On the notions of 'Satguru' and 'Self-Awareness' ... an invitation to critical dialogue

Peter Wilberg

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There is no greater gift a 'spiritual teacher' can receive than the gift of critical, questioning awareness and dialogue. In this essay therefore, I wish to open a space for such dialogue. I will do so first by questioning the notions of the 'true' guru or 'Satguru' in the way this term is understood in many spiritual-cultural lineages or traditions, i.e. as an initiator or initiate of that lineage or tradition. I argue instead that 'true' spiritual teachers are souls who attained their inner knowledge and 'initiation' in what is called 'the afterlife' i.e. not from a historic lineage of gurus but higher beings and teachers active in what is better called 'the spiritual world'. Such teachers incarnate with the specific purpose of translating the inner knowing thus attained into the spiritual-cultural languages, traditions and teachings current in a given era – but also and above all in order to *reinterpret* and *transform* those languages into clearer, less distorted and more philosophically coherent and consistent vehicles for the expression of truth.

Since our own 'post-modern' culture includes many spiritual groupings or 'sub-cultures' which claim to draw their truth from the languages, symbols and mythologies making up one or more different *pre-modern* traditions, texts, teachings, teachers or lineages (whether Indian or Japanese, Christian or Buddhist) part of the work of the 'true spiritual teacher' as I understand it is also to learn and master the spiritual terms and languages which distinguish and shape these manifold sub-cultures — whether they identify themselves as Buddhist or Hindu, Yogic or Tantric - and no matter which of the manifold sub-divisions of spiritual traditions, teachings and teachers they identify with or follow.

This new understanding and recognition of what constitutes a *Satguru* is, however, made more difficult by the fact that *neither* current spiritual sub-cultures claiming to inherit the mantle of pre-modern traditions (nor indeed those pre-modern spiritual traditions themselves) offer a true and comprehensive picture of the nature of the 'afterlife' - which is neither a mere interval between lives nor some state of total enlightenment or merger with the divine, but rather the gateway to the spiritual world – understood as an infinite multiplicity of non-physical universes, dimensions and planes of awareness, and which the so-called 'physical' plane is merely a type of nursery school preparing us to enter. Nor do these pre-modern teachings and their current followers or teachers recognise that the highest and most advanced 'schools' and forms of spiritual training have their reality not in earthly history but in that spiritual world to which the afterlife is a gateway. The type of teaching given is truly multi-dimensional, as explained in 'Seth Speaks' by Jane Roberts¹, aimed at developing skills not usually associated with or recognised in those seen as Satguru 'true' teachers:

"Such a teacher must be able to instruct various portions of one entity, in your terms, at the same time. Say, for example, a particular entity has reincarnations in the fourteenth century, [in] 3 B.C., in the year A.D. 260, and in the time of Atlantis. A teacher would simultaneously be in contact with these various personalities, communicating with them in terms that they could understand. Such communication demands a complete knowledge of the root assumptions of such eras, and of the general philosophical and scientific climate of thought at the time. The amount of knowledge and training necessary makes such a teaching communicator-career extremely demanding, but it is one of the courses available. The process of learning such information necessarily adds to the development and abilities of the teacher. Once such a choice is made, training immediately begins, always under the leadership of a practical expert. The vocation, for it is a vocation, leads such a teacher even into other realms of reality than those he previously knew existed."

From Seth Speaks – the Eternal Validity of the Soul

Deciding to become such a 'teacher' is one of several choices of what Seth calls basic 'inner vocations' (the others being the vocations of 'healer', 'creator' or any individually appropriate combination of all three vocations – teacher, healer and creator). In all cases an individual training to pursue such an inner vocation is one who has learned enough from different incarnations to leave the physical plane for good, but instead – somewhat like the Buddhist notion of the *Boddhisatva* – decides to incarnate again purely to pursue the vocation of, say, a teacher.

