

## THE CREATIVE VIBRATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS ACCORDING TO THE SPANDA SCHOOL AND CHRISTIANITY

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**RIASSUNTO:** *La vibrazione creativa della coscienza secondo la scuola Spanda e il cristianesimo.* Questo saggio è dedicato alla scuola Spanda: uno dei sotto-sistemi della filosofia Trika o Śivaismo del Kaśmir. La scuola Spanda pare essere una potente fonte di riflessione in teologia e in filosofia della comparazione. Questo studio è un primo tentativo di mettere a fuoco gli aspetti essenziali della dottrina della vibrazione, ponendo attenzione ai possibili punti in comune con la teologia cristiana e con l'epistemologia occidentale.

**Parole chiave:** Śiva - coscienza - vibrazione - vuoto - creazione - grazia - non-dualismo - trascendenza - immanenza - cristianesimo

**REZUMAT:** *Vibrația creativă a conștiinței în conformitate cu școala Spanda și creștinismul.* Acest eseu este dedicat școlii Spanda: unul dintre subsistemele filozofiei Trika sau Śivaismul Kaśmir-ului. Școala Spanda pare a fi o sursă puternică de reflecție în teologia și filozofia comparației. Acest studiu este o primă încercare de a pune accentul pe unele aspecte esențiale ale doctrinei vibrației, acordând atenție posibilelor puncte comune cu teologia creștină și epistemologia occidentală.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Śiva - conștiință - vibrație - vid - creație - har - non-dualism - transcendență - imanență - creștinism

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## 1. Introduction

I received my first notions of *sanātana dharma* from my study of the French philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943). In 1993 I began to write my thesis for my M.A. in Law on her philosophy of Justice. After Merton, she was the second person to sow the field of my soul with love for Eastern religions. She spoke about a “perennial philosophy.” She was keenly interested in the Greek and Egyptian mysteries, in *sanātana dharma* and Mahāyāna Buddhism. She believed that all these were valid paths to God. Nevertheless, she was opposed to religious syncretism, intended as effacing the particularity of the individual traditions and implying that one had a lower quality of attention. Inspired by her and with the help of Guenon’s books, I began to study some of the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

In 2007, at Jesuit School of Theology (JSTB) in Berkeley (USA), I took a course on Hindu Wisdom Paths. I was particularly interested in the final part of the course, dedicated to Kashmir Śaivism. In spite of the very short time spent on this subject, I recognized in it a great branch of Hinduism, in relationship with my personal experience and with my previous theological and philosophical studies.

In 2008, Prof. Michael Amaladoss’s course on Mission and Dialogue at JSTB pointed out the importance of the Hindu conception of nature in interreligious dialogue. Prof. Amaladoss talked about the human as the microcosm in which nature and the divine are integrated. He indicated energy as the link between different levels of being. Furthermore, he stressed the “not-two” (*a-dvaita*) of the relationship between God and world.

This paper is dedicated to my research in interreligious dialogue as it has developed until now, when I have found in the Spanda School a system which seems to be a powerful source of further reflections in comparative theology and philosophy. This study is a first attempt to focus the essential aspects of the doctrine of vibration, paying attention to the possible bridges with Christian theology and Western epistemology.

## 2. The Spanda School

Spanda System is one of the four sub-systems that comprise the Trika Philosophy or Kashmir Śaivism (the other sub-systems are the Pratyabhijñā system, the Kula system, and the Krama system). The Trika System is based on the idea that there are three energies which represent the threefold activities of the world: *parā* (supreme), *aparā* (lowest), *parāparā* (combination of the lowest and the highest). Swami Lakshmanjoo explains:

These three primary energies represent the threefold activities of the world. In the thought of Trika, therefore, it is admitted that this whole universe and every action in it, whether spiritual, physical, or worldly, is existing in these three energies<sup>2</sup>.

The purpose of Trika Philosophy is to enable someone to rise from individuality to universality. The Trika System contemplates scriptures which in Śaivism are called *āgamas*: the monistic *Bhairava Śāstras*, the mono-dualistic *Rūdra Śāstras* and the dualistic *Śiva Śāstras*.

The Spanda School, the first development of Kashmir Śaivism, recognizes that nothing can exist without movement (the word Spanda means movement or vibration). Where there is movement, there is life. The Spanda System was introduced in Kashmir by the great sage Vasugupta, a spiritual master who lived on Mahādeva mountain. The disciple of Vasugupta was Kallaṭa. Kallaṭa was a perfected yogi at the court of King Avantivarnam. Because Avantivarnam reigned between 855 and 883 A.D., Vasugupta must have lived during the first half of the ninth century.

