



The Secret of Embodiment

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW

The psyche is composed of everything [that exists].
—*Spanda-Kārikā* (2.3) of Kallata

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF HUMAN LIFE

One of the greatest contributions of Tantra to spirituality is its philosophy of the body. Unlike the vertical teachings preceding and surrounding it, Tantra has taken the human body seriously. A classic expression of the verticalist view of the body can be found, for instance, in the *Maitrāyanī-Upanishad* (1.3), a work probably belonging to the third century BCE:

O Venerable one, what good is the enjoyment of desires in this ill-smelling, insubstantial body, a mere conglomerate of

bones, skin, sinews, muscles, marrow, flesh, semen, blood, mucus, tears, rheum, feces, urine, wind, bile, and phlegm? What good is the enjoyment of desires in this body, which is afflicted with desire, anger, greed, delusion, fear, despondency, envy, separation from the desirable, union with the undesirable, hunger, thirst, senility, disease, sorrow, death, and the like?

Philosophical verticalism views the body as a breeding ground for *karma* and an automatic hindrance to enlightenment. The common Sanskrit word for “body” is *deha*, which stems from the verbal root *dih* (“to smear” or “be soiled”). It hints at the defiled nature of the body. Yet the same verbal root can also signify “to anoint,” which gives the noun *deha* the far more laudatory meaning of “that which is anointed.” The older Sanskrit word for “body” is *sharīra*, derived from the verbal root *shri* (“to rest upon” or “to support”), which has a more positive connotation: the body serves as the prop, or framework, by means of which the Self can experience the world. This notion led to the still more positive interpretation of the body as a temple of the Divine—an idea intimated in the early *Upanishads* but not fully elaborated until the emergence of Tantra much later.

Tantra’s body-positive approach is the direct outcome of its integrative metaphysics according to which this world is not mere illusion but a manifestation of the supreme Reality. If the world is real, the body must be real as well. If the world is in essence divine, so must be the body. If we must honor the world as a creation or an aspect of the divine Power (*shakti*), we must likewise honor the body. The body is a piece of the world and, as we shall see, the world is a piece of the body. Or, rather, when we truly understand the body, we discover that it is the world, which in essence is divine.

Because the human body has a complex nervous system allowing higher expressions of consciousness, it is especially valuable. Indeed, the Tantric scriptures often remind students of the preciousness of human life. Thus in the *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (1.16–27) Lord Shiva declares:

After obtaining a human body, which is difficult to obtain and which serves as a ladder to liberation, who is more sinful than he who does not cross over to the Self?

Therefore, upon obtaining the best possible life form, he who does not know his own good is merely killing himself.

How can one come to know the purpose of human life without a human body? Hence having obtained the gift of a human body one should perform meritorious deeds.

One should completely protect oneself by oneself. Oneself is the vessel for everything. One should make an effort in protecting oneself. Otherwise the Truth cannot be seen.

Village, house, land, money, even auspicious and inauspicious *karma* can be obtained over and over again, but not a human body.

People always make an effort to protect the body. They do not wish to abandon the body even when sick with leprosy and other diseases.

For the purpose of attaining knowledge, the virtuous person should preserve the body with effort. Knowledge aims at the Yoga of meditation. He will be liberated quickly.

If one does not guard oneself against that which is inauspicious, who, intent on the good, will ever cross over to the Self?

He who does not heal himself from hellish diseases while here on earth, what can he do about a disease when he goes to a place where no remedy exists?

What fool starts digging a well when his house is already on fire? So long as this body exists, one should cultivate the Truth.

Old age is like a tigress; life runs out like water in a broken pot; diseases strike like enemies. Therefore one should cultivate the highest good now.

One should cultivate the highest good while the senses are not yet frail, suffering is not yet firmly rooted, and adversities have not yet become overwhelming.

When we unpack the conceptual content of the above stanzas, we find that human life is so extraordinarily precious because it can serve as a platform or ladder for Self-realization. It endows us with

sufficient self-awareness to reflect on our existence and thereby give us valuable options in life. One of the fundamental choices we have is in fact to go beyond the *karma*-producing automatisms, beyond the unconscious behavior patterns, by which life tends to perpetuate itself. We can choose to grow ever more conscious of the forces pushing and pulling us and thus also to become increasingly capable of shaping our destiny. Finally, we can opt to identify with the very principle of awareness, the Self (*ātman*), rather than the diverse displays of the body-mind. Concretely, we can choose to stop thinking of ourselves merely as an individual of a particular race, creed, gender, age, social setting, or educational and professional background.