On the other hand the 'true teacher' in the sense Seth describes is always and at the same time both 1. a teacher in training (practicing the ability to both master and then also subtly deconstruct and transform the 'root assumptions' and 'terms' of specific historic eras and their cultures) 2. a teacher trainer, one whose principal students consist of spiritual teachers still unaware that spiritual knowledge derives from the bodily recall of the nature of reality as experienced and explored in 'the afterlife'. I use inverted commas to emphasise again that this is no mere 'life between lives' – but a gateway, for those who are ready, by which to enter the spiritual world - that multidimensional universe of awareness to which what is understood in spiritual teachings as 'self-realisation' or 'enlightenment' is comparable to a mere 'elementary certificate' or basic 'entry ticket' to an eternal journey of the soul.

Ignorance of this eternal journey goes hand in hand with the failure to understand that it only begins or that we take only our first faltering steps on it in upon leaving this plane of existence and its 'reincarnational cycle' for good - and that having done so we do not merely exist in some unchanging or divine state of 'enlightenment' or merger with the divine but begin to learn about any of the countless dimensions and planes of reality unknown, unconceived and even unimaginable to us before. Another sign of ignorance of the true nature of the life beyond 'physical' existence, is a consistent failure to recognise that not only emotional experiencing but also sensual and sensory experiencing not only continues but become far more vivid and intense after death and the loss of our so-called 'physical senses' than it is in this life - as well as assuming infinitely more various forms (as it also does in dreams and in particular in 'lucid dreams'). Yet the age-old association of spiritual experiencing as something dependent on controlling and reigning in 'the senses', 'emotions' and 'passions' continues. This reigning in or 'yoking' of all that most essentially constitutes life is one root sense of the word 'yoga' - with the 'yogi' compared to a charioteer yoking - reigning in and controlling what are presumed to be his otherwise uncontrollable horses - such as desires, the senses etc. This goes along with an extreme patriarchal worldview in which a man's own sexual drives or passions are seen as 'caused' by womankind (or in more 'sacred' Indian terms, by Maya or Mayashakti – she who is seen as creating what is merely an illusion of a sensory world, albeit one which can unwillingly trap the unwary - like a disguised prostitute can entrap a man, or as if the beauty of women can cause a man to rape her).

The understanding of 'yoga' as jug ('union' with the divine in life or after death) was a much later historic development² - though one that never fully disentangled itself from the practice of austerity, renunciation or asceticism (tapas) that was its historic root and that constituted a type of preparation for death or even a form of ritual suicide – an expression of what Freud would call the death instinct. As for the word 'yoga' as it is generally understood today i.e. principally as a commercialised teaching of different postures or asanas - this type of yoga only began to take the form it has today in colonial India – as a militaristic and later a nationalist counterpart to Western gymnastics. It was at this time also - under Muslim Mughul and British colonial rule - that individuals and groups calling themselves 'jogis' first appeared, either as hired mercenaries or as marketplace contortionists. And there is certainly no relation between today's 'postural yoga' however and either the Mahabharata and Gita (in which asanas

play no role in the various meanings given to 'yoga') or to the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* - which do not refer to any posture or 'asana' besides *sitting in a comfortable way* – a far cry indeed from the often uncomfortable if not painful or forced yoga postures taught today, whose own 'sources' go back only as far as the 12th or 15th century or later and whose aim was either immortality of the body or else an immortality of the soul after death – as if the soul were not already immortal - and as if it did not have its own immortal body.

Right at the start of this essay I put the word 'spiritual', 'spiritual' teacher and 'spiritual' world in quotation marks. This is because the word 'spiritual' is first and foremost a word with *Latin* roots and specifically Latin denotations and connotations - as is the word 'meditation'. Similarly terms such as 'energy' and 'physical' have Greeks roots and also Greek meanings – albeit meanings that *bear almost no relation to their current usage*. Thus whether or not one is an expert in any Asian language such as Sanskrit, the ability to translate 'original' texts of a pre-modern, medieval or 'ancient' character is, right from the outset, fundamentally limited and gravely distorted by the fundamentally *European* nature and fundamentally modern significations and usages of the very terms used to translate them. Given this limitation, it becomes a huge and vitally important challenge, some would say an impossible one, to uncover what meaning the supposedly equivalent terms of words such as 'meditation' etc. in Asian languages might originally have had – and also in what specific ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic context (or *changes* in context) they first attained the *significance* and *status* they had for the people who used them.

