

Empty and Given

The Buddha, the Christ, and the Teaching of Not Two

A teacher in northern India said that the world is found in this fathom-long body. A teacher in Galilee said that the kingdom of God is within you. And in the Upanishads a father told his son, who had gone looking for what is real: that you are.

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A note on names and terms

This book draws on texts in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Hebrew and Greek, and a word on how they appear may help. Where the Buddha's early discourses are quoted, their own language, Pali, is kept: *kamma*, *Dhamma*, *paṭicca-samuppāda*. Elsewhere the Sanskrit forms more familiar to English readers are used: *karma*, *Dharma*, *nirvāṇa*. They are the same words in two languages.

Tibetan terms are given as they are commonly pronounced, *rigpa*, *ösel*, *thukjé*, and Chinese names in the older spellings by which most readers first met them: Lao Tzu, the *Tao Te Ching*, Chuang Tzu.

References such as AN 3.61 or SN 36.21 point to the Buddha's discourses as the Pali canon arranges them: SN for the connected discourses, AN for the numbered discourses. Words that recur are gathered in a short glossary before the index, for the reader who meets one again a hundred pages on.

Introduction

Some people come to the meditation cushion from the pew. Some find their way back to the pew from the cushion. Some arrive by a third door. For many it opens first onto a yoga mat, then onto the Upanishads and the teachers of India, and at last onto both. And some never quite settle, and keep walking between them. This book is written from that walking.

Three teachers stand at its centre. The Buddha, who said that the world, its arising and its ending are found in this fathom-long body. The Christ, who said that the kingdom of God is within you, and who called the one he prayed to *Abba*. And Śaṅkara, the great teacher of the Upanishads, who gathered their oldest sayings into a single claim: that the one who seeks and what is sought are not two. Each of them turned attention inward. Each found, at the place where the world is met, something that changed how the whole of it was lived. And each left followers who would argue for centuries about what exactly had been found.

What they found can be said in three words, and the book is organised around them. The Buddha found the ground empty: no self in it, nothing that can be grasped or kept, and the ending of suffering in seeing so. The Christ found it given: a voice at the river calling him beloved before he had done anything at all, and a love he spent his life passing on. Śaṅkara found it full, and insisted that the one who finds it is not other than what is found. Empty; given; not two. The title holds all three. Its two words belong to the first two teachers, and the "and" between them, which refuses to let them become two things, belongs to the third.

That is the conviction of the book, and it can be stated plainly. Whatever lies at the ground of experience is empty: not a thing, not a self, nothing anyone can own. And it is given: no one made it, no one earned it, and those who have turned towards it have not found it indifferent. Lose the first, and the self grows fat on its spirituality. Lose the second, and the world grows cold. Hold them apart, as two truths to be balanced against each other, and they begin to argue. Most of what goes wrong on the inward path goes wrong somewhere in there.

The book has a lens, and honesty requires naming it at the start. It looks through the Buddhist path in its complete form: the early teaching of seeing and letting go, which is where many Western practitioners first meet it, on a Vipassana retreat; the Mahāyāna, with its emptiness and its vow to awaken for the sake of all beings; and the Vajrayāna, the tantric Buddhism of the Himalaya, with its deities, its devotion, and its teaching that the nature of mind is empty and luminous at once. The last part of the book gives the reason for that choice in full, but it can be said briefly here. Of all the traditions met in these pages, this is the one that has made room, inside a single practice, for relation, union, identity and emptiness, and has a way of letting each of them go. And its teaching of skilful means gives it a particular freedom: to take a teaching as true at its own level and in its own words, without having to convert it or dismiss it. A lens is not a verdict. A Christian or an Advaitin would draw the map differently, and where they would, the book tries to say so.

One thread runs through all three teachers and ties the book together, and it is imagination. What we imagine shapes what we live. Those who followed the Buddha mapped that power with great care. Those who followed Śaṅkara called it *māyā* and asked what lies beneath it. Some who followed Christ, many centuries later, in the America of Emerson and New Thought, tried to put it to work. What is imagination? Is it something we do, or something through which we are met? When I picture the divine, am I meeting something, or furnishing my own reflection? And when the self falls quiet and the pictures stop, is what remains empty, or is it love, or is it simply what one always was? The book does not settle these questions so much as walk them. It turns back on itself more than once, because that is how these things are actually learned.

Along the way it keeps company with many others: the Desert Fathers and the Hesychasts, Eckhart and Julian, Ramana and Ramakrishna, the Tibetan masters and the evangelical revivalists, and two twentieth-century American teachers, Joel Goldsmith and Neville Goddard, who read the Gospels as a map of consciousness, and one of whose distinctions this book has borrowed and put to work. Each is met as generously as honesty allows.

None of this replaces a path. It is offered to anyone who has found that the road they are on keeps opening onto another.

Part One

Three Teachers

The world in a fathom-long body

In one of the early discourses a young god named Rohitassa comes to the Buddha with a question. In a former life, he says, he was a seer who could cross the sky faster than an arrow, and he set out to walk to the end of the world. He walked for a hundred years, stopping only to eat and sleep, and died without arriving. Is it possible, by travelling, to reach the world's end?

The Buddha says no. And then he says the sentence this book begins from: "It is in just this fathom-long body, with its perception and mind, that I declare the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to its cessation."

The world he means is not the planet. It is the world as it is lived. Elsewhere he defines it precisely: that in the world by which one perceives the world and conceives of the world, that is what the Noble One's discipline calls the world. Eye and form, ear and sound, mind and thought. The world, in this teaching, is experience, and experience is found here.

The Dhammapada opens in the same place. "Mind precedes all things; mind is their chief; they are mind-made." The word translated "things", *dhammā*, can also mean states or experiences, and translators divide over it, but the direction is unmistakable: what arrives is shaped by the mind that meets it. And when the Buddha defines kamma, the act that shapes what comes next, he does not define it as a deed. "Intention, I tell you, is kamma."

Two things keep this from becoming a metaphysics of mind. The first is that the Buddha refused to build one. Asked whether the world is eternal or not, finite or infinite, he declined to answer, and compared the questioner to a man shot with a poisoned arrow who will not have it pulled out until he knows the name and clan of the archer. The second is that the inward turn has a single purpose. It is where craving is seen, and seeing it is how it ends. The world is located in experience not so that experience can be rearranged, but so that suffering can cease.

And he gave a way of looking there. The discourse on the foundations of mindfulness, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, turns attention to the body, to feeling, to the mind and to what arises in it, and asks only that each be known as it is, while it is: as arising, as passing, and as not mine, not I, not my self.

The second of those four is the easiest to pass over, and may matter most. The word is *vedanā*, feeling, and it does not mean emotion. It means the tone that every contact arrives with: pleasant, unpleasant, or neither. A sound reaches the ear already faintly welcome or unwelcome. An itch arrives already asking to be scratched.

The Buddha's account of how suffering is assembled turns on exactly this point. He called it dependent arising, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, and its principle can be said in a single line: when this is, that comes to be; when this ceases, that ceases. Traced through one moment of experience, it becomes a chain, and the chain has a hinge. From contact comes feeling, and from feeling comes craving. The feeling cannot be helped. The craving can. Between the itch and the scratch there is a gap, sometimes no wider than a breath, and a great deal of the teaching lives in it. The discourses remember him saying that whoever sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma, the truth he taught.

Alan Watts argued that there is no feeler standing apart from the feeling, and that we do not have sensations so much as we are them. Those who sit with feeling for long enough tend to find him right. Seeing, hearing and even thinking arrive, in the end, as something felt, and it is there, in the felt, that the world in the fathom-long body is either grasped or allowed to pass.

The discourse is the root of what is now taught around the world as Vipassana, insight meditation, and on a retreat it can look almost too simple to matter. One sits, and notes: rising, falling, hearing, thinking. In another lineage, carried from Burma by S. N. Goenka and taught now in centres across the world, one moves attention slowly through the body and meets each sensation as it is found, with awareness and with equanimity, reacting to none of them. In either form, the simplicity is the point. The world the Buddha located in the fathom-long body is not investigated by theory. It is watched, closely enough and for long enough that the one who seemed to be watching turns out to be made of the same passing stuff as what was watched. Much of

what follows in this book, however elaborate, is an attempt to understand what that simple watching finds.

II

The kingdom within

Some five centuries later, in Galilee, a teacher was asked when the kingdom of God would come. It will not come with signs to be observed, he said, "for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

The Greek, *entos hymōn*, can also be read as "among you" or "in your midst", and scholars have argued over it for a long time. But the inward reading is very old, and a whole strand of the teaching supports it by locating the decisive act in the heart. Anger at a brother already stands under the judgement reserved for murder. Lust in the heart is already adultery. "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart." This is strikingly close to the Buddha's definition of kamma. The act that matters happens before the hand moves.

A second strand is the one New Thought would later build on. "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." "According to your faith be it done to you." Faith like a grain of mustard seed, moving mountains. Read on their own, these sound like a law of mind: believe, and it comes.

A third strand points the other way entirely. Do not store up treasures on earth. Consider the lilies of the field, which neither toil nor spin. Whoever would save his life will lose it. And at the centre of the story, a man in the garden of Gethsemane asking for the cup to pass from him, and then: "not my will, but yours, be done."

Honesty requires a caution here. Most historical scholarship reads Jesus as a first-century Jewish prophet announcing the coming reign of God, not a teacher of mental science. A verse beloved of New Thought, "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he", is not his at all but a line from Proverbs. The inward reading of Jesus is ancient and serious; the reading of him as a teacher

of mental law is late and specific. And in his own mouth the kingdom is God's reign, not the hearer's wishes fulfilled. The prayer he taught says "thy will be done", not mine.

Beneath all three strands the Gospels place something that comes before any of them. In the earliest, before Jesus has taught anything or healed anyone, he comes up out of the river and a voice says to him: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Nothing has yet been done to earn it. The teaching, the healing and the prayer in the garden all come afterwards, and they come out of that. The word he used for the one who spoke, *Abba*, will matter a great deal later in this book. For now it is enough to notice where each inward turn begins. The Buddha's begins by finding no self in anything it watches. The story of Jesus's inward life, as the Gospels tell it, begins with being loved.

III

That you are

The third teacher stands differently from the other two, and the difference needs saying first. Hinduism credits no human founder. Its oldest scriptures are *śruti*, what was heard: the tradition holds that the Vedas were not composed by anyone but received by seers who heard them, and calls them *apauruṣeya*, not of human making. There is no Hindu equivalent of the Buddha under the tree or of Jesus at the Jordan, no single life from which the teaching flows. The teaching is there before any teacher, and the teacher's task is to hand it on and make it plain. In a sense the whole tradition begins with the second word of this book's title.

The part of that inheritance this book is concerned with is the Upanishads, the philosophical texts that close the Vedic collections and are therefore called Vedānta, the end of the Veda. The oldest of them are older than the Buddha. They are full of teachers and students, and one scene among them has become the tradition's emblem. The sage Uddālaka tells his son Śvetaketu to drop a lump of salt into water overnight and bring it to him in the morning. The salt

cannot be found. Taste the water, he says, from this side, from the middle, from the far side: it is salt throughout. So it is with being, which pervades everything and cannot be seen. And then the refrain on which the whole tradition would hang: *tat tvam asi*. That you are.

The same Upanishad says that in the beginning there was being alone, one only, without a second. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka has the sentence *aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman, and the method that goes with it: of whatever can be pointed to, *neti neti*, not this, not this.

Many schools read these texts, and Part Eight will meet three of them. The one that concerns this book most is *advaita*, not two, and its great teacher is Śaṅkara. He was born, by tradition, at Kaladi in what is now Kerala, and is usually placed in the early eighth century. The stories of his life were written down centuries later and have the shape of legend: a boy who wanted to renounce the world and a mother who would not allow it, until a crocodile seized his leg in the river and she consented so that he might at least die a monk; a young renunciant who found his teacher, Govinda, on the banks of the Narmadā; years of walking the length of India and debating anyone who would debate; monasteries founded at the four corners of the land; and a death, still young, in the Himalaya. Scholars doubt much of this, and doubt as well many of the works that carry his name. What is not in doubt are his commentaries on the Upanishads, on the Bhagavad Gītā and on the *Brahma Sūtras*, the terse aphorisms in which the Upanishads' teaching had been summarised, and the claim that runs through all of them.

The claim is uncompromising. There is one reality, Brahman. The self, *ātman*, is not a part of it, a spark of it, or a servant before it. It is it, entirely. What seems to be an individual person is Brahman misapprehended. A half-verse traditionally attributed to him puts the whole of it in a single line: Brahman is real, the world is appearance, and the self is nothing other than Brahman.

