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# Become another God:

Oneness, love and the philosophy of Sri Chinmoy

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Philosophy, The University of Auckland, 2012.

## Abstract:

In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy man is God. However, man also has to 'become God'. This oneness is not apparent to us in our everyday experience. We identify exclusively with our individual human self rather than God. Only a radical transformation of consciousness, which Sri Chinmoy calls God-realisation, can bring about conscious oneness with God. In many different religious and spiritual traditions, particularly mysticism, human beings have the potential to become one with God (or even become God). Becoming one with God can be interpreted in ways that either preserve or annul individual identity. If oneness involves complete loss of individuality, this could make relationships impossible and eliminate the potential for love. At first glance, loving God and being God may appear to be mutually incompatible situations. After briefly surveying various conceptions of oneness with God, I will discuss how Sri Chinmoy's philosophy provides a novel contribution to addressing this dilemma. In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy God is an all-pervading Self whose essence is love. Sri Chinmoy's description of God is similar to the Brahman described in the Upanishads as *Sat-chit-ananda* or 'Existence-Consciousness-Bliss'. For Sri Chinmoy, God is both one and many. In his conception of God-realisation we identify with both the one and the many when we realise God. Sri Chinmoy contrasts two types of consciousness: the heart and the mind, or the psychic and mental consciousness. The heart has potentially unlimited capacity for identification. Mental consciousness is mostly egotistic, creating a sense of division. When the heart rules us instead of the mind, we can expand our consciousness towards complete identification with God. In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy of oneness-in-multiplicity love is not only compatible with becoming God, it is essential.

*Humbly dedicated to Sri Chinmoy, whom I have the privilege of calling  
my spiritual teacher.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to offer my utmost gratitude to Professor John Bishop and Dr. Koji Tanaka, who painstakingly reviewed my work in each of its various incarnations. Their patience, kindness and insight helped immensely in bringing about the final salvation of my project from the clutches of eternal procrastination. The diverse background of each supervisor also brought balance to a somewhat unusual project which draws upon spiritual traditions from both East and West. I also offer sincere thanks to my mother, Susan Harward, for her assistance with the editing and publication process.

I would in addition like to thank, though I cannot name each individual, all those who in some way helped to smooth the journey's path toward completion. This includes faculty who were not responsible for my supervision but kindly offered useful advice; university administrators; students, family and friends.

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## THE ABSOLUTE

No mind, no form, I only exist;  
Now ceased all will and thought;  
The final end of Nature's dance,  
I am it whom I have sought.

A realm of Bliss bare, ultimate;  
Beyond both knower and known;  
A rest immense I enjoy at last;  
I face the One alone.

I have crossed the secret ways of life,  
I have become the Goal.  
The Truth immutable is revealed;  
I am the way, the God-Soul.

My spirit aware of all the heights,  
I am mute in the core of the Sun.  
I barter nothing with time and deeds;  
My cosmic play is done.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sri Chinmoy, *My Flute* (New York: Agni Press, 1972), 3.

## INTRODUCTION

In many religious and spiritual philosophies, oneness with God (or even becoming God) is the goal of life. But if oneness with God means the absence of any distinction, how can there be relationships, and hence love? The philosophy of Sri Chinmoy presents an interesting approach to dealing with this question. For Sri Chinmoy, God is our own highest all-pervading Self and His essence is love. Man is God, but has yet to realise it. This realisation, which Sri Chinmoy calls God-realisation, is compatible with love – in fact, it demands love. This is because, for Sri Chinmoy, God is both one and many and to realise God is to become conscious that you *are* the one and the many. For Sri Chinmoy, love is perfected when it allows us to identify with oneness in multiplicity. Thus realisation does not entail the end of love, but rather its expansion into the love which makes human beings realise their full potential.

What does it mean to become one with God, or to actually become God? Both Eastern and Western literature provides a fruitful source of philosophical material for exploring this question. ‘Becoming one with’ is a phrase often used in the sense of becoming very close to, but nevertheless distinct from something. So oneness with God could mean becoming *like* God or developing a close relationship with God. The phrase ‘becoming God’, although it has many interpretations, evokes an even deeper sense of union: that you can become exactly what God is.

Sri Chinmoy’s conception of God is much like the vision of divinity expressed in the Upanishads. Sri Chinmoy has his own favourite name for the highest divinity: the Supreme.<sup>2</sup> However, he frequently uses the word ‘God’ as more or less a synonym for the

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<sup>2</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *God Is*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1997), 7. Sri Chinmoy prefers the word ‘Supreme’ to God, believing it to be more descriptive of God’s “constantly evolving” nature. He says: “Many people may ask me, “Why do you have to separate ‘God’ and the ‘Supreme’? They are just synonyms.” But although God and the Supreme are one, there is a subtle distinction between the two. The highest Supreme is different from what we call God. When we speak of God-realisation, here ‘God’ is synonymous with the Supreme. But usually when we say ‘God’, we feel that He embodies a height which is static. He is like a mountain that is high, but flat. When we use the term ‘God’, we feel that He has reached His Height and stopped. He does not have a constantly evolving Consciousness; He is something finished, a finished product. But when we say

Supreme. Sri Chinmoy also, with less frequency, employs the term Brahman. He does this especially when commenting on Indian philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Sri Chinmoy echoes the Vedic description of Brahman as “the One without a second”, by also attaching this epithet to God.<sup>4</sup> At one point he even calls Brahman “God without a second”, thus making the connection more explicit.<sup>5</sup> He also affirms that God has the three qualities of *Sat* (Existence), *Chit* (Consciousness) and *Ananda* (Bliss) which are attributed to Brahman by the Vedic Seers.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Chinmoy’s conception of God-realisation not only makes love compatible with God-oneness, but is a pathway towards it. For Sri Chinmoy, to realise God is to fully identify with one’s highest, all-pervading Self. However, this does not entail the destruction of individuality. The consciousness of God-realisation<sup>7</sup> allows simultaneous identification with the one and the many. For Sri Chinmoy, the aspect of human consciousness which expedites this realisation is the heart or psychic consciousness. Psychic consciousness is characterised by a feeling of “inner oneness”<sup>8</sup> expressed as divine love. This oneness does not exclude the multiplicity necessary for relationship. Because God is both one and many, the realisation of God through the psychic consciousness is the experience of both oneness and multiplicity.

In Sri Chinmoy’s philosophy God is the essence of who we are, our own highest Self. He speaks of two ‘I’s. There is the ‘I’ of God, the essence and true Self of all. Then there is the

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‘Supreme’, we are speaking of the Supreme Lord who not only reaches the absolute Highest, but all the time goes beyond, beyond and, transcends the Beyond. There is a constant upward movement.”

<sup>3</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita: The Three Branches of India’s Life Tree*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1966). Note here Sri Chinmoy’s frequent usage of the word *Brahman* to describe divinity.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *A Seeker Is A Singer*, (New York: Agni Press, 1987), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0720/4/2> “The Highest, the One without a second, the God who has created the multiplicity, is always perfect.”

<sup>5</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Core Of India's Light, Part 3*, (New York: Agni Press, 1992), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0839/1/1>

<sup>6</sup> The ancient authors of the original Upanishads

<sup>7</sup> Sri Chinmoy sometimes refers to God-realisation as Self-realisation (or self-realisation) and other times simply as realisation. I will sometimes use these terms interchangeably, but always in reference to the same concept.

<sup>8</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Meditation-Service At The United Nations For 25 Years*, (New York: Agni Press, 1995), Chapter 4, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1094/6/9>

'i' of the individual self. In our ordinary, ignorant state of consciousness we identify with the individual 'i' but not the God 'I'. In God-realisation, there is identification with the God 'I' and each and every individual 'i'. We identify with the Whole and each of the parts. Thus, God-realisation does not necessitate the denial of individual consciousness but a widening of consciousness into an all-encompassing reality. In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy universality and individuality run together without conflict. The individual is not destroyed by realisation.

Finally, I will attempt to explain how becoming God through divine love in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy is the highest ideal of human development. Sri Chinmoy's conception of divine love provides the basis for an ethics of divine love in which the lover and beloved are one. Sri Chinmoy uses the phrases 'God the One' and 'God the Many' as twin epithets for the divine, suggesting that both unity and multiplicity are in the very nature of God. To become God, in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy, is to be transformed entirely by divine love. This divine love constitutes the highest satisfaction and ethical perfection available to humanity.

Sri Chinmoy's philosophy is unique and writing about it poses particular challenges. I have tried to keep my personal interpretation to a minimum, but can only hope that I have represented the author's views as accurately as possible. The bulk of his philosophy is to be found in short aphorisms, which are intended for deep reflection or meditation. The aphoristic method of writing was popular among classical philosophers, particularly the Greeks, Chinese and Indians. Sri Chinmoy has much in common with those ancient teachers. The method has now mostly fallen out of favour in the West, despite recent exceptions like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. A fruitful source of philosophical material is also to be found in the published transcripts of Sri Chinmoy's United Nations and university lectures, public dialogues and interviews.

One of the most challenging aspects of approaching Sri Chinmoy's literature is its sheer size. The creator of more than 1,500 books during his lifetime, he was one of the world's most prolific authors. These writings are not precisely arranged into categories by the author, although many of his students have collated them according to topic. As Peter Pitzele writes, "Sri Chinmoy is not a systematic philosopher",<sup>9</sup> in the sense that his works are the result of creative flow rather than diagrammatic planning. Sri Chinmoy's style is

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Pitzele, Introduction to *Beyond Within*, by Sri Chinmoy, (New York: Agni Press, 1988), iv

inherently free, and resists the mathematician's touch. These issues of size and arrangement make familiarising oneself with his teachings a potentially lifelong project. However, his writings are remarkably consistent and by studying even a portion of them it does not take long for key themes to emerge.

Another consideration is that Sri Chinmoy approaches his subject matter with the voice of someone who is deeply and intimately acquainted with it by way of experience, rather than simply through speculation or reasoning. This is to some extent a matter of 'take it or leave it'. One is free to accept or reject his claims. However, like other spiritual figures whose writings are philosophically important, Sri Chinmoy produces compelling visions of truth that are hard to ignore.

## ONENESS OR LOVE?

For that is what philosophy has promised me –

that she will make me God's equal.

- Seneca<sup>10</sup>

Why does the notion of becoming one with God (or becoming God) warrant philosophical attention? Firstly, philosophy of religion ought to be concerned not only with the nature and existence of God but also with how God and humanity might relate to each other. Secondly, philosophers of religion are now starting to pay more attention to the content of religious, spiritual and mystical experiences. These experiences are often described in terms of oneness with God. Thirdly, the West's recent exposure to Indian philosophy has challenged some of its traditional religious conceptions, including the notion that God and humanity are separate entities. Fourthly, oneness with God may be a viable alternative to secular ideals of human development.

In the second half of the chapter I will outline a philosophical dilemma associated with the notion of becoming one with God. If becoming God means becoming absolutely identical to God, then love may be redundant since a loving relationship needs more than one participant. Without a relationship, there can be no love. What I aim to show is that Sri Chinmoy's philosophy can deal with this dilemma in a way that reconciles love and oneness.

The idea of becoming one with God may seem absurd or even idolatrous to some. However, in many spiritual traditions both Eastern and Western, becoming God is the highest ideal of human development. This ideal, simply because of its presence in religious thought, is relevant to the philosophy of religion and so deserves consideration. The nature and existence of God are the main topics of reflection in standard philosophy of religion. But these are important philosophical topics precisely because of their significance for

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<sup>10</sup> Seneca, *Letters from a Stoic* Letter XLVIII, (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), 99

human existence. Because we are interested in our fate and our existence, our life's meaning and our life's destiny, we ponder the deeper meaning of the universe. If that pondering brings us to reflect on God, then we do so with an interest in how God relates to our own lives.

Western philosophers of religion traditionally had two main goals: to clarify the concept of God and to determine whether God exists. Although probing the nature and existence of God may be worthwhile, philosophy of religion should not stop there. Whether God exists and who or what God is are questions of great importance to human life, but they raise other questions about the significance of human life, its origins and its destiny. For example, if God created us for a purpose, then our lives cannot help but mean something different than if we are just a randomly assorted collection of stardust temporarily becoming aware of itself.

Human development is a central concern of religion. If God exists, then knowing about the nature of God reveals vital information about ourselves and our life's purpose. Most religions advocate a process of human development in which certain problems or deficiencies inherent to human life are satisfactorily resolved. This is evolution, in a very broad sense of the term. If God exists, then perhaps the goal of human life is to unite with God or even to become God.

Another reason the topic is worth exploring is that recently philosophers of religion have been paying greater attention to religious experience. What are often called spiritual or mystic experiences, do not necessarily occur within a religious context. I will use the term 'spiritual experience' as a blanket term for all these kinds of experiences. Perhaps because debates over whether God exists and what He might be like are so inconclusive, philosophers have become more interested in the experiences which religious or spiritual engagement is said to bring about. This has led some to look more closely at the writings of mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Teresa of Avila. The primary concern of mystics is the direct experience of God, which they hold to be more real and authentic than the results of intellectual inquiry about God. Pascal once described a vivid spiritual experience which he associated with "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob. Not the [God of the] philosophers and of the scholars".<sup>11</sup> He may have been referring to a distinction between

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Mesnard, *Pascal, his life and works*, (London: Harvill Press, 1952), 210 (my translation of this quote). The original text is: "*Dieu d'Abraham, Dieu d'Isaac, Dieu de Jacob. Non des philosophes et des savants*".

experiencing the divine and simply speculating about the divine. The experience was certainly important to Pascal, as he kept a written record of it in the lining of his coat where it was discovered after his death.

A common element of spiritual experience is that people report a change in perspective during which it seems that the sense of individuality has either disappeared completely or has been enlarged into an all-embracing unity. When they return to a state in which ordinary language and thought is possible, they may express this experience as having involved a sense of union or a merging with God. They may then claim to have become one with God. The nature of such close encounters with the divine, be they hallucination or reality, was given serious attention by few Western philosophers until the publication of William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*<sup>12</sup> and, later, W.D. Stace' *Mysticism and Philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> One of the main purposes of this literature is to decipher, however imperfectly, whether these experiences tell us anything worthwhile about the nature of reality.

Spiritual experiences are often said to be ultimately indescribable. However, an abundance of literature has flowed from the pens of mystics and seers in both East and West not just describing these experiences, but saying what they apparently reveal about the nature of reality. This is often where the mystic becomes a philosopher. Since there are plenty of people in various times and places claiming to be one with God, it seems worthwhile to consider what this actually means. It is easy to dismiss as nonsense reports of experiences that are so far out of the ordinary. However, to do so is to miss out on a potentially valuable source of insights.

Another reason why this topic is important is that over the last few hundred years, Western culture has been inundated with ideas and practices from India. Sanskrit words like *karma*, *yoga* and *guru* are now so imbedded in the English language that it is easy to forget their Oriental origin. This cultural influx has also influenced the religious and philosophical outlook of the West. Arthur Schopenhauer, one of the most important Western philosophers, was profoundly affected by his contact with the Upanishads<sup>14</sup> of India.

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<sup>12</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience, a study in human nature: being the Gifford lectures on natural religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*, (London: Longmans, Green, 1902).

<sup>13</sup> W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1961).

<sup>14</sup> The most philosophical parts of the Vedas, which are the foundational scriptures of Hinduism.

“Indian wisdom” he said, “flows back to Europe, and will produce a fundamental change in our knowledge and thought”.<sup>15</sup> Philosophers of religion in the West have tended to assume that when they talk about God, they must be referring to an entity which is ‘out there’, separate from humanity but in some way connected to it. However, this view of God is increasingly being challenged and the spread of Indian philosophy is at least partially responsible.

The effect of Indian thought on the West consists not only of what Europeans brought back from overseas conquest, or chanced upon in their search for rare books. While Europeans missionized in the East, Indians have in recent times travelled to the West with the intention of spreading their own spiritual ideas. This tide has come in many waves of various size, of which I will mention three. The first is Swami Vivekananda, whose eloquence and dynamic personality brought the ancient Vedanta<sup>16</sup> teachings within grasp of the modern mind and heart of the West. In his 1894 attendance at the inaugural Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago, Americans came face to face with the living spirit of Hinduism. Following this, Paramahansa Yogananda ensconced himself in California and found his final resting place there in 1952. Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi* is a remarkably lucid exposition of Eastern wisdom through the English language, one which Professor Ashutosh Dash of Calcutta University called “an Upanishad of the new age”.<sup>17</sup> In 1964 New York City became home to Sri Chinmoy from Bengal, whose outpouring of writings and talks facilitated a new fusion of Eastern and Western philosophy. In 1970 he became director of the United Nations Meditation Group by the invitation of Secretary-General U Thant,<sup>18</sup> and he guest lectured at many Western universities including Oxford,

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<sup>15</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and paralipomena: short philosophical essays*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 357

<sup>16</sup> Literally, the ‘essence of the Vedas’. Commonly used to refer to philosophies which are based upon interpretation of the Vedas.

<sup>17</sup> Self-Realization Fellowship, Introduction to *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda, (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1998), Xxiii

<sup>18</sup> Kusumita P. Pedersen, “Sri Chinmoy’s work at the United Nations: spirituality and the power of silence”, *Crosscurrents* (September 2010): 339-340

Cambridge, Harvard and Yale.<sup>19</sup> His philosophy, which I will soon consider in more depth, is that ‘man has to realise who he eternally is: God Himself’.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of Indian philosophy has also changed the way Westerners think about God. According to mainstream Western religion, God created the world *ex nihilo* (from nothing) and is essentially distinct from the world. But according to the Upanishads, the *Brahman*, the ultimate creative principle which some call ‘God’, has itself become the world. Furthermore, *Atman* (the highest reality in man) is *Brahman*.<sup>21</sup> There has been a shift in perspective so that now many Westerners see God as an internally accessible reality rather than an entity which exists wholly outside the self. The ‘New Age movement’ which blossomed in the 1960’s involved a partial rejection of traditional Western religious attitudes, and the adoption of many Eastern ones. This change in mood as reflected through the popular culture was illustrated by John Lennon, who said in 1966:

I believe in God, but not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call ‘God’ is something in all of us.<sup>22</sup>

Lennon’s comments caused controversy at the time, but nowadays this would be quite a commonplace assertion to make in the West about one’s belief in God, even from within the walls of a religious institution. This shift to a more subjectively accessible view of the divine is not just a product of Indian philosophy channelled through the so-called ‘New Age’ movement. It also stems from the re-interpretation (or rediscovery) of ancient doctrines in mainstream religion. For example, the notion of omnipresence (‘God is everywhere’). If God is everywhere, then He is surely ‘in all of us’. Another example is Plotinus, the ancient Greek who spoke of everything as One, and whose philosophy helped form a bridge between Christianity and the teachings of Plato. Many of Plotinus’ descriptions of what he believed to be ultimate reality are remarkably similar to that of

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<sup>19</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind* (New York: Agni Press, 2004). This contains transcripts of Sri Chinmoy’s American university lectures from 1976 to 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Union-Vision*, (New York: Agni Press, 1975), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0295/1/21>

<sup>21</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1951). See Radhakrishnan’s treatment of the Upanishads for an account of *Atman/Brahman* identity.

<sup>22</sup> Larry Kane, *Lennon Revealed*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Running Press Book Publishers, 2005), 118

mystics describing their apparent contact with ultimate reality, which suggests that Plotinus may have been both a mystic and a philosopher.<sup>23</sup>

As an ideal of human development, oneness with God may also be an alternative to secular ideals of ethical perfection. Oneness with God has ethical consequences, because he or she who has become one with God is a changed person. It is an ideal of human development which necessitates a transformation of human consciousness. Such a person will see the world, and act, differently. Those who advocate or claim to have experienced oneness with God often associate it with ethical perfection.

One possible reason why spiritual experience could lead to ethical perfection is that the experience of oneness with God may involve the transcendence of suffering and perhaps satisfaction or inner peace. Many reports of spiritual experience use words such as bliss, delight and ecstasy. If you are totally satisfied with the experiences that oneness with God can give you, it seems unlikely that you would possess urges such as hate, anger and lust which are normally thought to arise from dissatisfaction. Ethical perfection could be thus a natural product of the mystical or one-with-God experience.

Having set out why oneness with God is a philosophically important notion, I now turn to a dilemma in the philosophy of mysticism for which I think Sri Chinmoy's philosophy provides a solution. The dilemma is that oneness with God is often described as a state in which all distinction is abolished. But without distinction there can be no relationships, and without relationships love is impossible. This implies that some notions of oneness with God are incompatible with love.

I will begin with a quote from Cyprian Smith which sums up the dilemma:

[Knowledge] also annihilates all distinction, all separateness, and rests only in perfect unity. In love, however close the union and communion, the two partners always remain to some extent separate; there is always 'I' and 'You'. But knowledge is not content with this; it is not satisfied with a state of communion and likeness; it wants to press on further until there is no more 'I' and 'You' but only Oneness. It is no longer merely like God, it has become God.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1961), 77

<sup>24</sup> Cyprian Smith, *Spiritual life as taught by Meister Eckhart: the way of paradox*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1987), 23.