Hindus, including almost all teachers of Tantra, believe that death is not the end but that we undergo numerous rebirths and repeated deaths. They also believe that this cycle can be interrupted only by intervening in the processes of the mind itself, by shifting our sense of identity from the body-mind to the Self. When this shift is complete and irreversible it is called liberation. Since our present life is the sum total of all our previous unenlightened volitions (*samkalpa*) and actions, it is impossible to say which seeds sown in previous lives have already borne fruit and which are still awaiting fruition. This also means that we cannot know with absolute certainty the particular quality of a future embodiment. As we all know, life is full of surprises, and many of these surprises stem from our activities in past lives both on the material plane and on more subtle planes of existence. According to some schools of Hinduism, we cannot even be sure that our next incarnation will necessarily be into human form. Hence it is traditionally considered most auspicious to have achieved a human birth. More fortunate still is a human life in which we encounter a spiritual teacher and teaching that potentially can free us from the entire cycle of repeated incarnations.

As precious as human life is, it is also extremely fragile and short. Therefore all liberation schools are agreed that we must seize every opportunity to develop the art of self-understanding, self-transformation, and self-transcendence—which is called spiritual disci-

pline, *yoga*, or *tantra*. In the *Bhāgavata-Purāna* (7.6.1–9), the sage Prahāda explains the significance of human life in these words:

When still young, the wise person should cultivate the virtues dear to the Divine. A human birth is difficult to obtain here on earth, and even though human life is fleeting, it is full of significance.

Thus one should approach the Lord's feet, for he is the good-hearted ruler of the self of all creatures and is dear to them.

Sensory pleasures, like pain, are harvested effortlessly by embodied beings everywhere, simply on account of their destiny.

One should make no effort to obtain pleasure, for that would be a waste of life and would not bring the supreme peace that springs alone from the Lord's lotus feet.

Therefore, an intelligent person who is caught up in the world should struggle for peace while the human body is still flourishing rather than failing.

The span of human life is a hundred years. Half of this is wasted by a person lacking self-control, because he sleeps stuporously in the dark of night.

Twenty years go by in early childhood when one is bewildered and in youth when one is preoccupied with playing; another twenty years go by in old age when one is physically impaired and lacking in determination.

The remaining years are wasted by that person who, out of great confusion and insatiable desire, is madly attached to family life.

How can a person who is attached to family life, with his senses uncontrolled and bound by strong ties of affection, liberate himself?

Liberation presupposes the radical inner act of renunciation of all worldly objects and relations. It must be accompanied by an equally radical focus on the divine Reality. Prahāda's "ultimate con-

cern" was Vishnu, who, after many trials, granted him the highest realization.

Prahlāda's father, King Hiranyakashipu, likewise merged with Vishnu, because his mind was constantly fixed on the Divine. In Hiranyakashipu's case, however, it was not love but intense hatred of Vishnu that proved liberating. This is a Tantra-style teaching story, and only Tantra can offer a plausible explanation for this surprising feat: Whether the mind is focused by love or hatred, so long as its target is the Divine itself, the alchemical process of *solve et coagula* can occur. For the mind must point beyond itself to burst through its limitations by merging with a higher principle. As the *Shata-Patha-Brahmana* (10.5.2.20) stated long ago, one becomes that which one contemplates.¹ Tantra explored and elaborated on the deeper implications of this arcane truth.

AGELESS BODY, TIMELESS MIND

If we aspire to lasting happiness, which coincides with our full awakening in enlightenment, we must pay attention to our bodily existence here and now. All too frequently spiritual seekers look for ultimate fulfillment apart from their corporeal existence. And all too frequently they end up not in genuine states of higher being and consciousness but in mental states conjured by the power of imagination, which of course are neither liberating nor ultimately satisfying. By contrast, Tantra takes the body seriously—not in the sense of granting it a finality that it does not have, but in understanding it as the ground for all higher realizations.