Thankfully however, modern and 'post-modern' disciplines such as hermeneutics, discourse analysis and semiotics have granted us new terms such as 'inter-textuality' - allowing us to understand that now - as in the past - the language of 'spiritual' texts and teachings was not just what I call a specific 'intralanguage' used within and marking out a specific 'spiritual tradition' or 'in-group', but also an 'interlanguage' interweaving and/or appropriating and giving new senses to significant terms used in the texts of other, earlier or competing groups and traditions. Thus, far from simply referring to some pre-given 'thing', the language of the *tantras* for example, made use of words borrowed from earlier or other traditions or teachings. In doing so it did not merely use those words to denote or signify some 'thing' that had always existed, but rather *appropriated and subsumed* those words or terms within a fundamentally different cultural and religious framework - in this way also lending them a distinctly new meaning shaped by that framework. Thus, taking any significant word in Indian 'spiritual' discourses and texts, we must understand it in the same way the Russian linguist Bakhtin understood all discourse, namely that:

"The word in language is always half someone else's."

In other words, there is no type of speech or text, including the 'in-group' or 'intra-language' of a particular teacher or teaching, that is created *ex nihilo*. Instead all types of speech and text necessarily *adapt and borrow* from the language and vocabulary of *other texts and/or speakers* — either unconsciously and eclectically - or in order to intentionally appropriate and make use of their cultural status and capital whilst at the same redefining them within a new historic context. This is a very important meaning of 'inter-textuality', since the art of explicating and lending new understandings to words or terms whose meaning is generally taken for granted in a given culture, subculture or 'in-group' is *also* the art of what I understand as the 'true teacher'. The difference is that this type of true teacher uses this art — and all the skills it demands - with full awareness and intent. He or she does not use it in order to accrue fame, success, power or money. Nor does he or she use it simply to appeal to the

established 'aura', authority, reverence or status attached to existing traditions, teachers or teachings. Instead the aim of such a teacher is to make use of the cultural status or 'capital' already accrued by these traditions or teachers precisely in order to question, demystify and deconstruct the root assumptions hidden in the very languages of their teachings. In contrast, whether one is a spiritual teacher or a student of such a teacher, if one does not question the very *language and vocabulary* in which a particular tradition or teaching *is couched* – or is not even aware that there are any questions whatsoever to be asked about it – then the awareness of both students and teacher, far from being deepened, heightened or expanded by that language – remains for ever limited and shaped by it.

Thus when it comes to the whole issue of awareness – a term I have fundamentally redefined in my own teachings - I find myself constantly having to repeat a motto or mantra of my own: namely that what I see as the newer and truer understanding of awareness requires in turn a new language of awareness. This is something however, that cannot possibly be refined, developed and applied without a far more questioning and discerning awareness of language. What could be termed 'the accumulation of cultural capital' however, rests precisely on the use within a teaching or by a teacher of old terms such as prana or atman, modern ones such as 'energy', vague ones such as 'love', 'the light' or 'the heart' – or even generic terms as yoga and tantra themselves - all of which are simply assumed to have always meant the same thing, and referred to similar experiences or practices. In reality, they endowed with symbolic capital – with a certain 'aura' or 'mystique' - precisely because what they actually mean or signify – their 'signified' is never critically questioned. Not being questioned neither can it be more deeply explicated. Not being more deeply explicated neither however, can it be more deeply experienced.

Yet a quite different experience arises from simply using the word 'love', whether in a text or oral discourse, if this word is explicated in a new and different way – for example as the innately *feeling* character of awareness *as such* - what I call 'feeling awareness'. 'Love' understood in this way is that innate capacity of awareness to *sense* and *touch* others by virtue of *feeling* them – and vice versa. Indeed the essential meaning of the very word 'feeling' cannot be fully understood or experienced unless this word is taken first and foremost as a *verb* (as in touching and thereby 'feeling' an object or another person's hand) rather than as a plural noun (as in talking about a 'feeling' or 'feelings' that we 'have' toward or about another person). (See www.thenewtherapy.org.uk)