If what Smith says is true, then you can either be truly one with God or in a loving relationship with God, but not both. One response to this is to say that human beings can be one with God, but only in a very restricted sense. For example, the catechism of the Catholic Church contains a quote from St. Athanasius that “the Son of God became man so that we might become God”<sup>25</sup>. Taken literally, a statement like ‘become God’ might conflict with interpretations of Christianity in which the essence of God and the essence of man are eternally distinct. But ‘becoming’ God in this context is usually explained to mean becoming *like* God or somehow participating in the nature of God, as in Peter’s call to be ‘partakers of the divine nature’.<sup>26</sup> In Eastern Orthodox theology, to which *theosis* or union with God is central, a careful distinction is made between union with God’s essence and union with God’s energies.<sup>27</sup>

On this kind of view, oneness with God might simply mean that man and God unite with each other while remaining distinct. It is perhaps a divine marriage in which two become one but are still two. A traditional approach to marital union is that it consists of two persons joined together as one couple or ‘one flesh’ (interpreted in both a spiritual and corporeal sense). If oneness with God means nothing more than this, then of course love can persist throughout the union.

But for many mystics, sages and philosophers, oneness with God *does* mean something more than a union with God in which each party keeps their distinct identity. Some of them say that we really can ‘become God’ in the strongest sense of the term. And in some philosophies (such as Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta), we are already one with God but because of deep-rooted ignorance we experience life as separate beings. Such philosophies seem to ultimately have no need for love (except perhaps as a means to an end) because the goal sought is absolute identity with the One, rather than a relationship with the One.

Let us now turn our attention to love, and consider whether it is really so tied up with separateness as Smith implies. In the short passage just quoted, Smith assumes that love can live only where there is distinction. So if the ultimate spiritual experience is supposed

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<sup>25</sup> St. Athanasius quoted in Libreria Editrice Vaticana, “Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 3, 460”, Citta del Vaticano 1993, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P1J.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P1J.HTM).

<sup>26</sup> *King James 2000 Bible*, 2 Peter 1, [http://kj2000.scripturetext.com/2\\_peter/1.htm](http://kj2000.scripturetext.com/2_peter/1.htm)

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan D. Jacobs, “An Eastern Orthodox Conception of Theosis and Human Nature” in *Faith and Philosophy* 26.5 (2009), 615-27

to be without distinction, then such an experience is loveless. But is Smith right about love? Love is a matter of the heart, and the heart's feelings are difficult to describe. Without trying to define love (why would one want to try?) it is reasonable to say that the way humans experience love is always with respect to some object outside our selves, and hence there is always a relationship (or desired relationship) involved in love. However, there is a notable exception to this: self-love. The statement 'I love myself' would make sense as a declaration of relationship if I am distinct from myself. It is common to hear people speak of being 'in a relationship' with themselves and using terms like self-respect, self-esteem and so forth. If a self is internally distinct, especially if it is made up of many parts, then perhaps it could have a relationship with itself. Self-love could indeed be something real.

But even if self-love is still love, is it of an inferior kind to the idealised form of love which so many religions advocate? Different cultures have their own ways of privileging certain loves over others, but they all recognise a certain hierarchy. Loving a piece of cake is nowhere near the same as loving one's parents, which is again different from the way a loving God would love His creation. So, self-love may be a type of love – but not the most complete. In traditional Western terminology, *eros* is a type of love centred around satisfaction of the self, which may nevertheless cling to outside objects in its search for self-fulfilment. *Agape* is a selfless love, one which can sacrifice the interests of the self for a noble pursuit. If self-love does not require relationship then it could be compatible with the Oneness mentioned by Smith. However, this state of oneness would be incompatible with all forms of love other than self-love. Possibly, it would not even allow the full heights of *eros*, since *eros* looks beyond the self and is focused on the 'other' whom it desires to possess. So what remains is still unsatisfactory from the perspective of those who place ultimate value on any love other than self-love.

If love needs a relationship, then it seems God could not experience love without creating others to be in a relationship with. But in many conceptions of God, His very nature is love. If God is love through and through, then love does not arise from the process of creation but was there all along. If there is something ultimate and essential about love, then our experience of love through relationship is not the sole fact of the matter. It could be that relationships somehow allow love to be experienced, but are not the only way for that to happen. Love might peer out through many veils, while keeping mostly hidden behind them. Perhaps it is only by transcending relationship altogether that love in its

highest heights is discovered. But this is all mere speculation. To say that God's nature is love may simply be to say that He seeks to express His nature through loving relationships – hence the creation of the world. For the theist who is committed to love, treading the path to an absolute unity without differentiation may be a dangerous venture.

If absolute oneness with God is free of relationship, then the search for such oneness could be regarded as merely self-serving. Love forces us to confront and deal with the complex tension between our self-interest and that of others. It is in this struggle that we can grow and develop as individuals and become better people. A consciousness of non-duality in which there is no distinction between 'self' and 'other' could be a way of avoiding the more difficult and complex arena of human interaction, or at worst pandering to self-centredness.

The striving for non-duality is thus open to the accusation that, rather than being a genuine form of spirituality, it is instead what Mark Johnston calls "spiritual materialism",<sup>28</sup> in which inauthentic spiritual engagement becomes another tool to pander to one's selfish desires. I think the more extreme version of this accusation is relatively easy to deal with. The idea that the unitary consciousness sought by mystics is self-centred is true to an extent, but we need to be clear about what sort of 'self' is involved here. It is true that many mystical experiences are spoken of in terms of an experience of selfhood, especially Advaita Vedanta. However, this 'self' is not meant to be the human ego. It is something which transcends both ego and 'other'. This transcendent or divine selfhood is sometimes described as beyond 'I' and 'you' or 'self' and 'other', and the Self (with a capital 'S') really just a placeholder for something much greater than the individual subject.

Furthermore, those who are said to have been transformed by spiritual experience tend to display all the qualities of humility, restraint and compassion associated with effacement of the self rather than enlarged ego. So why call it the Self? I think the answer to this, at least in Indian philosophy, has been that it is because the Self is held to be accessible via introspection, through a process of going deep within. If *Atman* is *Brahman*, and *Brahman* is *chit* (consciousness), then there ought to be some pathway from the ordinary consciousness to the divine consciousness. Because *Brahman* is to be found internally, even while it transcends the individual consciousness, this warrants using the word Self. In Western vernacular the word 'consciousness' tends to get very tied up with concepts of

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Johnston, *Saving God: Religion after idolatry*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 16.

individual self-awareness and thought. Whereas in the East, *chit*, (which perhaps has no adequate synonym in English, consciousness being the closest available) is often seen as something vast and transcendent of which thought, sense and self-conception are but the most superficial manifestations. Descartes' pronouncement that 'I think therefore I am' has never impressed Indian philosophers very much. Their own Vedic sages looked for (and claimed to have found) an intuitive state of inner existence beyond thought, which allowed them to remark simply 'I [Brahman] am'.

In the pages that follow I will indicate how an application of Sri Chinmoy's philosophy could help resolve the dilemma of oneness and love that I have outlined. In the following chapter I discuss two different conceptions of oneness with God. Then I turn to Sri Chinmoy's writings on God and his philosophy of God-realisation. This realisation for Sri Chinmoy is neither the coming together of separate entities nor the obliteration of difference. In realisation, God is known as both the one and the many. Since God is one's own highest Self, we too are both one and many. To embrace oneness in multiplicity is to experience the highest love, and this love is the catalyst for ultimate perfection.

## 'BECOMING GOD' IN EAST AND WEST

A monkey climbed down a tree;  
Lo, he became a man.

A man looked up;  
Lo, he became a god.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>29</sup>

Does oneness with God (or becoming God) rule out individual identity? If a person does retain a separate identity when they become one with God, there is still the possibility of a relationship between God and that individual. However, if oneness means merging with God to such an extent that they are completely identical, then no relationship is possible. The distinction between these two conceptions of becoming one with God is important for theists who value their individual existence and the ability to form loving relationships. This difference is not an Eastern and Western split. Indian philosophy has tended to be more open to the notion of identity with God, but such views have also been expressed in the West despite being typically discouraged by religious establishments. In this respect, aside from their other views, St. Teresa of Avila and Sri Chaitanya of Bengal share more in common with each other than they do with Meister Eckhart or Shankara.

The first interpretation of becoming one with God I will consider is that it means some kind of union which falls short of absolute identity. In this sort of oneness, I am united with God but not the same as God. A variety of analogies, both personal and non-personal are used in the literature of God-union. The word union has many different meanings in ordinary life, and this is no less true in the spiritual life. We can join business and trade

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<sup>29</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Dance Of Life, Part 9*, (New York: Agni Press, 1973), Number 404 [\*Note to the reader: the term 'number' throughout the footnotes of this thesis refers to the numerical order of poems in a collection and not the page number of the volume in which it appears]

unions or enter the union of marriage. We can unite with an idea, a person or an object. Personal analogies for union with God take at least as many forms as the relationship between one human being and another. In union, there is still a sense of difference even though the two participants in the relationship may have become ‘one’ in a very real sense by uniting bodies, minds, will or spirit. The metaphor of husband and wife is a common analogy found in both East and West. It comes up in the Christian notion that the church is the ‘bride of Christ’. Sufi writings are also imbued with marital symbolism. The Indian Vaishnava movement uses the story of Krishna and the *gopis* to make a similar point, but goes even further by presenting love for the divine as something which transcends all earthly bonds. In the case of the *gopis* (female devotees of Krishna) they were so enraptured with love of Krishna, whom many Hindus believe to be God Incarnate, that they forgot completely about their husbands.

Non-personal analogies for such oneness with God include the relationship between a ray of sunlight and the sun, a spark from a fire, or some other image which represents both coming together and remaining distinct. A piece of wood, once carved into the shape of a man, comes to resemble a man. To say that the wood has become a man, only means that it is similar to a man – it is made in man’s image, perhaps. When a boy becomes a man he does not become his father just because his father is a man. They are two distinct individuals. In both cases, the different essences of the two things prevent them from becoming one. So to ‘become God’ in this sense means to become very much like God, without actually being exactly what God is. When a couple marry, the husband does not become the wife, although in a limited sense they do become ‘one’.

The idea of union with God is present in all the three main Western religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In its exoteric doctrines, the Western tradition emphasises the distinct identity of God and creature. Each of these religions also has its esoteric side which whispers about the oneness with God that transcends any distinctions. However, the dominant religious stance of the West regards union with God to be the forming of a relationship in which the parties remain eternally distinct. One way this has been expressed is through what Martin Buber calls the ‘I-Thou’ (*Ich und Du*) distinction. For Buber, God represents the “eternal Thou” who is always “other” than myself.<sup>30</sup> An I-Thou relationship

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<sup>30</sup> Sarah Scott, “Martin Buber.” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 9 July 2010, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber>

with God is one in which each party to the relationship is affirmed as a distinct whole without being swallowed up by a more inclusive category of being.<sup>31</sup> This separateness is also expressed in mainstream religious language by the statement that God and His creatures have distinct essences.<sup>32</sup> Union with God, in this sense, means that human beings and God are joined together without losing their individual essences.

In some religious views the ideal union with God is simply one in which we can be near to God and see Him. Although God is described in the Qu'ran as closer to man "than [his] jugular vein",<sup>33</sup> the standard Islamic view seems to be that humans will not see God until the afterlife.<sup>34</sup> Many Christians speak of the "beatific vision" in which one sees God "face-to-face", but generally say that this is meant to occur in heaven rather than on earth.<sup>35</sup> These orthodox views use the language of close association rather than merging. The word 'union' may still be used, but in a looser sense.

Union with God has been described by Christian mystics in various ways. For Bernard of Clairvaux it is "mutuality of love."<sup>36</sup> Jan van Ruysbroeck likens it to the way in which "iron is penetrated by fire" but "does not become fire". In the same way, "the creature never becomes God, nor does God ever become the creature".<sup>37</sup> For St. John of the Cross, the union is a "likeness which love begets". The soul which reaches a state of "perfect conformity and resemblance" is "perfectly united, and supernaturally transformed, in God".<sup>38</sup> Henry Suso affirms that in the "merging of itself in God" the human spirit "does not become God by nature".<sup>39</sup> Christian mystics such as these advocated the union of God

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<sup>31</sup> Sarah Scott, "Martin Buber."

<sup>32</sup> As in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians who were influenced by the metaphysics of Aristotle with its categorisation of reality into essence, substance, form etc.

<sup>33</sup> *Qur'an*, Surat Qaf 50:16, <http://quran.com/50/16>

<sup>34</sup> Cafer Yaran, *Understanding Islam*, (Edinburgh, UK: Dunedin Academic Press, 2007), 31-35

<sup>35</sup> E. Pace, "Beatific Vision," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company: 1907), New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02364a.htm>

<sup>36</sup> Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/mysticism/>

<sup>37</sup> W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1961), 222-23

<sup>38</sup> In Stace, W.T. *Mysticism and philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1961), p.222

<sup>39</sup> In Stace, W.T. *Mysticism and philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p.223

as lover and beloved but not the loss of individual identity in that union. Strong words like ‘merging’ may be used, but only with the understanding that the two natures thus merged are still intact.

St. Teresa of Avila was another Christian mystic who wrote about union between God and the soul but with marital analogies that, due to their personal and inner nature, are more suggestive of spiritual oneness than references to natural phenomena like fire and water can be. She called this union a “Divine Marriage” in which God would “unite Himself with His creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another”.<sup>40</sup> In Teresa’s depiction of this experience the creature is inseparably united with God but they are still ‘like two’, just as a married couple is a union of two distinct beings. This union may require the subordination of one’s individuality to God, but this is not the same as losing one’s identity completely. It could be a divine union so strong that it ties the individual irrevocably to God without destroying what is essential to that individual’s existence.<sup>41</sup>

Suso, in this excerpt from *A Little Book of Eternal Wisdom* clearly affirms an I-Thou distinction between man and God and a mutual yearning for each other which culminates in an intimately close relationship:

Turn Myself whichever way I will, in Me there is nothing that can displease, in Me is everything that can delight the utmost wishes of thy heart and desires of the soul. Lo! I am a good so pure, that he who in his day only gets one drop of Me regards all the pleasures and delights of this world as nothing but bitterness; all its possessions and honours as worthless, and only fit to be cast away; My beloved ones are encompassed by My love, and are absorbed into the One Thing alone without imaged love and without spoken words, and are taken and infused into that good out of which they flowed.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, Translated by Allison E. Peers, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 199-?), 97, EBSCOhost academic database

<sup>41</sup> This is a stronger form of union than the husband and wife relationship which may be severed by death or divorce. Teresa’s claim that the soul and God “cannot be separated from one another” indicates a far more durable bond than human marriage.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Suso, *A little book of eternal wisdom*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 199-?), 6, EBSCOhost academic database

The passage above affirms the duality of lover and beloved, while at the same time it speaks of being “absorbed into the One Thing”.<sup>43</sup> Absorption does not necessarily mean one substance being absorbed into another, but can also refer to the mental and emotional absorption in another that characterises intense love. To be ‘absorbed’ in something means to concentrate on it to the exclusion of all other things. But even if absorption is taken literally, this does not necessarily mean the relationship of duality disappears. The lover could become a part of God, but still retain her own identity within the One Thing.

In mainstream Islam, God is completely transcendent and so any union with God must retain the distinctness of Creator and creation. However, Islamic philosophy also has a mystical element. This focus on oneness is particularly pronounced in Sufism. Ibn’ Arabi, widely considered to be one of the greatest Muslim philosophers<sup>44</sup>, was a poet who gave great inspiration to the Sufis. A famous line from an Arabi poem runs: “When my Beloved appears, with what eye do I see Him? With His eye, not with mine, for none sees Him except Himself.”<sup>45</sup>

The theme of losing oneself in divine love of God is so prevalent in Ibn’ Arabi and the Sufis that it is hard to ignore. It could be said that such talk is merely a flight of the poetic imagination, and that these writers are only describing the abandonment of self-awareness and complete surrender to the Other that characterises the ecstasy of divine love. But it often seems as if these mystics are claiming to be so immersed in oneness with God that they have lost their individual identity. Here are some selections from Sufi poets of the latter sort, which suggest complete identity with God:

So they vanished in Him forever, as the shadow disappears in the sun.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Henry Suso, *A little book of eternal wisdom*, 6

<sup>44</sup> William, Chittick, "Ibn Arabi", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/ibn-arabi>

<sup>45</sup> Reynold Alleyne, Nicholson, trans., *The Mystics of Islam*, (Forgotten Books, 2008), <http://www.forgottenbooks.org/info/9781605066868>, 122

<sup>46</sup> Claud Field, *Mystics and saints of Islam*, (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2011), 132

Thy spirit is mingled in my spirit  
even as wine is mingled with pure water.  
When anything touches Thee,  
it touches me.  
Lo, in every case Thou art I!<sup>47</sup>

In the first poem above by Farid ud Din Attar, there is no longer any “I” and “Thou”. The second poem is by all-Hallaj who apparently claimed to be God.<sup>48</sup> His wine and water analogy could be a way of saying that “Thou” is exactly the same as “I”. Or, he could have meant that they are so intermingled that they are both present at the same place. If I mix wine with water, then they may be one in the sense that if I touch the mixture at any place, I will probably come into contact with both water and wine molecules. However, this does not mean that wine and water are exactly the same.

Turning now to Indian philosophy, some of the most notable adherents of union with God through dualistic personal love have been the Vaishnavas, and one of their most exalted personalities was Sri Chaitanya. Chaitanya’s impact on India was remarkable mainly because his intense devotion to God (specifically, Krishna as God) manifested in extraordinary heights of emotion and fervour. Eight short verses known as the *Siksastakam* are directly attributed to him. They are arranged in short cantos such as the following:

O my Lord, when will my eyes be decorated with tears of love flowing constantly when I chant Your holy name? When will my voice choke up, and when will the hairs of my body stand on end at the recitation of Your name?<sup>49</sup>

Whereas Hindus have typically sought liberation, the Vaishnavas regarded devotion as more important. The Vaishnavas preached *bhakti*, a philosophy of love and devotion to God.<sup>50</sup> Those who follow Indian *bhakti* devotional paths have traditionally spoken of five

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<sup>47</sup> Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The idea of personality in Sufism*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 30

<sup>48</sup> Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/mysticism/>

<sup>49</sup> Norvin J. Hein, “Caitanya’s ecstasies and the theology of the name,” in *Hinduism: new essays in the history of religions*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith, (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1976), 20

<sup>50</sup> John Grimes, *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 83

ways to represent this love of God through analogies of human relationship, each involving a greater degree of intensity in love and progressively drawing one closer to divine union. These are, in order of intensity, a pleasant but non-passionate calm feeling (as one might have for a sunset); the devotion of a servant for his master; the camaraderie of one friend for another; the fondness of a parent for a child and lastly, the passionate sweetness of a lover for the beloved.<sup>51</sup> The effect of each stage is meant to be cumulative, so that each one is an advance upon the other. The kind of liberation that would ‘liberate’ us from a devoted relationship with God, was completely rejected. To lose one’s identity in God is, to the *bhakta* or devotee, a spiritual death to be feared and hated with all one’s being:

For those who have attained the merciful sidelong glance of Lord Gaura,<sup>52</sup>  
impersonal liberation becomes as palatable as going to hell.<sup>53</sup>

Such liberation was seen this way by Chaitanya’s early followers because, being absent of personal relationship with God, it was held to be empty of love. For a Vaishnava, there is no love possible in such a liberation because love needs more than one person. There must, therefore, be duality. Chaitanya’s followers, through their biographical and theological works, credit him with espousing the doctrine of *acintya bhedābheda* or simultaneous oneness and difference. The Vaishnavas wanted to affirm that the individual and God are different portions of the same quality. A common analogy used is that of sun and the sunshine. The idea is that sunshine is both different from and the same as the sun. Sun and sunlight are one in quality, but a beam of sunlight is only a tiny portion of the entire sun. This is supposed to express the idea that the soul is a portion of God which nonetheless relates to God as a distinct person.

As Sri Ramakrishna puts it, neatly describing the *bhakta*’s stance:

I don’t want to become sugar; I want to eat it.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Yogas and other works*, Compiled by Swami Nikhilananda, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1953), 450-53

<sup>52</sup> Gaura is another name for Sri Chaitanya, meaning ‘Golden One’. See Tony K. Stewart, *The final word: the Caitanya caritāmṛta and the grammar of religious tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 3, DIO: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195392722.001.0001

<sup>53</sup> Srila Prabodhananda Sarasvati, *Sri Caitanya-candramṛta (excerpts)*, transl. Srila Prabhupada, <http://www.harekrsna.de/caitanya-candramrita.htm>

I will now turn to a sample of the traditions in which becoming one with God is described in terms that suggest absolute identity with God. Sometimes analogies like a drop entering an ocean or a spark returning to the fire are used to refer to the kind of union in which an individual merges into the Infinite and completely loses their separate identity. This is more than just union in the sense of two things coming together to form a greater whole. In merging, the distinct identity of the individual is completely lost. Writers who have expressed oneness with God in this kind of language include Plotinus, the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, and 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch philosopher Spinoza.

One of the earliest Western accounts of becoming God is from Plotinus, who began the philosophical tradition known as Neo-Platonism which greatly influenced the religious development of the West. For Plotinus, human life finds its perfection in *theosis* (normally translated as divinisation or deification), which is union with the One. The One is the self-caused Supreme or Absolute which is itself the ultimate cause of all things. In union with the One, the human being has “become the unity, having no diversity either in relation to himself or anything else”.<sup>55</sup> Plotinus also says:

No doubt we should not speak of seeing, but instead of seen and seer, speak boldly of a simple unity. For in this seeing we neither distinguish nor are there two. The man...is merged with the Supreme...one with it.<sup>56</sup>

One can draw varying interpretations from these words, but at face value they seem unequivocal statements of identity with God. Orthodox Eastern Christianity speaks of union with God as *theosis* or divinisation and (along with many other Christians) draws some inspiration from Plotinus. However, mainstream Christians also believe that the essence of God and man must remain distinct no matter how closely man approaches divinity. For Plotinus, *theosis* seems to involve a merger with the One so complete that it culminates in absolute identity.