## 3. Śivasūtra and Spandakārikā

The *Śivasūtra* (*Aphorisms of Śiva*), the first Kashmir Śaiva work consisting of nearly eighty aphorisms, is traditionally considered to be divinely composed by Śiva himself and revealed to Vasugupta. The *Spandakārikā* (*Stanzas on Vibration*),

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hughes (ed.), *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme: Revealed by Swami Lakshmanjoo*, n. p. 2003, 129.

traditionally attributed to Vasugupta, in good probability are the work of Kallaṭa who wrote them to summarize the teachings of the *Śivasūtra*. M. S. G. Dyczkowski, referring to Kallaṭa, states:

Although we cannot be sure whether it was he who wrote the Stanzas or, as Kṣemarāja maintains, Vasugupta himself, there can be no doubt that he wrote a short commentary (*vṛtti*) on it which was the first of a series of commentaries by various authors, including two by Kṣemarāja who took a special interest in this branch of Kashmiri Śaivism<sup>3</sup>.

The *Stanzas on Vibration* are the fully formed nucleus of the Spanda School, of which the *Aphorisms of Śiva* are its less definite prototype. The Spanda School is a doctrinal formulation of the dynamic character of the absolute and its manifestations at every level of existence and experience. It is essentially theistic. According to the School, the supreme Principle is at the same time the absolute One and a personal God. The creative and powerful God is the object of the Spanda yogi's faith and devotion. Dyczkowski specifies:

And devotion of the highest sort (*parābhakti*) is itself the unifying penetration (*samāveśa*) into the Godhead. Those who are thrilled by its wonder (*camatkāra*) possess the devotion that is itself the direct realization of Śiva. Those yogis have nothing to do; they need not even practice any means to realization (*anupāya*) because Śiva, both formless and omniform, is constantly manifest to them. The *Spanda* yogi is instructed accordingly to attend closely to the vibration of consciousness that gives life to the senses and mind, with the respect of profound faith and devotion<sup>4</sup>.

The *Aphorisms of Śiva* and the *Stanzas on Vibration* are the expression of a non-dualist school, according to which Śiva manifests himself through his divine powers as the countless forms of the universe at each moment and

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<sup>3</sup> M. S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism*, Albany (NY) 1987, 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> M. S. G. Dyczkowski (ed.), *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakārikā with four commentaries: The Spandasamdoha by Kṣemarāja: The Spandavṛtti by Kallaṭabhaṭṭa: The Spandavivṛti by Rājānaka Rāma: The Spandapradīpikā by Bhagavadutpala*, Albany (NY) 1992, 177.

then withdraws them back into himself. This activity is Śiva's divine vibration (*Spanda*) from which the school draws its name. P. E. Muller-Ortega, in his study on Abhinavagupta, comments:

The Ultimate is *spanda*: it vibrates, it expands and contracts; it manifests and reabsorbs; it is full of waves and waveless; it is full of bliss and yet suffering occurs; it plays a game of hide-and-seek with itself in which ignorance alternates with knowledge, and in which enjoyment and liberation can coincide<sup>5</sup>.

According to the description of Muller-Ortega, the vibration of the absolute is exactly the expression of the non-dualism of the Spanda School:

Clearly, the internal motion of expansion and contraction permits the impulse of *spanda* to manifest the variety of cognitions apparent in the manifest world. The unbroken unity of the non-dual can be animated and even polarized by an internal movement that is intrinsic to it. Yet this movement, the *spanda*, is incapable of reducing the non-dual, of rendering it anything less than non-dual. The essence of the absolute non-duality is that it harbors within it a rhythm, a pendulum that is able to swing the full spectrum of its reach without sundering the absolute<sup>6</sup>.