This is where Śaṅkara joins the other two teachers, and it is worth seeing exactly where. Like the Buddha, he places everything that matters in the knowing of what is already here. Liberation, for him, is not something produced. Early in his great commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* he sets out

what action can do: it can bring something new into being, it can bring something within reach, it can alter something, and it can purify something. Liberation, he insists, is none of these, because it is the nature of what one already is. Nothing done can produce it, and nothing left undone can lose it. It can only be recognised. The tradition loves a story that makes the point. Ten travellers ford a river and, on the far bank, count themselves to be sure no one has drowned. Each counts nine, forgetting himself, and they begin to mourn, until a passer-by counts them and says to the one who was counting: you are the tenth. Nothing was found that had been lost. The counter only stopped leaving himself out.

That is the second word of this book's title, spoken in Sanskrit. What cannot be produced cannot be earned, and what one already is cannot be owed. Śaṅkara's teaching is usually heard as the coolest of the three, a matter of knowledge rather than of love. But it shares this with the Gospel: nothing the seeker does brings about what is found.

Which raises a question for the many who came to this door by way of the yoga mat. Yoga is older than Śaṅkara, and as a name for inner discipline it first appears inside the Upanishads themselves. The Kaṭha calls it the steady holding of the senses; the Śvetāśvatara tells the student how to sit, with the body upright, and how to quieten the breath. Patañjali gathered the discipline into a system some centuries later, in the *Yoga Sūtras*.

Śaṅkara's relation to it is instructive. The *Brahma Sūtras* contain a line rejecting the Yoga school, and he read it as rejecting that school's philosophy, which kept the knower and the known forever two, while keeping its disciplines wherever they agreed with the Upanishads. Stillness of body, breath and mind can purify, and a purified mind is ready to hear *that you are*. But by his own account of what action can do, purification is not liberation. The mat can prepare the student for the teaching; it cannot be the teaching. A commentary on Patañjali carries Śaṅkara's name, and scholars still argue over whether he wrote it, which may be the right note on which to leave the relationship: close, disputed, and not quite settled.

And like the Buddha, he taught by removal. Not the body, which changes; not the senses, which report; not the mind, which comes and goes; not the

sense of being a doer, which rises and sets with waking and sleep. Where the two part is in what they say is left when the removing is done. The Buddha declined to name anything. Śaṅkara named it: being, awareness, bliss, which the tradition after him gathered into a single word, *sat-cit-ānanda*. Much of this book is an attempt to understand that difference without flattening it, and Part Eight takes it up directly.

One more thing belongs here, because it will matter throughout. Śaṅkara was a fierce critic of the Buddhists of his day, and argued against them at length. Yet his own tradition's rivals called him a Buddhist in disguise, and his teacher's teacher, Gauḍapāda, wrote verses that could stand beside those of Nāgārjuna, the second-century monk who is to Buddhist emptiness roughly what Śaṅkara is to non-duality. The lines this book follows do not only run in parallel. At certain points they touch, and at one of those points they have been quarrelling, fruitfully, for twelve hundred years.

IV

Two ways to inherit a saying

Set side by side, the three teachers share a turn. Each directs attention away from the world out there and towards the place where it is met. Each locates what matters most there, before anything is done: in intention, in the heart, in the recognition of what one is.

And each left sayings that can be inherited in two ways.

They can be read as a path of relinquishment. The inward turn is where grasping is seen and released, or where self-will is surrendered, or where a false identification is dropped. On this reading, "mind-made", "within you" and "that you are" are invitations to stop looking outside for what is only found by letting go.

Or they can be read as a technique of acquisition. If the world is mind-made, remake it. If belief brings what is asked for, ask for what you want. If you are the one reality, the world is yours to command.

It would be convenient to assign the first reading to Buddhism and the second to Christianity's American offshoots, but it would not be true. Popular Buddhism across Asia has always had its acquisitive branch: merit made for wealth and good fortune, protective chants against misfortune. And Christianity's contemplative tradition is one long practice of relinquishment. The Veda itself contains both. Much of it is hymn and rite, and many of the rites are performed for something: rain, cattle, sons, long life, heaven. The Upanishads, at its end, ask what would remain if all of that were given up, and Śāṅkara spent much of his life arguing that the second cannot be reached by the means of the first. The line between the two inheritances does not run between the traditions. It runs through each of them.

V

Down the three lines

In the centuries after the Buddha his teaching was analysed with great care. The Abhidharma catalogued experience into momentary events and the conditions that produce them. The Mahāyāna, emerging around the turn of the era, pressed the teaching of emptiness until nothing, not even its own categories, was left standing. Its sharpest voice was Nāgārjuna, a South Indian monk of the second century whom Tibetans honour as a second Buddha. His *Root Verses on the Middle Way* founded the school called Madhyamaka, the Middle Way, and their central move is simple to state and hard to stop thinking about. Carry the Buddha's dependent arising all the way down. Whatever arises in dependence on conditions has no being of its own, and that absence is what emptiness means. Emptiness is not a void behind things, nor a deeper thing hidden beneath them. It is how things are, because they depend. The itch is empty in exactly this sense: made of contact, nerve and attention, and none the less itchy for that.

And in the fourth century the brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu shaped Yogācāra, a philosophical school of the Mahāyāna that took "mind-made" further than anyone had: a detailed account of how experience is produced,

layer by layer, down to a deepest layer where impressions settle as seeds. It is not a devotional movement but an analysis, worked out inside a tradition already committed to the emptiness of all phenomena, some eight or nine centuries after the Buddha. Later still, in India and then in Tibet, the same line flowered into the Vajrayāna, which took hold of imagination, devotion and the body itself as means of awakening, and into Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, and its near twin Mahāmudrā, the Great Seal, which teach that the nature of mind is empty and luminous from the beginning. The last parts of this book stand on that ground.

The line from Jesus ran differently. The letters in Paul's name speak of "Christ in you", and of a Christ who emptied himself. The Desert Fathers of Egypt watched their thoughts with a precision any Abhidharmist would recognise. Dionysius, a Syrian monk writing around 500 under the name of Paul's Athenian convert, and Eckhart, the German Dominican preacher of the early fourteenth century, carried the inward turn into the darkness beyond every image of God, and the Hesychasts of the Christian East learned to descend with the mind into the heart and stand there, without images, before the one who sees. The same line also ran warm and personal: through the medieval devotion to the Holy Name, through Luther's "for me", and through the revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which gave fresh intensity to something as old as the faith itself: Christ as Saviour, known personally, met in the heart as a friend. What the revivals added was an emphasis on conversion as a decisive experience, and on the assurance that followed it. Part Six returns to it, once the book has the tools to do it justice.

The line through Śaṅkara ran backwards as well as forwards. Before him stood Gauḍapāda, whose verses on the Māṇḍūkya Upanishad are the oldest surviving statement of the non-dual reading. After him came commentators who refined the system for a thousand years, and the monasteries that tradition says he founded, which still stand. The other great readings of the Upanishads, Rāmānuja's and Madhva's, grew up in argument with his. And in the modern age the line produced two teachers who carried it to the world: Ramana Maharshi, who sat for more than half a century at the foot of the holy mountain of Arunachala and taught very nearly a single question, who am I?;

and Swami Vivekananda, who spoke for Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and afterwards taught Vedānta to American audiences.

In America the three lines met. Emerson and Thoreau had read the Bhagavad Gītā and the Upanishads a generation before Vivekananda arrived, and Emerson's poem "Brahma", published in 1857, puts the voice of the one Self into English verse. From that soil, and from Phineas Quimby's mental healing, grew the movement that came to be called New Thought. It read Jesus as a teacher of the inner life: mind causative over circumstance, God not far off but the very substance of the self, the kingdom within to be realised rather than awaited. To many who came to it from the East it sounded like Vedānta speaking the language of the Gospels, and historically that is not far wrong. Without knowing it, it also rediscovered a good deal of what Yogācāra had mapped in India fifteen centuries before.

Two of its teachers matter to this book, and both deserve better than the reputation New Thought has since acquired. Joel Goldsmith, whose *The Infinite Way* appeared in 1947, taught a mysticism of the one Presence so thorough that he refused to use God for anything: prayer, for him, was not asking but listening, not the application of a power but the recognition that there is only one. Neville Goddard, lecturing from the late 1930s until his death in 1972, is often misread as a prosperity teacher who borrowed some scripture for decoration. He understood himself as an interpreter of Christ, and said so relentlessly. The Bible, in his reading, is a psychological drama enacted in the individual, every figure in it a state of consciousness, the whole of it moving towards what he called the Promise: Christ awakening in a man as that man's own imagination. He reported that this had happened in him, beginning in 1959, and in his last years spoke of little else.

Neville divided his teaching into two parts, and the division is the most useful thing he left, useful far beyond his own school. The Law is the practice of deliberate imagination: assume the state you wish to live in, feel it as present fact, and circumstance will follow. The Promise is something else: the birth from above, the discovery that the one who was doing the imagining was not who he had taken himself to be. The Law, he said, is a nursery. The

Promise is what the nursery is for. This book borrows both words, and uses them more widely than he did. By the Law it means any practice that uses the power of the inward life to arrange its contents. By the Promise it means whatever such practice, done honestly, eventually gives way to.

The enquiry begins, in Part Two, where the machinery is most explicit. Yogācāra is the point in the Buddha's line where "mind-made" became a detailed account of how a world is produced. New Thought is the point in the modern West where "according to your faith" became a practice. Advaita stands beside both, agreeing with much of the account and disputing what lies beneath it. That is where the two inheritances, relinquishment and acquisition, are most sharply in play, and where the three teachers can first be heard in conversation.

Part Two

The Mirror and the Seed

The single proposition

Followed far enough, the Buddha's line and the modern manifestation teachers arrive at the same sentence: *there is nothing outside consciousness, and what you take to be the world is the ripening of what you have deposited in it.*

The Buddhist school is often called Cittamātra, mind-only. Its more technical term, Vasubandhu's, is *vijñapti-mātra*. *Vijñapti* comes from a verb meaning to make known, and translators have rendered the compound as representation-only, cognition-only, and, in the long teaching of the school by the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, *manifestation only*. That last rendering is why this school sits so close to the modern teachers of manifestation. Vasubandhu means that the object you seem to encounter is not delivered to awareness from beyond it but is awareness appearing in the shape of an object. Neville writes that "the world is yourself pushed out," and means something very close. Both are, in their own vocabularies, teachings of manifestation. Whether they mean the same thing by the word is the question the rest of this book keeps returning to.

Advaita arrives at a neighbouring sentence by another road, and stops short of this one in a way that will matter. For Śaṅkara the world is not a product of individual minds at all. It is superimposed on Brahman, as a snake is superimposed on a rope in dim light, and it is not more real for one person than for another. Part Three will find him arguing against the Buddhist idealists on exactly this point. But he agrees that the world as it appears is not what it appears to be, and that what it finally rests on is awareness.

Setting Advaita's reservation aside for the moment, a unified statement might run like this:

Reality is a single, self-luminous field of imaginative consciousness. That field carries within it latent impressions, deposited by prior activity. Those impressions ripen. Their ripening appears, from within the field, as a world standing outside it, encountered rather than made. The appearance of exteriority is not a lie told by something else; it is the structure of the

field's own unfolding.

Everything interesting lies in what follows from that sentence, and in where the three lines begin to pull on each other's seams.

VII

Imagination all the way down

The single proposition has a Buddhist source that sounds, at first, even more like the modern manifestation teachers than Vasubandhu does.

The *Madhyāntavibhāga*, one of the root texts of Yogācāra, is attributed to Maitreya, the bodhisattva expected as the next Buddha, who is said to have taught it to Asaṅga. It opens its first verse with a sentence that should stop any reader of this book: *abhūta-parikalpo 'sti*. The imagination of the unreal exists. Duality is not found in it. Emptiness is found in it. And it, in turn, is found in emptiness.

"Imagination of the unreal" is Yogācāra's name for the whole of experience as we live it: the ceaseless process by which consciousness appears to itself as a subject over here and objects over there. Neville, for his part, said that God is your own wonderful human imagination. So Maitreya and Neville agree on the opening proposition. Reality as we meet it is imagination. What differs is what each does next.

The Law, as Neville taught it, concludes: therefore imagination is the creative power, and it can be directed. Maitreya concludes: therefore the imagining is empty of the duality it projects, and emptiness is present right inside it, waiting to be noticed. One reading puts a hand on the lever. The other notices that there was never anyone standing at the lever, only more imagining. Neville himself, in the teaching he called the Promise, would arrive at something much closer to the second by another road.

It helps here to separate three things the English word "imagination" is made to carry.

The imaginary. Fantasy, the picture-making of the mind, what a child does with a cardboard box. Real as activity, unreal as content.

The imaginal. The word of Henry Corbin, the French scholar of Islamic mysticism, coined to rescue the *khayāl* of Ibn 'Arabi, the thirteenth-century Andalusian Sufi, from being dismissed as fantasy: a level of reality where the formless takes form, genuinely disclosed rather than invented. The visions of prophets, the forms the Real assumes in order to be met.