The Tantric approach is expressed well in the *Yoga-Vāsishtha* (4.23.18–24), a remarkable and huge Sanskrit work by a Kashmiri adept who probably lived in the eleventh century CE and was influenced by Tantra.² He put the following words into the mouth of the great sage Vasishtha:

For the ignorant person, this body is the source of endless suffering, but to the wise person, this body is the source of infinite delight.

For the wise person, its loss is no loss at all, but while it persists it is completely a source of delight for the wise person.

For the wise person, the body serves as a vehicle that can transport him swiftly in this world, and it is known as a chariot for attaining liberation and unending enjoyment.

Since the body affords the wise person the experience of sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell as well as prosperity and friendship, it brings him gain.

Even though the body exposes one to a whole string of painful and joyous activities, the omniscient sage can patiently bear all experiences.

The wise person reigns, free from feverish unhappiness, over the city known as the body, even as Vāsava [the god Indra] dwells in his city free from distress.

It does not cast him into the pit of pride like a high-mettled horse, nor does it cause him to abandon his “daughter” of wisdom to evil greed and so forth.

The body, then, is the field in which we grow and harvest our experiences, which may be positive or negative, painful or pleasant. While negative, painful experiences do not bring us immediate joy, they do so in the long run because—if we are wise—we relate to them rightly by regarding them as useful lessons. No experience need be devoid of merit. People have had major spiritual breakthroughs as a result of deep suffering and debilitating illness. Even physical pain does not have to be a merely unpleasant experience. In fact, it can sometimes be a doorway to ecstasy. I once underwent a painful three-hour session at the dentist. The Novocaine injections were not working properly, and after writhing in the chair during a complicated procedure, I finally was brought to the point of simply surrendering to the situation. Suddenly, as my resistance to the pain was removed, I found myself in a state of ecstasy, which lasted for the remainder of the operation. I had discovered the attitude underlying much of the world’s asceticism, known in India as *tapas*. Instead of shying away from the pain, I had allowed myself to pay full attention to it and

thus pass beyond it. Women have reported making a similar discovery during childbirth.

In their widely read book *In the Zone*, Michael Murphy and Rhea A. White mention well-known football players and boxers who continued in a contest despite broken bones, entirely oblivious to the pain. But more than that, some athletes—especially distance runners—invite pain to convert it into ecstasy and surplus energy. As Gerald Heard, one of the early spokesmen for Vedānta in the West, pointed out in his thought-provoking book *Pain, Sex, and Time*, pain is far more than a mere warning signal; it is an indicator of the store of available evolutionary energy in us:

Traditional and current opinion assumes that man's evolution is over. Any sensation he experiences, whether painful or pleasant, can only be for conservation and comfort, for restoring a disturbed stability, for keeping him where he is. Acute sensation cannot be intended to spur him to creativeness and to urge him to a new level of being. It must then be shown that there is unmistakable proof that we are developing actual capacities and faculties which so draw out and employ our vital energy that when this is done we are rendered painless. Strange as it may seem, enough evidence has already accumulated to make this highly probable. . . .

The new principle is simple. It may be stated as a proposition: The more mentally active anyone is, the less is he capable of pain. . . . The half-awake suffer most; the most intensely attentive are least aware of pain.³

The principle stated in the last sentence has been amply demonstrated by *yogins* and fakirs, who seem immune to pain because of their intense mental concentration. Heard rightly believed that the energy, or vitality, that typically causes us to experience pain points to the possibility of our further evolution—not on the physical level but on the level of consciousness. This possibility is in fact a challenge to us, for in order to translate it into actuality we must respond to it consciously. And this is precisely the purpose of all Yoga and Tantra.

To be clear, Tantra does not recommend that initiates pursue pain. Its goal is that of all Indic liberation teachings: to move beyond

all suffering and discover the indescribable bliss of Being. But Tantra understands that life on earth and in the other conditional realms brings us mixed experiences to which we must apply a measure of dispassionate, patient acceptance and self-discipline. Fearful avoidance of what we think are negative experiences merely reinforces the very attitude—namely, the exclusive identification with a limited body-mind—that breeds negative experiences. Likewise, blind attachment to what we consider positive experiences merely creates another kind of karmic bind by which we persist in our state of unenlightenment.