#### **4. The vibrating power of Śiva's consciousness**

The Spanda yogi is to cultivate an attitude of obedience and a sense of service to the Supreme Principle, open to Śiva's grace. In this way the yogi realizes the vibration (*spanda*) that is the dynamic, self-regenerative character of the absolute consciousness. P. Jash describes the meaning of *Spanda*:

Spanda, meaning vibration of activity of Śiva, is supposed to be the cause of all distinction. *Spandaśāstra* lays greater emphasis on the spiritual discipline for the recognitive intuition of a soul's identity with Śiva. Vasugupta describes Spanda as a psychic energy, throb or vibration in body, which is agitated by

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<sup>5</sup> P. E. Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*, Albany (NY) 1989, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva* 121.

intense anger, joy, deliberation and the like. It is expressed in self-appropriation of a particular object and determination to do a particular action. It is divine power in the form of serpent power (*Kundalinī*) which is asleep or coiled at the basic center, awakened by breath control and concentration on the Divine at it, and made to pierce six centers (*Cakra*) in *Suṣumnā*, spinal cord, and to ascend to the highest center above the cerebrum and unite with Śīva. Kṣemarāja speaks of Śīva as possessed of Spanda and self-existent. So Spanda is the vibration of the divine power of freedom not distinguishable from Him<sup>7</sup>.

In the Spanda School, the nature of the absolute is conceived as an eternal becoming, a dynamic flux of absolute consciousness. K. Mishra illustrates Śīva's consciousness:

Śīva is a Person because Śīva has self-consciousness. The self-consciousness of Śīva is not like the limited "I-consciousness" of the individual in which one differentiates oneself from others. The Divine "I" is the absolute or perfect "I" which incorporates everything within its bosom. When Śīva is completely alone – the one without a second – even then self-consciousness means being in oneself. Even in the state of the pure non-duality of Śīva, self-consciousness is possible by virtue of the natural inner dynamism (*kriyā, vimarśa, spanda, or śakti*) of Śīva. Self-consciousness is the natural dynamism of the non-dual Śīva-consciousness; it is its "eternal vibration" (*nitya-spanda*). This is the state of the pure "I am." When Śīva, out of His freedom, spontaneously manifests Himself as the world, the "I am" becomes "I am this." "This," or the object, exists only when the world arises, but "I am" is always there, irrespective of Creation<sup>8</sup>.

Everything forms a part of the radiant vibration of the light of absolute consciousness. The universe emerges from consciousness and submerges back into it. Muller-Ortega states:

The silence of the Supreme is shot through with a creative tension, a primordial urge, an impelling force. This force is the *śakti*, the power of the Ultimate, which sets up an agitation (*ghūrṇama*), even a disturbance (*kṣobha*),

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<sup>7</sup> P. Jash, *History of Śaivism*, Calcutta 1974, 130.

<sup>8</sup> K. Mishra, *Kashmir Śaivism: The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*, Cambridge (MA) 1993, 123.

which is responsible for the wave motion within the absolute. Thus, the absolute is continually arising into waves which create the slight and imperceptible movement or vibration that characterizes consciousness, and which allows consciousness to be the foundation and essence of all manifest reality<sup>9</sup>.

Properly speaking, the vibrating power of consciousness becomes manifest in this or that form and thus appears to be arising and falling away. The enlightened yogi recognizes that the expansion and the withdrawing of the universe coincide with the expansion and the withdrawing of Śiva's consciousness. Śiva's power to know is one with his power to create universe. Dyczkowski talks of Śiva as an artist who, with his imagination, paints the universe:

Śiva is the perfect artist Who, without need of canvas or brush, paints the world pictures. The instant He imagines it, it appears spontaneously, perfect in every respect. The colours He uses are the varying shades and gradations of His own Spanda energy and the medium His own consciousness. The universe is coloured with the dye of its own nature (*svabhāva*) by the power of Śiva's consciousness (*citi*)<sup>10</sup>.

When Śiva reveals himself he creates the universe; when he conceals himself, he destroys the universe. There is an intimate correspondence between the two phases of creating and destroying the universe and the Śiva's pulse of consciousness. Dyczkowski describes the pulsating power of Śiva:

Thus, the expansion and contraction of consciousness are brought about by Śiva's pulsating power, which is simultaneously identical with both. They are the internal and external aspects of the same energy<sup>11</sup>.

The events that constitute the universe are internal events happening within consciousness because their nature is consciousness itself. For Śaivism, consciousness and Being are synonymous. The Kashmir Śaiva metaphysics is constructed upon the concept of a dynamic and creative consciousness.

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<sup>9</sup> Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva* 120.

<sup>10</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 107.

<sup>11</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 86.