The ground's capacity to appear at all. Not an act of imagining, but the condition that makes imagining possible: the fact that awareness, however empty, is not blank but displaying. Dzogchen, which this book will reach at its end, calls it *lhun grub*, spontaneous presence. Advaita, in its own vocabulary, speaks of *māyā* as the power by which the one appears as many.

A sentence like "God is imagination" can be heard at all three levels, and much of what follows lives in the difference. Meant in the third sense, it is close to Dzogchen. Heard in the first, it lends a student's daydreaming the authority of the ground. Much later, this book will meet a practice built to keep the three apart: one that uses the first deliberately, aims at the second, and rests only in the third.

VIII

Why the world appears solid: the mercy of latency

The Buddhist account and the modern manifestation teachers describe the same machinery. At its base Yogācāra places the *ālaya-vijñāna*. English usually renders it storehouse consciousness, which is accurate as far as it goes but makes it sound like a warehouse: static, plain, a place where goods sit and wait. The Sanskrit is more alive. *Ālaya* means a dwelling, an abode; it is the word in Himālaya, the abode of snow, and Tibetan translators rendered it the ground of all. And Vasubandhu insisted that it is never still: it flows on, he says, like a river in spate. This book will call it simply the *ālaya*. Yogācāra describes it as a stream that receives impressions, *vāsanā*, literally perfumings, the residual scent a substance leaves in the cloth it has lain against. These perfumings settle as seeds, *bīja*. Seeds ripen, *vipāka*, and their ripening constitutes the next moment of the perceived world, both the body

and the "receptacle world" around it.

Neville's vocabulary is plainer, but the joints are in the same places. An assumption is a perfuming. Persistence is the settling of the seed. "An assumption, though false, if persisted in will harden into fact" is a statement about ripening. And his image of the world as a mirror that reports your inner state back to you, with a delay, turns out to be philosophically precise in a way that is easy to miss.

Consider the delay. If the world responded instantaneously to inner activity, no one would believe in matter. The lag between seed and fruit is the entire source of the illusion of an independent universe. A thing that answers at once is felt as an extension of oneself; a thing that answers in eight months is felt as a stranger with its own reasons. Latency manufactures otherness. What we call the objectivity of the physical world may be nothing more exotic than the ripening period of consciousness, experienced from inside the interval.

This is worth sitting with, because it means the sense of being acted upon by an external order is not an error to be scolded away. It is what causality feels like from within the stream. The practitioner is not asked to disbelieve the mirror. Only to stop mistaking the reflection for a second person in the room.

IX

The eight consciousnesses, read as a manifestation psychology

Yogācāra does not treat "mind" as one thing. It gives eight consciousnesses, and the reason this matters here is that they are not eight topics but eight different points of possible intervention, only one of which is any use.

The first five are the sense consciousnesses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching. Each arises in dependence on its faculty and its object, and each is bare. It does not compare, remember, judge or name. It presents and vanishes. Nothing is decided at this level; nothing can be argued with here.

This already settles something Neville is routinely misread on. When he says to deny the evidence of the senses, he is not instructing anyone to hallucinate or to pretend a bill is not a bill. He is saying that sense data is *output*. It is the terminal display of a process that concluded some time ago. Arguing with it is arguing with a printout. You do not dispute the reading; you change what is being read.

The sixth, *mano-vijñāna*, is the mental consciousness. It takes the sense streams as its objects and adds everything the senses lack: concept, language, memory, inference, comparison, planning, doubt, daydream. It is the only consciousness that ranges over abstractions as well as sense objects, and it runs more or less continuously, falling silent only in dreamless sleep, in fainting, and in certain meditative absorptions.

The sixth is where imagination happens in the ordinary sense of the word. It is also where objection happens. This is the practical problem every method of affirmation runs into, stated in Yogācāra terms: the faculty you are using to affirm is the same faculty that is refusing. You say "I am wealthy" and something answers, drily, "no." Two hands of one faculty pushing against each other, and the impression never lands.

The seventh, *kliṣṭa-manas*, the afflicted mind, is the strangest and most important of the eight. Its object is not the world at all. Its object is the *ālaya* beneath it, whose continuity it observes and misreads as a self. It is subliminal and it does not stop. It is not an occasional bout of egotism that flares up when you are slighted; it is a permanent background function, and classical Yogācāra says four afflictions accompany it constantly: the view of self, delusion about self, conceit of self, and love of self.

This is why experience does not merely occur but occurs *to someone*. The seventh is the reason there is a proprietor in the picture. It colours everything the sixth does, so that "a state is being lived" quietly becomes "I am getting what I want."

The eighth is the *ālaya* itself, the dwelling of every impression, and it does three things. It receives impressions. It carries them, providing the continuity we experience as memory and as being one person over time. And it projects, manifesting as the body with its senses, as the world that body finds itself in,

and as the seeds themselves.

Two features of it matter enormously. First, it is subliminal: you have no direct access, which is why deliberate effort at the level of the sixth so often fails to reach it. Second, and this is the crucial one, it is karmically neutral. It does not evaluate. It does not check whether a deposited impression is deserved, realistic, wise or good for you. It takes what it is given and ripens it. Neville said the same thing in the plainest possible English: the subconscious is impersonal, it does not judge, it accepts what you feel to be true. That is not a motivational slogan. It is an accurate description of the eighth consciousness, and it is as true of the impressions you would rather not have deposited as of the ones you chose. Vasubandhu adds a detail that will matter later: the *ālaya* is never without feeling, and its feeling is *upekṣā*, neither pleasant nor painful, the same word the meditation traditions use for equanimity.

The circuit. The seven active consciousnesses, the *pravṛtti-vijñāna*, arise out of the seeds in the *ālaya*; and in arising, they perfume fresh seeds back into it. The classical images are a flame and the wick it consumes, or two bundles of reeds propped against each other, each holding the other up. Seed and activity condition one another simultaneously, so there is no first term in the series and no point at which the system touches something outside itself.

This is the structural reason circumstances are stubborn. A situation is not merely a result; it is a result that is currently generating the impressions that will produce its own successor. The loop is self-feeding. Which is also, read the other way, the reason intervention is possible at all: nothing in the loop is anchored to anything external, so the whole of it turns on what is being deposited now.

So where can a practitioner actually act? Not at the first five, which are display. Not usefully at the sixth alone, where affirmation and doubt cancel. Not at the seventh, which is not a tool but the thing that has to go, and which will quietly appropriate any method you bring. That leaves the eighth, which cannot be addressed directly while the sixth is awake and auditing.

Which is precisely why the drowsy threshold turns out to be worth more than an hour of effortful visualisation. This is the borderland every sleeper

crosses each night and rarely notices: the minutes between waking and sleep, which sleep researchers call the hypnagogic state, when attention is still present but the judging, sorting mind has begun to let go, and images start to arrive on their own.

One caution before going on. The *ālaya* is not the Freudian unconscious, and it is not the universal mind of popular New Thought. Each stream has its own, and Yogācāra introduced the eighth not as a mystical posit but to solve a technical problem the earlier Buddhist schools had also felt: what carries karmic continuity across moments, and across states where mental activity ceases altogether. Other schools answered with other devices. The *ālaya* is a piece of engineering before it is anything else.

Advaita has its own map, and it is worth laying beside this one, not because the two are the same but because they rhyme in instructive places. It speaks of an inner instrument, the *antaḥkaraṇa*, with four functions: *manas*, the mind that entertains and doubts; *buddhi*, the intellect that decides; *citta*, the store of memory and impressions; and *ahaṃkāra*, the I-maker, the function that says "I" and attaches the word to whatever is nearest. The impressions stored in *citta* are called *saṃskāras* and *vāsanās*, the second the very word Yogācāra uses for perfuming. The first is shared as well. In Pali it is *saṅkhāra*, and it runs right through the Buddha's teaching: the fourth of the five aggregates that make up a person, the second link in the chain of dependent arising, and, in the Vipassana halls of S. N. Goenka's lineage, the everyday word for the stored reactions that equanimity allows to surface and pass away. The I-maker does the work of the seventh consciousness. The difference is in what lies beneath. For Yogācāra, beneath the *ālaya* there is only more stream, empty of own-being. For Advaita, all four functions are lit by an awareness that is none of them, the witness, *sākṣin*, which is not a part of the instrument but what the instrument is known by. The two maps agree about the machinery and part company over the light.

The door of sleep

Where the correspondence becomes almost embarrassingly exact is in technique.

The problem every contemplative tradition runs into is that the sixth consciousness is a gatekeeper. Whatever you affirm deliberately, it audits. The impression fails to perfume, because it is met and neutralised at the level of judgement.

Neville's answer was the state akin to sleep. Enter the drowsy threshold, where the discursive mind loosens its grip but attention has not yet gone out, and *there* occupy the scene. "Sleep is the door," he said, and "the feeling is the secret," feeling rather than thought because feeling is what survives the drowsy threshold when propositions do not.

Read through Yogācāra, this is a technology for bypassing the sixth consciousness and perfuming the eighth directly. It is not a metaphor for that. It is that, found by practice and described in plain English by a man who had no need of the Sanskrit. His nightly practice of revision, replaying the day as it should have gone before sleep, is a deliberate re-perfuming of the stream at the hour when the auditor is off duty.

The same door can be walked through in the other direction, and Buddhist practice does exactly that. Some intensive Vipassana courses, including the twenty-one-day foundation courses taught in northern Thailand in the lineage of the Thai master Ajahn Tong Sirimangalo, end with a determination of several days and nights without sleep. It is easy to take this for an endurance test. Read through the eight consciousnesses it is something more exact. It takes the practitioner to the drowsy threshold and holds them there, fully awake. The sixth consciousness tires and loosens its grip, and what is stored beneath surfaces with little filtering. But nothing is planted. The instruction is to observe and not react. Neville goes through the door to deposit seeds. The meditator stands in it and watches old seeds ripen without depositing new ones. The practice has old roots. The Buddha counted sloth and torpor, the

heavy dullness that settles on a sitting mind, among the five hindrances that cloud meditation, and the early tradition knew monks who took up the ascetic practice of *nesajjika*, never lying down to sleep at all, so as to meet that dullness awake. The sleepless determination is the same instinct in a modern form.

Advaita stands at the same door and asks a third question. The Māṇḍūkya Upanishad, the shortest of them all, maps the whole of experience in four: waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep, and a fourth, *turīya*, which is not another state but what is present in all three and altered by none. Gauḍapāda built the non-dual reading on it, and Ramana would point his visitors to the moment between sleep and waking, before the world and the one who meets it have assembled, and ask who is there. Where the one plants and the other watches, the Advaitin looks at the threshold itself, to find out who has been present on both sides of it all along.

The Tibetan traditions add a fourth thing that happens here, one the book will come back to at its end. They teach that at the moment of falling asleep, as more fully at the moment of death, the coarser layers of mind dissolve and the mind's own nature shows itself for an instant: what they call the clear light, *ösel*, luminosity. It dawns every night, and almost no one is awake to see it. The practice of sleep yoga is the attempt to be present when it does. Neville goes through the door to plant. The meditator stands in it to watch. The Advaitin turns to see who is standing there. And the yogin of the clear light waits for what shines in the doorway when no one is planting, watching or asking.

It is one door, and what one does in it is most of the difference between the projects this book compares.

Where Part Two arrives

That is the machinery, and on the machinery the Buddhist account and the modern manifestation teachers agree to a surprising degree, with Advaita assenting to most of it. The world is manifestation. Impressions ripen into it. The ripening lags, and the lag makes the world look independent. There is a door at the edge of sleep where the process can be reached.

What they do not agree about is what the machinery is for, who is standing at the controls, and whether anything lies beneath it. That is a question of right view, and it is where the comparison stops being descriptive and starts to matter.

Part Three

Right View

Two meanings of one word

Say *manifestation* to a reader of New Thought and to a reader of Vasubandhu and they will hear two different things.

For Yogācāra, manifestation is descriptive. It names how anything whatsoever comes to appear: the pleasant and the painful, the chosen and the unchosen, the world and the self who seems to stand in it. Nothing is exempt and nothing is being recommended. It is an account of what is already happening.

For New Thought, manifestation is productive. It names a technique for bringing about particular appearances: the relationship, the recovery, the house, the life one wants. It is a practice with a goal, and the goal is a better arrangement of experience.

One word, then, for an account of how everything appears and for a project of making certain things appear. The difference is not only one of scope. It is a difference in what each is ultimately for.

The manifestation project wants a beautiful life, and there is nothing contemptible in that. The Buddhist project begins somewhere else, with the observation that even a beautiful life is shot through with *dukkha*, unsatisfactoriness, because everything in it is impermanent and the one enjoying it keeps reaching for more. Its aim is not a better arrangement of experience but the end of the craving that makes every arrangement insufficient. New Thought works on the contents of experience. Buddhism works on the relationship to experience. A practice that perfects the first can leave the second untouched, or make it worse.