There are also many Indian philosophies which affirm the ultimate identity of God and human beings. Typically, in such philosophies man is already one with God but somehow ignorant of that fact. These ideas can be found in a reading of the Upanishads, but were

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<sup>54</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, trans., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (abridged), (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1958), 230

<sup>55</sup> Plotinus in W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, (London: Macmillan, 1961), 195

<sup>56</sup> Plotinus in W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 233

given more detailed exposition in Shankara's later commentaries on those texts. According to Shankara's philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, God or *Brahman* "is without parts or attributes...one without a second".<sup>57</sup> It is in the Upanishads (the philosophical sections of the Vedas) that the phrase 'One without a second' can be found, but it was Shankara who propounded a philosophy of unqualified monism on the basis of these ancient verses. Shankara is usually interpreted to have claimed that Brahman is the only true Self. It is everywhere and completely undivided. It seems to follow from this that the world with its apparent distinctions and diversity is an illusion, and the featureless One is all that exists.

Shankara's apparent emphasis on undifferentiated oneness and world-rejection was seen as a challenge to be overcome to the subsequent Chaitanya-Vaishnava movement which affirmed the reality of individuals, the world and a personal God (*Ishvara*) with positive attributes. While Shankara accepted that devotion to *Ishvara* may be an intermediary step towards the ultimate liberation of union with *Brahman*, the Vaishnavas saw *bhakti* as the goal itself and such a liberation as the death of their amorous love-play with Krishna.<sup>58</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna here describes the merging without distinction of the 'I' into Brahman during Samadhi<sup>59</sup>, a state of union with God:

When camphor is burnt, no residue is left. When discrimination ends and the highest Samadhi is attained, there is neither 'I' nor 'thou' nor the universe; for the mind and ego are merged in the Absolute Brahman.<sup>60</sup>

Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's most missionary disciple, gave numerous lectures throughout America and England during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the following paragraph he summarises Advaita Vedanta, one of the most influential Indian philosophies:

What does the Advaitist preach? He dethrones all the gods that ever existed or ever will exist in the universe, and puts in their place the Self of man, the Atman, higher

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<sup>57</sup> William Wainwright, "Concepts of God", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/concepts-god>.

<sup>58</sup> For Vaishnava followers of Chaitanya, Krishna is regarded as the Supreme Personality of Godhead who periodically descends as an *avatar*: the Supreme in human form on Earth.

<sup>59</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Samadhi and Siddhi*, 85. There are different grades of Samadhi. According to Sri Chinmoy: "Entering samadhi is like knowing the alphabet, but realisation is like having a Ph.D."

<sup>60</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Mylapore, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math), 252

than the sun and the moon, higher than the heavens, greater than this great universe itself. No books, no scriptures, no science, can ever imagine the glory of the Self which appears as man - the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist. I am to worship, therefore, none but myself. "I worship my Self," says the Advaitist.<sup>61</sup>

I have now surveyed a selection of spiritual and religious traditions from both East and West to illustrate two notions of becoming one with God. The first retains the duality of God and the one who 'becomes' Him. This union is a drawing closer into greater likeness and an intimacy of association characterised by ecstasy and love. The second notion, of identity with God, punctures the boundaries of essence which separate one being from another. Or, they reveal that such boundaries never truly existed. In the next chapter, I will turn to the writings of Sri Chinmoy. I will first look at his conception of God, and then his philosophy of becoming God. I suggest that Sri Chinmoy's philosophy of God-realisation transcends these two conventional notions of oneness.

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<sup>61</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Yogas and other works*, 316

## SRI CHINMOY'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

The student asks the spiritual Master:

“Please tell me,

Do you see God everywhere?”

The Master says:

“I do see God everywhere,

Plus I see something more –

I see you as another God!”

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>62</sup>

God, or “the Supreme” as he often calls Him, is the main subject of Sri Chinmoy's writings. Sri Chinmoy describes divinity in a way that is reminiscent of the Indian philosophies which draw their inspiration from the Vedas, but he adopts a Western form of expression. Almost all of his writings are in English, with occasional Sanskrit terminology. The word ‘God’ evokes connotations that are intertwined with Western religion, but Sri Chinmoy imparts new meanings to the term which hark back to the ancient traditions of India.

There is not enough room here for a detailed exposition of Sri Chinmoy's conception of God, so I have chosen to focus on three main aspects. Each of these aspects relates to the account given in the Upanishads of Brahman (ultimate reality) as *Sat-chit-ananda*: Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. The first aspect is God's all-pervasiveness as expressed by

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<sup>62</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 43*, (New York: Agni Press, 2005), Number 42,361

the statement “everything is God”.<sup>63</sup> I read this to mean that everything which exists is God, which suggests a link to the notion of God as Existence (*Sat*). The second aspect is God as “our own Highest Self”.<sup>64</sup> This, I take it, is no ordinary self (an individual subject of consciousness) but rather the unlimited ground of all consciousness. Hence, a connection can be made to the second term in the Vedic triad, *Chit*. Thirdly, for Sri Chinmoy God is Love. Some expressions of love in the world are higher than others, with divine love being a purer expression of God’s essence than human love. He also tells us that *Ananda* (which he usually translates as either bliss or delight) is “required for Self-fulfilment”<sup>65</sup> and that love is the manifestation of *Ananda*.<sup>66</sup>

Aside from these three divine aspects, I will also mention what Sri Chinmoy says about the origin of the world, and its relation to God. Sri Chinmoy says that God has become the world.<sup>67</sup> For Sri Chinmoy, the manifestation of God as the world occurred because the One wanted to become many. Quoting the Upanishads, he says: “*Ekam aiksata bahu syam* [...] ‘One desiring to be many,’ was His inner feeling”.<sup>68</sup>

It may not be obvious why the creation of multiplicity is a worthy pursuit for a being whose nature is delight with or without multiplicity. I think a plausible explanation is that Self-fulfilment for God is not static, but can be made even more fulfilling. Sri Chinmoy suggests as much when he speaks of God’s “ever-transcending Delight”<sup>69</sup>. Perhaps *Ananda* becomes even more fulfilling if it is manifested through love. If love cannot exist without

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<sup>63</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Christmas-New Year-Vacation Aspiration-Prayers, Part 51*, (New York: Agni Press, 2007), 62

<sup>64</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 12*, (New York: Agni Press, 1999), Number 11,511

<sup>65</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Summits Of God-Life: Samadhi And Siddhi*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), 79

<sup>66</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *At The Doors Of Time And Delight Opportunity Knocks*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0183/2/1>. The full quote is: “How does delight relate to love? Delight is love’s aspiration-height. Love is delight’s manifestation-might.” I have here assumed that ‘delight’ is being used as virtually a synonym for *Ananda*, like elsewhere in Sri Chinmoy’s writings.

<sup>67</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Songs Of The Soul*, Agni Press, 1971, 44. “God has projected the universe out of His Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. He has created the world. He has become the world.”

<sup>68</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The three branches of India’s life-tree: Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita*, 59

<sup>69</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Union And Oneness*, (New York: Agni Press, 1976), Number 43

multiplicity, then God would need to 'become many' in order to reach a higher degree of Self-fulfilment.

Sri Chinmoy regards God as the all-pervading reality besides which nothing exists.<sup>70</sup> He quotes approvingly from the Upanishads the phrase "*Sarvam khalu idam Brahma*. Indeed, all is Brahman."<sup>71</sup> He conveys a similar message in English when he says the "simplest Truth" is that "God is All".<sup>72</sup>

Like the authors of the Upanishads, Sri Chinmoy speaks of God as a Self. He calls God "our own Highest Self".<sup>73</sup> Sri Chinmoy often quotes two famous statements of identity with *Brahman* from the Upanishads. The first, and probably the most famous, is *tat tvam asi* or "that thou art".<sup>74</sup> 'That' means Brahman. At one point Sri Chinmoy offers a more elaborate translation which also conveys a sense of the phrase's original context in which a teacher is explaining the nature of reality to a student: "In essence and substance, my children, you are the One without a second".<sup>75</sup> The other quote from the Upanishads is similar to the first, but from a different narrative position: "*Aham Brahmasmi*" / "I am Brahman."<sup>76</sup> He presents both these ideas succinctly to the mind of the modern, Western reader when he states, "I am God; you are God; we are all God".<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Meditation-Service At The United Nations For 25 Years*, (New York: Agni Press, 1995), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1094/6/9>: "God is all-pervading; He is everywhere. Whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we grow into is nothing short of an expansion of His own Reality-Existence. Right at the outset we have to know that He alone exists."

<sup>71</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Upanishads: The Crown Of India's Soul*, Agni Press, 1974.

<sup>72</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Evening Descends*, (New York: Agni Press, 1996), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1127/3/18>

<sup>73</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 12*, (New York: Agni Press, 1999), Number 11,511

<sup>74</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The three branches of India's life-tree: Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita*, 94

<sup>75</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Soulful Questions And Fruitful Answers*, (New York: Agni Press, 1976), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0290/1/48>

<sup>76</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The three branches of India's life-tree: Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1996), 80.

<sup>77</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *God-Life: Is It A Far Cry?*, (New York: Agni Press, 1975), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0185/2/1>

God is an infinite circle whose centre is everywhere but whose circumference is nowhere.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>78</sup>

In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy the world is "God's Body", which God has both "created" and "become".<sup>79</sup> I have already mentioned that in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy, God is all-pervading. I have selected four passages which express this notion in slightly different ways. He says that God is everything, that God is both the Creator and the creation, and that God is both universal and transcendental. According to Sri Chinmoy:

God is not only  
In everything,  
But everything  
Is God.<sup>80</sup>

By distinguishing his view from the claim that God is merely *in* everything, Sri Chinmoy is going further than the doctrine of omnipresence which is familiar to Western philosophers of religion.<sup>81</sup> The idea that 'everything is God...and God is everything' is often referred to as pantheism.<sup>82</sup> But although Sri Chinmoy does say that the world (which contains or is contained by 'everything') is not separate from God, he ascribes personal and transcendent

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<sup>78</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson in Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life: the journey of India's soul*, (New York: Agni Press, 1971), 44

<sup>79</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Songs Of The Soul*, 44. This could open up another discussion on what is meant by "God's Body", but suffice to say that for Sri Chinmoy, the divine Body is an aspect of God and not a separate appendage.

<sup>80</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Christmas-New Year-Vacation Aspiration-Prayers, Part 51*, (New York: Agni Press, 2007), Number 62

<sup>81</sup> Edward Wierenga, "Omnipresence", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/omnipresence/>. In its classic formulation by Aquinas, "[God] is in other things created by him [as a] king, for example, is said to be in the whole kingdom by his power, although he is not everywhere present. Again, a thing is said to be by its presence in other things which are subject to its inspection; as things in a house are said to be present to anyone, who nevertheless may not be in substance in every part of the house. Lastly, a thing is said to be substantially or essentially in that place in which its substance is."

<sup>82</sup> Michael Levine, "Pantheism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/pantheism/>

qualities to God as we shall see. This makes Sri Chinmoy's conception of God quite different from the kind of pantheism in which God is *only* the world.

The next excerpt helps to clarify what this 'everything' is:

God has two aspects. He is God the Creator and He is also God the creation.<sup>83</sup>

If pantheism is belief in an "all-inclusive divine unity",<sup>84</sup> as Michael Levine puts it, then Sri Chinmoy's philosophy may be pantheistic. However, pantheism is commonly associated with the rejection of a personal transcendent God, while Sri Chinmoy affirms that God also has transcendent and personal aspects.<sup>85</sup> For Sri Chinmoy, God is the Creator and the creation. Both are aspects of the One. This means that the world (assuming that it is part of the 'creation') is God. However, this passage also implies that the aspect of God which is the Creator transcends the world. Pantheism has been described as the view that "God and the world are one".<sup>86</sup> To characterise Sri Chinmoy's position simply in those terms would be misleading.

In the following aphorism Sri Chinmoy describes how these two aspects of God, Creator and creation, interrelate:

This world belongs  
To God the Creator.  
At the same time  
God the Creator has become  
God the creation.<sup>87</sup>

The first line of the above aphorism is in harmony with conventional Western theism which says that God created the world, and the world which God created now belongs to Him. With the addition of the second line, the philosophical picture changes. If God the

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<sup>83</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Answers, part 28*, (New York: Agni Press, 2000), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1363/1/8>

<sup>84</sup> Michael P. Levine, *Pantheism : A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity*, (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 1

<sup>85</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Life-Tree-Leaves*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0157/1/25>

<sup>86</sup> Pace, E. "Pantheism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company: 1911), New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11447b.htm>

<sup>87</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 15*, (Agni Press, 1999), Number 14,799

Creator has become God the creation, then there is no separation between the two. Creator and creation are both God, but by becoming the creation, God did not cease to be the Creator (to whom the world still belongs).

I interpret these excerpts to mean that the creation is part of the Creator, so that in a very limited sense it 'is' the Creator. It is not outlandish to say that my finger 'is' me, as a shorthand for saying that my finger is part of me. If my body is me, then so is my finger. In a similar way, both the Creator and the creation are God. It is plausible that various aspects of God may be capable of interacting in various ways, even via personal relationships based on love.

The next aphorism indicates that for Sri Chinmoy, God occupies time and space but also dwells far beyond it:

God the creation  
Is the Universal  
Beloved Supreme.<sup>88</sup>

God the Creator  
Is the Transcendental  
Absolute Supreme.<sup>89</sup>

Sri Chinmoy associates universality with God the creation, which may refer to the world (or sum total of worlds) extending in all directions. The term transcendental implies that which is beyond time and space. For Sri Chinmoy, God is transcendental *and* universal, because He is both the Creator and the creation. By affirming the creation, which includes the physical universe, as an aspect of God, Sri Chinmoy rejects the idea that the world is non-existent. This aphorism also refers to God the creation as the "Beloved" and God the Creator as the "Absolute". This implies that in becoming the creation, God has allowed for multiplicity and hence love. Without this act of becoming, God is the Absolute without relations, His love unmanifested. This does not necessarily mean there would be no love, but it would not be expressed through relationships (which require the existence of

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<sup>88</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 5*, (New York: Agni Press, 1998), Number 4,897

<sup>89</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 5*, (New York: Agni Press, 1998), Number 4,898

differentiation). God could be inherently loving even without expressing His love, but it seems God's loving nature would make Him want to express this love by creating ('becoming') the world.

In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy God includes everything that can be conceived, but is ultimately inconceivable. The notion that we can point to something and say '*that* is God' seems to contrast with religious traditions in which God cannot be truthfully described through any direct statement, and the nearest we can get is the use of analogies. Or if God is truly infinite, perhaps language can at most say only what God is *not*. If this is right then the statement 'God is infinite' really means He is *not* finite. We have no way to truly conceive of what the infinite *is*. Some would find even this to be saying too much. Perhaps silence is the appropriate response to any query about God's nature. To conceptualise God is to create an idol made of human symbols, which is all thought and language really is. Perhaps to say anything of God at all is to falsify Him.

But the idea that you cannot say anything about what God *is* does not fully apply if God is universal as well as transcendent. Even if nothing true could be said about the transcendent aspect of God (which Sri Chinmoy calls God the Creator), there is plenty you can say about God the creation. Because God is infinite, and therefore limitless, he escapes definition. Sri Chinmoy states that only things which have limits can be defined.<sup>90</sup> However, God also expresses Himself through the finite. It is these finite manifestations which can be defined and measured (at least in a superficial way). These things *are* God, because God is manifested in each thing. However, God in His absolute infinitude remains far beyond human conceptualisation.

As far as I can tell Sri Chinmoy is quite pragmatic about this issue. He certainly uses words about God, but seems to view them as tools for pointing one in the right direction and not to forge ironclad doctrines in order to bind humanity with. It seems apt to mention here the Buddha's famous utterance about his teachings being like a raft to cross the sea, which no longer has any use once you have reached the shore!

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<sup>90</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Earth's Cry Meets Heaven's Smile, Part 3*, (New York: Agni Press, 1978), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0412/20/10>. "We define something. We try to limit and bind it, but God the Infinite is limitless; thus we can never define Him."

Every man is a divinity in disguise, a god playing the fool.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>91</sup>

I will now look at Sri Chinmoy's conception of God as the Self. My focus will be on his distinction between Self and self (or big "I" and little "i") and the relationship between Self and consciousness. In the Upanishads, Brahman is referred to as the Self:

All that is has its self in [Brahman] alone.<sup>92</sup>

Sri Chinmoy replaces the word Brahman with God. He says:

Inside me there is Someone  
Eternal, infinite and immortal.  
Who is that Person?  
God, and nobody else.  
Now you want to know  
Who my God is.

My God is my own  
Transcendental Self.<sup>93</sup>

So, according to Sri Chinmoy not only is God everything but God is also our own Self. The term 'Self' emphasises that God is the all-pervading and infinite Consciousness.<sup>94</sup> When we directly identify with a self, we refer to it as 'I'.

Sri Chinmoy differentiates between two 'I's. One "I" is the Transcendental Self, which is God the infinite Consciousness. The other 'i' is the ego, the individual self. Unless otherwise noted I will use the word 'Self' for the capital "I" and 'self' for the little "i":

One "I" is the ego; the other is not the ego. The first "i" is the small "i", the ego, and the other one is the capital "I", the immortal Self, the One, the Brahman Absolute.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays, lectures and orations*, (London: William S. Orr & Co., [undated]),15

<sup>92</sup> Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (transl.), *The Upanishads*, (Hollywood, California: 1947 Vedanta Press), 109

<sup>93</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, Part 19*, (New York: Agni Press, 1983), Number 1,835

<sup>94</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga And The Spiritual Life. The Journey of India's Soul.*,7

There are some striking differences between the two ‘I’s. The individual self or ego identifies with a limited perspective normally associated with a particular body and mind. On some occasions it feels connected to other bodies and minds, but its centre of consciousness is always a particular limited portion of reality.

However, the Self is none other than God. It is everything, and it identifies with everything. But it is not limited to any perspective. In Sri Chinmoy’s words, the Self “houses everybody as its very own”.<sup>96</sup> By contrast, the ego “only claims and possesses: “This is my father. This is my sister.””<sup>97</sup> The Self has a free access to everything whereas the ego does not. This is because the Self, being identical to God, is everything. The ego, which is bound and limited, is always searching for something outside itself in order to give it satisfaction. But there is nothing outside the Self, and so it has nowhere else to look for satisfaction. Unlike the ego, the Self is complete. However, the ego feels its completion must come from something or someone else. Thus, “the very nature of the ego” is “to be dissatisfied and displeased”.<sup>98</sup> It has this nature because “it has not seen the Truth”.<sup>99</sup> This is in stark contrast to the capital “I”:

The capital “I” is always satisfied. It is growing and expanding and fulfilling itself to its satisfaction. It has no need to get further fulfilment or to search.<sup>100</sup>

Given that the two ‘I’s are so different, one might ask why the term ‘Self’ should be used at all to refer to God. The use of the same word as that which refers to the limited ego, even if distinguished by capitalisation, suggests some affinity. And yet, surely a self of any kind is always limited because it implies some particular perspective. That perspective may be very large, it may encompass a multiplicity of perspectives, but it still seems limited.

Why refer to it as a Self?

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<sup>95</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Speaks, Part 3*, (New York: Agni Press, 1976), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0273/1/4>

<sup>96</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Speaks, Part 3*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0273/1/4>

<sup>97</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Speaks, Part 3*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0273/1/4>

<sup>98</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Transcendence Of The Past*, (New York: Agni Press, 1977), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0347/4/3>

<sup>99</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Transcendence Of The Past*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0347/4/3>

<sup>100</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Transcendence Of The Past*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0347/4/3>

Without delving too deeply into the matter, I suggest that the term Self is useful because it marks some key similarities between the individual self and God. There is enough similarity between them for elements of individual selfhood to be used as analogies for the infinite Self. The most important similarity is that they both involve consciousness. An individual self is a subject of consciousness which has a particular set of limited experiences. But for a consciousness to be infinite, it has to be more than just a limited perspective. Yet it is these perspectives with which the term ‘consciousness’ is ordinarily associated. However, what I think Sri Chinmoy means by infinite consciousness is that which allows any and all perspectives to exist. It is infinite because no number of individual selves, each with its limited consciousness, can exhaust it. And yet, the way to come into closer contact with the infinite consciousness is through our own limited consciousness. On this view the inner silence of meditative states where there is no thought is not the absence of consciousness, but rather the entry into an expanded consciousness without limits. The notion that God is self-conscious and that He is our own highest Self implies that God can be accessed through our own consciousness. However, human consciousness is usually dominated by the sense of ego (the little ‘i’) which prevents us from being fully conscious of our all-pervading existence.