Significantly, Tantra asks us to go beyond the traditional stance of the cool, utterly detached observer of all our experiences. It recommends the more refined position of witnessing while at the same time understanding that observer and observed are not ultimately distinct. The Tantric approach is to see all life experiences as the play of the same One. Whether positive or negative, all experiences are embedded in absolute joy, the great delight (*mahā-sukha*) of Reality. When we have understood that what we dread the most—be it loss of health, property, relationships, or life itself—is not occurring *to us* but *within* our larger being, we begin to see the tremendous humor of embodiment. This insight is truly liberating.

The Tantric scriptures hammer on what may be the most important discovery of ancient spirituality, namely, that we *are* the world. The world is our true body. Therefore we are truly ageless, for according to Hindu cosmology the Big Bang that gives birth to the world is, after the demise of our present universe, followed by another Big Bang, ad infinitum. Cosmic existence unfolds and enfolds itself perpetually. Moreover, since body and mind are only conceptually separate and in actuality form aspects of the same world process, our mind is timeless as well. This profound finding is articulated in the archaic teaching of the identity of microcosm and macrocosm.

THE MYSTERY OF MICROCOSM AND MACROCOSM

The age-old isomorphic teaching that the microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm is fundamental not only to all magic but also

to arcane arts like astrology, as well as to the spiritual traditions, including Tantra. An oft-quoted statement of the *Vishva-Sāra-Tantra* puts it this way: "What is here is elsewhere; what is not here is nowhere."⁴ Western students of esoterica are familiar with this principle from the famous saying of Hermes Trismegistus, "As above, so below." Moreover, without this hermetic insight, which has been re-discovered by modern science in the idea of the "holographic universe," we cannot adequately understand the *Vedas* and much of later Hindu sacred literature.⁵ For instance, it is a master key to a deeper interpretation of the symbolism of many stories contained in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purānas*, which have a spiritual significance. It is certainly fundamental to Tantric theory and practice.

It is within the microcosm (body-mind) that, according to the *Tantras*, we find the doorway to the outer cosmos. The entire architecture of the universe is faithfully mirrored in our own body-mind. As the *Shiva-Samhitā* (2.1-5), a seventeenth-century Hatha Yoga manual composed under the influence of Tantra, states:

Within this body exist Mount Meru, the seven continents, lakes, oceans, mountains, plains, and the protectors of these plains.

In it also dwell the seers, the sages, all the stars and planets, the sacred river crossings and pilgrimage centers, and the deities of these centers.

In it whirl the sun and the moon, which are the causes of creation and annihilation. Likewise, it contains ether, air, fire, water, and earth.

All beings embodied in the three worlds, which are connected to Mount Meru, exist in the body together with all their activities.

He who knows all this is a *yogin*.⁶ There is no doubt about this.

We can access the cosmos by going within ourselves because objective and subjective realities coevolve from and always subsist in the same Reality. In the transcendental dimension, they are absolutely

identical. In the subtle realms, they are barely distinct, and they manifest as seemingly separate lines of evolution only in the visible material dimension. All this means nothing of course to materialists, who believe only in the existence of material elements and (reluctantly) in consciousness as a by-product of matter (i.e., the brain). The Tantric view is much more comprehensive and sophisticated because it pays due attention to humankind's psychological and spiritual capacities.