That is not a reason to dismiss the productive sense. It is a reason to keep asking, of any practice of manifestation, which of the two meanings it serves.

Śaṅkara drew the same line in his own terms. Whatever action produces, obtains, alters or purifies belongs to the world of results, and what is produced can be lost. What one is cannot be produced, and so cannot be lost. The productive sense of manifestation works entirely within the first. Each of the

three teachers pointed at the second.

XIII

The knot at the centre

The first pitfall follows directly, and it is where Yogācāra and the teachers of manifestation stop agreeing.

Return to the seventh consciousness. It is the knot, and every Yogācāra path is in the end a loosening of it, culminating in what Yogācāra calls *āśraya-parāvṛtti*, often translated the revolution at the base. *Āśraya* is the basis, the *ālaya* itself, on which everything else rests; *parāvṛtti* is a turning over, the way soil is turned, or a coat turned inside out. At awakening the basis is not restocked with better seeds. It turns over. The *ālaya* stops serving as the dwelling of afflicted impressions and shows its other face, which the tradition calls mirror-like wisdom: it reflects whatever arises and keeps none of it. In the same turning the seventh consciousness, the knot, becomes the wisdom of equality, which sees self and others alike. Note what that means: the goal is not a better *ālaya*. It is the collapse of the faculty that was treating the *ālaya* as its property. The Upanishads call it the knot of the heart, and Advaita names the faculty *ahaṁkāra*, the I-maker; Part Eight returns to it by that road.

Now: who is doing the manifesting?

If the answer is the seventh consciousness, then any project of deliberate imagination, assumption included, becomes the most effective self-fortification ever devised. You would be using a true ontology to thicken the exact structure the ontology exists to dissolve. You would learn that the world is your own mind, and use the knowledge to get a car. The technique works. That is what makes it dangerous. A false teaching usually fails, and its failure sets you free of it: the promised car never comes, and sooner or later you walk away. A true teaching misapplied is more dangerous because it works. The car comes, and with it the conviction that the self who wanted it is the author of the world, so that every success tightens the very knot the

teaching was given to loosen.

And yet Neville's central term cuts the other way. *I AM* is not, in his usage, the personal self. It is the name from the burning bush. In Exodus, Moses, sent back to Egypt, asks the voice in the fire what he should say when the people ask its name. The answer is *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, I AM THAT I AM: tell them that I AM has sent you. The text then gives the name of Israel's God, the four letters YHWH, which most scholars connect with the same verb, to be. Devout Jews do not pronounce it, and the vowels that make it Yahweh are scholarship's best guess.

An old line of interpreters takes the name as being itself, prior to any predicate: the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures renders it *I am the one who is*. But the Hebrew verb leans forward as easily as it rests, and can be read *I will be what I will be*. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher this book will meet again, heard in it a promise of presence: I will be there, as I will be there. The same words can name being itself or a presence that keeps its word. The Advaitin will hear the first and the psalmist the second, and this book will need both.

Neville took it in the first sense. His instruction was never "I, Neville, want"; it was to enter the bare sense of being and then attach the state to it. That is very close to the classical move of resting in the unqualified and letting the qualified arise within it.

So the same three words sit on both sides of the knot. *I am* as the afflicted mind asserting itself, and *I AM* as the ground announcing itself. Nothing in the technique distinguishes them. Only the practitioner's honesty does.

XIV

Everyone else in the dream

The second pitfall is quieter than the first and in some ways worse.

Neville taught that other people are yourself pushed out: that the unkind colleague and the loving friend alike are your own states, played back to you in human form. He meant it chiefly as a discipline of attention, and as such it

has real use, since it stops one blaming others for one's own reactions. Taken as metaphysics it is solipsism, and solipsism has consequences. If other people are my projections, their suffering is scenery. From there to "they attracted it" is a very short step. Neville, who urged his hearers to imagine the good of others as readily as their own, did not take it. Many who learned only his Law have.

Yogācāra saw the objection coming. If the world is only manifestation, why does it not obey me, and why do you see the same street? Vasubandhu's answer is collective seeds: beings whose karmic streams are congruent generate a congruent world, as people sharing a dream see the same dream-city. He goes further and insists that other mind-streams are real and act on one another, which is why one person can genuinely harm another. The field is a commons, not a private studio.

Advaita met the same danger inside its own walls. A late strand of the tradition taught *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda*, the view that the world is created in the act of seeing it, and some of its proponents drew the conclusion that there is only one individual soul, whose dream everyone else is. Ramana is reported to have commended the first of these views to earnest seekers as a discipline. But Śaṅkara himself had set his face against anything like the second. Arguing against the Buddhist idealists of his day, he insisted that at the level where we live the waking world is not like a dream: objects are perceived as outside the one who perceives them, and it is no use denying what is perceived. His Brahman is one, but the world superimposed on it is common, and in it another person's suffering is as real as one's own. The great teacher of *māyā* turns out to be one of the strongest witnesses against solipsism.

All of this puts a real limit on manifestation that popular New Thought tends to erase. Your assumption enters a field already densely perfumed by every other stream in it. It is not false that the world is manifestation. It is false that it is *only yours*. And the Mahāyāna aspiration to awaken for the sake of all beings would be incoherent if all beings were features of one's own dream. Compassion needs someone to be compassionate towards.

Right view and wrong view

Nāgārjuna has a verse that could stand over this whole part. Emptiness misunderstood, he says, destroys a person of weak understanding, just as a snake seized by the wrong end does, or a spell wrongly cast. A powerful teaching in the hands of the wrong view does not fail harmlessly. It turns.

Buddhism has a criterion for telling the difference, and it is worth using explicitly. *Sammā-diṭṭhi*, right view, is the first factor of the eightfold path. It is not a test of doctrinal loyalty. A view is right if it leads towards the end of suffering and wrong if it leads away from it, and the Buddha was clear that even right view is a raft, to be used for crossing and then set down.

By that measure a great deal of what the inward traditions teach is right, including much of what the modern teachers of manifestation drew from them. That mind precedes and shapes experience is the opening verse of the Dhammapada. That intention is the operative factor in action is the Buddha's own definition of kamma. That the world is dreamlike is standard Mahāyāna, and that it is not what it appears to be is the whole of Śāṅkara's teaching on *māyā*. That impressions deposit and ripen is Yogācāra's mechanism, described in Part Two. A Buddhist has no quarrel with any of this.

The trouble lies in what can be added to it, and the additions belong to no one tradition.

An eternal Self. The claim that one's true identity is an unchanging Self, an I AM or a Divine Mind, is in Buddhist terms the eternalist view: the view of a self that the teaching of not-self exists to undo. Advaita will insist that its Self is not what the Buddha refused, since it is not a person, a possession or an object, and Part Eight takes that claim seriously. The *I AM* can be read as subtly as the book read it at the knot. But in careless hands the Self of the Upanishads, the I AM of New Thought and the immortal soul of popular Christianity can each become the ego with a longer lease.

One cause for everything. The claim that everything one experiences has a single author, whether oneself or God, is not merely an overstatement. The

Buddha named it as wrong view. Among three sectarian tenets he rejected as leading to inaction (AN 3.61) are the claims that everything experienced is caused by past deeds and that everything is caused by a supreme creator. Popular religion of every kind manages to hold one or both. The Buddhist who tells the sick that it is their karma, the Christian who tells the bereaved that God took their child for a reason, and the manifestation teacher who says the victim attracted it are making one move in three vocabularies. In the Sīvaka Sutta (SN 36.21) the Buddha refutes the first directly, listing causes of what we feel that are not kamma at all: disorders of bile, phlegm and wind, the change of seasons, carelessness, assault from outside.

The unsatisfactory taken as satisfying. Buddhism names four inversions of perception, and one of them is taking what cannot finally satisfy to be satisfying. A practice aimed at securing desired conditions is built on that inversion, and the conditions it secures are impermanent anyway.

Solipsism, as above, which quietly dissolves the ground of compassion.

Four more belong on the map. They afflict every inward path, and they will return throughout this book in Buddhist, Christian and Vedāntic dress.

Nihilism. The opposite extreme to the eternal Self, and less often noticed. If the world is mind-made, it can seem to follow that nothing in it matters: that illness, grief or injustice are only wrong assumptions, to be imagined away rather than met. The truth that appearance is constructed is used to conclude that what happens in it has no weight. The Buddha's middle way runs between this and eternalism. Things are empty, and they still arise, and what arises still hurts.

Spiritual materialism. The phrase is that of Chögyam Trungpa, the Tibetan teacher who did as much as anyone to bring the Vajrayāna to the West, and it gave its name to his book of 1973, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. He described three "lords" by which the ego maintains itself, and the subtlest is the Lord of Mind: the use of spiritual and psychological disciplines themselves to secure and refine the sense of self. Any method in this book, the most traditional included, can serve the Lord of Mind, because success in it feels exactly like spiritual progress.

Attachment to experience. Every serious practice produces states: vivid imagery, bliss, clarity, and in manifestation practice the thrill of apparent results. The contemplative traditions agree that these are signs along the way, not the fruit of it, and that clinging to them binds as surely as clinging to anything else. A method that measures itself by its experiences will find it very hard to walk past them.

Spiritual bypassing. The psychologist John Welwood, himself a Buddhist practitioner, coined the phrase in the 1980s for the use of spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep unresolved emotional wounds and unmet developmental needs. It is the imagined state used to avoid the actual one. Neville's revision, the practice of reimagining a painful event as one would have wished it, can be a real healing of memory. It can also be a way of never feeling what happened. Positive assumption can become a refusal to feel fear, grief or anger at all, since feeling them is taken as planting the wrong seed. In every such case the practice succeeds at the level of experience, which is precisely what makes the avoidance so hard to see.

There is an old story that fits the whole cluster. In the Brahmajāla Sutta a being is reborn first into an empty world. Others appear after him, as it happens in accordance with his longing for company, and he concludes: I am the Great Brahmā, the Maker, the Creator, father of all that are and shall be. The later arrivals believe him. His mistake is to take temporal priority for authorship, and his own wish for the cause of what followed it. In the Brahmanimantanika Sutta the Buddha meets another such god, Baka, convinced of his own permanence, and shows him the edges of his world. Neither is a villain. Both are sincere, exalted, and wrong about what they are. Any inward teaching at its most inflated is the Brahmā's error with a method attached, and manifestation teaching merely makes the method explicit.

The verse after the verse

Buddhist right view is one test. Each tradition supplies another from inside, because each has a teacher whose words can be read back against the followers who claim them.

Take the verse beloved of every teacher of believing prayer. "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" is as close to a charter for the Law as scripture offers. But Mark does not stop there. The next sentence reads: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone." The verse that teaches the power of belief is bound, in the same breath, to the release of grievance. Belief is not left free to serve whatever the believer wants.

Or take "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you", often read as a technique: seek the kingdom in order to get the things. It sits at the end of the passage about the lilies and the birds, and its whole point is the order of the seeking. Treat the kingdom as a means and it is no longer first.

The Gospel's own version of the knot at the centre is the saying Part One set beside the lilies: whoever would save his life will lose it. The self that is enlarged by getting what it wants is exactly the life that is lost by being saved. And the story turns, finally, on a prayer in a garden that does not get what it asks for, and is answered by being surrendered.

The Bhagavad Gītā draws the same line from the side of action, and Śaṅkara wrote his commentary on it with the line in view. Kṛṣṇa, God in human form, serving as charioteer to the warrior Arjuna on the eve of battle, tells him that his concern is with the act alone and never with its fruits: act, but do not let the fruit be the motive. Śaṅkara read the Gītā's whole teaching on action as a discipline of purification, readying the mind for knowledge, and what purifies it is precisely the dropping of the claim on results. The act done for its fruit binds. The same act, offered, loosens.

None of this was lost on the mystics of New Thought. Goldsmith taught that God is not a power to be used, and Neville set the Promise above the Law. But it is often lost on those who learned only the Law. By the standard of the teachers it claims, the manifestation project stops exactly where the Gospel, and the Gītā, begin.

XVII

How much is in our hands

If everything is manifestation, how much of it do we actually author? Buddhism's answer is more exact, and more modest, than either the manifestation teacher or the fatalist would like.

What is in our hands is intention, which, as Part One noted, is how the Buddha defines kamma. Each moment of intending is a deposit, and that deposit is genuinely ours to make.

What is not in our hands is the ripening. Seeds already planted will fruit whatever we now think, and the Buddha lists the precise working-out of kamma's results among the four things that cannot be conjectured (AN 4.77), matters that drive anyone who tries to calculate them to distraction. Nor is everything that happens the fruit of kamma, as the Sīvaka Sutta insists; the later commentarial tradition formalised this as several orders of causation running at once, of which kamma is only one. Add the collective seeds of everyone else in the field, and the individual's share of authorship shrinks to something real but small.