For Sri Chinmoy there are many egos, but only one Self. This is why Sri Chinmoy refers to the Self as the One. The “outer self”, which is unique to each individual, is multiple:

In our true Self we are all one. But in our outer self, we are many.<sup>101</sup>

However, for Sri Chinmoy the existence of the One Self does not negate the existence of the many. The Self is simultaneously one and many in the same way that a flower is both one and many. A lotus is one flower, with many petals. Likewise, God is one Self with many individual aspects. Each self is an aspect or ‘petal’ of God:

God is One. At the same time, He is Many. He is One in His highest Transcendental Consciousness. He is Many here on earth in the field of manifestation. At the Highest, He is Unity. Here on earth, He is Multiplicity. God is the Lotus, and He has

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<sup>101</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Volume II*, (New York: Agni Press, 2004), 68

many, many petals, each representing an individual aspect of Himself. He is manifesting Himself in infinite ways and in infinite forms.<sup>102</sup>

Each individualised portion of the Self is referred to as a soul. “When the One wants to play the role of the many, the One creates the soul”.<sup>103</sup> In its native consciousness, the soul intuitively feels the underlying oneness of all souls with God.<sup>104</sup> However, a human individual also consists of a body and mind, which ordinarily are ignorant of oneness. In the worldview of the Upanishads which Sri Chinmoy endorses, the human being represents a half-way point in evolution between the “lowest abyss of inconscience” into which the soul has plunged, and the soul’s re-emergence into the consciousness of *Satchitananda*.<sup>105</sup> From the perspective of this composite individual self, God is the ‘other’. But if God is our highest Self then He cannot be other as long as we identify with the Self. In the ordinary notion of selfhood there is always an ‘other’. But that notion applies only to the ego.

In my conception, God is not somebody other than ourselves, not a separate person. The God that we are referring to is our highest and most illumined part. Right now when we think of ourselves, we think of our body and not of our soul. We identify ourselves all the time with our lowest part. Our being is like a house that belongs to us. We do not use the third floor at all, but spend most of our time in the basement or on the first floor. Since we spend most of our time there, we feel the basement is our real reality. But the third floor is also ours, if we can only find our way there.<sup>106</sup>

This passage illustrates a distinction between being consciously part of God and unconsciously part of God. It is only in the very highest consciousness (‘the third floor’) that one realises that God is one’s own Self. If this account is true, then many of the deepest and most enduring questions human beings ask about God are ultimately

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<sup>102</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Volume II*, (New York: Agni Press, 2004), 67

<sup>103</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Self-Discovery And World-Mastery*, Agni Press, 1976.  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0274/1/11>

<sup>104</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Volume II* (New York: Agni Press, 1973), 40-42

<sup>105</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Beyond within: a philosophy for the inner life*, (New York: Agni Press, 1988), 81.

<sup>106</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Fifty Freedom-Boats To One Golden Shore, Part 2*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974),  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0120/7/5>

unanswerable because they presuppose a distinction between the seeker and that which is sought. An example of one such question is found in the following aphorism of Sri Chinmoy's:

Man's eternal question is:

"Who is God?"

God's immediate answer is:

"My child, who else is God,  
if not you?"<sup>107</sup>

Here it first appears as if there are two distinct selves involved in a dialogue, in which man poses a question and God answers. Man's question is about the identity of God. However, God throws the question right back at man. This gives the aphorism a puzzling, almost *koan*-like nature. For, as soon as God designates the questioner as 'you', He seems to be distinguishing her from Himself. And yet, the very same object turns out to be God after all. So who is questioning who?

In the same way that a *koan* requires the penetrating glance of direct intuition, such an aphorism is meant to propel us towards an inner search. We mistakenly locate God outside our own consciousness, when in fact He can never be found elsewhere. Sri Chinmoy expresses the futility of this outward search for God through the story of the deer who is enchanted by the scent of musk on his body, smells it and then runs itself to death trying to discover the source of the fragrance.<sup>108</sup>

Having outlined Sri Chinmoy's conception of God as the Self, I turn now to the third aspect that I will focus on: God as Love.

Love, which is the essence of God, is not for levity, but for the total worth of man.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Lord's Secrets Revealed*, Agni Press, 1973.

<sup>108</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga And The Spiritual Life. The Journey of India's Soul*, 33

<sup>109</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Love and friendship* (Maryland, Arc Manor: 2007), 43

Love has a central place in Sri Chinmoy's conception of God. God the all-pervading Self is essentially love. As human beings experience it, love comes in various grades. Sri Chinmoy considers divine love to be closer to the nature of God than human love, because of its association with infinite consciousness.

There is also a link in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy between love and delight. The ancient Vedic formula for God is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (in Sanskrit, *sat-chit-ananda*) and Sri Chinmoy affirms that "God has projected the universe out of His Existence-Consciousness-Bliss."<sup>110</sup> The third term, *ananda*, is usually translated as either bliss or delight and Sri Chinmoy uses those two words almost interchangeably.<sup>111</sup> In a line from one of his poems Sri Chinmoy tells us, "Delight is what God is."<sup>112</sup> Elsewhere, he defines delight as "Love-ecstasy".<sup>113</sup> Because love is the expression of *ananda*, it is also the expression of *sat*, the truth, existence and reality: "Love is reality expressed and manifested".<sup>114</sup> The connection between love and delight adds an extra dimension to the characterisation of God as *sat-chit-ananda* found in the Upanishads, which is often overlooked in those interpretations which restrict love to the realm of duality.

In one section of his writings, Sri Chinmoy says:

If one wants to define God, one can define Him in millions of ways; but I wish to tell you that no definition of God can be as adequate as saying, "God is all Love."<sup>115</sup>

This is not an attempt to precisely define God. Indeed, he elsewhere says: "Nobody can define God adequately".<sup>116</sup> However, some conceptions of the undefinable can

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<sup>110</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Songs Of The Soul*, Agni Press, 1971.

<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, at one point Sri Chinmoy does make a subtle distinction between the two: "There is only a slight difference between delight and bliss. You can see the difference between delight and bliss in a very simple way. Delight takes a liquid form. It is like water, a vast expanse. Bliss is something thick and condensed. Bliss does not spread. It does not have the capacity nor does it want to spread. Everything it has; it stays in one place. But delight flows and spreads." Sri Chinmoy, *Flame Waves, Part 11*, Agni Press, 1978.

<sup>112</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The three branches of India's life-tree: commentaries on the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita*, 32

<sup>113</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Europe-Blossoms* (Santurce, Puerto Rico: Aum Press, 1973), Number 61

<sup>114</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Beyond within: a philosophy for the inner life*, (New York: Agni Press, 1988), 417.

<sup>115</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 1*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0196/1/2>

approximate it better than others. Here, Sri Chinmoy says that “God is all Love” is the *most* adequate definition, even though it does not perfectly capture what God is. But clearly, Sri Chinmoy believes that love gives us a very important insight into the nature of God.

However, love comes in many different varieties. Sri Chinmoy is very specific about what sort of love is essential to God. It is “divine love”, he says, that “makes God God”.<sup>117</sup> Thus, divine love can give us a better insight into God’s nature than other forms of love.

But what is divine love? Sri Chinmoy usually discusses divine love in tandem with what he calls human love, and makes a comparison between them. From the excerpt below, it seems that divine love is far closer to the “Self-fulfilment” of God than human love:

My Lord,  
What is the difference  
Between human love and divine love?

"My child,  
The difference  
Between human love and divine love  
Is very simple:  
Human love desperately needs.  
Divine love abundantly feeds.”<sup>118</sup>

In a 1974 lecture entitled ‘Love Human and Love Divine’, Sri Chinmoy outlines his philosophy of love. He sees the highest form of love, divine love, as the type of consciousness in which the One is fulfilled in the many and the many are fulfilled in the One. Human love is characterised by possessiveness; seeing only the superficial aspects of the beloved; expectation and a sense of separateness. Divine love involves expansion; seeing the Self in others; satisfaction and the consciousness of oneness in multiplicity.

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<sup>116</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 41*, (New York: Agni Press, 2004, Number 40,608

<sup>117</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Golden Boat, Part 1*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), Number 3

<sup>118</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Lord’s Secrets Revealed*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1973), 7

Human love is tied up with individual selfhood while divine love reflects the nature of the infinite, all-pervading Self.

For Sri Chinmoy, possessiveness, which reflects a narrow and ego-based consciousness, can be a feature of human love. This possessive attachment is sometimes so strong that we end up “strangling that person in the name of love” or being “strangled” ourselves.<sup>119</sup> By contrast, divine love will only “expand our own consciousness and the consciousness of our beloved”.<sup>120</sup>

The more limited one’s consciousness is, the less deeply it can see into the other person’s true nature because Sri Chinmoy considers the inmost identity of all things to be the divine Self. Sri Chinmoy uses the example of a man’s love for a woman to illustrate this point. He says if the man sees only her physical, vital, mental or “animal” aspects, then he will only be capable of human love.<sup>121</sup> But if he sees the Divine in the woman, then he will be able to love her divinely.<sup>122</sup>

Another feature of human love according to Sri Chinmoy is that it is not given unconditionally. There is always the expectation of a return. Divine love, on the other hand, finds inherent satisfaction in giving more of itself:

In human love there is constant demand. If I give you something, then I expect you to give me something; it is always give and take. But in divine love we give unconditionally.<sup>123</sup>

For Sri Chinmoy, human love is inherently unsatisfactory whereas divine love is always satisfied.<sup>124</sup> In its highest form, divine love means to “give, and even if our love is not

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<sup>119</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Speaks, Part 1*, (New York: Agni Press, 1976), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0269/11>

<sup>120</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 2*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0197/2/8>

<sup>121</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 2*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0197/2/8>

<sup>122</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 2*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0197/2/8>

<sup>123</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Meditation-Service At The United Nations For 25 Years*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1094/18/10>

accepted, we do not mind. We shall go on giving, for we are all love, our Source is all Love”.<sup>125</sup> Divine love, if it is the manifestation of *Ananda* (delight) as Sri Chinmoy proclaims, is the means to God’s greater Self-fulfilment.

I mentioned earlier the view that the sole motivation for the One to become the many (while still remaining One) is to increase its delight. In the arena of multiplicity, in which relationships become possible, this delight becomes more intensified because it can be experienced as love. We may say, then, that love is the delight of the One expressed through the delight of the many. When the delight, *ananda*, is manifested in the realm of the many, it is called love. *Ananda* is an essential aspect of God because God is fundamentally *sat-chit-ananda*. Love is God’s essence because it is the end (or *telos*)<sup>126</sup> of *ananda* in its striving for ever-greater fulfilment, and the natural manifestation of delight through earthly multiplicity.<sup>127</sup>

For Sri Chinmoy, divine love is the consciousness of unity in multiplicity. This is the kind of consciousness in which the beloved is not separate, but one with the lover. In any relationship of love, the lover and beloved both have the same highest Self. One aspect of the Self is relating to another aspect of the Self. However, in human love the beloved is a complete ‘other’. In divine love, there is a conscious awareness that both lover and beloved share a common identity as the One. However, this unified consciousness is disbursed throughout multiple centres of consciousness which can relate to each other. This is a relationship of oneness that does not efface difference, but embraces it. Sri Chinmoy calls divine love “the song of multiplicity in unity.”<sup>128</sup> However, in human love there is multiplicity with almost no sense of oneness. I do not see my beloved as an aspect of my Self, but as a completely separate identity.

As Sri Chinmoy pronounces in a key passage from ‘Love Human and Love Divine’:

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<sup>124</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Fifty Freedom-Boats To One Golden Shore, Part 4*, Agni Press, 1974, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0122/8/2>

<sup>125</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part II*, 342

<sup>126</sup> Love is not necessarily the ultimate end. For, if God’s Delight is ever-transcending as Sri Chinmoy claims then perhaps *ananda* can reach even greater levels of fulfilling manifestation beyond love.

<sup>127</sup> I am here using the word ‘essence’ in a loosely Aristotelian sense without knowing if this is what Sri Chinmoy intends. In Aristotle’s metaphysics the final cause of something, or its developmental end, may be referred to as its essence.

<sup>128</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part II*, 341

In human love, the lover and the beloved are two separate persons. The lover is running toward the beloved, and when he reaches the beloved he finds his satisfaction. In divine Love, the lover and the beloved are one and inseparable. In divine Love, the Lover is the Supreme and the Beloved is the Supreme. In human love, we feel that satisfaction lies somewhere else- not within us, but in somebody else. But in divine Love, satisfaction is found nowhere else but in ourselves. The Lover and the Beloved are one and the same-the Supreme dwelling within and the Supreme outside us. When we speak of our 'self' as the divine Lover or Beloved, we have to know that this is the 'Self' which is both the One and the many.<sup>129</sup>

In this passage we find a number of interesting philosophical points. In human love, the lover and beloved are seen as separate persons. In divine love, they are one and the same. The Supreme (another word for God) is the true Self of all. The Self is both lover and beloved, both One and many. This means that whatever object we love, is nothing other than our own Self. To the extent that we are conscious of this, our love becomes divine. However, this consciousness does not eradicate diversity. If it did, then it would also eradicate love. There is still a “lover” and “beloved”, it is just that divine love recognises them both as aspects of the One Self.

I have said that in Sri Chinmoy’s philosophy love of the many becomes divine when the lover is conscious of the beloved as the Self. If the ultimate identity of the beloved is the Self (for the Self has *become* the many), it follows that whatever you love is the Self. But until we truly recognise this, and *consciously* love the One Self in the beloved, our love is not divine: “With the divine Love, we go first to the One, the Source, and from there we go to the many.”<sup>130</sup> We cannot truly love any human beings without loving God, since everyone is part of God and God is the innermost Self of all. To truly love someone (in the highest, divine sense) requires loving God, since God is all:

You cannot love any human being unless and until you love God. If you can make yourself feel that you love God and God alone, and nobody else, then you love everyone, for God is Someone who is inside everyone. If you say you love him or

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<sup>129</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part II*, 343

<sup>130</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Part II*, 343

you love her, from that individual love you cannot go to love of God. But from love of God you can go to love of humanity.<sup>131</sup>

To summarise, Sri Chinmoy regards love as the essence of God, and divine love as a higher expression of this essence than human love. God is the One without a second, an all-pervading conscious Self. The fundamental nature of this consciousness is delight. Delight is God's Self-fulfilment. God seeks ever-transcending fulfilment, and enhances His satisfaction by becoming many. Delight is manifested through multiplicity as love. The Self is both One and Many, and divine love is fulfilment in God's conscious experience of Himself as both one and many. This divine consciousness, unlike ordinary human consciousness (and its associated human love) is suffused with delight.

I have now explained three aspects of Sri Chinmoy's conception of God. Firstly, God is everything. He is all-encompassing and excludes nothing. Secondly, God is our own highest Self. He is the big 'I', while the individual self or ego is the little 'i'. It follows that the Self is everything, and everything is the Self. Thirdly, God is love. Love is God's essence and substance, and the highest divine value. Human love is connected to the ego, whereas divine love relates to the Self. There is nothing to love outside the Self, and all love is ultimately love of God. I will now turn to Sri Chinmoy's conception of union with God or realisation.

For Sri Chinmoy, God is man and man is God. It is to this identity that we must fully awaken in order to reach our highest fulfilment:

My philosophy is: God is man, yet to be manifested, and man is God yet to be realised.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Father's Day: Father With His European Children*, (New York: Agni Press, 1976), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0284/2/42>

<sup>132</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *God-Life: Is It A Far Cry?*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0185/2/1>

## GOD-REALISATION: BECOMING WHO YOU ARE

Sri Krishna meditated. He became God, the Love Divine. The Buddha meditated. He became God, the Light Divine. The Christ meditated. He became God, the Compassion Divine. Now God wants you to meditate. He wants you to become God, the Life Divine.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>133</sup>

Having introduced Sri Chinmoy's conception of God, I will now consider what he says about the type of consciousness which is required for man to, as Sri Chinmoy puts it, "realise what he eternally is: God Himself."<sup>134</sup> This chapter will look at what this realisation is and how it could be achieved. Sri Chinmoy describes God-realisation as a human beings' conscious identification with God as their own true Self. Somehow, the multiple centres of consciousness have become so individualised that they are no longer conscious of their true identity with the One Self. This ignorance is the cause of suffering. The divine love or manifested *ananda* is the consciousness of oneness in multiplicity. Where consciousness is restricted and limited, there may still be love but it is less than divine. If there is only consciousness of multiplicity and no oneness, then love is absent – or it becomes the love that barely deserves the name, for it is so debased as to be almost unrecognisable. This is the love of the psychopath for murder, or the love of destruction and disorder in the person who commits cruel misdeeds with seemingly no remorse. We may say a person 'delights in evil', and here we can allow for there to be a trace of *ananda* even in the worst motivation, *ananda* as the cause and end of all creation, distorted by the

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<sup>133</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Garland of Nation-Souls: Complete talks at the United Nations*, (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1995), 255

<sup>134</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Union-Vision*, (New York: Agni Press, 1975),  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0295/1/21>

presence of ignorant egotism which falsely seeks to separate the delight of one person from the delight of another, thus ultimately thwarting the fulfilment of both.

God-realisation is to cure our ignorance as to who we really are. In full Self-consciousness, in true Self-identification, delight is the essential motivation and there are no barriers to its fulfilment, for if God is *sat-chit-ananda* then delight is the very nature of consciousness. Ignorance of the Self is a denial of bliss, for it is a turning against one's own nature. God-realisation (which Sri Chinmoy also calls Self-realisation) is identification with the Self so that the consciousness which has become distorted by egoism basks in the infinite delight of its true essence.

Identification with the Self is not simply the identification with an undifferentiated unity. The Self is the One that has become many without ceasing to become One. All the many are parts of the Self and so the Self must consciously identify with the multitude. The Self knows itself as the entire reality, the Creator and the creation, the transcendent and the universal. It knows itself as each atom as well as the infinite vastness. The idea of Self-identification simply as a bare unity with no differentiation whatsoever, is the other extreme from each creature identifying only with itself and not with any other. The consciousness of oneness in multiplicity does not negate either the diversity of beings or the all-encompassing One.

I have said before that in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy when the Self becomes many, it expresses its essential delight in and through divine love. As long as there is multiplicity, there can be love. This expression is the very purpose of the creation, for God to transcend his delight through the even greater delight of love. Ignorance is the narrowing of this love through limited consciousness, and consequently the submergence of delight into diminished forms: pleasure, mundane happiness, limited and fleeting joy.

Human love covers a great spectrum of loves, not only the most debased but those which are considered noble and natural. The best examples of human love approach the divine, for they include a vast element of self-giving and selflessness. This abandonment of the self through love is an unconscious or partly conscious recognition that the self is not the true identity, and that the fulfilment of one's real Self is in the love that is proper to that Self, that is without limits and bounds, that loves the many (all the many) for they are part and parcel of the One.

In this philosophy, love is the goal of the universe and its very reason for being. It is the essence of God. But if man is God, then love is also the essence of humanity. It is only for the sake of love that man exists. Love, divine love, is thus the developmental ideal of man. It is his perfection and satisfaction.

God-realisation is the transformation of human consciousness away from exclusive identification with individual self, and towards identification with the infinite Self that includes each individual. For Sri Chinmoy this necessarily entails surrendering the individual will to the Will of the Self (in other words, the Will that seeks the highest fruition of *ananda* through love). To reach this state of surrender one starts with love, but this human love must be enlarged and awakened into divine love. Human love is a limitation of divine consciousness and thus can provide at most a limited delight, whereas divine love is the manifestation of infinite consciousness and infinite delight. This divine Self-consciousness at once identifies with both the One and the many. The transformation of human love into divine love within an individual is an expansion of consciousness which culminates in identification with the Self:

Divine love is the expansion of our consciousness. The very nature of divine love is to expand, expand, expand and become one with all that it touches. The more we expand ourselves, the sooner we feel the Universal Consciousness as our very own. And when we feel the Universal Consciousness as our very own, at that time we become the Universal Self.<sup>135</sup>

Sri Chinmoy's conception of God is an all-pervading, Supreme Self whose essence is divine love. Each individual self exists as a limited portion of the Supreme Self. However, human beings in their everyday consciousness are ignorant of this. According to Sri Chinmoy, human consciousness can be transformed until it reaches a state of God-realisation, conscious oneness with God. Sri Chinmoy's conception of realisation provides an account of oneness with God which also allows for the existence of a loving relationship between the individual self and the Supreme Self.

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<sup>135</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Inner Hunger* (Aum Publications: New York, 1976), 52

By advocating God-realisation (a term he uses synonymously with Self-realisation), Sri Chinmoy echoes one of the central messages of the Upanishads: that Brahman, the essence of reality, must be realised as the true self:

Blessed is the man who while he yet lives realizes Brahman. The man who realizes him not suffers his greatest loss. When they depart this life, the wise, who have realized Brahman as the self in all beings, become immortal.<sup>136</sup>

Sri Chinmoy defines God-realisation<sup>137</sup> as “identification with one’s absolute highest Self”<sup>138</sup> or “conscious oneness with God”.<sup>139</sup> He sometimes refers to realisation as a kind of ‘knowledge’ in contrast to the ignorance of ordinary human consciousness. Once attained, God-realisation can never be lost.<sup>140</sup>

In Sri Chinmoy’s writings, surrender to God is regarded as a necessary condition for achieving God-realisation:

How far are we from realisation? We can know the answer by the degree to which we have surrendered to God’s Will.<sup>141</sup>

The idea of surrender is often connected to slavery or bondage, the giving up of liberty. But Sri Chinmoy stresses that what he means by surrender is the “dedication of one’s limited self to one’s unbounded Self”.<sup>142</sup> Sri Chinmoy distinguishes between human surrender, in which the surrendering party perceives themselves to be a completely separate individual, and divine surrender which is the surrender of “our lower existence to our higher existence, it is the surrender of oneness to our own highest height”.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (transl.), *The Upanishads*, 27-8

<sup>137</sup> Sri Chinmoy also uses a Sanskrit word, *siddhi*, as a synonym for God-realisation.