Spanda doctrine contemplates the creative pulsation of consciousness, which is equated to the opening and closing of Śiva's eyes (*unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*). Dyczkowski comments:

When Śiva opens His eyes (*unmeṣa*), the universe, His universal object, appears within the field of His vision and becomes manifest to all. Conversely when He closes His eyes (*nimeṣa*), it dissolves away, receding back into the unformed, unmanifest condition it was in prior to its appearance. In this way all things attain to their own individual existence and fall from it as part of the universal Act of Being. As phenomena arise into the field of consciousness (*udaya*), they lay hold of their specific nature (*ātmalābha*) and their own condition (*svasthiti*) as their manifest form, which is Śiva Who is all things, and when they fall away from it, they again attain their own nature and fundamental state in Śiva. This quality of the Act of Being is analyzed by dividing its pulse into two halves – one outpouring, expanding, extending, flowing, spreading out, emerging and unfolding, and the other its reverse<sup>12</sup>.

## 5. The world as the unfolding of consciousness

The equation is not only between the creative pulsation and the movement of Śiva's eyes, but also between Śiva's movement and the yogi's consciousness. The yogi's enlightenment, in fact, has two phases: one is introverted and the other is extroverted. Therefore, the yogi, during his contemplation, one with Śiva, creates and destroys the world of his objectified perceptions. Dyczkowski explains the movement of the yogi's contemplation:

The yogi rises to the more universal levels of subjectivity when they expand and emerge out of consciousness, and descends by submerging the expanded states of the higher levels to manifest the contracted states of the lower. In this way the yogi's bodily consciousness emerges when he rises from contemplation (*samādhi*) and is submerged when he returns back into it, and so is subject to the alternation between the higher and lower states until he achieves the goal of total and permanent consciousness expansion<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration* 177-178.

<sup>13</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration* 178.



The yogi's consciousness is not a passive witness, but is a conscious activity that generates the universe. The subjective consciousness is the ground and the source of the existence of the objects which are manifested by the subject. In this sense there is an identity between the consciousness and its contents. The perceiving awareness and its object are essentially identical. Dyczkowski states:

The Śaivite idealist, however, says that the object is a form of awareness (*vijñānākāra*). The objective status of the object is cognition itself. Perception manifests its object and renders it immediately apparent (*sphuṭa*) to those who perceive it<sup>14</sup>.

## 6. The creative play of the liberated yogi

The yogi realizes that creation is a spontaneous event in which his nature, at one with Śiva, who is all things, unfolds as all things. The world is the unfolding of the consciousness of the absolute. J. Singh, in his exposition on the *Stanzas on Vibration*, states:

The world and Śiva are not two separate entities. Śiva is the world from the point of view of appearance, and the world is Śiva from the point of view of Reality. Śiva is both transcendent to and immanent in the world [...] The second point that is made out is that since the world owes its existence to Him, it cannot conceal Him even as a pot cannot conceal the potter, nor can it serve as an impediment in His free Self-expression and Self-expansion. That is to say He cannot be limited by space, time, figure, etc. This has another very important implication. Since the real or metaphysical Self of each individual is essentially Śiva, the world cannot throw a pall over it. Only the individual has to recognize his Self<sup>15</sup>.

In this creative play of consciousness there is neither succession nor simultaneity. If it is true that *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa* denote succession and that succession means time, it is also true that Śiva is above Time. Therefore

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<sup>14</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 48.

<sup>15</sup> J. Singh (ed.), *Spanda-Kārikās: The Divine Creative Pulsation*, Delhi 2005, 33.

*unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa* must not be taken in the order of succession. According to the logic of a coincidence of opposite polarities, the two phases of vibration coincide and are interchangeable. Dyczkowski explains:

The polarities in the *Spanda* context are not succession (*krama*) and its absence (*akrama*), but the unfolding (*unmeṣa*) and withdrawal (*nimeṣa*) of this power and, by extension, the arising and falling away of perceptions, manifestation, level of being in the process of ascent and descent to and from the supreme state, and the moments in the cycle of creation, in short, the entire cosmic order from the most universal essence down to the most particular existence with its innermost dynamism. Kṣemarāja demonstrates that the two extremes form the climax of a single process and that they essentially constitute each other, as expressions of a single fact, to ultimately conclude that everything is the play of consciousness and that in reality nothing arises or falls away<sup>16</sup>.

The goal of the *Spanda* yogi is liberation in the embodied state, that is to say liberation while living (*jīvanmukti*). He achieves perfect contemplation and is liberated only when his senses and mind are fully active and he has entered his essential nature which is Śiva. Here the yogi realizes his essential Self, which is different from the empirical self. Singh states:

When the yogi realizes the *spanda* principle, then he knows that this is his essential Self, and not the empirical, psychosomatic creature whom he had so long considered to be his Self. He has now broken his shackles and is truly free<sup>17</sup>.