That small share is where practice happens. Old seeds ripen; what one does with the ripening is the new seed. Meet it with craving or aversion and the same pattern is perfumed back in. Meet it without reacting and the seed ripens out without being replanted. This is why the meditator standing awake at the door of sleep matters more to this book than the manifestation technique does. The only lever Buddhism finally grants is the response to what is already arriving, and that lever turns out to be enough to end the whole cycle.

The tradition has a word for that response: *upekkhā*, equanimity. It is not indifference, which is a reaction of its own, a shrug. It is a non-interference with the natural flow of experience: an all-embracing, spacious impartiality in which the pleasant is not clutched and the unpleasant not pushed away. And it happens where the Buddha said the world is met, in feeling. An old seed ripens as a sensation, a mood, a sudden tightness in the chest. Awareness sees it. Equanimity declines to answer it. Neither fed nor fought, it finishes, and nothing new is laid down in its place.

So, are we literally creating our own reality? Yogācāra's answer undoes the question. Reality as it appears is indeed constructed by consciousness. But experience manifests as a pair, a grasper and a grasped, a self here and a world there, and both halves are constructions. The "we" who supposedly does the creating is one of the things created. The creator is created. This is also why the modern debate over whether Yogācāra is metaphysical idealism or a phenomenological account of experience matters less than it seems. On either reading, the one thing it will not allow is a self standing outside the process, pulling the levers.

XVIII

The Law and the Promise

Everything so far suggests that the Buddhist path and the teachers of manifestation finally part ways over their goals: the one dissolves the projection, the other masters it. That is the usual summary, and I no longer think it is quite right, because Neville himself did not think it.

He divided his own teaching into the Law and the Promise. The Law is the mechanism of assumption, and he was explicit that it is a nursery, a training ground where one learns by direct evidence that imagination creates reality. The Promise is something else entirely: the birth from above, the end of the man who was doing the manifesting. He said plainly that the Law would pass away and the Promise would not, and grew visibly impatient in his later years with audiences who only wanted the Law.

He took the two words from Paul, who in the letter to the Galatians sets the promise made to Abraham before the law given at Sinai, and calls the law a *paidagōgos* until Christ came: the household slave who walked a child to school. Very nearly a nursery.

Lay this against the three natures, the *trisvabhāva*, and it locks into place.

The **constructed nature**, *parikalpita*, is the world taken as independently existing objects out there. This is the level at which an unexamined life is lived, and at which the Law is first believed.

The **dependent nature**, *paratantra*, is the causal flow of consciousness itself, seed to fruit to seed. This is the Law seen accurately. The practitioner of assumption is working here, and working correctly.

The **perfected nature**, *pariniṣpanna*, is simply the absence of the constructed within the dependent. Not another world. The same flow, with the superimposition of independent objecthood removed. This is the Promise.

Advaita has its own version of the same ladder. Later Advaitins, building on Śaṅkara, distinguished three orders of reality: the merely apparent, like the snake seen in the rope or the contents of a dream; the empirical, the shared world in which pots are made and debts are paid; and the absolute, Brahman alone. The rhyme with the three natures is not exact, and should not be forced. But the shape is the same: a world that seems to stand by itself, the same world seen as dependent, and what remains when the seeming is removed.

So Neville's teaching and the Buddhist path do not simply diverge. They contain the same two stages, in the same order, and both say the second supersedes the first. Yogācāra is candid that the first stage is provisional. Neville said so too, and grew impatient when his hearers declined to hear it.

XIX

Where Part Three arrives

To learn to deposit deliberately is the Law, the dependent nature seen at last for what it is, and it is the first genuine step out of naive realism. To recognise that there was never anyone standing apart from the field to

receive its fruits is the Promise, the perfected nature, which is not a further achievement but the removal of a superimposition that was never true. The Law makes you the dreamer. The Promise ends the dreaming. The second cannot be reached by refusing the first, and the first is wasted on anyone who stops there.

The mirror is real enough. The seed is real enough. The one who was going to be enriched by both is the only thing in the account that was never there.

One strain remains, and it is the largest. The Father to whom Jesus prayed is personal, addressed and loved. The Brahman of the Upanishads is fullness: being, awareness and bliss. The *ālaya* is emphatically neither: a momentary, conditioned stream, empty of own-being, and Yogācāra insists on this precisely so that it cannot become a soul, or a God, by another name. The obvious resolution is to read the other two apophatically: the Father as a way of speaking about the ground's generosity, Brahman as a name for emptiness said with too much warmth, and any Divine Imagination as imagining rather than an imaginer. Blake, whom Neville quoted constantly, had already said that God only acts and is, in existing beings or men.

But something has been left standing that should not have been, and the rest of this book is the cost of having left it.

Part Four

The Question of God

A concession made too quickly

At the close of Part Three I disposed of the largest question in the book in a single paragraph. The Father is personal and addressed; Brahman is full; the *ālaya* is emphatically not a self; read the first two apophatically and the difficulty dissolves.

That was too fast, and it was too fast in a particular direction. It assumed without argument that the Buddhist side was the rigorous one and the Christian and Vedāntic sides the ones requiring translation into it. That assumption is widely held, it is flattering to a certain kind of modern contemplative, and it is not obviously true.

So: the case for God, stated at its strongest, and then the question of whether God and emptiness can be consolidated at all.

The case, at its strongest

Five strands, none of them a proof. They are the places where a purely Buddhist account of the ground looks thinnest.

The field is given. Nobody manufactured awareness. The *ālaya* was not built by anyone who uses it. Part Two describes with great precision how the given unfolds, and says nothing whatever about its being given. Buddhism's reply is beginninglessness: there is no first term, the series has always been running, and the question is malformed. That is a serious answer. It is also a refusal rather than an explanation, and the theist's claim is that the refusal is doing work it has not earned.

The ground answers to address. The strongest of the five and the least discussed. Approach the ground as an *it*, something to be examined, and you find what Part Two described: an impersonal, uncomplaining receiver. Approach it as *Thou* and something else reports back. Anyone who has prayed

even one sentence in the vocative knows the report from inside: the same silence, once addressed, is no longer quite the same silence. Every theistic contemplative literature insists this is not a change of mood but a change in what is disclosed. Buber's claim is that I-It and I-Thou are not two attitudes towards one reality but two relations that constitute their object differently, and that the second cannot be entered by investigation. If that is right, then a method of analysis would be structurally incapable of finding what the theist finds, not because it is absent but because analysis is an I-It operation. The neutrality of the *ālaya* might be a finding about the *ālaya*. It might also be a finding about analysis.

The ground is reported as loving. Yogācāra calls the *ālaya* *avyākṛta*, karmically indeterminate, morally neutral. It receives without preference. But the first-person report of the theistic contemplatives is not of neutrality. It is of being met, held, and wanted. Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century English anchoress, does not present "all shall be well" as an inference she drew; she presents it as something shown to her. The Upanishads, which find no Thou at the summit at all, report it as *ānanda*, bliss. Either a very large body of careful report is mistaken about the single most important feature of what it encountered, or neutrality is an artefact of how one went looking.

The world is intelligible. Seeds ripen into a world rather than into noise: lawful, shareable, coherent enough to be studied, and in places beautiful. Dependent arising describes the mechanism of that coherence; whether it accounts for there being an order at all is less clear. This is the weakest of the five, and weak for a good reason: order is simply what dependent arising looks like from inside, and we have no disordered universe to compare it with.

The ethical residue. If the ground is neutral, love is something that happens in beings and is not a feature of reality. If the ground is love, then compassion is not merely skilful but *accurate*, a correct perception rather than a good policy. Buddhism's answer is elegant: compassion, *karuṇā*, follows necessarily from wisdom, *prajñā*, because once separateness is seen through there is nothing left to withhold care from. The theist's response is that this is elegant in the way a derivation is elegant, and that the mystics did not report a derivation.

Which God is being argued for

Everything turns on what the word is taken to mean, and the usual comparison is rigged by choosing the crudest sense available.

If God means a very large person with preferences, located somewhere, who made things and occasionally intervenes, then the Buddhist critique lands and lands hard. That is Baka again, the god convinced of his own permanence, and the tradition has already indicted him in its own terms.

But this is not what the classical theistic mystical tradition means, and it says so with some force. Dionysius holds that God is not a being among beings but beyond being altogether, that every affirmation must be denied, and then the denial itself denied. Aquinas holds that God is in no genus, is not an instance of anything, is not *a* being but the subsistent act of being, and that all our language for God is analogical rather than literal. Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth-century bishop, holds that the infinite is by definition never comprehended, so the soul's ascent has no terminus and moves into darkness rather than light. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous fourteenth-century English guide to contemplative prayer, holds that God may be loved but not thought. Eckhart goes furthest: the Godhead beyond God, without why, and the ground of the soul and the ground of God are one ground, which is why he can pray God to rid him of God.

Notice what that tradition denies. That God is a thing. That God is an object of knowledge. That God has properties in the way creatures have properties. That the distinction between God and the ground of the soul is finally intelligible. These are not concessions extracted by modern pressure. They are the tradition's own mature position, arrived at from inside.

Advaita drew the same distinction centuries before Eckhart. Śaṅkara speaks of Brahman without qualities, *nirguṇa*, of which nothing can finally be said but not this, not this; and of Brahman with qualities, *saṅguṇa*, the Lord, *Īśvara*, who creates, sustains and receives worship. The Lord is real at the level of the world, and the devotion offered to him is not wasted, but at the

level of the ultimate there is only the one without qualities. Eckhart's God and Godhead are the nearest Christian parallel, and the resemblance is close enough that readers of both have been drawing it for a century.

So the real comparison is not Buddhist rigour against Christian naivety. It is two traditions that both insist, at their most developed, that the ground cannot be made into an object. That is a far more interesting contest, and a much harder one.

XXIII

Where they cannot be joined

Three obstructions. I want to state them without softening, because the bad syntheses are all built by blurring exactly these.

Aseity. The God of classical theism exists *a se*: necessarily, uncaused, dependent on nothing. That is, with precision, the definition of *svabhāva*, own-being, the very thing emptiness denies of everything without exception. Nāgārjuna carves out no exemption for the ultimate. The same objection lands on Advaita's Brahman, the one thing Advaita will not call empty, and Śāṅkara's Buddhist critics made it with vigour. This is not a difference of emphasis or idiom. It is a contradiction, and any consolidation must either give up divine aseity or limit the scope of emptiness. Most attempts quietly do the second and do not admit it.

Emptiness is empty. The commonest bad synthesis treats *śūnyatā* as a luminous absolute and God as another name for it. Nāgārjuna forecloses this explicitly. Emptiness is not an ultimate reality; it is the absence of intrinsic existence, and that absence is itself empty. Those who take emptiness as a view he calls incurable. So emptiness is not a ground one arrives at. It is the discovery that the search for a ground was malformed from the beginning. God, however apophatically construed, remains something one is finally united with, deified by, broken through into. Even Eckhart's breakthrough is a breakthrough *into*. Emptiness has no into.

Relation. The doctrine of the Trinity is the claim that ultimate reality is constitutionally relational, that personhood and relation go all the way down rather than appearing at some derived level. It is a claim about God, not about us: classical theology numbers no human being among the three persons, and no one is a part of the Son. What it offers the believer instead is adoption, a place inside the Son's own relation to the Father, given by grace rather than possessed by nature, which Part Seven will meet in Paul. The Buddhist unconditioned is not relational in that sense. Compassion is a consequence of wisdom, not a property of the unconditioned. A Christian will say that the difference between a consequence and a property is the entire difference between a philosophy and a God. Of all the Buddhist traditions, Dzogchen, which this book reaches at its end, comes nearest to counting compassion among what the unconditioned is, though not near enough to settle the matter.

XXIV

Two operations on one mistake

What can be said is neither that they are the same nor that they are rivals.

God and emptiness are not two descriptions of one object. They are two operations performed on one mistake.

The mistake is reification: taking the ground of experience to be a thing, and taking oneself to be a thing standing in relation to it. Emptiness dissolves the thing-ness from below. It withdraws own-being from every candidate in turn, including itself, until there is nothing left with the right shape to be grasped. Apophatic theology dissolves it from above. It raises the ground beyond every predicate, denying each affirmation and then denying the denial, until again there is nothing with the right shape to be grasped.

They approach ungraspability from opposite directions and arrive at the same practical result, which is that grasping stops. This is why the literatures sound so alike at the summit, and why quoting them side by side is so seductive.

But they leave different residues, and honesty means naming which. Emptiness leaves no residue at all. That is its glory and its coldness. God leaves relation. That is its warmth and its risk. The Buddhist says the residue of relation is the last hiding place of the self. The Christian says the absence of relation is a failure to recognise that being is gift.

That fork does not close by argument, and I do not think it should be forced to.

XXV

Mutual correction, which is better than identity

What can be said is what each is *for*, and there they turn out to be treatments for each other's characteristic disease.