<sup>138</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Summits of God-Life: Samadhi and Siddhi*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1999), 23

<sup>139</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Beyond Within: a philosophy for the inner life*, 494

<sup>140</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Summits of God-Life: Samadhi and Siddhi*, 23

<sup>141</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life*, 37

<sup>142</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life*, 23

<sup>143</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Divine Hero*, (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002), 96

Sri Chinmoy likens this surrender to a drop entering an ocean: “Although a tiny drop of water can be taken as an individual drop, when it merges into the infinite ocean it does not lose its so-called individuality. On the contrary, its individuality is expanded into an infinite expanse of ocean.”<sup>144</sup> It is not loss of identity, he insists, but the enlargement of consciousness.<sup>145</sup> This analogy is applied to the case of human individuality, which he says is transformed into “the infinitely vast and all-pervading personality of the Divine”.<sup>146</sup> The ‘drop and ocean’ analogy which Sri Chinmoy uses has its limitations. Analogies by their very nature are incomplete. They can only hint at the reality they purport to describe. God is not an ocean, and a human being is not a drop. However, they may be ‘like’ oceans and drops in important ways. I think there are two main points we are supposed to take away from the analogy. Firstly, that the individual is to some extent a microcosm of God. The individual is a minute portion of God, just as the drop is a minute portion of the ocean. Secondly, the individual is not destroyed when it becomes one with God, just as the drop is not destroyed. Now, it is unclear whether by ‘drop’ Sri Chinmoy means an indivisible unit of water or something which is itself made up further droplets. If it is the latter, then presumably the drop would not be able to maintain its integrity as a drop once it entered the ocean. But I think this is where the analogy departs from the point Sri Chinmoy is trying to make, because he nowhere suggests that oneness with God will break the individual into pieces. Nor does the ocean analogy suggest undifferentiated unity is the outcome of the merger. An ocean may be one body of water, but it is also composed of countless units. The point is that when an individual realises God, nothing is destroyed.

Does a shift in consciousness from identification with finite self to infinite Self mean that there can be no longer a relationship between the individual and God? It would be easy to assume that identification with the all-pervading Self means that any individual identity is lost. However, Sri Chinmoy challenges this assumption. Identification with an all-pervading Self does not necessarily prevent identification with a lower self that is part of the higher Self. I can identify with my body as well as my feet, even though the feet are part of my body. Furthermore, because the little ‘i’ and the big ‘I’ are not identical (in the same way that a foot is not identical to the body) there is nothing to stop the lower self

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<sup>144</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Oneness of the Eastern Heart and the Western Mind, Volume II*, 68

<sup>145</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Garland of Nation-Souls: complete talks at the United Nations* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: 1995), 123

<sup>146</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Beyond within: a philosophy for the inner life*, (New York: Agni Press, 1995), 408

from relating to the higher Self as long as the lower self retains a sense of selfhood. This sense of selfhood, I suggest, can persevere even if one identifies (through God-realisation) with their own highest Self. The self will always regard what is outside itself as ‘other’, whereas for the Self there is no other. However, there is nothing to stop individual identity and universal identity from co-existing. Insofar as ‘I’ identify with my individual self, I can relate to my own Self as ‘other’. This is because the Self is, indeed, not identical with my self. However, both are mine because the little ‘i’ is a tiny portion of the infinite and all-pervading ‘I’.

A consequence of God-realisation is that one would go from being self-centred (where the ‘self’ is the ego) to God-centred. The ego makes us feel that the world revolves around us. In Sri Chinmoy’s notion of God-realisation there is an expansion of the limited self to the divine Self, or from the “i” to the “I”. The consciousness of “i” only occurs when one “separates a portion of himself from his entire existence”.<sup>147</sup>

For Sri Chinmoy, identification with the Self is the finding of our true identity rather than a loss of identity. The consciousness of God-realisation is vast enough to encompass both identification with the one and identification with the many. Unrealised human beings know themselves only as isolated portions of the Many. After realisation, human beings will know themselves as the One manifesting itself through the Many. This results in an ego-less individuality.

If God is both one and many, it follows that the ultimate identification with the Self is identification with both the one and the many. Realisation-consciousness cannot just be an undifferentiated mass. It must be consciously one with each and every thing in its uniqueness. The following two passages emphasise aspects of what Sri Chinmoy takes identification with God to be like. In the first, the identification is described in a way that is reminiscent of looking at someone and then realising it is your own reflection. In the second passage, the identification is to look at many people, and see them *all* as your own reflection.

As soon as you see God you will say “He looks like me!” God’s Eyes, His Face, everything of His will look the same as you. The only difference will be that He is

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<sup>147</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Garland of Nation-Souls*, 142

infinitely more beautiful than you because your own most illumined part is infinitely more beautiful than your least illumined part.<sup>148</sup>

This comment may appear anthropomorphic, as if God is only an enlarged version of our individual self. But what I think Sri Chinmoy is pointing to here is that the Self is not something completely alien to our self - in fact, it is truer and more authentically who we are than what we ordinarily take to be our 'self'. God looks like me because He is me. And yet, God is everyone else as well. He is the reality or being that is most true and authentic in each person.

The idea of looking into a mirror is commonly associated with self-consciousness. We expect to see our self reflected there. But perhaps in a stage of ignorance, alienated from our own highest reality, we would not even recognise the reflection as our own. Our consciousness correctly oriented, we would know, Sri Chinmoy proposes, that God looks exactly like us. This passage implies that to 'see' God, is to see our own reflected Self, since He is our own most illumined part. Yet this Self is also everything. It is the sole One yet it contains the infinite many. This many-ness is emphasised in the second passage, which says that I will 'know' that I have realised God when I see that the faces of the 'other' are all mine.

How to know  
When you have realised God?  
The day you can look in the mirror  
And use your inner will power  
To see not only your face  
But countless other faces  
In and around your face,  
And know that these faces  
Are all yours-

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<sup>148</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Vision Of God's Dawn*, New York: Agni Press, 1974,  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0201/1/16>

On that day you will know  
That you have realised God.<sup>149</sup>

Sri Chinmoy indicates in at least one passage that the God-realised person is likely to use the term 'I' to refer to their individual personhood, but only on a conventional basis. The person who is consciously one with God "says 'I' merely because it is the simplest manner of expression in this world of duality and multiplicity."<sup>150</sup> He notes that some Indian yogis forgo the use of 'I' and simply say 'He', regarding each action as an act of Brahman.<sup>151</sup>

A God-realised person has no separate will. The individual will has been surrendered entirely to God, the highest Self. This is because "the foundation of realisation is unconditional surrender to God's Will."<sup>152</sup> Accordingly, it is fair to say that they do not act as individuals but rather God acts through them, using them as instruments. However, God acts differently through different individuals which means, for practical purposes, it makes sense to say 'she did it' in order to identify which individual instrument God used for the task. Similarly, we could say of a guitar that it 'makes a sound' even though the guitarist is the one who plays it. The realised soul is conscious that "he is the instrument and God is the Doer".<sup>153</sup>

If the realised individual is only an instrument of God, it might seem that their freedom or autonomy is compromised. However, I believe this concern is misplaced. If the individual became solely an instrument of something entirely other than itself, then I agree this would be problematic. But recall that in Sri Chinmoy's conception, God is not a separate person. God is our own highest Self. So, for the individual consciousness to be an instrument of one's highest Self, is simply to act (in and through each multiple centre of consciousness) in accordance with one's own inmost Will. Freedom is entirely compatible with such surrender. Indeed, it could be argued that the individual cannot be truly free unless their

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<sup>149</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, Part 69*, (New York: Agni Press, 1984), Number 6,898

<sup>150</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Mind-Confusion And Heart-Illumination Part 1*, Agni Press, 1974, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0143/4/10>

<sup>151</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Mind-Confusion And Heart-Illumination Part 1*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0143/4/10>

<sup>152</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Christmas-New Year-Vacation Aspiration-Prayers, Part 32*, New York: Agni Press, 2005, Number 54

<sup>153</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Garland of Nation-Souls*, 102

will is united entirely and unconditionally with that of God. As long as the individual is ignorant of its essential Self, all its actions arise from ignorance and its 'freedom' is really a stumbling in the dark.

For Sri Chinmoy, the mind or mental consciousness has inherent limitations which prevent it from identifying with God. Sri Chinmoy focuses on the mind as the aspect of human consciousness which, ordinarily, apprehends the subject to be separate from the object. The mind lacks the perception of inner oneness. To be intellectually aware of this oneness or to believe in it is not enough to counteract the mind's deep-seated divisiveness. This is not to say that Sri Chinmoy's view of God-realisation is that it has no effect on the mind, or that the mind cannot participate in experiencing the realised state. Sri Chinmoy speaks of the "illuminated mind" which the realised person gains.<sup>154</sup> This is the mind that has been touched by the consciousness of the heart to such an extent that is intuitively aware of oneness, an awareness that the heart already possesses. Whatever role intellectual development may play in achieving realisation (and Sri Chinmoy acknowledges this role can be significant in certain preparatory stages before realisation), a higher consciousness than the mind (namely, the heart or psychic consciousness) is necessary because it is directly aware of inner oneness. In the journey towards realisation as narrated by Sri Chinmoy, the heart takes priority over the mind.

So far, this chapter has focused on what Sri Chinmoy means by God-realisation. I now turn to the question of how this realisation may be achieved. It occurs through a transformation of consciousness. In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy the heart is far more important than the mind in bringing about this transformation. Love, not thought, is the all-important catalyst. More specifically, it is divine love. Realisation is complete identification with God as the Self, but it is also the fruition and deepest consummation of divine love. In Sri Chinmoy's conception, the mystical and the devotional, the unified consciousness and the love-intoxicated consciousness run together.

As I have mentioned, Sri Chinmoy's ideal of realisation is the conscious oneness and identification of a human being with God. From Sri Chinmoy's conception of God it follows that each human being is at least *unconsciously* one with God. The purpose of realisation is to become conscious of that oneness. However, this has to be more than just an intellectual realisation. One can repeat '*tat tvam asi*' millions of times with firm

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<sup>154</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Philosophy: Wisdom-Chariot Of The Mind*, New York Agni Press, 1999, 27

conviction of its truth, while still retaining a separate ego in all other areas of life. It is this type of purely intellectual conviction which Shankara chastised in one of his disciples who repeatedly claimed 'I am Brahman' without possessing the spiritual realisation to back it up.<sup>155</sup>

The type of consciousness which realisation entails must be far more than a belief, an idea or a mere emotion. It must seem at least as real as the deep-seated and almost unshakeable sense of our own existence. Surely, it would have to seem even *more* real, since it would reveal our individual existence to be only a partial glimpse of our true identity. For if our true self is God then the identification of our self as only a mind, body or aggregate of individualised particles is a colossal error. It is a false consciousness which would be revealed as such in light of the truth. In realisation, the whole focus of consciousness would shift to God. Like the sun unveiling itself from behind the clouds, realisation dispels the ignorance that keeps someone chained to an ego-dominated experience of life.

To go from self-centredness to God-centredness is a radical shift, a conscious expansion from the finite to the infinite. According to Sri Chinmoy, the mental consciousness separates and divides reality. It creates the perception of separate, individual identity. The heart unites and identifies with the totality of being, consciously feeling the oneness of everything and delighting in this oneness.

The mind always separates; it gets tremendous satisfaction in dividing reality. Because it sees itself as separate from others, the mind always wants to exercise supremacy over others.<sup>156</sup>

The heart immediately identifies with the consciousness, with the essence of a person or thing.<sup>157</sup>

The mind is not a trustworthy friend. But the heart immediately identifies with both the subject and object. Identification is oneness. Oneness is infinitely more than mere mental awareness, so the heart is by far better than the mind.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Two Devouring Brothers: Doubt And Ego*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0200/1/2>

<sup>156</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Answers, Part 10*, (New York: Agni Press, 1999), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1284/>

<sup>157</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Fifty Freedom-Boats To One Golden Shore, Part 5*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0229/3/1>

According to Sri Chinmoy each aspect of consciousness has its own defining feature or predominant mode. Thought dominates the mind whereas love rules the heart. In the mind there is always a sense of separation, due to the nature of thought. In the act of thinking, there is always a distinction between subject and object. Each thought has its own content which forms the object of the thought. At the same time each thought gives rise to the awareness of a self, a subject. The heart, by contrast, is that aspect of consciousness which identifies rather than distinguishes, because it seeks to become one with the other through love. The heart recognises an underlying inner oneness between all things, and this recognition is manifested through love. This is, according to Sri Chinmoy, a feature of pure or divine love. The problem with human love is that it is mostly impure, because it is so admixed with mental consciousness that the 'other' is seen as a totally separate object. What love should be, says Sri Chinmoy, is identification with the object loved so that it is not regarded as separate from the subject.

Sri Chinmoy's philosophy of God-realisation integrates two traditionally divergent strands of spiritual aspiration. The first is the path of love and devotion (in Indian philosophy called *bhakti*), in which God and the individual are distinct and the goal of spiritual life is to enter into a closer and more intimate loving association with Him. Then there is oneness with God, in the sense of complete identification, often referred to as *jnana* or the path of knowledge. Shankara, whose school of thought came to rival and finally overtake Buddhism in India, spoke of a realisation in which there was only the *Atman/Brahman* – no 'I' and 'Thou' – and therefore no relationship. Devotion to a personal God (in Sanskrit typically named *Ishvara*) he accepted, but seemingly just as a stepping stone to this higher realisation. Like Wittgenstein's ladder, it has to be eventually kicked aside.<sup>159</sup>

Sri Chinmoy's realisation is oneness with God, but unlike Shankara he sees this as the absolute consummation and highest expression of love. This is not just wordplay, for the

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<sup>158</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Consciousness: God-Journey To Man And Man-Journey To God*, New York: Agni Press, 1974), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0184/2/4>

<sup>159</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (USA, Barnes & Noble Publishing Inc, 2003), 6.54: "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly."

love he advocates is a kind worthy of its name, in which relationship and play are fully alive.

The transformation of human consciousness from mind-centred to heart-centred allows surrender to take place. This is because, while the mental consciousness clings to the limited ego “i”, the psychic consciousness is aware of the infinite Self. The psychic consciousness, the heart, operates through love and identification.

Love, the natural language of the heart, is the force that expands beyond the self and reaches out to God by identifying with ever-more of reality. Since according to Sri Chinmoy only God exists, to love God means to love all. Both the Creator and creation aspects of God must be subject to our love if we truly love God.

If to realise God is to have conscious oneness with God, then divine love is going to help us achieve realisation because it makes us feel inseparably one with everybody. If we love God, then we love everything and everyone because all is God. Divine love makes us feel one with both the universal and transcendental aspects of God. It follows that the more our hearts fill with divine love, the closer we are to realising God. If love is a capacity of the heart, then the heart is more important for God-realisation than the mind. Even though the mind may be involved in love, it is the heart that plays the greater role.

As previously mentioned, Sri Chinmoy distinguishes between human love and divine love. While he indicates that both are manifestations of the same love which has its source in God, human love occurs when that love is filtered through a limited, ego-bound consciousness. It is divine love, and not human love, that allows us to realise our oneness with God and consequently oneness with everything. In the excerpt below Sri Chinmoy explains his philosophy that divine love allows the kind of oneness which leads towards realisation, more so than human love:

The very nature of human love is to stick only to one person and to reject everyone else: accept and reject, accept and reject.

But in divine love, which is unlimited and infinite, the question of acceptance and rejection does not arise at all. In divine love there is no possession - only a feeling of oneness. This oneness can enter into an animal, into a flower, into a tree or even into a wall. It is not like human love where today we want to possess one person or thing, tomorrow two persons, the day after tomorrow three. When we have divine love for

someone, at that time there is automatically inseparable oneness. No bridge is required; we just become one.<sup>160</sup>

This passage elaborates on the distinction between human and divine love. Firstly, human love is restricted in its range. We love some people, but not others. We may even hate those whom we do not love. Secondly, human love often involves a sense of possession. To be possessive of someone is to be attached, and as long as we are attached to someone we will suffer if we lose them. Possessiveness might also lead to jealousy, anger and a lack of regard for the other person's independence. By contrast, divine love is unlimited and has no demands. It is for all, and each, and everybody.<sup>161</sup> Possessiveness arises because we feel separate from another and want to claim them. Here, there is an underlying insecurity and fear that we can never completely claim the object of love since we feel that we are separate from them. According to this passage when there is divine love, there must also be inseparable oneness. The feeling of oneness is non-possessive because possession is based on a feeling of separation.

Mental knowledge, the type of knowledge granted by the mind, always involves a distinction between subject and object. The mind's tendency is to identify with only a limited portion of reality. However, the heart identifies with both subject and object:

The mind gets tremendous pleasure by limiting itself, by separating itself, by showing its own individuality. But the heart does not want to maintain its individuality or personality. It only wants to melt into the infinite Vast.<sup>162</sup>

If God is everything, then the fullest identification with God must include identification with everything. The heart identifies with both the one and the many. This naturally follows from the idea that the heart identifies with God, the highest all-pervading Self, who is both one and many:

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<sup>160</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 2*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0197/2/1>

<sup>161</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Service-Boat And Love-Boatman, Part 2*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0197/2/1>

<sup>162</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Height Of Silence And The Might Of Sound*, New York: Agni Press, 1974. <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0186/2/16>

The day I feel my existence and my illumining heart in everyone is the day I immediately become one in many and the many become one in me.<sup>163</sup>

I have set out Sri Chinmoy's conception of God-realisation in which human beings 'become God' by realising that God is their true identity. But this is a variegated identity, both one and many, so the conscious identification with God must contain this diversity. The consciousness of God consists of delight, which expresses itself as divine love in the realm of multiplicity. Identification with the Self, or God's Self-Consciousness, is thus characterised by divine love.

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<sup>163</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Meditation-Service At The United Nations For 25 Years*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1094/12/1>

## ONENESS VERSUS MULTIPLICITY

Multiplicity is nothing but the outer robe of unity.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>164</sup>

I have chosen to arrange the remaining three chapters into themes which correlate roughly to the triune Vedic description of God as *sat-chit-ananda* (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss). This is because I think it provides a helpful way to look at this topic from three different angles which, in the end, complement each other. *Sat* stands for the ultimate reality and the highest truth. *Chit* can be translated as consciousness, but not in the restricted sense that this word is so often used. Thought, feeling, experience, knowing – these can all be considered activities and surface waves of *chit* which is itself a grand ocean of consciousness. *Ananda* is delight, bliss, ultimate satisfaction – but all human words are paltry expressions which barely hint at the heavenly nectar which the Indian sages believed *ananda* to be. Human consciousness is so often starving for happiness and full of desire. The notion of a completely fulfilled existence seems far off, alien, and even strangely bewildering to so many.

In the Vedic Indian tradition, God or Brahman is often described as *Satchitananda* and full realisation of the Self encompasses all aspects of the triune Divinity. This suggests a few things about realisation: it is aligned with the highest truth (*sat*) and so cannot brook falsehood in the slightest; it involves absolute consciousness (*chit*), unadulterated pure, infinite knowledge and intelligence, experience without limits; it is the highest good, for the highest happiness (*ananda*) must involve the highest good (as Western philosophers all the way back to Aristotle proclaim) and no happiness is sweeter than delight. This gives *ananda* an ethical significance, for the delight-flooded person is said to live a life which is entirely good. To be, to experience and to enjoy – these three attributes of God were, for the Vedic Seers, interdependent. It is impossible to enjoy without experiencing, or to experience without being. On the other hand to exist without experience, or to experience without happiness, is utterly futile.

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<sup>164</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Eternity's Breath*, Agni Press, 1972. <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0016/1/21>

If God is both one and many, then God-realisation is identification with the one and the many. But how could God be both the Self and the Beloved? For Sri Chinmoy, these supposed antimonies come together in the realisation of the *yogi* (he or she who is one with God).<sup>165</sup> This idea can be explored through three different themes, each of which correlates to an attribute of *satchitananda*. The first theme relates to ultimate truth. To the logical mind, identification with God as both the one and the many may appear contradictory. This chapter explores how the proposition that God is both one and many, Self and Beloved, *could* be true. I will make no attempt to prove that it *is* true.<sup>166</sup>

In the next chapter I will shift the focus to consciousness, and how the realised consciousness could accommodate the experience of both unity and multiplicity, both identity with God and individual difference. Such a consciousness is itself the highest knowledge and this is also the highest love. In this consciousness to know is to love and to love is to know. Individuality can be reconciled with all-pervading consciousness, thus allowing for the experience of interpersonal love.

In the final chapter, I explain how this notion of God-realisation can form the basis for divine love as the ideal of human flourishing. If the consciousness of God-realisation is suffused with divine love, then all ones' activities are expressions of that love. This love would be bliss-flooded, universal and unconditional. Each act would stem from a consciousness which directly perceives the Self in all, and loves all. The last chapter elaborates as to how this consciousness would fulfil the demands of ethical perfection and thus provide an alternative to secular accounts of human development.