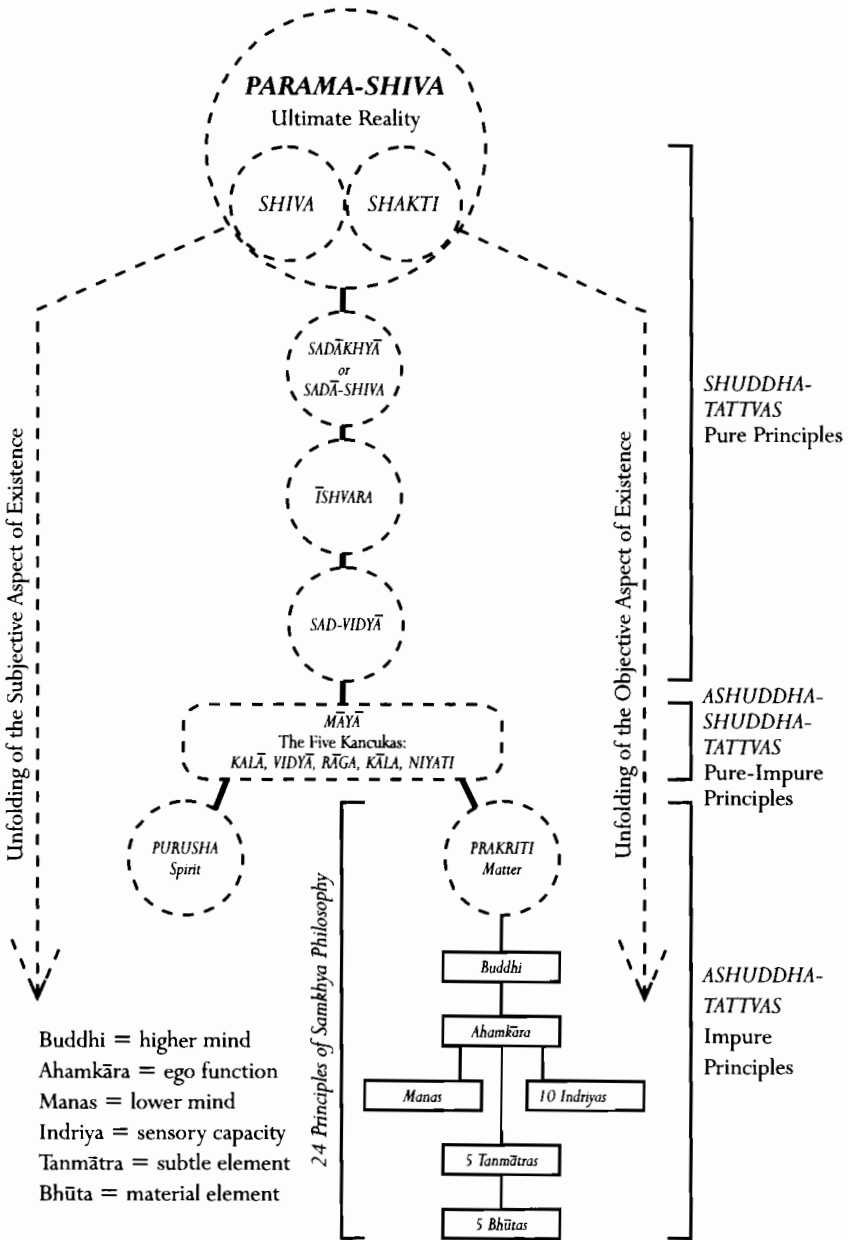
According to one prominent school, Kashmir's Pratyabhijnā, Tantra's ontology (model of existence) comprises thirty-six principles or categories (*tattva*). These evolve out of the ultimate Reality, or Parama-Shiva, who or which is called a metaprinciple (*atattva*).⁷ In descending order, these are as follows:

I. Universal Principles

1. *Shiva* (the Benevolent)—the masculine or consciousness aspect of the ultimate bipolar Reality
2. *Shakti* (Power)—the feminine or power aspect of the ultimate bipolar Reality, which polarizes Consciousness into "I" (*aham*) and "this" (*idam*), or subject and object, but without separating them dualistically
3. *Sadākhyā* (That which is named Being [*sat*]) or *Sadā-Shiva* (Ever-Benevolent)—the transcendental will (*icchā*) that recognizes and affirms "I am this," with the emphasis still on the subjective "I" rather than the objective "this" of the universal bipolar One
4. *Īshvara* (Lord)—the Creator, corresponding to the realization of "this I am," subtly emphasizing the objective side of the One and thereby setting the stage for cosmic evolution
5. *Sad-Vidyā* (Knowledge of Being) or *Shuddha-Vidyā* (Pure Knowledge)—the state of balance between the subjective and the objective, which are now clearly distinguishable within the One

II. Limiting Principles

6. *Māyā* (She who measures)—the power of delusion inherent in the ultimate Reality by which the One appears to be



The thirty-six principles of existence according to Tantra.

limited and measurable through the separation of subject and object, which marks the beginning of the impure order of existence