Emptiness is a therapy for grasping at things. The disease it does not treat well is coldness: the quietism, the subtle pride of the one who has seen through everything, the reduction of other people to occasions for one's own practice, and the final irony of reifying emptiness itself into an insight one possesses.

God-language is a therapy for grasping at self-sufficiency. It restores gift, gratitude and address, and it makes it very hard to treat other beings as scenery. The disease it does not treat well is anthropomorphic drift: the slow return of Baka, and behind him the petitionary magic into which any teaching of believing prayer, New Thought included, slides when it loses its nerve. Worse, in a way, than crude idolatry is the refined version, where the self is not denied but enormously enlarged by its relationship with the Absolute. The seventh consciousness thrives on being beloved.

So the consolidation is not a merged object. It is a mutual correction, each tradition guarding the exit the other tends to leave open. That is less satisfying than an identity and considerably more useful.

What this does to the synthesis

Return to the systems this enquiry began with, because each of them fails in exactly the direction the other's medicine treats.

Any teaching that says God is imagination survives only in the apophatic reading: imagining rather than an imaginer, activity rather than entity, Blake's identity of God and the human imagination read as an identity of act and not a relationship between two parties. That is how Neville meant it at his best, in the Promise. Read personally, at the level of the Law, it becomes an eternal Self that gets what it wants, which is the eternalist extreme with a technique attached.

Yogācāra's *ālaya* survives only if it stays empty. The moment it becomes a luminous ground, a cosmic mind, a Brahman under a Buddhist name, it has failed its own tradition. That is not a hypothetical risk. It is precisely the charge Madhyamaka critics levelled at Yogācāra, and it is why Yogācāra insists that the *ālaya* is conditioned, momentary, a stream rather than a substance, and that it ceases, as a dwelling of seeds, when the basis turns over.

Advaita's Brahman faces the same test from the other side, and Part Eight will apply it. The Self survives only if no one can own it.

Each system's characteristic failure is a drift into the other's territory. Which is the best evidence available both that they are not the same thing and that they need each other.

The ground, stated

Consciousness is the sole ground, not as substance but as activity: an imagining without an imaginer standing behind it. Within that activity, impressions settle and ripen, and their ripening constitutes the appearing world. The interval between deposit and fruit is what makes that world

feel foreign; the sense of a self at the centre of the interval is what makes the fruit feel owed.

Of that ground two things must be said, and neither may be dropped. It is empty: it has no own-being, it is not a thing, and it is not a self, so nothing about it can be possessed and no one can stand in credit with it. And it is given: it was not made by anyone who uses it, it answers when it is addressed, and those who have addressed it report not neutrality but welcome.

To hold only the first is to arrive at a true and slightly lifeless universe. To hold only the second is to build, eventually, a very large self with a very good relationship. To hold both is uncomfortable, and the discomfort is probably the most accurate thing available to us.

The mirror is real enough. The seed is real enough. The ground is not a thing, and it is not nothing, and it was never owed.

XXVIII

An argument inside Buddhism

The argument this part has been having also happened inside Buddhism, and it was ferocious. The *shentong* position, "empty of other", was elaborated by Dolpopa, a fourteenth-century Tibetan master, and the Jonang school he shaped, and carried into parts of the Kagyu, one of Tibet's four great schools: the ultimate is empty of adventitious defilement but not empty of its own luminous nature, which is replete with qualities rather than blank. The *tathāgatagarbha* literature, the Indian scriptures of buddha-nature, says the same, that the ground is empty of what obscures it and full of what it is. The *rangtong* side, "empty of self", replied that this is a self by another name, smuggled back in under a Buddhist word, and that Nāgārjuna left no exemption for the ultimate. Whichever way one leans, the accusation this part has worried about has already been made, answered, and made again, by people with everything at stake.

One Buddhist tradition treats the question not as a dispute at all, but as the plain description of the ground, held from inside a single practice. It is Dzogchen, and the book will end with it. First, though, the question has to be taken where it is most practical: into imagination, where the Vajrayāna does openly and under strict view what the modern manifestation teachers do by instinct.

Part Five

The Imagined Deity

It would be convenient if the three lines met only in philosophy. They also meet in practice, and in a practice so striking that anyone who has worked with affirmation or visualisation and then sits down with a Tibetan *sādhana*, a practice text, will feel the ground shift slightly.

Vajrayāna Buddhism contains the most elaborate discipline of deliberate imagination any contemplative tradition has produced. The practitioner visualises a deity in exact detail, then visualises *being* that deity, holds the identity with conviction, recites the deity's mantra as their own speech, and treats the surrounding world as the deity's pure realm. Put that way, it is hard to see what distinguishes it from Neville's "assume the feeling of the wish fulfilled." If imagination is God, and the tantric practitioner imagines themselves as a buddha, then the tantric practitioner would seem to be practising the Law with better iconography.

That conclusion is wrong, but it is wrong in an instructive way, and the reasons it is wrong are the same reasons Part Three gave for why manifestation teaching goes astray. The difference is that tantra knew about the danger in advance and built the whole practice around it.

Part Two promised a practice built to keep the three senses of imagination apart: one that uses the imaginary deliberately, aims at the imaginal, and rests only in the ground. This is it. It is also where the lens through which this book reads everything else first comes into focus.

XXIX

What deity yoga actually is

A deity, or *yidam*, is not a god in the theistic sense and not a character in a fantasy. It is a form of enlightened mind: a buddha's wisdom and compassion appearing in a particular shape, colour, posture and entourage, each detail of which encodes a teaching. The thousand arms of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, are its thousand means. Vajrayoginī's red body is transformed desire. A wrathful deity's crown of skulls is the five poisons of ignorance, desire, anger, pride and envy, defeated and worn.

The contrast with India's other great tradition of sacred images is worth a moment. In a Hindu temple the consecrated image is, for the worshipper, the deity really present: a rite of installation invites the god's own life into the stone, and for a Vaiṣṇava or a Śaiva the one worshipped there is the supreme Lord himself. Śāṅkara, as Part Four described, honoured such worship as true at the level of the world and pointed beyond it to Brahman without qualities. The yidam is neither a Lord nor a sign pointing past itself. It is the practitioner's own awakened nature, met in a form the lineage hands down, and dissolved again at the end of every session.

The practice text, the *sādhana*, has a fixed architecture, and the architecture is the point. In outline:

Refuge and bodhicitta. Before anything is imagined, the practitioner takes refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha; the holy Dharma, as Tibetans call the teaching; and the Sangha, the community that carries it. Then the practitioner states why, in the resolve called bodhicitta: to awaken, for the benefit of all beings. The motive is fixed at the start, not left open.

Dissolution into emptiness. Then everything is dissolved. The practitioner, the room, the world, the very idea of a self who is about to visualise, all resolve into emptiness, often with a mantra that says so directly. *Oṃ svabhāva-śuddhāḥ sarva-dharmāḥ svabhāva-śuddho 'ham*: all things are pure by nature, I am pure by nature. Or: *oṃ śūnyatā-jñāna-vajra-svabhāvātmako 'ham*, I am of the nature of the indestructible wisdom of emptiness. Notice what "I" means in that sentence. It does not mean the person sitting on the cushion. It means the empty nature that person was a construction upon.

Arising. From that emptiness, not from the ordinary self, the deity arises: first a seed syllable, then a lotus and moon disc, then the full form. In the framework of the Nyingma, the oldest of Tibet's schools, this follows three *samādhis*: the samādhi of suchness (resting in emptiness), the samādhi of universal illumination (compassion arising spontaneously from that emptiness), and the causal samādhi (the seed syllable from which form unfolds). Emptiness first, compassion second, form third. The order is not decorative.

The three essentials. While the deity is held, three things are cultivated together. *Clear appearance*: the form vivid in every detail, yet transparent, like a rainbow, never solid like a statue. *Recollection of purity*: remembering what each detail means, so the image stays a teaching and does not become a picture. And *divine pride* (sometimes vajra pride): the stable conviction "I am this deity."

Dissolution again. At the close, the deity dissolves back into emptiness. Nothing imagined is kept.

Arising as illusion, and dedication. The practitioner re-emerges into ordinary activity, seeing forms as the deity's body, sounds as mantra, thoughts as wisdom, all "appearing yet empty, like a reflection." Whatever good was generated is given away, dedicated to all beings.

Tsongkhapa, the great reformer who founded the Gelug school, and whose treatment of this is the most rigorous in the Tibetan canon, held that deity yoga is precisely what distinguishes tantra from the sūtra path: not the imagery, but the fact that a single mind both realises emptiness and appears as the deity's form. Wisdom and method in one moment of consciousness. The deity is what emptiness-realisation looks like when it takes a shape.

One detail from the lower tantras makes the point almost too neatly. The kriyā tantra system lists six "deities" through which the practice proceeds, and the first of them is not a form at all. It is the deity of suchness: the emptiness of oneself and the deity alike. The first deity you meet is the absence of any deity to meet.

XXX

Two conventional truths, and one ultimate

A common first reading of deity yoga runs like this: conventionally, the deity is imagined and therefore unreal, but ultimately it is real. It is an understandable way in, and it gets something right. It is also exactly where the practice starts to mislead, because it quietly assumes that the ordinary self doing the imagining is the real thing against which the deity is measured.

The tradition says something more careful, and more interesting. Conventionally, the deity is imagined. But so are you. The person who sits down to practise is also a construction: a pattern of seeds ripening into a body-image, a name, a history and a felt sense of being someone. Yogācāra's word for this is *parikalpita*, the constructed or imagined nature. The ordinary self is not less imagined than the deity. It is imagined without knowing it is imagined, and that is the only difference that matters.

So deity yoga is not the replacement of something real with something invented. It is the replacement of one conventional appearance, impure and mistaken for solid, with another, pure and known to be empty. The Nyingma scholar Mipham made this formal. He distinguished two kinds of conventional valid cognition: that of limited vision, which sees an ordinary person in an ordinary world, and that of pure vision, which sees the same situation as the deity in its realm. Both are conventional. But the second, he argued, is the more accurate, because it corresponds to how things appear to one whose obscurations have cleared. The deity is not a nicer fiction laid over reality. It is a truer fiction than the one you were already living in.

And ultimately? Ultimately neither the deity nor the ordinary self is found. If the deity is "ultimately real", it is only in the sense that the qualities it displays, clarity, emptiness, compassion, are the actual nature of mind, the *tathāgatagarbha* that Part Four discussed. What is ultimate is not the figure. It is what the figure is made of.

That gives a precise version of the intuition that the deity is somehow more real than it looks. The deity is real in the sense that the ground is real, and imagined in the sense that everything conventional is imagined, including the imaginer. The sentence "God is imagination" can be read the same way, but only if "imagination" means the ground's power to appear. If it means the imagining the practitioner does, the sentence has made the conventional self into God, and that is the most exact definition of the problem this book has been circling since the knot at the centre.

The result taken as the path

Here the resemblance to the modern manifestation teachers becomes almost uncanny, and it deserves to be stated at full strength.

Tibetan tradition distinguishes the sūtra path as a *causal* vehicle and tantra as a *resultant* one. On the sūtra path you cultivate the causes of awakening, generosity, ethics, patience and the rest, across long stretches of time, and buddhahood is the eventual effect. In tantra you take the result as the path. You begin by assuming the qualities of buddhahood now, and the assumption itself becomes the method by which you arrive.

That is the Law's central instruction almost word for word. Live in the end, Neville taught: do not work towards the state; assume it, occupy it, feel it as present fact, and the means will follow. He arrived by a different route at the central idea of the resultant vehicle.

And the mechanism is the one Part Two described. Deity yoga works by *habituation*: planting new impressions in the *ālaya*, repeatedly and with feeling, until they ripen into perception. The seed of ordinary self-appearance has been deposited so often that it now arises by itself; deity yoga deposits the counter-seed, the pure appearance, until that too arises by itself. Tsongkhapa is explicit that stability comes through familiarisation. The Law's insistence on repetition until the imagined state feels natural is the same instruction.

So the machinery matches. What differs is where it is pointed, and how method and goal relate. It would be unfair to say that tantra's project is awakening and Neville's is getting what one wants; his own project, by his account, was the Promise. But in tantra method and goal are joined. The result assumed in the practice is buddhahood itself, and the one assuming it has just been dissolved into emptiness, so that every session is a rehearsal of the goal. In Neville they come apart. The Law is aimed at chosen states and circumstances, while the Promise, he insisted, cannot be produced by assumption at all. It comes unbidden, by grace, in its own time.

There is something honest in that, and it is the honesty Śāṅkara showed in refusing to let liberation be the product of any act. Neither would let the goal become one more thing to be manufactured, and a Christian can recognise in the refusal the old insistence that awakening is gift and not achievement. Tantra agrees that awakening is not produced. Its claim is that it can be rehearsed until it is recognised. The Law leaves the daily practice without that direction from the goal. A student can spend years faithfully assuming houses, relationships and recoveries, and nothing in the Law itself turns them towards the Promise. Tantra uses the resultant vehicle to rehearse the leaving of the self every day. The Law, practised on its own, can use the same vehicle to furnish the self's house while the Promise waits at the door.