Now, I will briefly outline what some philosophers and some philosophically important figures have said about mystics and their accounts of becoming one with God. Some Western scholars have, though not being mystics themselves, taken to the study of mysticism in a sympathetic fashion. These include Walter Stace and William James. As philosophers, one of their main interests in the subject is to investigate what (if anything) the mystical experience can tell us about ultimate truth. There is no shortage of mystical literature available for this enquiry, from diverse ages and climes, from which both Stace

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<sup>165</sup> In Sanskrit, he or she who has attained oneness (*yoga*) with God. In Western tradition, the term 'mystic' is more likely to be used.

<sup>166</sup> This would require, among other things, logically proving the existence of God which is something I do not wish to attempt.

and James have quoted extensively. Both of them point out that mystics do not all express claims about ultimate truth in the same way.

William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, says a common element of mysticism is to “become one with the Absolute”.<sup>167</sup> However, he follows this up by saying that mystics’ explanations of what this oneness entails are often quite different.<sup>168</sup> Walter Stace, the author of *Mysticism and Philosophy*, agrees. However, Stace focuses more on the ‘paradoxical mystics’ who he thinks use contradictory language to express a stance he calls “identity in difference”.<sup>169</sup> Stace says that some mystics endorse ‘dualism’ which is the position that God and the world (or individual) are “purely different from each other with no identity”.<sup>170</sup> Monism, he says, is just the opposite. For Stace, identity-in-difference is neither dualism nor monism nor anything in between. Stace points out that mystical literature contains elements of both monism and dualism, sometimes within the very same passage.<sup>171</sup>

For Stace, many if not most mystics are really saying that God is both identical to and distinct from the world (or self). This ‘identity in difference’ is neither monism nor dualism, which are mutually exclusive terms as Stace defines them. Even though Stace believes that this is a logical contradiction, he does not say that it is therefore meaningless or inherently false.<sup>172</sup> This is because he accepts that some contradictory claims may be true.<sup>173</sup> Stace does not think that the contradictions are merely used as rhetorical or poetic devices. He believes that although the mystics who speak of identity-in-difference are trying in earnest to express themselves fully, they simply cannot do so in a non-contradictory fashion.<sup>174</sup> He also rejects the theory that these mystics are simply mis-

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<sup>167</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London, Longman, Green and Co, 1928), 419

<sup>168</sup> James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 425

<sup>169</sup> Stace, W.T. *Mysticism and philosophy*, 212

<sup>170</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 219

<sup>171</sup> Stace, 210

<sup>172</sup> Stace, 253

<sup>173</sup> He is not the only philosopher to do so. Graham Priest, an eminent logician, has written numerous books and articles defending the idea that some logical contradictions are true. Whether Priest’s work has any application to the claims of mystics is an interesting question.

<sup>174</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 257

describing their experiences, pointing to the consistency of such claims across a diversity of times and places.<sup>175</sup> Stace thinks that some mystics clearly and unambiguously contradict themselves.<sup>176</sup> He believes that the laws of logic are the rules we use for dealing with multiple items, but these laws are not applicable to the Absolute One because it admits no multiplicity.<sup>177</sup> Stace's solution is that "the many is the sphere of logic, the One the sphere of paradox".<sup>178</sup> However, he believes the very distinction between the many and the one is only an abstraction in our mind.<sup>179</sup> Without using abstraction (and hence logic) the problem fails to arise for us. It is only a problem from the standpoint of the world in which the many is separate from the One, where we have to use logic to deal with the multiplicity that the world confronts us with.<sup>180</sup>

Other philosophers have tried to avoid Stace's conclusion that logic should only apply to worldly rather than mystical experience, by reinterpreting mystical literature in a non-contradictory way. For example, Betty argues that even if mystics actually experience 'undifferentiated unity', and are correctly reporting their experiences, they could still be distinct individuals having an experience which they are convinced is absolute oneness with God.<sup>181</sup> Stace, he thinks, confuses what *seems* with what truly *is*.<sup>182</sup> Or, according to Pletcher, self-contradiction is a necessary tactic of the mystic who wants to point to something which is inexpressible in human language and unthinkable through human concepts. The mystic does not mean to make contradictory propositions, it is just that non-contradictory propositions are even less capable of expressing what the mystic wants to convey. To use *non-contradictory* language would be misleading if the claims you want to make do not correlate to anything which the human mind can actually conceptualise.

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<sup>175</sup> Stace, 258

<sup>176</sup> Stace, 262

<sup>177</sup> Stace, 270-71

<sup>178</sup> Stace, 272

<sup>179</sup> Stace, 271

<sup>180</sup> Stace, 272

<sup>181</sup> L. Stafford Betty, "Towards a Reconciliation of Mysticism and Dualism", *Religious Studies* 14. 3 (Sept 1978): 291-303. Betty's personal preference is to interpret all mystical statements in terms of dualism.

<sup>182</sup> Betty, "Towards a Reconciliation of Mysticism and Dualism", 295

Forcing the mind to encounter contradictions may jolt it out of the familiar, worldly ways of thinking and towards a more transcendent outlook.<sup>183</sup>

Some hold out hope for a ‘mystical logic’ that will bring clarity to the strangeness. For Findlay, mysticism involves “a refusal to accept and use the notions of identity and diversity which the ordinary logic applies so confidently”.<sup>184</sup> But for mystics, “the only sort of identity that can be ultimately admitted is one that can be stretched in varying degrees, which can come nearer and nearer to the limit of sheer diversity, otherness, without ever reaching it”.<sup>185</sup> Findlay thinks that even if this ‘stretchable’ identity runs afoul of ‘ordinary logic’, there could still be a mystical logic in which it is valid.<sup>186</sup>

These issues have not escaped the attention of Indian philosophers. Mysticism runs deep in the Indian psyche. The life-blood of Indian culture is contained in the credo of the Upanishads with its call for direct realisation of truth, its proclamations of *tat tvam asi* (that thou art)<sup>187</sup> and *ekam evadvitiyam* (only the One, without a second)<sup>188</sup>. Before turning to a discussion of Sri Chinmoy’s philosophy, I will pay attention to two figures whose philosophy Sri Chinmoy comments on extensively in his own writings. Sri Chinmoy spent about two decades in Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram at Pondicherry, and was greatly exposed to his philosophy. He also had a great affinity for Sri Ramakrishna, who he saw as laying the spiritual groundwork for other teachers of humanity to follow.<sup>189</sup> Sri Ramakrishna belonged to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Aurobindo to the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Both say that the ultimate reality is Brahman, the One without a second and this reality manifests itself through the apparent multiplicity of the world. Sri Ramakrishna’s philosophy is known to us mainly through the

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<sup>183</sup> Galen K. Pletcher, “Mysticism, Contradiction, and Ineffability”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 10.3 (July 1973): 201-211

<sup>184</sup> John Findlay, “The Logic of Mysticism”, *Religious Studies*, 2.2 (April 1967): 154

<sup>185</sup> Findlay, “The Logic of Mysticism”, 154

<sup>186</sup> Findlay, 159

<sup>187</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita: The Three Branches of India’s Life Tree*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1966), 94

<sup>188</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Commentaries on the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita: The Three Branches of India’s Life Tree*, 67

<sup>189</sup> Kusumita P. Pedersen, “Sri Chinmoy and Sri Ramakrishna”, *Prabudda Bharata*, 116.1 (January 2011): 109-114

diary of 'M' (Mahendranath Gupta), a close disciple of the Master. These diary records were published in English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and provide the most authoritative account of his teachings, for Ramakrishna was not formally schooled and did not write. Sri Aurobindo, by contrast, was sent to England by his father and studied at Cambridge University. He was a prolific author who wrote systematically and lucidly in the English language and in a highly philosophical prose style. His magnum opus is *The Life Divine*. They both commented on identity and diversity in connection to spiritual experience and the goal of becoming one with God.

Sri Ramakrishna was a skilled oral communicator and taught mainly through the use of stories and analogies. The most everyday objects and situations were used to express abstract cosmic principles and attributes of the Divine. Sri Ramakrishna was well aware that *jnana* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion) were two major paths of *yoga*, both aimed at propelling the aspirant to realisation of God. As I have already noted, Sri Chaitanya primarily advocated *bhakti* while Shankara saw *jnana* as the ultimate goal. The *bhakta* or devotee to seek a close relationship with God (which implies difference), while *jnana*, the seeker of ultimate knowledge, aims for absolute oneness with God (identity). As a source of philosophical and practical guidance who claimed to have realised God himself, Sri Ramakrishna often commented on these approaches.

In his practical teachings, Sri Ramakrishna emphasised *bhakti* rather than *jnana*. However, he held that both of these methods were valid pathways to God-realisation. Ramakrishna states: "God is attained only when man gets established in one or other of these three attitudes: (1) All this am I; (2) All this art thou; (3) Thou art the Master and I am the servant".<sup>190</sup> Ramakrishna says that the realised yogi attains the fruits of both *jnana* and *bhakti*, regardless of which path he follows.<sup>191</sup> Interestingly, although Ramakrishna speaks of *jnana*'s "non-dualistic Knowledge" as "the highest",<sup>192</sup> he advocates the path of devotion (*bhakti*) as an easier path which in any case can deliver the same outcome which was achievable through *jnana*.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 220

<sup>191</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 217

<sup>192</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 217.

<sup>193</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 216

The Jnana Yogi says, “I am He.” But as long as one has the idea of the Self as body, this egotism is injurious.<sup>194</sup>

As a general rule, a soul would do better, in this present age, to love, pray and surrender himself entirely to God. The Lord will save His devotee and will vouchsafe to him even Brahma-jnana<sup>195</sup> if the devotee hungers and thirsts after it. Thus the Jnana Yogi will attain Jnana as well as Bhakti.<sup>196</sup>

There is no indication in these passages that, upon attaining *jnana*, one somehow loses the realisation of *bhakti*. In fact, Ramakrishna advocates *bhakti* for more than simply practical reasons. He seemed to find variety more enjoyable than unity. He is reported to have said to his close disciple, Vivekananda:

I enjoy the Lord not only in His unconditioned state of Oneness, as unqualified Brahman, in Samadhi, but also in His various blessed manifestations through sweet human relationship. So do you likewise. Be a Jnani and a Bhakta in one.<sup>197</sup>

Now, how is it possible to have a realisation which involves both *jnana* and *bhakti*? Since one aims at complete non-duality and the other is staunchly dualistic, it seems contradictory to have both in one. If Ramakrishna’s teachings on God-realisation involve identity-in-difference, what does he mean by this? The most vivid explanation I can find is his ‘buttermilk’ analogy which runs as follows:

As long as you are in the plane of relativity, you must admit both ‘butter’ and ‘buttermilk’, - you must admit both Personal God and the universe. To explain the analogy, the original milk is Brahman realised in Samadhi, the ‘butter’ the Impersonal-personal God, and the ‘buttermilk’ the universe made up of the twenty-four categories.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 201

<sup>195</sup> ‘Brahma-jnana’ is a compound of Brahma (which can mean ‘Brahman’) and ‘jnana’ (knowledge), suggesting it refers to the knowledge of God. In the context of the passage, it probably means the knowledge of absolute oneness.

<sup>196</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 217

<sup>197</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 255

<sup>198</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 232

This analogy suggests that, according to Ramakrishna, identity and difference are experiences both available to the yogi which represent aspects of the same reality. Perhaps the *yogi* can swing between the absolute and the relative at will, between relationship and identity. Depending on whether he focuses on the absolute or relative aspects of reality he may be lost in the One or playing among the many. This avoids contradiction, because it means undifferentiated oneness is true *for the absolute* while diversity is true *for the relative*. Each has its own domain of sovereignty in which its own rules apply. The highest mystical or realised consciousness has a free access to both.

Ramakrishna also points out a limitation in our conceptual understanding that forces us to use the language of both oneness and difference when trying to describe mystical experience. He says that to even talk of the One Absolute is to already postulate the relative many. Until we have directly experienced the absolute, we must take relativity for granted whenever we utter the word ‘absolute’, for in making that very utterance we cannot help but affirm the ‘I’ and a world of multiplicity with which we interact:

You cannot possibly put It [the Absolute] as It is; for in doing so you cannot but enamel it with a foreign element, that is, with your own personality.<sup>199</sup>

This suggests that the Absolute, ‘as It is’, is indescribable and inconceivable because our use of language and thought presupposes the existence of a human, individual personality. Even to speak of ‘the One’ is to bring in human concepts, very much rooted in the world, to explain that which transcends (but may contain) the world.

Sri Aurobindo deals with the issue by refusing to treat ‘one’ and ‘many’ as mutually exclusive categories. In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo affirms that in a higher state of consciousness there can be “oneness with God and yet a relation with Him”.<sup>200</sup> He anticipates the objection that this cannot be true because it is a contradiction. In response, Sri Aurobindo starts by explaining why he thinks the Absolute (which he identifies as Brahman or God) does not exclude the relative. The Absolute is ineffable, he admits, because “our language and thought can deal only with the relative”.<sup>201</sup> However it does not

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<sup>199</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, comp., 233

<sup>200</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publication Department, 2001), 392

<sup>201</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 393

follow logically, he says, that the Absolute is thereby something which is completely opposed to the relative.<sup>202</sup> Such an opposition is perceived because of the common tendency to define the Absolute exclusively in terms of negation.

Such an approach, Sri Aurobindo says, is unnecessarily restrictive and leads to a logical impasse.<sup>203</sup> He notes that the ancient Indian sages spoke of Brahman both positively and negatively; “for they saw that to limit it either by positive or negative definitions was to fall away from its truth”.<sup>204</sup> The purpose of negation, he says, was to deny that the Absolute could be limited to any positive statements made about it.<sup>205</sup> We say that the Absolute cannot be both One and Many because in our minds we have set them apart, presupposing a strict opposition between them.<sup>206</sup> Of course, if we define one as ‘not many’ and many as ‘not one’, we will see them as irreconcilable contradictions. By adopting a more catholic definition in which both these terms are mutually compatible, the problem of contradiction is avoided entirely.

Reference to God as ‘one’ could simply be an analogy. Normally when we call something one, we are simply attaching a label for our own purposes to something which may have no natural unity at all. The human mind labels and categorises objects, but when one looks deeper into this process it is seen to be mostly arbitrary. We are forced to admit that what we call ‘one’ stone is many molecules put together. One molecule is made of many atoms, and one atom has its own constituents. Scientists are not certain that they have discovered any ultimate unit of matter, a true ‘one’ that can never be subdivided, and there may be no such thing in existence. There is nowhere in the natural world anything that is one and *not* many, and I do not think it is even possible to conceive of a ‘one’ that I cannot also conceive of being divided into many. But when God is called the One, normally that is supposed to mean something like the ultimate unit (although unique and infinite). But since this is nothing like the true nature of objects we normally use the word ‘one’ to refer to, it is just an analogy for the ‘oneness’ of God. What this means is that God’s oneness is nothing that the mind can grasp.

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<sup>202</sup> Sri Aurobindo, 393

<sup>203</sup> Sri Aurobindo, 393

<sup>204</sup> Sri Aurobindo, 395

<sup>205</sup> Sri Aurobindo, 396

<sup>206</sup> Sri Aurobindo, 402

But what if God is one *and* many? Can our mind grasp it then? No, because the ‘many’ is just as much an analogy as the ‘one’. Our concepts of multiplicity are dependent on the concept of oneness. When we say many, we mean ‘more than one’. We mean that we can count how many things there are. By counting them, we imply that there are units to be counted. But since there are no indivisible units, this is just a convention. The concepts of one and many are completely dependent on each other. A one or a many *per se*, without at least implicit reference to the other, is just not thinkable. Perhaps to say God is one *and* many, is just to use these terms as an analogy. God may not be ‘one’ or many’ in the sense that we can *think* about it, but in another sense that is quite inexpressible.

I have delayed my discussion of Sri Chinmoy until now because I wanted to show how some other contemporary Indian philosophies treat the issue of identity-in-difference in relation to becoming God. The rest of this chapter will consider a type of spiritual experience what Sri Chinmoy refers to as ‘contemplation’. I think that his conception of contemplation provides a novel approach to the issue under discussion.

Recall that in Sri Chinmoy’s philosophy God the Creator has ‘become’ God the creation to increase the overall satisfaction of God. God is the One before He manifests the world, and afterwards He is still the One but is also the Many. The Many are, because of ignorance, not living in the full consciousness of delight, and without their ultimate fulfilment the One cannot transcend His own fulfilment in the way that He aspires for. This calls for a process of development, an evolutionary progression, in which the Many become fully conscious of the One so that they can live in perfect delight. The creation is to become conscious of itself as the Creator who has *become* the creation.

In this aphorism, there is an imperative for the lover to become the Beloved, and the creation to become the Creator:

I have been God the lover.

I now have to become

God the Beloved.

I have been God the creation.

I now have to become

God the Creator.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, Part 96*, (New York: Agni Press, 1984), Number 9,555

This aphorism suggests that not only are God the Creator and God the creation aspects of the one, but that they can relate to each other through love. It also implies that the lover is the creation and the Creator is the Beloved. What does ‘becoming’ mean in this context? It is hard to say without access to the experience that it is trying to describe.

However, in the context of Sri Chinmoy’s notion of contemplation the meaning should become a bit clearer. Sri Chinmoy’s usage of the word ‘contemplation’ is very specific, and goes beyond the relatively mundane meaning that is normally attributed to the word or even the way it is often described in religious practice. Sri Chinmoy indicates in some of his writings that God-realisation is the fruition of contemplation.<sup>208</sup> Sri Chinmoy’s description of contemplation provides an insightful way to show how identity and diversity may coalesce, without contradiction, and be experienced as such in higher states of consciousness.

I will begin by identifying the key elements in Sri Chinmoy’s notion of contemplation, with some examples from his literature. Contemplation starts with difference and ends with difference, but never escapes an implicit oneness. At the start of contemplation, two ‘persons’ (for want of a better word) face each other. However, during contemplation the identity of each person becomes interchangeable. This means they are never truly separate, yet the very process of interchange keeps their relationship going.

Each description of contemplation in Sri Chinmoy’s writings follows this basic structure. The two persons are sometimes described as ‘creation’ and ‘Creator’, other times as ‘lover’ and ‘beloved’, or simply as ‘God’ and ‘I/you’. Each contemplation narrative begins by emphasising difference. The lover is the lover and the Beloved is the Beloved. God the Creator is the originator of God the creation<sup>209</sup>, which would seem to give him a position

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<sup>208</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Purity: divinity’s little sister*, (Zurich: Madal Bal, 1998), 54. “Finally, when he contemplates he will enter into the goal and grow into the goal. He will become the goal itself. This is God-realisation.”

<sup>209</sup> Does “God the creation” refer to the entire extended universe, or just a particular individual within it? Precisely this question comes up during one of Sri Chinmoy’s frequent accounts of dialogue between the Beloved Supreme and His “son”. It seems that God the creation as a whole has its own cosmic identity, which can be directly perceived in states of universal consciousness: Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration*, (Agni Press: New York, 1987), 47-8. “When I say that I need you only, you have to know what I mean. You may say, ‘There are millions and billions of people on earth, so how can He say that He cares only for me?’ But you have to feel that ‘you’ means your extended, expanded part. Your eyes have become larger than the largest, your arms have become longer than the longest. Your whole existence has expanded and enlarged,

of greater divine authority. The drop is humbled before the ocean. The little human-‘i’ meekly bows before the Transcendental God-‘I’, which is his own highest Self but as far as his lower self is concerned, is the infinite *Thou*.

During contemplation, the identity of each party is reversed:

One moment we are the divine lover and God is the Supreme Beloved. The next moment we change roles.<sup>210</sup>

God says: “I want to worship you!”<sup>211</sup>

I become the tiny drop or wave, and you become the ocean.<sup>212</sup>

I shall become the creation and you become the Creator.<sup>213</sup>

But it does not end there. This is only the start of a game of hide-and-seek. In the next stage, each party resumes their previous roles.<sup>214</sup> Then the Beloved hides and is sought by the lover. When the lover is successful, the ‘game’ is again reversed. This game, says Sri Chinmoy, “has neither a beginning nor an end”.<sup>215</sup> The process of contemplation thus resembles an eternal dance in which identity is lost, gained, and lost again. One kind of duality is replaced by another. Two remain two, but they are not the same two as before. A sort of divine alchemy has taken place. But there is nothing permanent about the change, for with great ease the original duality can be restored. In contemplation, identity is fluid. It is lost, only to reappear. It is no sooner gained, than given away.

What could be the motivation for this reversal of roles? I have outlined the view so far that delight is what motivates God, and God the One wishes to increase His delight by

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and all other human beings are encompassed in your extended, expanded reality. They are a part of your existence.”

<sup>210</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Meditation: man-perfection in God-satisfaction*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1989), 68

<sup>211</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Rainbow-Flowers Part 3*, (New York: Agni Press, 1999), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1320/1/24>

<sup>212</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration, Part 1*, (New York: Agni Press, 1977), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0352/1/12>

<sup>213</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration*, (Agni Press: New York, 1987), 35

<sup>214</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, (New York: Aum Publications, 2006), 15

<sup>215</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 15

becoming God the Many, thus creating multiplicity which allows Him to fully experience love. In contemplation, oneness and multiplicity are perfectly reconciled in the sense that each party 'becomes the other', while maintaining the distinction which allows for play. It could that love is not ultimately fulfilled merely in difference, nor merely in unity. It requires something which transcends both, and contemplation fills this role.

