

## Chapter 23

# The Primal Metaphor of Sub-Asia

Hinduism and Buddhism are not the only religious formations that originated in Sub-Asia, but they are the largest ones. They have spread, especially Buddhism, to other areas and adapted to those cultures while carrying with them the inner logic of the Sub-Asian metaphor for approaching Final Reality. I am naming that metaphor, **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**.

The Hindu saying "THAT I AM" is one of the clearest expressions of this primal metaphor. THAT Infinite Silence, I (as Profound me) AM. THAT (Eternal Brahman, beyond all temporal passing things) and I (the Atman or Great Self) AM. In other words, THAT and I are of one Reality. In the final realization of myself, I experience a union with the Infinite Silence. I am one with that Absolute Stillness beyond all the busy, noisy things of life. Part of what this means is a highly exalted view of personal being. My essence cannot be understood as a psychological pattern or a sociological conditioning. I am a Mysterious Part of that equally Mysterious Whole. In this sense, I transcend my culture, my body, my biology, my personality, my ego, my whatever I have typically referred to as "my self." The route to experiencing this essential "me" entails a detachment from all these temporal things. This freedom from all things enables a consequent "return" or "engagement" in all temporal things in a free and nonchalant fashion.

Buddhism perfected methods of sitting in alert silence and stillness, watching the inflow and outflow of the living breath as well as achieving awareness of the coming and going of sensations, thoughts and feelings. The final aim of this intense concentration was to experience the union of the concentrator with this Infinite Silence/Stillness. This means experiencing an "I" that is something more than my coming and going sensations, thoughts, and feelings. I am that Silence. I am that Stillness. I exist not merely in the temporal comings and goings, but as one with the entire cosmos of Every-Thing-Ness, indeed the Stillness beyond all that moves or sounds. The Hindu foundation for Buddhism is clearly retained. Buddhist enlightenment resonates with the experience pointed to by the phrase "THAT I AM." Many Buddhist teachers teach that their "enlightenment" is an experience of "no self." But this "no self" does not mean having no inner life or no responsibility for living my temporal existence. I find it clarifying to view "no self" as an expression of the loss of everything we normally take to be our self. We are not our ego. We are not our personality. We are not our social conditioning. We are not our reputation among humanity. We are a mysterious at-one-ment with Being as a Whole.

I am not attempting to give a complete description of the vast variety of Buddhist and Hindu practices and reflections, but simply to note a metaphor that is operating in this complex set of ancient religions originating and functioning within this Sub-Asian cultural zone.

**Uniting with the Infinite Silence** can be understood as a conscious experience in the living here and now. This experience is Timeless. This experience is wholly NOW. The Infinite "THAT" and "I" are both Timeless. The realized no-self or Atman SELF is Timeless. In the depth experience pointed to by the metaphor **Uniting with the Infinite Silence**, the temporal world stops. I exist in the NOW. The past is only memory. The future is only anticipation of not yet. In this NOW I am liberated from both memory and anticipation. I live in Freedom, and within this Freedom I return to my temporal world. I have memories and anticipations. I have a body with its sensations, emotions, and thoughts. But I am living within a liberation of detachment from the temporal flow. I live in the temporal flow as a non-temporal union with the Timeless.

With the aid of many competent Buddhist and Hindu teachers, this basic motif for religious practice is making an enormous impact on Europe and the Americans. These revitalized forms of Sub-Asian practice are challenging Westerners to inquire beyond the psychological and sociological views of themselves into a grounding in conscious experience that is more basic to who they are as human beings.

As we will see, this primal metaphor is also a human creation, and thus it is finite and limited like all the other primal metaphors. It is a primal metaphor that is no better than the other primal metaphors. But it is a powerful and useful metaphor, and its current revival of clarity challenges all religions, from whatever zone of culture, to pay attention to the depths of consciousness that this metaphor encourages. Every area of the world deals with the enigma of consciousness, but Sub-Asia specializes in a research of consciousness. In being so focused Sub Asia has pioneered treasures that can deepen all the other heritages. Many Westerners are already experiencing an important deepening through their respectful dialogue with this zone of inquiry.