The term 'self-awareness' or 'self-consciousness' is also one that deserves scrutiny, since while its meaning is generally taken as totally self-evident by most who use or hear it, as I have often written, it actually harbours within itself hidden metaphysical questions of *the* most fundamental nature. The first question. Are we speaking of an awareness/consciousness of self that itself belongs *to* that very self? Or are we speaking of what is often called 'witnessing' awareness' - in which case the question arises as to whether that witnessing awareness is in turn and itself the property of a self, albeit another self or 'subject' of consciousness? Linguistically therefore, if we interpret 'self-awareness' as a type of 'awareness of self', everything hinges around the little word 'of'.

Does the 'of' in the expression 'awareness of self', have a genitive character – implying that 'awareness' belongs to the 'self' referred to (making the 'of' in 'awareness of self' the equivalent to that in 'branches of a tree', i.e. branches belonging to that tree)? Or does it have a totally non-genitive character?

I argue that whilst there is indeed something that can be called 'awareness of self', the 'of' in this expression cannot - *in principle* - be interpreted linguistically in a genitive sense, as belonging *to* the 'self' referred to - or indeed to anything that there is an awareness 'of'. Indeed according to what I have

termed 'The Awareness Principle', to believe that an awareness of something – anything – can belong to or be the property of that thing makes no logical sense in principle. Why? Because since we only know of the very *existence or being* of any thing – or self – through an awareness of it, if follows that that very awareness is logically and ontologically prior to and distinct from any thing or self *of* which it is aware. Simple logic dictates that even to speak of 'meditating upon the self' implies a duality of a meditating and meditated self, one of which is 'aware' of the other. That same simple logic dictates that there simply *can be no self of any sort* that 'is' aware or that 'has' awareness - since simply to *know* of such any such self implies, in principle a prior or *a priori* awareness of it. The same logic makes nonsense also of the notion of a higher or pure awareness that is immediately aware of 'itself' rather than of its manifestions, a notion flawed both by its circularity and by the way in which it turns pure awareness, i.e. awareness *as such* - into some 'thing' it can be aware of.

The philosophical consequences of these logical arguments at the heart of The Awareness Principle — applied critically to the commonly used notion of 'self-awareness' - are so fundamental, radical and far reaching that they have yet to be fully grasped in all their vast implications. One consequence is that the entire notion of an 'aware self' or 'aware being' is abolished at a stroke. Where does this leave us one may ask? Surely it is self-evident, a simple empirical fact, that there are countless beings or selves that 'are aware' or that 'have' or 'possess awareness'? And if not, how are we to explain this seemingly self-evident or empirical truth? In fact we can account for the seeming existence of aware beings or selves by recognising that everything that is - including every single experienced thing, world and self — is not, in essence, 'aware' but rather *is* an awareness. By this I mean that it is an individualised portion, expression of a singular, universal awareness. This awareness is 'the One' that is so often referred to in gnostic, mystical and philosophical discourse. Yet this One is not a being, not even a supreme or divine being. It is not even being as such ('Being' or 'beingness') or selfhood as such ('I' or 'I'-ness). Instead this One is a singular *awareness* — an awareness which is not the property but rather the ultimate *source and essence* of all beings, all things and all selves — each being a portion of it.

"The body is an awareness." Carlos Castaneda. It is in this sense and this sense only that we can say that there are 'aware bodies', 'aware beings' or 'aware selves' - a sense based on the recognition that every such body, being or self neither simply 'is' aware nor 'has' awareness but rather - as a portion of the One Universal Awareness - is an awareness in its own right.

Thus an atom *is* an awareness, as is a cell, plant, tree, fish, animal, human being and ultimately any *body* or group of bodies – even cosmic bodies such as planets, stars and galaxies. This understanding is the *still un-thought* and *still un-explicated* truth of countless spiritual teachings and traditions which still get bogged down in logical-philosophical confusions *between* Being, the Self or the 'I AM' and most primordial reality of all - Awareness.