This process all seems remarkably strange as long as we perceive identity in the usual way. If two things are completely separate, it is hard to imagine how their identities could be reversed and what that might mean. Here is one way of looking at it: The identity of the One Self admits all lower identities as part and parcel of its entirety. All experiences are experiences of the Self. Suppose there are potentially infinite aspects of the Self, each with its own sequential stream of experiences. The assumption of identity or "I"-ness is kept in place by the integrity and continuity of our experiences. The sense of identity would be diminished if one stream of experiences was interrupted by a completely different one. If I dream of being a tiger and then suddenly my dream turns into that of a bird, my sense of 'tiger-ness' is going to be severely shaken. If a stream of experiences suddenly changes course in a radical way, the sense of individual identity which was established by the stream may be replaced by a different identity. Let us say that God the Creator and God the creation represent two divergent streams of experience within the Eternal One. Now, say that the experiences which the Creator would have had are now being experienced by the creation, and vice versa. They *become each other* because their respective identities are not fixed and solid. Identity is fluid, so they can reverse their identities back and forth.

When it becomes many the Self experiences itself as an array of limited, finite selves and through the introduction of ignorance into the equation, many if not all of these perspectives lose their sense of connection with the great conscious being of which they are a mere part. When ignorance is overcome through divine love and surrender, each of these perspectives is able to eventually realise its oneness with all perspectives. For many aspirants, that may seem enough. We have transcended duality and realised our unlimited existence as all selves and as the Self which pervades them all. But in Sri Chinmoy's conception, this is not quite enough. For, in the contemplative game of hide-and-seek the 'I-Thou' relationship is resuscitated in a new form in which Creator and creation, the transcendental and universal aspects of the One Self, playfully throw identity around like a tennis ball.

Sometimes, like in the following poem, Sri Chinmoy emphasises relational love as something which transcends oneness:

My Lord,  
Is there anything more fulfilling  
Than the feeling of oneness?

“Yes, My child,  
When you feel  
That you are the Eternal Lover  
And I am your Eternal Beloved,  
And when you feel  
That I am the Eternal Lover  
And you are My Eternal Beloved,  
The feeling of oneness  
Is supremely transcended  
And immortally fulfilled.”<sup>216</sup>

However, Sri Chinmoy also points out that the lover and beloved are always fundamentally ‘one’. God expanded, became more of Himself, to better taste the delight. Yet he remains eternally one:

No, inseparable oneness is there, but the One projects Himself into two so that He can enjoy the Cosmic Game. In the outer plane the human mind will see separativity, in spite of inseparable oneness in the inner world. But the heart will feel that the One has divided Himself into two to taste the cosmic Delight.<sup>217</sup>

In contemplation, the “two” who are ultimately “One” maintain their twoness while ‘becoming One’ in a much deeper sense, by sharing each other’s identity. Mere undifferentiated oneness and mere separate interaction are both insufficient. If oneness with you means that we both disappear into the absoluteness of pure being, something very important seems to have been lost. Similarly, if there is only difference and no oneness then how can there be the fullest possible delight in the other? To melt into the other, to

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<sup>216</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Lord’s Secrets Revealed*, (New York: Aum Publications, 1973), 77

<sup>217</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration*, 65

fuse with the other at the deepest level of being, is to consummate difference. What can the purpose of multiplicity be other than to become one again and again?

The contradiction which W. Stace believes is at the heart of mystical claims about reality does not apply to Sri Chinmoy's account. This contradiction, which Stace calls the 'pantheistic paradox', is that many mystics claim the world *is* identical to God, and also that the world *is not* identical to God.<sup>218</sup> In other words, mystics assert identity in difference. Is there a similar paradox in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy? Sri Chinmoy does say that God is an all-pervading unity in which the world and everything in it is nothing other than God. He also uses the dualistic language of diversity and relationship. God and I may converse with, embrace, seek and love each other. From a superficial point of view, this may appear contradictory. However, a fuller understanding of Sri Chinmoy's philosophy nullifies this objection.

In Sri Chinmoy's teaching our real identity is God and not the imposter ego. This identity is multifaceted and allows for individual experience to a potentially infinite degree. Sri Chinmoy distinguishes between God the Creation and God the creator, the One become many. Insofar as 'I' am God the creation, or an aspect thereof, I can relate to God the Creator as a distinct person. I can even relate to God the Creator with an attitude of devotion and worship. I believe that when Sri Chinmoy wishes to emphasise the multiplicity of the divine, particularly the relationship between Creator and creation, he uses the familiar theistic language of 'I-Thou'. However, underlying this difference is an essential and unbreakable unity. When he wishes to emphasise this, Sri Chinmoy focuses on the notion that God is our own highest Self. The world *is* identical to God in the sense that God is the One without a second and thus encompasses everything including the world. But the world *is not* identical to God, if by 'God' we just mean God the Creator. In other words, God the creation does not exhaust the full reality of God the Creator. Therefore, Sri Chinmoy's account of identity in difference avoids the logical paradox identified by Stace.

From the perspective of Western philosophy, this is familiar ground. After all, Christian doctrine says that God is three persons in one substance. By adopting a similar logic it is valid to say that God can be two, or seven, or any number of persons in one substance. Why not have millions and billions of persons in one God? God the creation is infinitely

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<sup>218</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* 212

complex, with numerous lives and personalities. The person who realises God is still a person. They have not, by becoming aware of their oneness with God, completely lost their individual identity. On the other hand, each person is ultimately a manifestation of God and the divine essence in me is also the divine essence in you. This may be why Sri Chinmoy sometimes urges each human being to ‘become another God’, but other times speaks of each person as merely a divine instrument. I can be ‘another God’ to the extent that I am a completely fulfilled human being. When I as an individual truly live in ‘Existence-Consciousness-Bliss’, I am another God. This perfected individuality requires no separate will from God. In fact, that would actually get in the way. If God’s Will is the will that seeks complete fulfilment, then we will not be fulfilled as long as we will differently from God.

Just because something is non-contradictory, does not necessarily make it understandable. The logical mind is entitled to a last gasp of incredulity. The one may be many, and the many be one, but perhaps this is impossible to conceive. For the mind can only aim at imagining an indivisible one by removing distinctions. Divine truths purport to be ultimate truths. They are the truths by which, when they are known, everything else is known. It is often believed, or hoped, that we might be able to attain the ultimate truth through the mind or intellect. Sri Chinmoy rejects this proposition, proclaiming that “the more you think, the farther away you are from Reality.”<sup>219</sup> Truth can be attained through the heart because it can identify with God, the ultimate truth. This answer can then be brought into the mind.

If you follow the path of the heart, you see that it immediately identifies with the reality – no matter what the substance or essence of the reality is. Then, once the heart brings you the answer, you bring it into the intellect.<sup>220</sup>

This means that the highest God-Knowledge (or Self-knowledge) is available to the psychic consciousness and can only then be disseminated to the intellect. If the heart can seize the ultimate truth but not the mind, then identity-in-difference may be an eternal mystery as far as reason is concerned – but is revealed through divine love. Love in its fullest glory, not reason, would then be the highest aperture of divine knowledge.

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<sup>219</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 40*, (New York: Agni Press, 2004), Number 39,157

<sup>220</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Divine Hero*, 141

## GOD AND I

Suddenly I shall wake.  
Suddenly I shall have  
Flying wings.  
Suddenly the sky will give me  
What is has: freedom.  
Suddenly I shall once more  
Consciously become  
What I was before:  
God.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>221</sup>

I have indicated that Sri Chinmoy's philosophy of God-realisation provides a way of affirming identity-in-difference while avoiding contradiction. But how does this translate into conscious experience? In Sri Chinmoy's philosophy, the divine love of the heart expands the individual consciousness towards the infinite, transcendental consciousness. Divine love, experienced through the heart or psychic consciousness, is the love (or 'love-delight') which is inherent to God. The closer one is to identification with God, one's own highest Self, the more one experiences love. This love is manifested in human life both through love of the transcendental ('God the Creator') and love of the universal ('God the creation'). Divine love is the recognition of the self in the Other, or the Other as the self.

There is something about the experience of love which is paradoxical by nature and perhaps can never be fully understood but only lived and felt. On the one hand, love seeks union. It strives for oneness. Love seeks to make two into one, though this 'one' may be a relation of unity. Love does not seem satisfied with physical, intellectual or even emotional union. It seeks further, to a complete meeting of personalities and individualities . When this yearning has ceased, it is because the fire of love has waned – no longer does it

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<sup>221</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Wings of Light, Part 12*, (Santurce, Puerto Rico: The Aum Press, 1974), 9.

animate the feverish quest for unity. However, love in everyday experience is often tragic – it is constantly frustrated in achieving the perfect union for which it seeks because it reaches an impassable barrier of division which keeps the two from ever completely becoming one. It is because it always seeks, but never finds absolute oneness, that it has a tragic nature which the poets express so well.

This is the tragedy of constantly seeking an unattainable goal, like Dante's story of the damned soul who eternally reaches for a fruit to satiate his hunger that is so close, and yet too far away. Yet, if we take Sri Chinmoy's conception of love, then the problem is not that union is unattainable but that we are trying to attain it with the wrong methods. We are seeking union based on ego-bound human love. But since the ego is what separates us from others, the love that is enmeshed in ego can never reach the goal for which it so desperately longs. Only divine love, which reflects the true oneness of reality, can expand our consciousness into the all-pervading fountain of delight in which love finds its ultimate consummation.

On the other hand, love is the play of difference. It thrives on duality, on the interplay of subject and object, lover and beloved. Without this interplay, we feel, love would vanish – for how can love exist without someone to love and someone to be loved? 'I am here, you are there, and together we meet'. This is love. Oneness may seem to the lover a cavern of emptiness in which this play, this dance, is extinguished in the cold light of non-differentiation. But this dance or 'lila', to use that old poetic Indian expression, thrives on difference – this gives love its character, its life, its force of being.

Here we have a paradox and a puzzle that lies at the very core of love. The divine lover, like the 'I' of Sufi poetry, cries out for the divine Beloved, but so often as he expresses it the love only finds its ultimate consummation in a forgetting of self, a plunging into the ocean of infinity so that nothing remains. Yet perhaps all is not lost. The logicians may still insist on finding a foothold to keep their sensibilities intact by saying that, even in the world of love, there is only apparent but not real contradiction. For the self can still retain its difference, even while being immersed in the One of which it becomes (or always was) a part. The experience may seem like a loss of self only because one's attention has become completely fixed in the other. If or when the attention draws back, the self is found just as before – it had never left.

The paradox is most pronounced in accounts of God-union in which God literally *is* the Self. Then it is all too easy to say that the individual self never was, never is and never will be. There is only the illusion of the self or, perhaps, a kind of shadow-self which persists only until the blazing light of the true Self shines forth. Here, there is union to be found but perhaps no difference and distinction. For the difference was only a half-truth superimposed on the unity, and in the fullness of absolute truth there can be no veil of separation. Both those who seek identity with God and those who favour retaining separateness have typically maintained that, while love can be a bridge to identity with God, it loses its *raison d'être* in the stillness of the One. Although the enlightened wisdom of the sage can see that there is no need to despair, for nothing is lost that was ever essentially real, still the lover is at this point unsatisfied for their love was never something ultimate but only a step out of the ignorance-cave, a cruel joke within a cruel joke, a ladder to be knocked away as soon as climbed up.

If the Self is truly one, and not a fragmented self of units standing in relation to each other, then it is hard to see how love is compatible with the realisation that 'I am the One'. For such an affirmation seems to swallow up, to deny the small 'i'. What we need, then, is a Self capable of internal relation and yet truly one in a meaningful sense. It is a Self in which personalities, souls, concrete beings may have personal relations with each other – for only then is love kept alive and not extinguished by an infinite, featureless unity. There can be no love without relation. If it is *a* Self (rather than a community of selves) then it is a unified perspective, not separated. So if there is to be love within the boundless unity of the Self, love which is not a mere chimerical illusion but a real relation between lovers, then the Self must be one but also many. It is one because it is ultimately indivisible, despite our deep-seated ignorance of this indivisibility – which our minds perpetuate but our hearts hold the key to overcoming. It is many because it is love, and love needs the play of difference. Love is made all the sweeter if it can be consummated in a deeper oneness in which the play may yet persist.

The notion of an all-pervading Self may also be confusing because, when we talk about the self, we tend to assume that it interacts with separate, external objects. To try and make sense of an all-pervading Self we either have to dump the notion of subject-object distinctions altogether, or accept that the Self can be its own subject and its own object. If the Self is both subject and object, then this explains how many different perspectives can exist simultaneously. In fact, there could be an infinite number of subject-object relations.

In each case, both subject and object are the Self. So, when I look at someone they present themselves as an object which appears to me, the subject. When they look at me, I am an object to them and they are the subject having an experience in which I appear. In both cases, I am the Self and they are the Self. The Self is observing the Self and being observed by the Self.

Now, if I am the Self and you are the Self, why is it that I do not experience what you are experiencing? It seems that my self is one thing and your self is another. However, this experience may reflect only a partial view of reality. Because this 'I' does not sense itself in other 'I's, it perceives itself as limited and separate. However, this could be simply because of ignorance. In ordinary, unrealised human consciousness we exclusively identify with a limited perspective of the Self, rather than all perspectives. Consequently, we see ourselves only as the subject perceiver and not also as the object perceived. Sri Chinmoy calls this state of ignorance *maya* (adopting the terminology of Indian philosophy):

With the inner eye, we see that vision and reality are one. One moment you are the reality and I am the vision and the next moment I am the reality and you are the vision. Maya tells us that you as an individual are sitting in one place and that I as an individual am sitting at a different place. But when we use the inner vision, or third eye, then we see that both of us are one; we see that God's Vision and God's Reality are inseparable.<sup>222</sup>

What the above passage suggests is that it is possible to transcend the experience that 'I' am separate from 'you' and from others around me through an "inner vision". To ordinary human sight, an object or individual that I see is separate from me. To the inner vision, we are one with what we see. A connection can be made here between the inner vision and the notion of 'contemplation' discussed earlier. Here, two individuals occupy two different spaces marked 'vision' and 'reality' depending on whose perspective it is. They are seen as separate according to our normal sight, but with the inner vision those two spaces are seen to be interchangeable. In other words, I can occupy the perspective of the individual who, before, was only an object of my sight. Like contemplation, this is a way of maintaining

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<sup>222</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Sri Chinmoy Speaks, Part 9*, Agni Press, 1976.  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0283/2/2>

difference while recognising oneness. Each perspective is a perspective *of the One*, and because of this it is freely interchangeable *between many*.

Whereas the mind operates through thought and the subject/object distinction, the heart operates through identification with the inner reality of what it feels. It identifies with everything without making any division, yet also without uniformity. According to this view the Infinite has multiple perspectives which appear to be separated from one another. What we call the 'finite' is only an apparent isolation of a 'part' of the Infinite, but in fact is just the Infinite in which a section has been artificially cut off. The mind may see the 'whole' as an assemblage of parts, but there are no parts to begin with besides what we define with our mind. Really, the 'one' means the indivisible reality and the 'many' is all the things that may appear separate while they are really not. This does not mean that multiplicity is an illusion, just that our mental division of the world into separate entities is not ultimately real. When the world is seen through the mind, it always sees it as something outside. It creates a subject/object distinction. There is no inner and outer in the heart's unrestricted grasp of infinity. This is the direct perception of identity-in-difference.

The "inner vision" which Sri Chinmoy mentions can be regarded as the identification of the heart. As mentioned before, the heart is the aspect of consciousness which identifies with the highest Self. The heart identifies, while the mind divides. The heart directly and intuitively feels its oneness with everything, while the mind artificially divides reality with its powerful faculty of conceptualisation. The heart thus has the "inner vision" necessary to see unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. Unity and multiplicity can co-exist in the realised consciousness because, although the Self identifies with both subject and object, it does not dissolve the distinction between subject and object. Rather, they are perceived as interchangeable aspects of the One. So there is still a place for the limited 'i' in the realised consciousness.

One might think that ignorance is entirely about having a limited perspective, and realisation is about identifying with all perspectives. However, the play of difference seems to require that we are *truly* a subject, and that someone else is *truly* an object. If we are all subjects and all objects at once, then it would seem as if the 'spell' is broken and perhaps we would be unable to love, for love seems to require a sense that the object of our love is something outside of us that we yearn for. Yet, it is not necessarily the case that realisation should end all limited subjectivity. Infinity should not be seen as a limit, but rather

freedom from all limits including the limit of *not* being finite. Love can thus be preserved, because it is the free play of indivisible oneness enjoying itself through infinite highways and byways, brooks and rivulets of Being – merging and separating, yearning and embracing.

Sri Chinmoy's use of the body as an analogy for God suggests that each individual consciousness is supposed to perform a distinct function of the benefit of the whole consciousness:

You are one from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. Yet at one place you are called ears, at another place you are called eyes. Each place in your body has a name of its own. Strangely enough, although they are all part of the same body, one cannot perform the action of another. Eyes see, but they cannot hear. Ears hear, but they cannot see. So the body, being one, also is many. Similarly, although God is one, He manifests Himself through many forms.<sup>223</sup>

This analogy suggests that each limb or organ of our body has its own unique function which grants it a limited individuality. There is an overall consciousness which unifies and governs this diverse functionality. What seems to have happened with human beings due to ignorance is that some 'organs' have lost their conscious connection to the whole. There are occasional reports of limbs (such as hands) seeming to have a mind of their own and acting in ways that appear quite autonomous, despite the person's intentions. Something similar may be going on with respect to human beings and God.

The paths of knowledge and love are united in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy of God-realisation. If whatever can be known is in God, and the Self who knows is also God, then Self-knowledge is also God-knowledge. As Sri Chinmoy puts it: "If you know yourself, you know God, because in essence there is no difference between you and God".<sup>224</sup> In this context to know the Self is to identify with it completely. Ignorance makes us feel that we are only a limited individual self. Since it is the heart which identifies with God through love, it makes sense that the heart is also the faculty of Self-knowledge. Whereas the intellect always makes a division between the observer and the observed, to the "eye of

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<sup>223</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life*, 32-3

<sup>224</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Yoga and the Spiritual Life*, 101

intuition” they are one and inseparable.<sup>225</sup> The intuitive knowledge of the heart is “knowledge without thought or mental form. It is direct and spontaneous. It makes you feel what it is”.<sup>226</sup> This knowledge, or we may call it wisdom, is knowledge which blossoms through and in love, because it is love which perceives the one in the many and the many in the one. Paul may have been referring to this intuitive vision when he spoke about the eye of the heart.

It might seem as if experiencing everything as the Self would result in the loss of any individual experience. How would it be possible to function as ‘I’, the individual human being, and also know yourself as ‘I’, the universal and transcendental All? One way of dealing with this is to say that someone in a realised state would lose individual consciousness completely, and be absorbed into the cosmic consciousness in which he or she simultaneously experiences the consciousness of every single creature. But it is hard to see how an individual in this state would be able to function in everyday life. Even the simplest of tasks, such as eating, would pose a difficult challenge if you could not distinguish some experience to call your own from the mass of universal experiences.

However, I do not think we need to see the realised state as being one in which you are compelled to live such a universal life that you are incapacitated as an individual. Instead, we could see such a being as one who has just enough individuality to function as a complete person on earth, while having an unmistakable sense of the shared inner reality within all things. They might also have a free access, during meditative absorption, to states in which they lose all individual ‘i’-consciousness, but this would not be the norm. Such a person would have the experience of ‘unity’ to the extent that they are aware of the presence of their self in all things. They would also experience ‘multiplicity’ to the extent that they possess a limited, finite ‘I’ which they use as a tool for leading a unique life. In that consciousness, one could relate to other individuals as individuals, feel oneself as a subject interacting with objects, and even worship with devotion the transcendental aspect of one’s highest Self as a personal ‘Thou’. It makes sense that realisation would be a liberating rather than restricting experience, and thus it would expand new avenues of consciousness rather than sealing off all the old ones.

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<sup>225</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Power Within*, 52

<sup>226</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Power Within*, (Moscow: Guru-Noka Publications, 2007), 52

The role of the heart would be crucial in such an experience. This is because the heart is, according to the view being outlined, the faculty of identification. However, in order to maintain some semblance of individuality while completely identified with God it seems one would also (in the outer, individualised consciousness) be able to see aspects of God aside from one's individual person as objects to interact with. In the transcendental consciousness which becomes available in full realisation one could completely identify with everything using the heart so that there is only self and no 'other', but in the individual consciousness one would still be able to interact with 'others' who are distinct to one's individual 'self', which is but a projection of the highest Self.

In his writings Sri Chinmoy often explores the interplay of individual identity and God-identity through the notion that God seeks to make man, not just one with God through realisation, but a God in his own right. When the unlimited Self fully manifests itself through an individual, that person has not only become God; they have become *another* God.

Sri Chinmoy portrays this transformation not simply as a whimsical desire of God, but something which God needs to be properly fulfilled:

My Lord,  
Will I ever be able  
To become like You?  
“My child,  
That is My only Dream,  
My only Dream,  
My only Dream.  
I want you to be like Me,  
Another God.”<sup>227</sup>

In order to become God, one must already be surrendered to God:

You will become, like Me, another God. You know that this creation is Mine, the universal Vision is Mine, the transcendental Reality is mine; but a day shall come when everything will be yours. Like Me, you will be the possessor of the universe,

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<sup>227</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *My Christmas-New Year-Vacation Aspiration-Prayers, Part 21*, (New York: Agni Press, 2003), Number 56

the indweller of the universe, the ruler of the universe. Since you know that you will eventually become another God, for the time being, you can make your surrender complete.<sup>228</sup>

Sri Chinmoy also adopts the poetic voice of the devotee who wants to maintain his subordinate status as God's "eternal slave"<sup>229</sup> and to keep God as his "eternal Lord".<sup>230</sup> Here, the otherwise surrendered devotee pleads with God not to become His equal, not to become like Him. This seems to arise from a fear that God will no longer be available as an object of worship once this transformation has taken place.