XXXII

Divine pride and the knot

Of the three essentials, divine pride is where everything is decided.

Tantra identifies two things the practice exists to overcome: ordinary appearance and ordinary conception. Clear appearance works against the first, replacing the ordinary image with the deity's. Divine pride works against the second, which is the deeper problem: the habitual conviction that one is an ordinary, limited, separate person. Divine pride replaces "I am this ordinary self" with "I am this deity."

Put beside the knot at the centre, that is alarming. The seventh consciousness, *manas*, is exactly the faculty that says "I am" and means it. And here is a practice that trains a stable, confident, felt "I am" and attaches it to a divine form. If the one generating that conviction is *manas*, then the practitioner has not dissolved the knot. They have gilded it. Ordinary pride has simply acquired a halo, a thousand arms and a mantra.

The tradition's answer is that authentic divine pride can only arise on the basis of emptiness. The "I" in "I am the deity" is supposed to be the same "I" as in the dissolution mantra: not the person, but the empty nature. Tsongkhapa's position, and that of the Dalai Lama in his teachings on it, is

that deity yoga without a real understanding of emptiness is not tantra. It is visualisation, a technique any tradition can use, and in the absence of the view it tends to reinforce the very self-grasping it was meant to remove.

Which means that the conclusion reached at the knot applies to tantra without modification. The same three words, *I am the deity*, sit on both sides of the knot. Nothing in the technique distinguishes them. The dissolution into emptiness at the start is the tradition's attempt to guarantee which side one is on, but the dissolution is itself only a practice, and a practitioner can recite *svabhāva-śuddho 'ham* with perfect attention while manas watches, waiting for its turn to be magnificent.

The Nyingma tradition preserves a story about exactly this. In one widely told version, two disciples receive the same teaching from their master, that the mind is naturally liberated. One understands it and practises accordingly. The other, called Tharpa Nagpo, Black Liberation, concludes that since everything is self-liberated, nothing he does can bind him, and proceeds to do everything. He is expelled, sinks through lifetimes, and is reborn as Rudra: not an ordinary demon, but the demon of spiritual ego, magnificent, powerful and entirely self-certain. He is finally subdued by a heruka, one of the wrathful deities of the highest tantras, and the tellings add a remarkable detail: the ornaments the wrathful deities wear, the skins and bone ornaments, are what remains of Rudra, taken and turned to use.

The story remembers more than it says. Rudra is one of the oldest names of Śiva, and the bone ornaments, skull cups and charnel-ground ash of the wrathful Buddhist deities were first the regalia of Śaiva ascetics who lived among the cremation grounds. Modern scholarship, Alexis Sanderson's above all, has shown that some of the highest Buddhist tantras took whole passages from Śaiva scriptures and reworked them. The tradition did not forget the debt. It told it as a conquest: the god subdued, his ornaments worn, his power turned to the work of awakening. And what changed in the taking is this book's own fault line. In the non-dual Śaiva traditions the culminating recognition is *śivo 'ham*, I am Śiva: one supreme awareness, real, recognised as oneself. Part Eight will hear the same refrain in a hymn ascribed to Śaṅkara. The Buddhist says *I am the deity* only after dissolving into

emptiness, and dissolves the deity too when the session ends. The same ornaments, worn on a different ground.

Set Rudra beside the Brahmā who believed himself the Maker. The Brahmā mistakes temporal priority for authorship. Rudra mistakes the teaching of liberation for licence. Neither lacks realisation of a kind; both have the right view and the wrong owner of it. And the image of the heruka wearing Rudra's remains says something no argument quite can: that the path does not abolish the inflated self so much as defeat it and put it to work. The pride is not destroyed. It is re-owned.

XXXIII

The brackets

This allows a precise statement of what the sādhana's architecture is for.

Deliberate imagination practised on its own, as in most modern methods of affirmation, visualisation and manifestation, is the generation stage of a sādhana with the brackets removed.

It keeps clear appearance: the vivid scene, rich in sensory detail, a handshake or the weight of a key. It keeps divine pride in its functional form: assume the state, feel it as yours, live from it rather than towards it. Neville's version even has something like the drowsy threshold where waking structure loosens, his state akin to sleep, which rhymes faintly with the sādhana's rehearsal of dissolution.

What it removes is everything before and after. There is no refuge, and so no reference point outside the practitioner's own wanting. There is no bodhicitta, so the motive is left open, and an open motive will be filled by whatever is loudest. There is no dissolution into emptiness at the start, so the one doing the assuming is the ordinary self, unexamined. There is no recollection of purity, so the image means nothing beyond itself: the new car is only a car. There is no dissolution at the end, so the imagined scene is kept and clung to, which the Law actually instructs, since doubt must not be allowed to erase it. And there is no dedication, so whatever power the practice

generates flows back to its source.

Every one of those omitted steps is there, in the tantric architecture, to protect against a specific failure. Taken together they are the right view, built into the practice's structure so that a practitioner with poor view is still carried along by a form that has it. The Law, practised on its own, strips out the structure and leaves the power.

Neville would not accept this as a full account of his teaching, and it is fair to let him answer. As the comparison with the resultant vehicle showed, the Promise was never the Law, and was never meant to be produced by technique. He was clear that the Promise is what matters and the Law is preparatory. But the Law was what most of his audiences came for, and it is what most of those who followed him went on teaching.

XXXIV

Tantra's own manifestation layer

Honesty requires admitting that tantra is not only the pure resultant vehicle described above. It also has a manifestation layer, and it is not hidden.

The tradition recognises four enlightened activities: pacifying, enriching, magnetising and subjugating. There are practices for long life, for healing, for averting obstacles and for wealth. Jambhala, the wealth deity, is practised across Tibetan Buddhism, and nobody pretends his practice is about emptiness alone. The tantras distinguish ordinary accomplishments, worldly powers including the attainment of material aims, from the supreme accomplishment, which is awakening.

So the gap between Vajrayāna and New Thought is not that one wants nothing in the world and the other wants everything. Both work on circumstances. The difference is where the worldly practices sit. In tantra they are held inside a structure that fixes their purpose: Jambhala is practised so that one's generosity has resources, with offerings that are themselves an act of giving, and ordinary accomplishments are treated as byproducts that are either put to the service of the path or, if clung to, become obstacles. The

enriching activity is for others first.

In Neville's own terms: tantra has a Law, and it keeps it subordinate to the Promise by design. New Thought has the Law, and leaves the Promise to arrive by grace, in its own time.

XXXV

Pure view and everyone else

Part Three argued that the quiet danger in any teaching that makes other people one's own states is solipsism: others become oneself, pushed out, and compassion loses its object.

Tantra's pure view looks at first like the same move. All beings are seen as deities, all sounds as mantra, the whole environment as a pure realm. It is a total reinterpretation of other people in the light of one's own practice.

But the direction is opposite. That teaching, taken as metaphysics, reduces others to one's own contents: the unkind colleague is your own unkind state, to be revised. Pure view raises others to the status of buddhas, whose nature is as luminous as your own and in no sense your possession. One view absorbs the other into the self. The other recognises in them what is also not the self. Pure view, practised correctly, is a discipline of reverence, and reverence is the natural enemy of solipsism.

Practised incorrectly, it has its own form of the same failure, and recent decades have shown it plainly. In several Western Vajrayāna communities, pure view was turned into an instrument: the teacher's harmful behaviour was to be seen as the enlightened activity of a deity, and students who named it as harm were told their perception was impure. That is solipsism in reverse. Instead of others being one's own projection, one's own perception of real harm is dismissed as mere projection. The victims are erased either way. The traditional safeguard is the same as everywhere else in this book: pure view never overrides the discernment of cause and effect. A line attributed to Padmasambhava, the eighth-century master remembered for establishing Buddhism in Tibet, states the principle as well as it has been stated: though

my view is as vast as the sky, my attention to actions and their results is as fine as flour.

XXXVI

The same map, in tantric dress

Part Three drew a map of wrong views. Every one of them has a tantric form, and Nāgārjuna's image of the spell wrongly cast is nowhere more literal than here.

Eternalism appears as the deity reified: taken as an eternally existing being outside, to be pleased and petitioned, or as one's true Self in a way that is merely the ego enlarged.

Nihilism appears as "it's all empty", used as licence. That is Tharpa Nagpo's error, and the tradition thought it serious enough to make a demon of it.

Spiritual materialism was Trungpa's diagnosis from inside the tantric tradition, offered to his own students. A visualisation practice is an ideal instrument for the Lord of Mind, because mastery of it feels exactly like realisation.

Attachment to experience has a precise Tibetan form. The meditative experiences of bliss, clarity and non-thought are signs of practice, not realisation, and clinging to them is said to lead to rebirth in the refined heavens rather than out of saṃsāra, the round of birth and death, altogether. Chöd, the practice of cutting through taught by the eleventh-century Tibetan yoginī Machig Labdrön, names a demon of elation, the māra that feeds on spiritual success and good circumstances, and places it alongside the demon of self-inflation.

Spiritual bypassing appears as the luminous form draped over grief and anger that were never met.

In every case the technique is not what goes wrong. The view goes wrong, and the technique, being effective, amplifies it.

The Buddha who came from nowhere

The Christian East faced the same danger and made the opposite decision. Where tantra takes hold of the imagination under strict view, Hesychasm forbids images in prayer altogether, for fear of the self-deception it calls *prelest*. Part Six takes that tradition up in full. Buddhism, interestingly, also contains an answer that splits the difference, and it comes from one of the earliest visualisation texts of the Mahāyāna.

In the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra*, translated into Chinese in the second century, the practitioner visualises Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, until he appears clearly, as if present. Then comes the teaching. The practitioner asks where this Buddha came from, and realises that he came from nowhere: I did not go to him, and he did not come to me. Whatever the mind thinks, it sees. The mind makes the Buddha; the mind sees the Buddha; the mind is the Buddha. And then the final turn: the mind does not know itself and cannot see itself. The mind that conceives is ignorance; the mind without conception is nirvāṇa.

That is the whole of this part compressed into a paragraph. The visualised Buddha is real enough to be seen. It is made by the mind. It is the mind. And the point of seeing it is not to learn that one can summon buddhas, but to discover that the one summoning cannot be found.

The deity is given

One last difference, and it returns this part to the book's title.

In the Law, the image is chosen by the one who wants. You decide what the wish fulfilled looks like, you design the scene, you write the script. The practitioner is the author.

In Vajrayāna, the practitioner authors nothing. The deity is received in an empowerment, from a teacher, within a lineage. Its form is fixed: the number of arms, the implements, the colour, the posture, the proportions. Thangka painters work to an iconometric grid inherited over centuries, and a deity whose proportions are wrong is not a creative variation but an error. You do not design your yidam. It is given to you, and your task is to become able to receive it. Tibetans speak of the whole teaching in the same way, as the holy Dharma: not assembled, but received. Even the power of the practice is traced not to the practitioner's imagination but to the blessing of the lineage, *adhiṣṭhāna*, something that comes to you rather than from you.

That is the other half of "Empty and Given." The deity arises from emptiness, which is why it cannot be grasped. And it is handed down, which is why it cannot be owned. The Law has neither half: the image is not dissolved into emptiness, and it is not received. It is made and kept. Neville's Promise, by contrast, has both: it came to him unbidden, and what it revealed was that the one he had taken himself to be was not the author after all.

So this part can close where Part Three left the Law: a nursery. Deity yoga is what the nursery would look like if it had been designed from the start by people who knew what the child would find when it grew up: that the imagining is real, that the imaginer is empty, and that what shines through both was never manufactured and never owed.

Dissolve first. Then let the form arise, and know whose it is not.

Hold it clearly. Remember what it means. Wear it without keeping it.

Then let it go back where it came from, and notice that you go with it.

Whatever was good in that, give away.

Part Six

The Friend in the Heart

Part Five ended with a deity that is imagined, dissolved and given away, and it would be easy to leave the matter there, as if the tantric practitioner and the Hesychast monk were the only serious people in the room. They are not. The largest living form of Christian experience in the modern world is neither of these. It is the evangelical conviction of a personal relationship with Jesus: a relationship begun in a moment of surrender, sustained through prayer that feels like conversation, and described by those who have it as the most real thing in their lives.

Contemplatives tend to regard it with a certain condescension. It seems too warm, too simple, too emotionally forward, and too sure of itself. This part tries to do what the book has tried to do throughout: read the thing through the machinery, take it seriously, name what could go wrong in it, and ask what, at its best, it is in service of. The aim is not to explain the experience away. It is to see whether the lens can hold it without breaking it.