For even to speak of a 'Witnessing Awareness' is to imply one type of awareness among others, i.e. a 'witnessing' one, whereas what I am speaking of is not a *type* of awareness but awareness *as such* – that singular awareness which is the *one sole reality* - all things and selves being both an expression of it and at the same time constituting all that IT – this one singular, universal awareness - experiences. Hence the twin guiding mantra or mottos of this radically new understanding – 'The Awareness Principle' – understood as a 'Theory of Everything'.

- 1. Awareness as such is Everything all that is.
- 2. Everything is an Awareness in its own right.

Expressed in European philosophical terms, Awareness, as 'the One' (Greek *sophon*) is logically and 'epistemologically' *prior* to Being, to any Self or 'l' and to all things that are – to all beings and all phenomena whatsoever. At the same time every being, self or phenomenon *is* an awareness in its own right, i.e. an invidualised form of awareness. Hence it is not the Self or 'l' that is aware. On the contrary Selfhood and the 'l' are but one of infinite phenomena, each of which both is an awareness and *of* which there also is a higher trans-individual awareness – not an awareness which is yours or mine but one the very essence of the *divine* - that beyond which there is nothing higher (*anuttara*), and outside which there can *be* nothing at all. For just as there can be nothing 'outside' space or 'before' time ('outside' and 'before' being themselves spatial and temporal terms) so also can there – *in principle* - be nothing, no 'l' or 'You', self or world, being or body that is 'outside of' or 'before' Awareness. Instead all bodies and beings, indeed all experienced phenomena whatsoever, are but sensual shapes and forms taken by awareness 'as such', i.e. in its singular and universal character.

To think otherwise is like believing that an ocean belongs to or is a product of the fish and other life forms that emerge and evolve from and within it, or that space is a possession or product of things it contains, or that the earth belongs to or is a product of beings dwelling on it. To think otherwise is also like believing there can be any sort of awareness of light without that invisible *light of awareness* through which alone all things can become visible - and *not just* through the eyes as a sense organ. For the light that illuminates our dreams requires no eyes – being the light of awareness. Similarly, the body we inhabit in our dreams has no flesh, blood or organs – but is a body of awareness, composed of awareness. As for what is conceived of as our 'physical' body, that too is a body of awareness – the only difference being that it is that body of awareness *as perceived from without* rather than as experienced from within.

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on." William Shakespeare

That stuff, the stuff of which all bodies and things are made, is awareness. This fundamental principle of course, runs directly contrary to the more or less explicit claims made by contemporary brain science – namely that awareness is (or can in principle) be the property or by-product of anything (for example the grey matter of the brain) that already *assumes* an awareness of it. Elementary intellectual discernment makes such a notion entirely untenable however - being equivalent to believing, for example, that dream awareness as such can be 'caused' by some one thing we might happen to dream *of* (in this case a dream object perceived in the form of a 'brain') and that even though our very perception of that brain-like 'thing' is only possible within a pre-existing *field* of awareness, whether dreaming or waking awareness. I began this discourse however by speaking of what in various Indian based spiritual traditions has come to be called the 'true teacher' or 'teacher of truth' – the so-called *Satguru*. Anyone familiar with my own website and books on what I term 'The New Yoga' – or to be more exact, 'The New Yoga of Awareness', might be forgiven for thinking that by calling myself 'Acharya Peter Wilberg' I too present myself as a guru - or even *satguru* – in the same manner as other current spiritual groupings, traditions and teachers drawing from Indian thought. They might also be forgiven for wondering if I too am simply attempting to appropriate the cultural capital, authority and status attached to the designation I chose - *Acharya*.

They may also be forgiven if this observation is reinforced by my references to a particular pre-modern guru - Sri Abhinavagupta, the lineage of gurus preceding him and the tradition of what is called Kashmiri Shaivism with which they are associated. On the other hand, others, knowing of the huge diversity of

themes, teachings or traditions discussed – and questioned – in my books and websites on many other subjects, may be surprised to see that in most of these little or no reference is made to Indian thought or to gurus of any sort, and that the term 'Acharya' is dropped from the author name on their cover or content. Indeed the more familiar they are with all my books and on-line writings they more they may be forgiven for feeling so confused or overwhelmed by their diversity that they begin in frustration to ask themselves – 'Just who is this 'Peter Wiberg'?' What sort of person/author/teacher is it who seems as much at home in the languages of Marxism, gnosticism, Oriental thought, European philosophy and phenomenology, semiotics, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, as he is in the language of Trika Shaivism, Advaita and Indian thought in general – and moreover is able to often make surprising and insightful connections between them?

