

## Chapter 10

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# How Can We Contact Semantic Nothing?

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In the preceding chapter, when describing the world of psychic phenomena, I used broad concepts of these phenomena. The present chapter is limited to the aspects of our inner world which can be described only by concepts inherent in it.

From our own experience we know that the entrance into Nothing is signified by the stopping of our personal, psychological Time. Slowing down Time may imitate death. This was brilliantly expressed by the famous Russian actor Michael Chekhov (1953) in his passage against the naturalistic scenes of death on the stage:

Death on the stage should be shown as a slowing down and disappearance of *time*. The actor portraying death must so arrange the rhythm and meter of his role as to enable the audience watching him to feel the slowing down of time and unnoticeably approach the point when the slowed down tempo seems to stop for a moment. And this stopping gives an impression of death.

Chekhov himself skillfully used this technique. I remember seeing him play Hamlet. In the death scene the rhythm of time was slowing down. The banners were lowered over the body of the dying Hamlet in the same slowed down rhythm. Nothing special seemed to be happening on the stage, but the spectators were bewitched: they felt the contact with Nothing. It was not an ordinary performance, but a mystery. Watching that performance was my first encounter with another reality. This memory of my youth seems to have predetermined much in my life.

All other techniques of contacting Nothing are also based on various methods of slowing down personal Time. One of them is meditation, which is described in detail in Chapter 11. Here I would like to say only

that the mystery played by Chekhov was an attempt to involve the whole audience in collective meditation.

A second way is the slowing down of Time that occurs in love. The nature of love has excited philosophers from time immemorial. Here I again turn to Plotinus, a philosopher completing the epoch of pre-Christian thought. He began his tractatus "Love" with a noteworthy question (Plotinus, 1956):

What is Love? A God, a Celestial Spirit, a state of mind? Or is it, perhaps, something to be thought of as God of Spirit and sometimes merely as an experience? And what is it essentially in each of these respects? (p. 191)

At the end of the tractatus we find an amazingly simple answer to this question:

Then Love is, at once in some degree a thing of Matter and at the same time a *Celestial spring of the Soul's unsatisfied longing for the Good.* (p. 201)

Plotinus had comprehended the whole complexity of the nature of love: both its material side and its urge towards contact with Nothing (recall that the Good of Plotinus is one of the names of the first facet of the higher Trinity which, by force of its simplicity, should not contain anything in itself).

Now, having enriched ourselves by the experience of many cultures, we are able to interpret Plotinus's brief but expressive assertion. Within our contemporary culture, love is primarily seen in its material, purely instinctive manifestation. In Freud's conception this instinct, being socially suppressed, leads to a pathology of personality and at the same time proves to be the principal impetus in the evolution of culture. Freudianism turned out to be a caricatural completion of the many centuries of Christianity—the culture of love aimed at merging with God, personified in Christ, through love. In Christianity love was seen in its non-physical, ascetic, and simultaneously deeply romantic facet.

Consider the way love was seen in other cultures. The East has the tradition of *tantrism*. There Love is revealed through intercourse which, transcending, acquires mystic significance. It is preceded by thorough and prolonged preparation, including the self-cleansing procedure and meditation directed at inseparable union of the couple in their psychological spaces. [For more details on tantrism, see Gold and Gold (1978).]

Thus, love was revealed differently in different cultures—sometimes submerged into matter, sometimes aimed at what we are ready to call God.

Psychologically, it is important to emphasize that love, like any other

temporal process, can pass through stages of evolution, but having achieved its *fullness* it passes into an extra-temporal state.

Love in its fullness is existence outside Doing, free existence or, in other words, existence which could be called non-existence, since it occurs when the personality is dissolved in the original semantic vacuum. Non-existence signifies leaving Time. Love makes Being and Non-Being come together; it transfigures Death. But we may also say that love becomes a synonym of Death.

I have been surprised to find that certain attempts to reveal the nature of love in its fullness are also being made in the West. The quotations presented below are from an issue of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* completely devoted to the philosophy of love.

Love as a way of stopping time, or entering eternity. Sex and the atemporal mystical continuum. (Keen, 1979)

. . . love is an integral part of existence and of our individual lives. . . . We have the choice to experience love or not to experience love. We are always choosing to experience ourselves as a function of love or as loveless beings living in a meaningless universe

Now the difficulty is that we are a consumer society. We have a grabbing and holding mentality; to go out and make, create, and build. We think that if we don't run the house, business, spouse, and children, it's all going to fall apart. We are convinced that we have to *do* in order to justify our *being*. . . .