The Five "Coverings" (Kancuka) Associated with Māyā:

7. *Kalā* (Part)—the principle by which the unlimited creatorship of Consciousness becomes limited, causing limited effectiveness
8. *Vidyā* (Knowledge)—the principle by which the omniscience of Consciousness is curtailed, causing finite knowledge
9. *Rāga* (Attachment)—the principle by which the wholeness (*pūratva*) of Consciousness is disrupted, giving rise to the desire for partial experiences
10. *Kāla* (Time)—the principle by which the eternity of Consciousness is reduced to temporal existence marked by past, present, and future
11. *Niyati* (Necessity)—the principle by which the independence and pervasiveness of Consciousness is curtailed, bringing about limitation relative to cause, space, and form

III. Principles of Individuation

12. *Purusha* (Man) or *Anu* (Atom)—the conscious subject, or Self, which experiences the objective reality
13. *Prakriti* (Creatrix)—the fully objectified reality, or nature, which is particular to each conscious subject

IV. Principles of the "Inner Instrument" (Antahkarana)

14. *Buddhi* (Understanding)—the mental faculty of intelligence, which is characterized by the capacity for making distinctions
15. *Ahamkāra* (I-maker)—the principle of individuation by which a person appropriates experiences ("I am such and such," or "I possess such and such")

16. *Manas* (Mind)—the mental faculty that synthesizes the incoming sensory impressions into whole concepts and images

V. *Principles of Experience*

The Five Powers of Cognition (Jnāna-Indriya, written Jnānendriya):

17. *Ghrāna* (Smell)—the olfactory sense
18. *Rasa* (Taste)—the gustatory sense
19. *Cakshus* (Eye, i.e., Sight)—the visual sense
20. *Sparsha* (Touch)—the tactile sense
21. *Shravana* (Hearing)—the auditory sense

The Five Powers of Conation (Karma-Indriya, written Karmendriya):

22. *Vāc* (Speech)—the faculty of communication
23. *Hasta* (Hand)—the faculty of manipulation
24. *Pāda* (Foot)—the faculty of locomotion
25. *Pāyu* (Anus)—the digestive faculty
26. *Upastha* (Genitals)—the procreative faculty

The Five Subtle Elements (Tanmātra):

27. *Shabda-Tanmātra* (Subtle Element of Sound)—the potential for auditory perception
28. *Sparsha-Tanmātra* (Subtle Element of Touch)—the potential for tactile perception
29. *Rūpa-Tanmātra* (Subtle Element of Sight)—the potential for visual perception
30. *Rasa-Tanmātra* (Subtle Element of Taste)—the potential for gustatory perception
31. *Gandha-Tanmātra* (Subtle Element of Smell)—the potential for olfactory perception

VI. Principles of Materiality

32. *Ākāsha-Bhūta* (Element of Ether)—the principle of vacuity produced from the subtle element of sound
33. *Vāyu-Bhūta* (Element of Air)—the principle of motility produced from the subtle element of touch
34. *Agni-Bhūta* (Element of Fire)—the principle of formation produced from the subtle element of sight
35. *Āpo-Bhūta* (Element of Water)—the principle of liquidity produced from the subtle element of taste
36. *Prithivī-Bhūta* (Element of Earth)—the principle of solidity produced from the subtle element of smell

Tantric ontology seeks to answer the question of how the One can become Many, or how the ultimate Reality, which is singular, can give rise to the countless objects that we perceive through our senses. All liberation teachings provide some kind of an answer to the riddle of creation, because in order to be liberated we must trace our way from the Many back to the One. In Advaita Vedānta, as articulated by the eighth-century teacher Shankara, the world of multiplicity is simply the product of our spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*). The world is a phantom produced by the unenlightened mind. When the root ignorance is removed, the world reveals itself in its true nature, which is none other than the universal singular Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*saccid-ānanda*).⁸ According to Shankara, the phenomenal world is not nonexistent (because in the final analysis it is the eternal ultimate Reality); however, it is unreal (*asat*) because it appears as something other than what it truly is. To describe this curious condition the Vedantic sages often invoke the term *māyā*, which signifies illusion. What is implied by this concept is, among other things, the idea that the transition from the One to the Many is not a genuine emanation but only an apparent evolution (*vivarta*).