For a rare few this is not so much a question as the key to their appreciation of my work and writing in all its faces and genres - recognising as they do in them all a mode of deeply original yet also clear and incisive thinking - albeit one that, for them - also clearly has its roots both in an authentic lived experience of what I write of and/or a type of wordless inner knowing that communicates through it. In contrast, the most unfortunate of my readers or students are those who almost completely fail to recognise anything fundamentally, radically and decisively new in my writing and in my work as a whole. Thus, even though they may think what I write about 'awareness' or Indian 'spiritual' traditions to be unusually clear and well-written, they nevertheless persist in believing that despite this I am ultimately only using different words to say or write the same thing as many others have said or written. This is an expression of a very old and questionable belief – the belief that whilst mystics of different eras, religious traditions or sub-traditions, may speak in different terms, the essence of their mystical experience of truth is essentially the same, i.e. quite independent of the cultural context and conditions in which it occurred and the concepts or language in which it is couched. The implication here is that how an experience, message or meaning is couched in words is a mere shell - bearing no significant relation at all to what is experienced or communicated through those words. Thus to speak as Ramana Maharishi and others in the Hindu tradition do, of 'meditating upon the self' - though this may of very basic psychotherapeutic value in cultures where many people do indeed lack a deep and fully embodied awareness of self - is not something that can result in the same type of psychological, spiritual or mystical experience as that of a Buddhist seeking to eliminate any and every sense of self - and instead seeks an ultimate experience of no-self or 'anatman' - or of a Jew who seeks an intimately personal 'I-Thou' relation between the self and God in which, however inseparable, both remain absolutely distinct and not 'one' - not Brahman.

Here again we confront the belief that there can be any such thing as a type of wholly *universal* and 'unmediated' experience of truth, mystical or otherwise, i.e. a mode of experience completely independent of the specific cultural-religious language into which it is pressed (for example Hindu religious languages in which the notion of 'self' is absolutely central). This idea runs directly contrary to the type of critical *awareness of language* that I argue is so central to developing a genuinely newer, truer and more logically concise and consistent *language* of *awareness*. Such a new language of awareness would also have the character of not being bound by the terms of any one spiritual vocabulary. Hence it could as easily be applied to rethinking Marxism and monetary economics as it can to rethinking the nature of 'Yoga', 'Tantra', 'Advaita', 'Turya' – or the 'Satguru'. It would also be a language which transcends the limiting vocabularies and modes of discourse of so many spiritual tradition or teachers, most of which tend to lay claim to a type of 'truth' which is not only *immune from all forms of critical discourse* but also renders *all other modes and fields of discourse* irrelevant.

In coming to a new understanding of 'true teachers' I began this essay with the suggestion that such a teacher or *Satguru* is essentially a teacher trained in the art of so deeply *immersing* themselves in a variety of quite distinct cultural *languages* and symbol systems, that these come alive within their soul and in their lived experience. It is through such a teacher's *immersion* in and fluent *mastery* of these languages that they come to serve as a vehicle *not only* to critically expose questions or 'root assumptions' that may lie still *unthought* within them *but also* to open up and explore as yet new and still *unexperienced* dimensions of awareness and experiencing. One wonders then, just how many centuries it may still require for humanity - including its philosophers, scientists and 'spiritual teachers' - to come to recognise and experience the simple and basic truth that it is not any being, thing, self or world but a primordial *awareness* of being - and with it of all that *is* and could *be* - that is the most primordial reality or truth of all. This despite the fact that all we need do to come to this truth is to ask ourselves how we come to know that we ourselves or anything at all 'is' or 'exists' - and to realise that the answer to this question is - through *an awareness of it* - an awareness that cannot, logically and in principle, be reduced to anything that that awareness is an awareness of.