The yogi has to establish himself in his essential Self which is the real Experiencer, which is the nature of Śiva. This entering of the yogi into his essential nature, as a diving into his innermost depths, is a penetration into Śiva's consciousness. It is a real mystic union with Śiva. In this state, the yogi, at one with Śiva, plays the same game of creation and destruction that Śiva is engaged in. This creative playing is without purpose: aimless and delightful

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<sup>16</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration* 189.

<sup>17</sup> Singh (ed.), *Spanda-Kārikās* 70.

like a child's game. The liberated yogi enjoys, as does Śiva himself, whatever he freely chooses to create. Dyczkowski states:

The yogi who realizes that all things are one with consciousness, which is both his true nature and Śiva Who is all things, or perceives that everything is nothing but its playful pulse, is liberated and the Deity manifests to him at one with him<sup>18</sup>.

### **7. The Void of the vibrating power of consciousness**

The yogi has to penetrate into the spanda that is the internal movement of the Heart of Śiva. In this way the vibration overflows in the Self. Muller-Ortega illustrates this event:

It is in the Heart that the entire universe is dissolved in a self-consciousness which is known as the *spanda*, vibration. The specific nature of this vibration is an overflowing in the Self. This overflowing creates a very slight motion, a peculiar vibration of the light of consciousness, which in turn sets up the wave function of consciousness<sup>19</sup>.

The yogi merges into the incessant systole and diastole of the Heart of Śiva and there he dominates time, participating in the creation of Śiva's consciousness. In this state of liberation, the yogi Śiva abides in the void of the vibrating power of Śiva, where everything is dissolved and created. Dyczkowski describes the Void of absolute consciousness:

Śiva is the Void (*śūnyatā*) of absolute consciousness – its supportless (*nirālamba*) and thought-free (*nirvikalpa*) nature. Integral and free, Śiva, the abode of the Void, dissolves everything into Himself and brings all things into being. Fullness pours into emptiness and emptiness pervades fullness. Penetrating suddenly into the fullness of consciousness, all things are at once made part of its absolute and undefinable nature<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration* 234.

<sup>19</sup> Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva* 119.

<sup>20</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 119.

The Void of Śiva is not a state of non-being; it should not be confused with a mere nothing. It is called Void because all objectivity ceases. In this sense the whole universe is empty. The yogi in perfect contemplation realizes that the object is the form of the subject. Therefore, the void of the liberated state expresses non-dualism, where there is no place for the division between subject and object. If the division between subject and object does not exist, then Reality is Void. Ultimate reality transcends all the opposites, including subject and object. Dyczkowski, referring to the *Stanzas on Vibration*, specifies:

In one of the few places where the author of the *Stanzas on Vibration* takes time to indulge in polemics, he points out that the Voidness (*śūnyatā*) of the vibrating power (*spanda*) of consciousness, manifest when all diversity disappears, should not be confused with an empty 'nothing'. The universe of diversity is not annihilated, but recognised to be one. It is the void in the sense that it is universally manifest and hence has no distinguishing features. Eternal and free of the contraries, it cannot be contrasted with anything else. Intuited as the throb of one's own awareness, it is never known objectively and hence is essentially undefinable. Although it is said to be the destruction of all objectivity, the Void is not a state of 'non-being' (*abhāva*)<sup>21</sup>.

## 8. The Center of the Void

To realize the void of absolute consciousness, the yogi has to penetrate into the Śiva's pulsation. He has to experience a state of transcendence in immanence and immanence in transcendence. When he does so, he is at the source of all thought, outside of the confines of time. He is in the Center of the Heart of Śiva. It is in this Center that the Void of consciousness resides. The yogi moves from the particular vibrations of consciousness at its periphery to the universal throb of the Heart. Developing the awareness of the Center, the yogi experiences the bliss of consciousness. Dyczkowski points out that the Center is in relationship with the emergence of thought:

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<sup>21</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 121.

To grasp reality in its completeness, we must go beyond the partial representations of thought and speech. To experience the primordial source and basis of all things, we must pierce through the outer periphery of thought and plunge into the Centre, to discover the instant in which thought, and with it, the sense of diversity, initially emerges<sup>22</sup>.