However, for God it is not only desirable but perhaps inevitable that man will become another God:

God may accept your wish  
If you do not want to become great.  
But He will never accept your refusal  
To become another God.<sup>231</sup>

Why would God want us to become another God? We are told that God wants us to be His "compatriot"<sup>232</sup>, His "main partner"<sup>233</sup> and His playmate<sup>234</sup> rather than a slave. It is not enough for God to become many; for God the Creator to interact lovingly with God the creation. The many, or God the creation (in this case human beings), must reach a level of spiritual evolution in which they are fully blossomed personalities whom the Creator can interact with at a higher level; creative partners who can execute the divine Will (to which they have already surrendered) as independent, divine individuals. The motivation for this could be that in order to fully enjoy the love that multiplicity makes possible, the

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<sup>228</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *O My Pilot Beloved*, (New York: Agni Press, 1980), <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/1500/537>

<sup>229</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 20*, (New York: Agni Press, 2001), Number 19,452

<sup>230</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *The Dance Of Life, Part 10*. (New York: Agni Press, 1973), Number 488

<sup>231</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Twenty-Seven Thousand Aspiration-Plants, Part 48*, (New York: Agni Press, 1984), Number 4,794

<sup>232</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration*, 121

<sup>233</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Europe-Blossoms*, (New York: Agni Press, 1974), Number 689

<sup>234</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Everest-Aspiration*, 65

multifarious personalities within God the One must develop and mature. It could be that the more developed a personality becomes, the greater their capacity to give and receive love. This is often true in human life, and might also be true in the divine life.

A typical question that could arise at this point is how can there be one God and also many Gods? Does not 'another' God imply more than one? However, we have already seen that in Sri Chinmoy's philosophy there is one God ('One without a second') who has multiple aspects. Ultimately God is the Self without any 'other', but on the other hand when the Self becomes many it creates endless variety within its being. Thus each new divine personality, once fully developed, may be called 'another' God. The primary distinction is between the Creator and the creation, who are both called 'God' and may act as distinct persons (in the case of the creation, as countless persons). But not all parts exercise the capacity of the whole. If a part is fully surrendered to the whole, and identifies with the whole completely, then it could develop to the point where it has all the capacities of the whole at its disposal. This would be a problem if there was any possibility of conflict between divine personalities, as the One would then be divided against itself. But because 'becoming another God' involves surrendering to the divine will, there can be no such clash.

We saw that in contemplation the Creator and the creation can alternate the stream of their experiences in a game of identity-with-difference. And in becoming another God, the creation evolves to the point that it is equal to the Creator. The purpose of both these dynamic processes is to intensify divine love and thus increase the satisfaction of God. There is potentially no end to this continually increasing satisfaction, and thus no end to the infinite richness of love, for Sri Chinmoy (as mentioned earlier) envisions God as a being whose delight is "ever-transcending".

In the next chapter, I will make the point is that a philosophy of divine love, based on the heart's feeling of oneness, can replace all ethics. In Sri Chinmoy's conception, the 'ethical' imperative (which is really beyond ethics, because it is based on the longing for ultimate satisfaction rather than 'right' or 'wrong') is:

Love God and become another God.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Seventy-Seven Thousand Service-Trees, Part 41*, Number 40,537



## LOVE AND BECOME

Love is a bird.

When we encage it, we call it human love.

When we allow love to fly in the all-pervading Consciousness, we call it

Divine Love.

- Sri Chinmoy<sup>236</sup>

I have been considering the question of whether love is compatible with ‘becoming God’, and I have done so mainly by looking at the spiritual philosophy of Sri Chinmoy which seems to reconcile both ideals. This is a philosophy in which divine love, understood as the consciousness of oneness-in-multiplicity, is the ultimate fulfilment of human life. On this view, God has created multiplicity in order to experience love and thus intensify His own delight. Somehow, ignorance has entered into the equation<sup>237</sup> - so that multiplicity has lost sight of oneness and plunged into separativity – at least within the ordinary human consciousness. For both God and humanity (who are ultimately, one and the same) to be truly fulfilled, the consciousness of oneness-in-multiplicity must be restored. The balance has swung too far away from oneness, and needs to be brought back. The mind presents no ultimate solution to this conundrum, for its own divisionary tendencies feed the very ego that separates each one from the other. Sri Chinmoy posits the heart as the solution. For the heart, the psychic consciousness, is closer to the true, undistorted consciousness of the Self. It is therefore the heart, far more so than the mind, which can lead humanity out of this predicament. The human heart in its present state may not be capable of divine love, in

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<sup>236</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Eternity's Breath*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0016/1/4>

<sup>237</sup> How did this ignorance come about? This is an important question, but I do not have the space in this project to give it justice. It is also perilously close to that age-old question ‘why is there evil?’, which opens up a whole other vista of philosophical queries.

which one is conscious of the all-pervading 'I', but it can expand its own human love to feel more and more the divine essence in each thing – until, when this love culminates in divine surrender – the little 'i' of human ego has lost its obstinate force of resistance to the Will of God (which is none other than intentionality directed towards unlimited love), and becomes a conscious instrument of the higher Self. Then, when divine love and surrender reach their highest height, complete identification with both the One and the Many (God-realisation) breaks the spell of ignorance. In such a development, humanity 'becomes' God. As an individual, she is 'another God', for she is fully possessed of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, a perfect fusion of individuality and universality. In this view, man's fulfilment and thus his ultimate flourishing lies in realising who he always was: God.

The divine lover loves God because ultimately God is the only object that one can possibly love. God is also the deepest identity of the one who loves. As Sri Chinmoy notes, in his philosophy God is both the lover and the Beloved. This extends to every possible relationship, so that in the love between parent and child, friend and friend or husband and wife, God is ultimately each party in the relationship. "When we enter the spiritual life, God becomes our mother, our father, our wife or our husband. God has and God is all the relations."<sup>238</sup>

Even if all love is love of God, this does not mean that all love is equal. Love takes multiple forms which, in Sri Chinmoy's view, fall into two broad categories: human and divine. One of the main distinctions is that human love is based on possession while divine love is based on the feeling of oneness. When love is possessive, this implies a sense of separativity. If I feel separate from someone who I wish to be close to, then my love is likely to include attachment and clinging. I will want to grab hold of that which I feel could easily slip away. If, instead, I feel a sense of oneness with someone, then I perceive an inner presence that connects us both. For Sri Chinmoy it is not just that we are connected. God exists in both of us, and ultimately we are both God manifesting through two distinct forms. The heart directly intuitively feels this oneness through its power of identification, and experiences it emotionally as love. However, the purity of this love will depend upon the

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<sup>238</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Beyond Within*, 413

level to which the heart identifies with God. Love is essential for God-realisation:

“Without love, we cannot become one with God”.<sup>239</sup>

In human beings at an ordinary level of consciousness, this feeling of oneness is relatively underdeveloped. It is at least dimly manifest in all human beings, to the extent that each person is capable of love. However, in most people the true knowledge of oneness which love represents is overshadowed by a false sense of separation, so that the actual feeling of love in one's outer consciousness is extended towards very few objects, and mainly revolves around satisfaction of the ego. The love which does exist towards some objects is tinged with the consciousness of separativity. Though the lover is dimly aware, perhaps subconsciously, that some oneness between them and their object of love exists (which is what awakens the heart to the beloved in the first place), this love is also accompanied by the sense that, because the lover and beloved are separate, they must cling and grasp to each other so that they do not slip away. This creates a desperation and a pathos which invites jealousy, insecurity, anxiety and grief.

The closer love is to being divine love, the stronger will be the sense that there is a divine presence in both the lover and beloved from which one can never be separated. While outer circumstances may shift and change, the kernel of divinity which is the all-pervading Self lies at the essence of each party to the relationship. If the ultimate nature of reality is the unity in multiplicity that has been described, there is an irresistible and universal law of attraction holding all together in an inseparable infinite unity, and this force of oneness we may call love. But love is more than just a magnetic force pulling everything together. If that were it, then the force would ultimately be so strong as to make variation, and hence relationship, impossible. ‘Union’ would also be impossible, for union is a dynamic process requiring the multiple to become one. Union requires multiplicity, for things to come apart (or seem to come apart) so they can be put back together. This force of love has to have within it, not just an irresistible magnetism but a dynamic urge for expansion, for multiplication, for creating more of itself endlessly and experiencing love in infinite forms, configurations and patterns.

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<sup>239</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Rainbow-Flowers, Part 1*, Agni Press, 1973,  
<http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0058/1/37>

This love, this essence at the heart of the universe, is expressed as a dynamic tension. It is not that everything is seeking absolute unity, or multifarious individuality, but that it seeks both. Divine love, the higher type of love available to the human experience, reflects this tension at the heart of existence. It stems from a knowledge of the heart that, ultimately, both lover and beloved are identical. But insofar as the one expresses itself through the dynamic interplay of lover and beloved, love is a yearning for unity in multiplicity. Sri Aurobindo said “love is a yearning of the One for the One.”<sup>240</sup> This love delights in both the yearning for oneness that only distinct beings can have, and the desire for expansion that leads the one to burst forth into the many.

In divine love, the interest of the highest Self is put ahead of narrow self-interest. This is because divine love is a reflection of identification with the highest Self and so it cannot allow the ego-driven will of the individual to prevail over the Supreme Will. The divine lover cares first and foremost for the highest welfare of the Self, who is (insofar as the lover can have any sense of identity distinct from the One) his supreme object of love. If God is everything, then this also means that the divine lover cares for the highest welfare of everything.

But how do you know what the highest welfare of everything is? The problem is how to translate this noble-sounding principle into something which helps us make practical, ethical decisions. The answer, it seems to me, is through a subordination of the individual will to the Will of God, so that our own highest Self makes all the decisions directly. God acts, and ‘we’ (meaning the little ‘i’ or finite individual) allow ourselves to be an instrument. We have already seen how for Sri Chinmoy, surrender of the will is a prerequisite for realisation. All acts of the lover who is surrendered to God will be loving acts, because they flow directly from the Will of God whose essence is love. One whose acts and volition are surrendered entirely to the highest Self will not act with any trace of egotistic desire or love of personal power. For, to love individual power is to renounce love of God.

How can one know how to surrender to the Will of the highest Self, so that the will is entirely in accordance with the highest love of God? For Sri Chinmoy, it is through listening to the heart. The heart is here the faculty of inner knowledge, and knowledge of God’s Will is required to align the will to God. This is the heart which, due to its

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<sup>240</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, (Pondicherry, India: All India Books, 1970), 32

identification with the highest Self, can direct the will towards complete surrender. This is because, in true identification, the Will of the highest Self becomes one's own will. In some ways, this conception of loving surrender can replace a 'moral' view of life. Morality may be important for many reasons, but it is supplementary to the overall objective of God-realisation. Rather than there being a 'right' and 'wrong' which is always the same, in this view it makes more sense to say that what is right is what love dictates. Not just any run-of-the-mill love, however. It is the love of the highest Self reflected in action. The completely surrendered divine love will thus 'feel' through the heart how to do as love commands. As Augustine puts it: "Love, and do what you will".<sup>241</sup>

In Sri Chinmoy's conception of God, the divine essence is love and this love entails delight or what he sometimes calls 'love-delight' to indicate that these two aspects are inseparable. I will make the further step of associating goodness and delight, on the basis that 'good' and 'evil' are concepts which can be made synonymous with satisfaction and suffering respectively. What I mean is not only that delight is good, but that anything good must be so because of its relationship with delight. I will distinguish delight from lesser forms of happiness like pleasure (understood in its narrower sense related to the physical senses). There are all sorts of things which bring pleasure and happiness which are widely considered immoral. However, we can dismiss most forms of happiness from belonging to the highest good because they are characterised by ignorance.

If the highest knowledge is self-knowledge (this Self being God, who is everything) then any state of consciousness which deviates from this self-knowledge is relative ignorance. Such a state is not pure Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*sat-chit-ananda*). It is admixed with ignorance. Because it is not the highest consciousness, it is also not the highest bliss. The highest bliss is found where there is no ignorance, only self-knowledge, and this is realisation. If the highest bliss is only to be found in realisation, then the types of happiness sought and experienced in the unrealised state cannot be considered the highest good. They may be more or less good, depending on the extent to which they are imbued with divine love. Divine love grows out of human love, but cannot fully flourish until human love is transcended. This is due to human love's attachment to the separation of the little 'i'. It

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<sup>241</sup> H. Browne, trans. and Philip Schaff, ed., *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7*, (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/170207.htm>.

follows that the more divinely loving one is, the closer one is to the highest good which is none other than the highest satisfaction.

A potential danger here is that being motivated entirely by love and fulfilment could lead to hedonism. What if my own urge for love or enjoyment leads me to do despicable or harmful things? The answer, I think, is that you really need a good deal of spiritual maturity to 'follow your heart' and not get into trouble. In Sri Chinmoy's conception, your heart has to be in tune with the soul, the individualised portion of God, and you need to listen to your heart amidst all the other clamouring voices. You also need the strength to act in accordance with the heart. So it may be that to live your life in accordance with *divine* love is really a higher calling, one that cannot be followed without already having done some inner training or following certain ethical prescriptions.

One could ask whether this view is truly a moral or ethical one. If the consideration of other people's wants is a minimum requirement for "being in the moral world"<sup>242</sup>, then rejecting that there is really such a thing as 'otherness' seem to take us out of that world altogether. If diversity and hence individuality are unreal because only the One exists, then there is no basis for morality and ethics. It takes at least two to have ethical obligations, responsibilities and consequences. Strict monism, understood in terms of absolute non-differentiation, is an inherently amoral system. However, in Sri Chinmoy's view we are not dealing with strict monism. Rather, it is identity in difference. To the extent that there is difference, there is room for morality.

According to this ethics of love, we can ultimately dispense with rule-based morality. If rules and principles help us live a life aimed at the highest love, then they are helpful guides along the way. However, they should not be relied upon as some ultimate authority. If there is to be an ultimate moral authority, it is the heart. However, the heart needs to be properly attuned to the frequency of divine love. It is by developing the heart's feeling of oneness that one can act fully in accordance with love, seeking the highest bliss of God in all and all in God.

In this view the highest morality comes through development of the heart. This development is sometimes referred to as an opening, a blossoming or an expansion. In Sri Chinmoy's writings the analogies of a blossoming flower or a rising sun are often used to

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<sup>242</sup> Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 98

describe the heart's awakening. It is a heightening of the latent sense of identification with God inside a human being, to the point where the person identifies with God in everything and as everything. But, because some individuality still remains, this identification is overlaid by a sense of difference which allows one to love the 'other' even though, ultimately, it sees the other as oneself.

This 'law of love', which is ultimately a law of oneness being played out in the field of multiplicity, is the true basis for morality even while it transcends any moral principle. It is not a prescription of how to live one's life, but an orientation which gives the life its inner peace, fullness and delight. If this orientation becomes universalised in all individuals, then the result will be world peace, world harmony and world oneness. Divine love would become the panacea to solve all problems between human beings and the inner law which governs from the heart in a benevolent fashion. When the law of love reigns, it will replace all others (both moral and legislative) which were, at best, vague approximations of this inner law; imperfect, prone to error, the result of reasoning and deliberation rather than the clear insight of the heart.

In the realm of politics, which is the science of how best to govern human beings, the heart which is fully attuned to divine love would have the final say. Political processes of competition and compromise would be replaced by an inner communion with the self, which, if all hearts were tuned to the same frequency, would speak in the same voice to all. The being who is divinised and transformed by love would perhaps be no longer human but divine, and would have transcended the need for politics, which is a human affair.

The notion that this world is not just in God's image but is actually *God the creation* is a proposition which should give succour to the oppressed and pause to the oppressor. The preventable starving to death of millions, the waging of war against the innocent, the needless destruction of nature – these are not just crimes against humanity, but crimes against God. In this philosophy it is God in the form of an innocent child who is shot down by a soldier in the streets. To one who sees God as everything, the cries of the oppressed should be seen as God's cries.

According to this ethics of love, it is by loving the One that we come to love the many. "You cannot truly love any human being unless and until you love God".<sup>243</sup> This is because

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<sup>243</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 40

God is inside everyone.<sup>244</sup> Since God is the essence of each person, it follows that you cannot truly love a person in the most integral sense without also loving God. And if you truly love God, then you love everybody because God is everything. This is also a self-love, because God is our own highest Self. “You must regard the persons around you as limbs of your own body”.<sup>245</sup> To love divinely and universally simply requires that we be authentic to who we truly are since we are essentially God, and God is essentially love. In contrast to human love, which is characterised by a sense of possession (but which may, and often is, punctuated by elements of selflessness and glimpses of higher love) divine love is described as “the sweetest feeling of spontaneous oneness with the human being or beings concerned”.<sup>246</sup>

Divine love is thus characterised by oneness in difference, or unity in multiplicity. It is oneness because all things are essentially God. The lover and beloved are both God. It is also difference because the fluidity of identity (as demonstrated by contemplation) retains identity rather than abolishing identity. But what this also means is that any particular individual is not merely a part of God, or has God inside him or her, but in a very real way is God Himself. This is because the experience of being a part of God the creation or a little ‘i’ (while my Transcendent Self appears to ‘me’ as the wholly Other) is only contingent. It is subject to change at a moment’s notice, as the contemplation narrative suggests. It is this contingency which means that, at any moment, God the creation may become God the Creator. This may occur because, beneath the surface, the two are absolutely one. If each individual is thus *potentially* God the Creator, this gives good reason for an attitude of devotional reverence to all forms of life. To fix upon the essence of a thing (even an ordinary, mundane object) and see *that* as the Source which projects forth all of reality, is surely a way of accessing a more loving and thus more divine consciousness.

I have outlined, based on Sri Chinmoy’s writings, a particular view of oneness with God through love, in which God is the all-pervading Self. However, there are many philosophies which speak of opening the heart, and have practices for doing so. A common element in much of these techniques is a turning inward, the cultivation of inner stillness in

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<sup>244</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 40

<sup>245</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 40

<sup>246</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 55

which, by dimming the constant chatter of thoughts and sensual information, a deep inner peace can be discovered. There is a lot of potential for research in the area of what we could call psychic development – the development of the heart. What are the best practices for developing the heart's capacities? How does their suitability differ according to the individual? Do traditional religious and spiritual philosophies have anything to contribute? Traditional practices which may play a role in developing the heart include prayer, meditation, music, art, literature, service to others and even physical endurance. There is potential for all of these to offer something to the process of awakening divine love.

In the present day, divine love is the quickest way to realise the Highest. The mind has played its role, especially in the West. The West has offered many mental giants to the world, but right now the West needs more of the wealth of the heart, which is love.<sup>247</sup>

Recently, the mind has exerted its dominance in human affairs. However, it could be that the mind is unable to achieve the ultimate human happiness and flourishing that most of us seek. With its analytical powers, the mind has assisted tremendously in helping human beings evolve beyond the level of animals. It has improved our material standard of living remarkably, and has uncovered many of the secrets of the universe. However, the mind has not brought us peace nor the enlightenment and ultimate truth that the human race seeks. While the mind may be aware of the need for peace, it does not seem to know how to attain it. The atom bomb stands as a furious symbol of the mind's twin powers of creation and destruction. Thanks to the mind, we know how to split the atom and pull apart countless lives. But do we have the wisdom not to use this power? The wisdom which serves the oneness of all things in spite of their differences, that regards compassion and love as the highest goods, is a product of the heart. I have argued that if there is such a oneness, the mind's power of analysis, which is its capacity for dividing reality, fails to fully grasp it. Only a capacity to fully identify with reality in its totality could sense this oneness. This capacity, if it is found at all, is found in the heart – where empathy, love and oneness shine forth. It is only the heart that can give birth to a new world of peace, because peace is based on love and oneness. It is only when the heart becomes the ruler of life rather than the mind, that the divinisation of human beings can take place. As Sri Chinmoy puts it:

When the power of love

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<sup>247</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Love*, 77

Replaces the love of power

Man will have a new name: God.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Sri Chinmoy, *Meditations: Food For The Soul*, <http://www.srichinmoylibrary.com/books/0001/1/20>

## CONCLUSION

Love is one of life's deeper mysteries. The search for love leads towards higher and higher ideals. Religion and spirituality, when fully connected to the deepest human concerns, always advocates love and compassion.

I have offered a view, based on Sri Chinmoy's philosophy, that the heart's longing for love is not only compatible with, but necessary for oneness with God. To become God, human beings must be driven entirely by the highest and purest love.

Sri Chinmoy represents the ancient wisdom of India translated for a largely non-Western audience. His conception of God has an affinity with the vision of ancient Vedic sages, but uses the language of Western theism.

While it is often thought that the highest self-development can occur through reason, Sri Chinmoy proposes that reason has its limits. Beyond these limits, he claims, is the heart, which is our entry point into infinite existence, consciousness and delight. This intriguing philosophy asks us to follow the path of love, if we really want to become another God.

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