Like Advaita Vedānta, most schools of Tantra also maintain that the ultimate Reality is singular. However, they tend toward the view that the Many actually and not merely apparently evolves out of the

One (while still being contained within the One as the eternal backdrop of cosmic existence). They reject any metaphysics of illusionism. This emanationism is technically known as *sat-kārya-vāda*, which denotes that the effect (*kārya*) is preexistent (*sat*) in the cause: the world could not come into existence if it did not already exist in potential form in the ultimate Being. Perhaps four thousand years ago—long before the rise of Tantra—the sage Āruna taught his twenty-four-year-old son Shvetaketu this metaphysical principle. He pointed out that a clay pot, a clay vase, or a clay statue all are made from clay, though they are given different names to indicate their respective functions. Then Āruna expressly challenged the metaphysical credo that something can come out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*):

Dear one, in the beginning [all] this was being only, singular, without a second. Some say that [all] this was nonbeing only, singular, without a second and that out of nonbeing being was produced.

He said: But how indeed, dear one, could this be? How could being be produced from nonbeing? To be sure, dear one, in the beginning [all] this was being only, singular, without a second.⁹

More than a millennium later, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (2.16a) followed up on this idea, expanding it as follows:

Nonbeing (*asat*) does not come into being (*bhāva*); being does not disappear (*abhāva*).

In any case, the importance of the Tantric emanationism lies not in the sphere of philosophy but in the realm of spiritual practice. For the existential categories serve the *yogins* or *tāntrikas* as a map by which they are able to find their way out of the maze of multiplicity back to the simplicity of the nondual Reality.

The basic categories of Tantric ontology were worked out long ago by the Sāṃkhya school of thought, the rudiments of which can be found already in the *Rig-Veda*. In its classical form, as delineated in the *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* of Īshvara Krishna, Sāṃkhya recognizes twenty-four ontological principles, the twenty-fifth being the principle or

category of the supremely conscious Self (*purusha*). The twenty-four principles belong to the province of nature (*prakriti*), and they are essentially the same as those given by the Tantric philosophers (and summarized above). However, they added twelve more principles based on a careful analysis of their experiences in the most subtle states of meditation and ecstasy.

The ultimate principle is pure Consciousness, the irreducible Identity of all beings and things. The Pratyabhijnā school calls it *Parama-Shiva*, or “He who is supremely benign.”¹⁰ In contrast to Advaita Vedānta, however, the Pratyabhijnā system contends that the ultimate Reality, though singular, includes the principle of transcendental Power (called *shakti*). The two are inseparable. As the *Tantras* state, Shiva without Shakti is powerless, and Shakti without Shiva is equally impotent.

This is a quintessentially Tantric doctrine. As the Shaiva *tāntrikas* are fond of pointing out, their understanding of the nature of reality has a distinct advantage over the metaphysics of Advaita Vedānta. For they do not have to conjure up a separate agency—namely, *māyā*—to explain the existence of the world, nor do they have to deny the reality of the world. As they see it, their nondualism is more self-consistent than that of Advaita Vedānta. For the Shaiva metaphysicians, both *māyā* and world are integral to the One, and the world is not a shadow to be abandoned but a glorious manifestation of Shiva. However, Advaita Vedānta in their eyes is not truly nondualistic because in addition to the existence of the One it also affirms the beginningless effectivity of *māyā*, which is separate from the One and is the cause of the Many. Shankara anticipated this criticism when he explained *māyā* as being neither a reality in itself nor a phantom (which would be ineffective) but as inherently indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*).

Working with the power or energy aspect of Reality is the specialty and unsurpassed strength of the Tantric adepts. Hence Tantra is sometimes wrongly identified with Shaktism. Both are really distinct historical streams of spirituality, though they have greatly influenced each other over the centuries. I will discuss the doctrine of Shiva-Shakti in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the ultimate

Reality, which has two aspects (Consciousness and Energy), manifests as the universe. It is for this reason that we, who are that Reality, can awaken to our true nature even while we are in the embodied state.

We *are* the world, as modern ecological-minded philosophers have rediscovered, and we also are that which transcends, creates, and sustains the world and again withdraws it into its infinite and timeless expanse.