The yogi seeks to find the Center between one cognition and the next or between two perceptions, before the origination of thought-constructs from which all differentiated perceptions emerge. He tries to penetrate into the initial instant of perception, before dichotomizing thoughts arise in his mind. Dyczkowski explains:

The yogi who succeeds in checking the movement of his attention, experiences within himself the subsidence of thought into the emptiness of the Centre which unfolds full of the powerful pulsation of consciousness within which all objectivity merges and becomes one in the transcendental outpouring (*lokottarollāsa*) of its aesthetic rapture<sup>23</sup>.

R. Gnoli, in his introduction to *Tantrāloka*, says that *spanda* is the origin and the death of thought:

Secondo Vasugupta e il suo discepolo (o discepolo d'un suo discepolo) Kallata, vissuto anche lui in Kashmir verso la metà del IX secolo, la realtà ultima delle cose non è immota e cristallina coscienza – essere intelligenza beatitudine – come volevano le scuole del Vedānta, ma movimento, energia, forza incessante, non segregata dal mondo ma piuttosto principio attivo, fonte delle innumerevoli creazioni e dissoluzioni, cosmiche e individuali. Movimento e vibrazione nel momento teoretico e meditativo, lo *spanda*, nel momento religioso e devozionale, si identifica con Śiva, l'autore, come vedremo, delle cinque operazioni, benefico e tremendo insieme. Questi due momenti – quello teoretico e quello religioso –, come di solito accade nel pensiero dell'India, non sono in contrasto vicendevole né rappresentano l'uno il superamento dell'altro, ma si alternano in modo equanime nella mente del devoto. Questo

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<sup>22</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 153.

<sup>23</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 153.

movimento si identifica con la coscienza, con il sé, è la stessa forza del sé, da cui tutto dipende e su cui tutto riposa. Non identificabile in nessun pensiero – esso sarebbe automaticamente pensato, dunque morto, limitato –, lo *spanda* è piuttosto il principio dove nasce e dove insieme si spegne questo o quel pensiero, il punto di connessione ideale, mai pensato, ma pensante, che collega due pensieri, due immagini tra loro<sup>24</sup>.

## 9. Master's consciousness

To achieve the state of liberated consciousness, the yogi needs a Master (*guru*). The relationship with the Master is very deep. The Master is for the disciple Śiva himself: he enlightens his disciple and transmits realization. He explains the meaning of the scriptures and reveals the secret power of spiritual discipline. He has to transport his disciples beyond thought. There is an extraordinary reciprocity in this relationship. It is something that is beyond a simple exchange. Through this relationship both the Master and his disciples liberate themselves. Dyczkowski has wonderful words to describe this reciprocal realization:

The highest, most perfect relationship the disciple can have with his Master is such as it is with Śiva Himself: one of identity. The exchange that takes place between them is an internal dialogue within universal consciousness, their common identity (*svabhāva*). Limiting itself to a point source (*aṇu*) and obscured by the thought-constructs born of doubt and ignorance, consciousness assumes the guise of the disciple who seeks to attain the expanded fullness of his Master's consciousness. The Master, on the other hand, embodies the aspect of consciousness which responds to the inquiring consciousness of his disciple. Free of the notions of 'self' and 'other', when the disciple is liberated by his grace, it is the Master who in reality liberates himself<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> R. Gnoli, Introduction to *Luce dei Tantra: Tantrāloka*, by Abhinavagupta, Milan 1999, XXVIII-XXIX.

<sup>25</sup> Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration* 168.

D. Odier, in his commentary on the *Vijñānabhairava* (the tantra of Divine Consciousness) points out that in the relationship between Master and disciple there is not a great difference between them. There is not a psychological dependence of the disciple upon the Master, because at the higher level there is a real union between them. Odier states:

L'intensité de cette relation, que le tantrisme qualifie de «passionnée», fait émerger les qualités profondes du disciple et permet au maître lui-même de se libérer, car il est «un» avec son disciple dont il partage les émotions, les extases, les désirs, les angoisses, les peurs et même l'obscurcissement. Cette très belle conception de la relation demande une remise en question constante et c'est dans ce jeu profond que le maître est porté par l'éclosion de chaque disciple qu'il ne craint pas d'adorer comme Shiva/Shakti alors que cette adoration lui est rendue par le disciple. C'est là l'un des points les plus extraordinaires de cette quête de la non-dualité où maître et disciple font corps dans le réel et l'absolu<sup>26</sup>.

