. He should voluntarily surrender himself and choose death in order to realize the higher self. The Tantric initiate should willingly give up the finite ego. Kabir warns the seeker that only those who are ready to surrender their egos may enter the house of the Lord.

The concept of metaphysical knots (*aporia* or *granthi*) is found in both mystical schools. It is necessary to untie or cut the knots which prevent the free flow of divine light. The disciple will be unable to have the ecstatic experience of unity with the Divine unless the knots are untied.³⁵

The concept of creation through contraction is common in both mystical traditions (It is called *zimzum* in Kabbalah and *tirodhana* or *sankocana* in the Tantra). As the Infinite Light of the Divine can not be received directly by the finite, the Divine makes it appear in a limited form. According to the Kabbalah theory of *zimzum*, the divine withdrawal makes it possible for the universe to exist. He becomes the world by first withdrawing himself. Like the Tantric, Isaac Luria also holds that the absolute contracts itself in order to give rise to the world of finitude. Creation is thus preceded by the voluntary self-contraction and self-limitation of the Divine.³⁶ Contraction or self-concealment is the first act of creation according to the Tantra. In a sense the Divine adapts the power of His light to the capacity of the creatures. It is similar to the activity of a teacher or a father who uses words which are suitable to the level of understanding of the children. The Divine creation does not involve complete darkness but merely a diminution in the intensity of light.³⁷ Similarly evil is also not a complete negation of good, but represents a lower grade of good.³⁸

The view that the Divine Couple is the exemplar of all coupling of male and female in the universe is accepted in both systems. God and His Schekhina, Shiva and Shakti, are the primal couple. Although the Absolute in-itself is wholly transcendent (*anuttara*), we can know it through its Shakti or power. Shakti is the face of the Lord. The principle of dualism, of male and female, runs throughout the universe. The male occupies the right side, the female the left side. The human body is a microscopic representation of entire creation. It is a sacred vessel containing the Divine spark. The prescribed coupling of the male and female culminates in a kind of metamorphosis. God himself realizes his own unity through the act of human coupling.

In spite of these similarities, there are some fundamental differences in the aims and attitudes of the two mystical traditions. The union of the couples is never allowed to transgress the Laws in the Kabbalah. It is strictly confined to legitimate couples. There is, however, no such restriction for those who follow the Tantra. It is sometimes recommended that the union of the couple should preferably violate the social norms. Again the Tantric ideal is to retain the semen and not allow it to fall. For the fall of the drop is death, and retention is life.³⁹ But there is no such restriction in the Kabbalah. Further the aim of the Tantric is to ascend to the higher level of reality and transcend the limitation of time and space. For the Kabbalah, however, it is a kind of descent from the higher to the lower. The goal of the Tantric is individual salvation or perfection. The aim of the Kabbalah, on the other hand, is collective redemption, the restoration of the unity between Israel and God. For it, the union is meaningful only in the context of the history of the people of Israel. The aim of the Tantric is the absorption of the individuality in the Divine. The Tantric realization of union takes place within the heart. In the Kabbalah, it is outside, in the nation of Israel. It is an ongoing process in which the whole community of Israel participates.

NOTES

1. Isadore Epstein, *Judaism*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 309.
2. Norbert M. Samuelson, *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 77.
3. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 250-51.
4. Collette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, (Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 115-19.
5. *Judaism*, p. 288.
6. *Judaism*, p. 311.
7. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 149-50.
8. *Judaism*, p. 322.
9. *Judaism*, p. 312.

10. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, p. 176.
11. *Judaism*, pp. 205-06.
12. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 231-34.
13. *Judaism*, p. 143.
14. *Judaism*, p. 143.
15. *History of Jewish Philosophy*, pp. 113-131.
16. *Agni Purana*, 59, 15-16. 60, 19-20.
17. Alexandra David-Neel, *India as I Saw It*, (Paris: Plon, 1951), p. 8.
18. *History of Jewish Philosophy*, p. 173.
19. *History of Jewish Philosophy*, p. 178.
20. *Judaism*, p. 156.
21. *Judaism*, pp. 136, 156.
22. Samuelson, Norbert M., "Rosenzweig's Philosophy of Buddhism," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (Saskatoon, Sask., and Miami, FL) Vol. I (1998): 8-12.
23. "Rosenzweig's Philosophy," p. 10.
24. Bibhuti S. Yadav, "Buddhism on Rosenzweig," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (Saskatoon, Sask., and Miami, FL) Vol. I (1998): 19.
25. "Buddhism on Rosenzweig," pp. 24-7.
26. *Judaism*, pp. 55-57.
27. *Judaism*, p. 55.
28. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, p. 197.
29. *Modern Jewish Philosophy*, p. 67.
30. *Judaism*, p. 143.
31. *Judaism*, p. 223.
32. *Zohar*, 3.288a
33. Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2.40.
34. Diana M. Sharon; "Mystic Autobiography, A Case Study in Comparative Literary Analysis," *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (Saskatoon, Sask., and Miami, FL) Vol. II (1999): 23, 31.
35. "Mystic Autobiography," p. 43.
36. *Judaism*, pp. 244-45.
37. *Judaism*, p. 223.
38. *Judaism*, p. 223.
39. *Siva Samhita*, IV, p. 88.