There is something basically wrong, and it has to do with the way we relate to nature. It has to do with the way we believe we have to create those things that are good in our lives. What we want in life we see in terms of activity, doing. But love is not a function of doing; love is a function of being, of simply what you are. That's what it means to speak of it as a substratum. It is the energy from which you are made, from which you come. . . .

You suddenly can't have sex with anyone other than the beloved. Just as in sex two bodies become one, so in love, suddenly, two minds become one. There is a merging of the minds. Some transformation has taken place.

When the substratum of love energy reaches the mind, flowering there in its own way and becoming love, you have a whole new series of trials before you, for love is the destroyer of ego. . . .

Now notice that two things are frightening, and they both have to do with love. Sex is frightening because we lose control. Love is frightening because we lose the independence and autonomy of mind. We lose the capacity to control in love. When you are in love you are crazy. . . .

. . . love is a great opportunity. It is the greatest thing going in the Human Potential Movement. We've forgotten about it. We have

techniques, facilitators, and workshops. Love, I am telling you is the greatest of these. It is what is called in India a *Sadhana*, a personal spiritual discipline. Love is a way to come to God. But it requires a constant purification. (Veereshwar, 1979)

Recall that above (see Chapter 6) we said much about personal, psychological time being generated by Doing. In the article by Veereshwar quoted above, love is the exit from Existence, Doing, i.e., a return to the extra-temporal unmanifestation which for him proves to be God.

And now a few words on tantrism from Dychtwald (1979):

In the tantric lovemaking experience, which is called "Maithuna," the lovers undergo a variety of meditations and rituals before they actually make physical contact. These rituals and preparations are designed to create a strong spiritual bond between the two lovers and also to generate a mood of deep mindfulness and respect for the sexual joining which is to follow. Once the preparatory meditations have been completed, the two lovers proceed to make genital contact while maintaining the strong spiritual link that they have worked so devotedly to create. (p. 56-57)

As the intensity and focus of the experience builds toward orgasm, the psychic space between the lovers continues to expand, allowing each partner the feeling of openness and godliness. In tantric yoga, the lovers do not try to achieve orgasm. Actually, if they are trying anything at all, they are trying not to have orgasms.<sup>1</sup>

Instead, the tantric lovers are attempting to draw the building forces of Kundalini energy upward through their bodyminds, thus releasing the power of the various chakras. (p. 57)

Once again, we see that from this eastern perspective the emphasis is not on the body and sexual release as ends in themselves, but rather as channels through which the development of self may proceed. (p. 58)

Thus we see that the East, in its anthropocentrism, which had allowed it to concentrate on the experimental study of man, managed to lift the veil of the mystery of sex and showed that the act following a series of meditations can be a means of stopping time. The act begetting life can also be regarded as begetting its end; in other words, it transcends life into another state.

The ultimate closeness of the two proves to be a crucial point on the life-death spiral—here lies the revelation achieved by the East. And that is why one can often hear there that life and death are one.

The West in its cosmocentrism has revealed something else—the trans-

<sup>1</sup> In a footnote to the quoted article, its author remarks that there are different attitudes to orgasm in different tantric traditions. In any case, if it occurs within the tradition that does not seek it, this does not cause a negative attitude. For details about the techniques of Tantrism see Gold and Gold (1978).

forming power of Love, unconditioned and acting momentarily. Recall the episode from the Gospel about the robber crucified together with Christ. His Love for Christ momentarily transfigured him. No preparations, no meditations. And before he had been just a robber.

Within the contemporary culture submerged in the world of things and success, love seems to be revealed in all its fullness only in tragic moments of ultimate tension. I would like to quote here Victor Frankl<sup>2</sup> (1963), who was a prisoner in a Nazi camp:

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love*. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, “The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.”

Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was gray around us; gray was the sky above; gray the snow in the pale light of dawn, gray the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad, and gray their faces. I was again conversing silently with my wife, or perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason* for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious “Yes” in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable gray of a dawning morning in Bavaria. “Et lux in tenebris lucet”—and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present, that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was *there*. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of

<sup>2</sup> Victor Frankl is a leading European psychiatrist, the founder of the theory of logotherapy.

me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me. (p. 63-64)

If we started to speak of the opposition of Christianity and the East, we should emphasize the possibility of dialectical interpretation of the evangelic teaching. Being is revealed through personal Time generated by Doing; non-being comprehended as a free, extra-personalized existence not generated by Doing is revealed through love. Christ's sermon proved to represent dialectical unity of these two opposed essences. Two themes permeate the Gospels: the preaching of Love and the preaching of Doing: "Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them" (St. Matthew, 7:20).

The Christian comprehension of the essence of love is its manifestation through Doing. And if we are going to speak of Christ's new word, following the historical tradition, such a new, unprecedented word was the *dialectics* of manifestation of Love through Doing. Christ is revealed for everybody in the canonical Gospels through Doings of everyday Judean life. The mystic part of Christ's teachings is primarily contained in the apocryphal Gospels which seem not to have been intended for everybody. In the Gospel of the Egyptians, Christ is the son of silence. Silence, the synonym of non-being, is manifested on the Earth through Doing generated by love.

The European Middle Ages retained the tradition of Christian Doing. I only mention here the words of Eckhart (for details see Chapter 11, section D) that every man on the Earth should perform his Deed. The Middle Ages generated the romantic image of the knight, the cult of the Beautiful Lady—a peculiar transcendence of sexuality, and legends of the Temple of the Holy Grail in which the Cup with Christ's blood is kept. Then came religious wars and revolutions and the formula: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. The East knew nothing of the kind. It was typical of the East to go away from life, and of the West, in contrast, to enter it. However, there cannot be clear-cut boundaries: hermits also existed in the West. The entire history of the Western world is a test of whether humanity is prepared socially to contact what had been called Silence.

The most vivid and passionate preaching of Doing in the East is contained in the Bhagavad-Gita; there Doing is existence itself. It is Doing born of an inner drive, without a particular goal or concern for its fruit. But the nature of the inner drive remains unrevealed. The succession of ideas is made prominent if we assume that the predecessor of the Gospels is the Bhagavad-Gita rather than the Old Testament. The Gospels reveal what was hidden in the Bhagavad-Gita. Note, however, that the ideal of knighthood was generated by the Gospels and in no way by the

Bhagavad-Gita, though it seems at first sight that it would be natural to expect just the opposite.<sup>3</sup>

And now let us make a comparison of the basic notions of Christian culture. The synonym<sup>4</sup> of love is freedom, since love is always a rebellion, an urge towards freedom. Love does not obey ego and thus destroys it. Similarly, it does not obey social and religious institutions and thus destroys them.

The personal rebellion may join the social one—and this makes clear why revolution with its romantic aspects is a purely Western phenomenon. In the Gospel of John we read: “. . . and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (St. John, 8:32). So freedom also becomes a synonym for knowledge, the inner knowledge which the gnostics attempted to restore. The elements of the synonymous *circle* are: love, freedom, and knowledge. However, we already said above that death is also a synonym of love. The same is true of freedom: our subjects who meditated over the word *freedom* (see Chapter 13) constantly had the images of weightlessness, bodilessness, flight, leaving the Earth. So the synonymous circle is closed through silence akin to death. The four words love, freedom, knowledge, silence are discrete, the apices of a square circumscribed by a circle. The words are synonyms; their semantics smoothly flows from one into another. Our consciousness, prone to see the world divided, breaks the circle and the semantic links between words, making us see them as divided and different.

Above we spoke about a quaternity, and here we see another one. Perhaps, taken together, they form an eightfold pattern, the great Ogdoad of the gnostics.

The entrance into Nothing and contact with it is opened through each of its four facets: through *love* in the Christianity of the Gospels and in tantrism, through *freedom* in the Buddhist liberation of personality, through *knowledge* in gnostic Christianity, and through *silence* in meditations which seem to be known to all cultures. But it is only through Love that Nothing contacts human physical nature directly.

<sup>3</sup> Note that nowadays the attempt to resurrect the ideal of a free Warrior, whose inner drive remains unrevealed, is made by Carlos Castañeda in his bewitching books, especially in *Journey to Ixtlan* (Castañeda, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Recall (see Nalimov, 1981a) that we call synonyms two words whose rank correlation coefficient for the succession of explanatory words ordered according to their importance is close to unity, or at least significantly differs from zero. If the coefficient approaches unity, the words become identical, semantically indistinguishable. Synonym does not mean identity.