## 10. Kashmir Śaivism and Christianity

The Spanda School is a metaphysical and theological system, where we find theoretical considerations about the nature of reality and practical instructions for attaining liberation. The goal of the system is to allow the yogi to realize that the universe is the play of his own consciousness. The liberated yogi abides in the body, conscious that he is one with Śiva and the universe. According to the Spanda School, the reality of absolute consciousness is at once Śiva, man and universe. The vibrant energy of consciousness (*Spanda*) is inherent in one's own nature. Śiva's pure consciousness, pure perceiving subjectivity is every man's authentic identity. The individual soul (*jīva*) is all things. The act of perception gives existence to the world of objectivity. Every act of cognition generates and withdraws all things. Things arise and fall away in the field of awareness.

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<sup>26</sup> D. Odier (ed.), *Tantra Yoga: Le Vijñānabhairava tantra: Le «tantra de la connaissance suprême»*, Paris 2004, 60.

In Kashmir Śaivism we find a transcendence through active participation. The desire is not denied but read as the pure will or freedom of the absolute. The yogi' desire merges with Śiva's creative will. There is a transition from the finite to the infinite without ontological division. The finite is a symbol of the infinite. This is the transcendental attitude of the absolute. Reality is the emergence of the finite from the infinite and vice versa. This is the pulsation (*spanda*) of the absolute, beyond the dualism of the apparent opposites. Subject and object, unity and diversity are aspects of the one reality.

The concept of consciousness is the foundation of Spanda metaphysics. Despite the Vedantin's Brahman, where creation is unreal, Kashmir Śaivism believes in a personal absolute God who is the one reality. He is the highest level of consciousness, in which everything is contained. Similarly to the Yogācāra Buddhist School, the Spanda School contemplates a consciousness which creates its own forms. This is a real creation. This is the way in which the convergence of a monistic idealism and a pluralistic realism is possible. Here the world is a symbol of the absolute.

Spanda doctrine offers to us some interesting points of possible connection with Christianity and contemporary epistemology.

The concept of creative consciousness is close to the Christian mystic's understanding of the nature of Deity. For example, in *The Divine Names* by Dionysius the Aeropagite we find the conception of one God, whose unity is indivisible plurality, producing and maintaining all unity and plurality. But also Ignatius Loyola, in the *Contemplation for Obtaining Love* in his *Spiritual Exercises*, sees the divine reality as Source, as immanently active and as giving out its own energy for love of the whole created world. P. E. Murphy, in his *Triadic Mysticism*, has widely shown some parallels between the mystical theology of the Śaivism of Kashmir and writings of various Catholic mystics like John of St. Thomas, the French School of Bérulle, St. John of the Cross and Clement of Alexandria. I think that his conclusion on the Beatific Vision as the most profound level of comparison between the Triadism of Kashmir Śaivism and Catholicism is really interesting. It is my personal opinion that his discussion must be extended to the debate among Catholic theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the relationship between Grace and nature. In particular,



Karl Rahner's conception of man as the Event of God's Free Self-Communication has many elements that appear to be similar to Kashmir Śaivic metaphysics. Murphy indicates a typical difficulty of Catholic theology in discussing the Beatific Vision:

[...] Catholic theology, unable to use Identity language, has great difficulty in explaining how the experience of intimacy with a God so exalted in His transcendence can be connatural to a creature so abysmally inferior in its being, no matter how transfigured by grace and the Light of Glory<sup>27</sup>.

I think that Rahner's conception, according to which the supernatural constitution of man's transcendentality due to God's offer of self-communication is a modality of his original and unthematic subjectivity, is really able to administrate the problem illustrated by Murphy in a good way. The fact is worthy, if we just consider the extreme point of Murphy's conclusion. Murphy, quoting José Pereira, states:

It thus seems not only possible but probable that in the vast amount of theological literature some divine revelations exist unrecognized, in messages 'which have been revealed but not guaranteed – preservation from error being, as we believe, a privilege accorded only to the two Testaments.' However, it is for the Church's *Magisterium* to give us this guarantee. And there are numerous theologians today who would agree that the Church, since Vatican II's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, is moving in this direction; so that one day, they believe, non-Christian insights will also enjoy the status of guaranteed revelation<sup>28</sup>.

Strangely, Murphy does not take into consideration contemporary theologians. He only quotes John Henry Newman, stating that he «[...] adhered to the concept of a universal revelation from which our Christian truths emanated»<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> P. E. Murphy, *Triadic Mysticism: The Mystical Theology of the Śaivism of Kashmir*, Delhi 1986, 176-177.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, *Triadic Mysticism* 182.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *Triadic Mysticism* 182.