How could it be however, that this most basic truth of all – namely that a primordial *awareness* of being or 'isness' lies, at the very ground and heart of our being or existence - came to be passed over in human history and across so many historical epochs and cultures? The answer I have suggested in my teachings and writings is that for millennia humanity has lived according to a root assumption that awareness or 'consciousness' is the *private property* of a being or beings. Hence it was only in pre-historic civilisations or tribal cultures in which the *economic* notion of private property - and the history of class or caste divisions that accompanied and arose from it - had not yet cemented itself, that awareness itself and as such was still experienced as something unbounded by the flesh and present in everything from a rock or river to a tree or mountain, animal or human being, planet, star or constellation. As I have argued in my book 'Tantric Wisdom for Today's World', only later did there emerge something like an ego or 'l' that took awareness as its *private property* and as something bounded by the *human body* – 'its' body. Before that time, as Seth explains, human awareness was not felt as something bounded by the body but could merge with the awareness manifest as a rock or tree, flow with the awareness manifest as a river or ride on the awareness manifest as a breath of 'wind' or *pneuma* – the root meaning of the Greek word for 'spirit' and one still echoed in the Latin word 'spirit' – from the verb *spirare* – to breathe.

In spiritual and religious discourse however, one does not even asks what terms such as 'spirit' essentially mean? No do spiritual teachers who seek to offer their students a 'spiritual' experience of any sort – for example of 'thought-free' awareness, recognise the simple and obvious truths that (a) the awareness of a thought is *not itself* a thought but something *innately* thought-free, or (b) that the starting point of thought-free awareness is, paradoxically, the very thought or abstract concept of such an awareness. To truly and fully *experience* something of the nature of 'pure awareness' is, in other words, to come to a tangible, fully embodied and intense experience of what for most begins as a seemingly abstract *concept*. Yet I know of only two teachers (Seth and Rudolf Steiner) who explicitly recognise that meditating abstract verbal concepts (*vikalpa*) is, in and of itself, a powerful way of expanding spiritual awareness and coming to new word- and thought-free spiritual *experiences* (though in practice this *is* the principal way in which teachings become effective). Why however, has the role of language and abstract thought in seeding and shaping spiritual insights and experiences of truth come to be glossed over? One reason is its sheer obviousness – it being too obvious to even remark on the fact that spiritual teachings and texts themselves take the form of linguistically couched and communicated

thoughts - even if only in the form of wholly ungrounded or even contradictory verbal assertions, each bearing a whole host of *unthought* questions within them. A second reason is that today thinking has, as Martin Heidegger pointed out, almost entirely lost its essentially *meditative* character, having been almost wholly replaced by different forms of calculative, technical and instrumental rationality. Indeed the very concept of *meditative thinking*, let alone its practice, is one entirely foreign to most practitioners of what is called 'meditation'.

Sri Abhinavagupta was quite correct in stating that 'Philosophy is an abstraction from high level spiritual experiences'. But given the dialectical or reciprocal relation of linguistic concepts and experiencing, I myself can confidently assert – *from experience* – that the converse is also the case: namely that 'Highgrade spiritual experiences are an embodiment of high-grade philosophy'. Even what I call the pure awareness of any experience, mystical or otherwise, is itself, paradoxically, something that can only ever attained through a specific. 'high-level' *experience* of that very awareness – for example as an experience of the 'light' of awareness or its spacious character.