It is my strong opinion that a deep knowledge of Kashmir Śaivism and, in particular, of Spanda School can help theologians to study in a new way the relationship between Grace and human nature, in the line of Rahner's theology. The metaphysical model of Difference-in-Identity, according to Murphy's presentation of Kashmir Śaivism, probably has something important to say to the Catholic theology of Grace. D. P. Lawrence, in his contemporary interpretation of the philosophy of monistic Kashmir Śaivism, has already indicated two directions for possible cross-cultural work:

First of all [...], it must be granted that there is a dialecticity in both traditions. There is, paradoxically, a dualistic moment in the Śaiva notion that the multiplistic experience of the world and the individuals in it are *real*, as the emanation of Śiva. Much of the Śaiva devotional literature in fact has a dualistic, supplicatory quality. Likewise a moment of identity between God and the world is found in much of Christian theology, particularly when it makes use of features of Neoplatonic emanationism; this is seen also in the Thomist conception of the act of the divine intellect. The understanding of identity in difference found in both traditions permits a degree of rapprochement. Second, in the philosophy of logos/recognition that I have expounded, the moment of identity is supported precisely by the premise of idealism, the reduction of human experience and its objects to contents of the divine mind<sup>30</sup>.

In my opinion, Rahner's sensitivity to the absolutely unlimited transcendence of the natural spirit in knowledge and freedom has something in common with the Spanda doctrine of the creative power of consciousness. In Western language, we can say that here epistemological and ethical issues are rooted in a metaphysical vision of soteriological meaning. The Spanda conception of transcendence through active participation, in the yogi's path of liberation, seems to be a good place in which to point out some aspects that are probably common to Śaivic metaphysics and Catholic theology.

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<sup>30</sup> D. P. Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument: A Contemporary Interpretation of Monistic Kashmiri Śaiva Philosophy*, Albany (NY) 1999, 167-168.

The epistemological realm is of great interest in our time. Neuroscience, psychiatry, and neurology are provoking epistemology in the direction of a clarification of the nature and the role of awareness and consciousness. Trying to understand the relations between experiences and brain activities, scientists explore correspondences between phenomenology and neuroscience to solve the so-called mind-body problem. W. J. Freeman illustrates the meaning of this research:

We shall now have a look at some of the relations between the neural and mental dynamics of awareness. There is no need to prove that a biological connection exists, because most of us have used chemicals and drugs, in substances such as wine, tea, or tobacco, to modify, enhance or suppress states of awareness in medicinal, religious, or recreational contexts. So what is this connection? How do states of awareness change the activities of neurons? How can neural activity cause awareness, which include states of pain or pleasure? These are questions of cause and effect. Causality is implicit and unavoidable in the underlying question with which I began: who or what controls your brain?<sup>31</sup>

Freeman, exploring intentionality, finds some conceptual tools in philosophical visions like the nonrepresentational systems of Aquinas, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, which avoid the Cartesian subject-object split. In particular, he is interested in Heidegger's conception of the phenomenon of intentionality in relationship with the transcendence of the Dasein over things, that is to say transcendence as a fundamental determination of the ontological structure of the Dasein. In these sense, Freeman's research looks to an intentionality which is founded in the Dasein's transcendence. I think that explorations of this kind can be provoked by the Spanda system, according to which pure perceiving subjectivity is every man's authentic identity. It seems to me that the idea that the act of perception gives existence to the world of objectivity because of the penetration of the yogi into Śiva's creative consciousness is very powerful for this research. J. Rudrappa, in his book on Kashmir Śaivism, indicates what I think is the key point of this theme:

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<sup>31</sup> W. J. Freeman, *How Brains Make Up Their Minds*, New York 2000, 117.

The phenomenon of knowledge may be said to be a union of the subjective and the objective waves of consciousness in the sea of all inclusive universal consciousness. This supersensuous knowledge is technically called *Anubhava* which implies the subject as becoming what the object is<sup>32</sup>.

Finally, the Spanda School can favor a fruitful cross-cultural dialogue, in which Christian theology and western philosophy collaborate to give a new understanding of man and the power of his consciousness as related to the Absolute Source of energy that is Love. The conception of creation can evolve in the sense of a man's cooperation with God, in a deep partnership based on the unity of Being as powerful dynamism.

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<sup>32</sup> J. Rudrappa, *Kashmir Śaivism*, Mysore 1969, 138-139.