Thus, if we take the term as Sanatana Dharma as referring to some type of 'eternal truth', then precisely because it is eternal it cannot, as suggested at the start of this essay, have a 'beginning' which can be traced back through a historical lineage - for it is trans-temporal and trans-historical in its very essence. Nor can any supposedly direct or immediate experience of this 'truth' be separated from its cultural context. That is why I urge all readers of this essay not only to study 'Seth Speaks' and the other Seth books by Jane Roberts, but also Danish researcher Børge Madsen's new and original book called 'Why Yoga?' and subtitled 'a cultural history of yoga'. In it, he deconstructs the mythologies surrounding spiritual 'yoga' lineages - mythologies that not only today - but also and throughout the entire history of Indian spiritual traditions - have regularly been manufactured in order to artificially add to the authority of new teachers and teachings by investing them with the 'symbolic capital' - the aura and status - of earlier or much older ones. Even today, the mythology is maintained that the tradition of Kashmir Shaivism - effectively wiped out by Muslim invaders from Turkey was somehow maintained by some hidden lineage of gurus, or that 20th century gurus such as Nityandanda and Mutkananda could claim some sort direct linear descent from figures such as Sri Abhinavagupta, or though (putting mythology aside) the latter had more than a handful of disciples - none of whom will have approached his work with a consciousness shaped by 20th century culture.

From this perspective, no 'spiritual teacher' who is not aware of how it belongs to the *very essence* of almost all religious and spiritual traditions (including Kashmir Shaivism) to *create* their own *mythological histories and lineages* can be regarded as a *Satguru* in the new sense I have sought to explicate here. This new sense is also based on a new understanding of knowledge as such - which is not seen as flowing along a linear timeline or through a lineage of gurus from the past to the present, but rather as descending from the spiritual world - through the vehicle of individuals who recall their experience of and training within it. Indeed one could go further and argue that if there *is* any dimension of linear temporality in the process of 'spiritual transmission' it has a fundamentally *reverse* character to the one usually attributed to it: namely just as life is lived in anticipation of death and the 'afterlife' – a return to a direct experience of the spiritual world and spiritual truth - so too are earlier traditions and teachings *anticipations* of later, more clearly, fully, deeply and meditatively thought-through ones.

But what of the so-called *Siddhis*, marks or signs of a *satguru* – and in particular his or her capacity for so-called direct transmission of awareness in silence. What distinguishes the understanding of the true guru

or *Satguru* in 'The New Yoga' from all other traditions and teachings is that the mark of so-called 'Self-Realisation' – recognised as identification with Pure Awareness – is seen as an infinite capacity for *Becoming Other*. By this I mean the capacity to attune to and identify with the aware inwardness or 'soul' of any seemingly 'non-self' phenomenon - from a single sound or colour to an atom, cell, body or entire universe of bodies – as well as being able to identify with the soul of another being, human or trans-human. The true guru, as pure feeling awareness, can also attune to and embody not one but a *myriad* of different selves, including both countless aspects of the guru's own individual soul - and that of others. He or she can literally feel their way into and see directly into the soul of another - as well as literally *entering* the awareness body or 'soul body' of the other. In this way the true guru can also come to perceive the multitude of *different selves* (parallel or reincarnational, actual or potential) present or latent both within their own soul and that of others. Finally, through the true guru's capacity to also *shape-shift* his or her own 'soul body' or 'body of feeling awareness' in the likeness of these many selves – another important dimension of the capacity for *Becoming Other* - the true guru can also *reveal* the larger soul of another *to* that other – and with it, the face of each and any of the *countless selves* which their soul embraces and contains.

As for what is often referred to as *Shaktipat*, this is not, in essence any type of transmission of 'energy' on the part of a guru, but rather the capacity to touch another being with an inner feeling awareness of one or more of the countless *Shaktis* within them. These are not 'energies' but *capacities, potencies or potentialities of awareness* of a sort that are latent within every being as their own infinite and unique dimensions of *individualised* awareness or selfhood. Together and as one they are experienced as *pure power* or *Shakti* – the counterpart of that pure feeling awareness, singular, universal and all-pervading, that is the essence of *Shiva*. *Shakti* is also the manifestation of that awareness in all sensory phenomena and realms of experiencing, both physical and trans-physical. What a paradox it is then, that the *suppression* of sensory experiencing should still be regarded as a spiritual aim or accomplishment of any sort, when in reality one of the greatest *gifts* awareness brings with it is an *intensification and enrichment* of sensory and sensual experiencing in all its dimensions, not just in waking life but in our dream life - and also and in particular *after death*.

References:

- 1 Seth Speaks the Eternal Validity of the Soul, Jane Roberts
- 2 Why Yoga? a cultural history of yoga, Børge Madsen