XXXIX

What is being described

The shape is familiar to anyone who grew up near it. A person hears that they are loved by God and separated from God by sin, that Jesus died in their place, and that by accepting him as Lord and Saviour they can be forgiven and made new. They pray, often a simple prayer of surrender, and something happens. For some it is a flood of emotion; for some a quiet certainty; for some almost nothing at the time, and a slow change afterwards. They describe themselves as born again. From then on, Jesus is not a doctrine but a presence: someone they speak to while driving, who comforts them in the night, who guides decisions, whose voice they learn to recognise.

The conviction itself is as old as the faith. Christ as Saviour is there in the first preaching. Paul speaks of the Son of God "who loved me and gave himself for me." Augustine's *Confessions* are addressed from beginning to end to a Thou. Bernard of Clairvaux and the medieval devotion to the Holy Name dwelt on the sweetness of Jesus, Thomas à Kempis wrote of familiar

friendship with him, and Luther made the words "for me" the centre of faith. What the evangelical movement did, from the eighteenth-century revivals onward, was place this at the very heart of Christian life and give it a particular shape: conversion as a decisive, often datable experience, assurance of salvation following from it, and the individual's own response as the hinge. John Wesley's heart "strangely warmed" at Aldersgate in 1738 is its emblem.

The idiom "personal relationship with Jesus" is younger still, largely a product of twentieth-century mass evangelism. The first of Bill Bright's *Four Spiritual Laws*, written in the 1950s, is that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. It is worth noticing, gently, how close that sentence sits to the New Thought culture that grew up in the same country at the same time.

The Gospel text at the centre of it all has a doubleness in it that repays attention. When Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3 that a person must be born *anōthen*, the Greek means both "again" and "from above." Nicodemus hears only the first meaning and asks how a grown man can re-enter the womb. The evangelical tradition has mostly kept the first meaning too: a second birth, a new start. The second meaning says where the birth comes from. The word itself holds the book's two poles. Renewal, and the fact that the renewal is given.

XL

How it is learned

The most useful outside study of this experience is Tanya Luhrmann's *When God Talks Back*, an anthropologist's account of several years spent with a charismatic evangelical church in America. Her finding, stated simply, was that people learn to experience God as a person, and that the learning is a skill.

Congregants were taught to talk to God as to a friend, to set aside time for him, even to imagine him sitting across the table with a cup of coffee. They learned to notice which of their own thoughts "felt different" and to treat those as God's voice, then to test them. They practised prayer that was heavily

imaginative, walking through scenes with Jesus, picturing his face, listening for his reply. Those who practised most, and who had some natural capacity for absorption, reported the most vivid sense of God's presence. In a small experiment she ran, people given a month of imaginative prayer reported sharper mental imagery and more vivid spiritual experience than those who spent the month listening to lectures on the Gospels.

Read through Part Two, this is exactly what one would expect. Seeds are deposited through hearing, repetition, song, scripture memorised and prayer rehearsed. The seeds ripen as perception: a felt presence, a recognised voice, an inner companion who is there when one turns towards him. It is the same machinery that ripens the ordinary self, and the same machinery deity yoga uses deliberately. Clear appearance: the face, the table, the cup. Something like divine pride, though inverted into relation: not "I am he" but "I am his."

Paul says faith comes from hearing. The Yogācārin would agree, and add only that hearing is how seeds enter the *ālaya*.

XLI

The case for a created saviour

So the case can be made plainly. The Jesus of the personal relationship is, at least in part, something the believer builds.

Psychology has said this in several ways already. Ana-María Rizzuto's *The Birth of the Living God*, a study from 1979, traced how each person's image of God is assembled from early relationships: parents, carers, the felt shape of being loved or not loved. Attachment researchers have argued that God functions for many believers as an attachment figure, a secure base and safe haven, doing psychologically what a good parent does. Object relations theory would call it an internalised good object: a loving other taken inside, from which one can now be seen and held when no one else is present.

And it works. That is the striking thing. Evangelical conversion narratives are full of addictions broken, violence renounced, self-hatred released. In the language of Part Three, *manas* had been running a loop of self-condemnation,

and the installed image of a loving other interrupts it. The believer is now seen by someone who knows the worst about them and does not leave. The old self, as Paul puts it, has passed away; a new creation has come. A new centre of identity has been planted in the *ālaya* and allowed to ripen, and the seeds of the old self lose their grip because they are no longer being watered.

That is the sceptic's case at its strongest: the saviour is something the believer has built, and the building is what saves. It does not even need to shrink the word "save" to make it true. Rescued from the loop, released from the old ripening, given a new place to stand.

XLII

Why "created" is not the end of the sentence

But Part Five has already shown why that argument cannot stop there.

The ordinary self is also constructed. If being assembled from seeds made a thing unreal, nothing in conventional experience would be real, including the one making the argument. The question is never whether a form is constructed. It is whether the construction is truer or less true, and what it is a construction of. Mipham's "truer fiction" applies here with full force. A self organised around being loved and forgiven may simply be a more accurate conventional appearance than a self organised around fear and shame, because it is closer to what Julian of Norwich and the whole theistic contemplative tradition report the ground to be.

There is a second limit to the argument, and it is the one the evangelical would raise first. Nobody invents their Jesus from nothing. The image is received: from scripture, from a preacher, from a grandmother's faith, from a community that has carried the name for two thousand years. Like the deity in Part Five, it is given before it is built. And evangelical theology insists, more fiercely than almost any other Christian tradition, that even the faith by which one receives it is a gift, not an achievement. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing."

So a fair reading has two halves, exactly as the book's title does. The form is constructed, as all forms are. What arrives through the form is claimed to be given. Part Four argued that analysis is an I-It operation and would be structurally unable to find what an I-Thou relation discloses. The psychologist who shows how the God-image was assembled has described the vessel with real precision. Whether anything was poured into it is not a question the description can settle.

XLIII

Where the evangelical form is stronger than the Law

Set beside the manifestation teaching of Part Three, the evangelical relationship has one structural advantage that deserves to be named, because contemplatives rarely give it credit.

The practitioner of the Law is the author of the change. The evangelical is emphatically not. Every good thing that happens is attributed to someone else. "Not I, but Christ" is the instinctive grammar of the whole culture. Testimony is always of what was done *to* the speaker. In the language of the knot, the credit flows away from manas rather than towards it.

That matters more than it seems. The Brahmā error and the Rudra error both turn on taking credit: mistaking one's own priority for authorship, or one's own liberation for licence. A spirituality whose basic reflex is gratitude has an in-built defence against both. Paul's sentence in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," is structurally the Christian counterpart of the dissolution mantra in Part Five. First the old I is ended. Then the new life arises, and the one living it is not the one who was there before.

Neville read "Christ in you" as your own imagination, and at the level of the Promise he meant by that something close to what the mystics mean. At the level of the Law the same reading is at constant risk of enlarging the self, as Part Three showed. The evangelical reads it as someone other than you who has come to live where you were, and whatever the risks of that reading,

it is pointed away from the self.

XLIV

Tantra and the Friend

Set beside tantra, the evangelical relationship can look like a less self-aware version of the same practice. The comparison holds in part, and the ways it fails are illuminating.

Tantra has its own relational forms, and they are closer to evangelical experience than one might expect. Many sādhanas visualise the deity in front before, or instead of, visualising oneself as the deity, and the practitioner receives blessing from that other. Guru yoga places the teacher, seen as a buddha, above one's head or in one's heart, and much of its practice is tearful longing: the famous prayer of calling the lama from afar. The tradition even describes the practitioner's attitude in the lowest class of tantra as like that of a servant to a lord, and in the next class as like that of companions. Relationship precedes identity.

The confession practice of Vajrasattva is closer still. The practitioner relies on a pure being, openly regrets their harmful actions, performs a remedy, and resolves not to repeat them. Then purifying nectar is visualised pouring down from the deity, and at the close Vajrasattva declares that one's faults are purified. Confession, repentance, cleansing from above, and a spoken assurance of forgiveness. An evangelical would recognise every step.

And Buddhism has a whole tradition built on other-power. In the Pure Land Buddhism of the thirteenth-century Japanese teacher Shinran, one cannot save oneself; one entrusts oneself to Amida Buddha's vow, and even that entrusting is given by Amida rather than produced by the practitioner. The resemblance to Reformation theology is so close that the Swiss theologian Karl Barth discussed it in the *Church Dogmatics* as the nearest parallel to Protestant grace anywhere in the religions, before insisting that what finally distinguishes the two is the name of Jesus Christ.

So the difference between tantra and evangelical faith is not that one is relational and the other not. It is that tantra carries the relationship *through* to its dissolution. The deity in front is eventually absorbed into oneself, and then both dissolve into emptiness. The lama in the heart turns out to be the nature of one's own mind. The relationship is real and used fully, but it is understood as a stage on the way to recognising that the two were never two. The evangelical relationship stays a relationship. The Thou remains Thou.

It is tempting to call tantra the more advanced of the two: the same practice, carried out with one more degree of awareness. There are two reasons for caution.

The first is that awareness can be its own trap, and the placebo makes the point well. For a long time it was assumed that a placebo only works if you do not know it is one. See through it and the effect vanishes, like a Jedi mind trick that only works on someone who does not notice it being played. On that view the evangelical, who neither knows nor cares that the image is constructed, gets the full effect, and the tantric practitioner, who knows, should get nothing.

The research has complicated this. In a 2010 study led by Ted Kaptchuk at Harvard, patients with irritable bowel syndrome were given pills openly described as placebos, inert and containing no active ingredient, and still improved significantly more than a group given no treatment. The anthropologist Daniel Moerman has argued that "placebo effect" is the wrong name altogether, and proposed "meaning response": the body answering not to a substance but to meaning, care and ritual.

In these terms tantra is an open-label placebo. It tells the practitioner plainly that the deity is constructed and empty, and asks them to practise with full commitment anyway. That it can still work is the whole wager of the resultant vehicle. But the knowing has a cost. The practitioner who knows the deity is a construction can hold it lightly, which is the aim; or can hold it coolly, which is not. The knowing can become a vantage point from which one never quite surrenders, and the tantric tradition knows this too, which is why it insists so hard on devotion. The evangelical, practising without the label, may be giving themselves more completely to what comes through the

image than the sophisticated practitioner ever does. There is a humility in naivety that knowledge has to work to recover.

Nor should "placebo" be heard as dismissive. If what heals is meaning, the question of whether the meaning is true has not been answered. It has only become more pressing.

The second caution is that the Christian would not concede that remaining in relation is a lower stage. Part Four set out the strongest form of that claim: that the ground answers to address, and that personhood may be a finding about the ground and not only a feature of the one who approaches it. If that is right, then dissolving the Thou into the nature of mind is not a deeper insight but a different decision, and possibly a loss. The book has declined to close that fork, and should not close it here.

There is a third answer, which Part One set out in outline and Part Three mostly used as a warning. Between the Thou who remains Thou, and the two who were never two because both were empty, stands a further claim: that the two were never two because there was only ever one, and that what is found when the relationship is carried all the way through is neither a friend nor an absence, but oneself, known at last. India's word for this is *advaita*, not two, and its great teacher is Śaṅkara. The book will come to it in full, but by way of the teacher who said, in the Gospel most loved by those who read him in this light, "I and the Father are one", and by way of a simpler question beneath that saying: what was his own relationship with the one he called Father?

XLV

How it can go wrong

Respect is not the same as uncritical acceptance, and the evangelical relationship has characteristic failures that the machinery makes easy to see.

The Jesus who agrees with me. If the image is assembled partly from one's own seeds, it will tend to carry their shape. The inner voice that confirms one's politics, one's grievances, one's preferred reading of the world is a sign that the construction is being done by *manas* rather than received.

Research has in fact found that people tend to attribute their own views to God more readily than they attribute them to other people. The Friend becomes a mirror, and the problem of everyone else in the dream returns: other people, and God, pushed out from oneself.

Certainty that closes. Assurance of salvation is meant to release the believer from fear. It can harden instead into a certainty that nothing needs to be examined again: the conversion moment treated as a finished transaction rather than the start of transformation. Hesychasm, as we will see, treats repentance as lifelong; the born-again moment in its thinner forms treats it as done.

Emotion taken for presence. Part Five described the tantric form of attachment to experience. The equivalent here is taking the warmth of worship for the reality of God, so that when the feeling fades, the believer concludes God has gone. Many deconversion stories are stories of a faith that rested on an experience rather than on what the experience pointed to.

The personal become private. A relationship with Jesus that concerns only the believer's inner life, and has nothing to say about the poor, the enemy, or the stranger, has quietly edited out most of what Jesus said. The point made about the verse after the verse applies here exactly: judged by his own master, a Jesus who makes no demands on how one treats others is not the one in the Gospels.

Faith as anaesthetic. Spiritual bypassing, as Part Three described it, in its evangelical form: grief hurried towards the assurance that God has a plan, anger declared un-Christian before it has been felt, depression treated as a failure of faith. Placing everything in God's hands is sometimes surrender, and sometimes a way of not touching what is in one's own. The loving Friend can be used, like any image, to avoid rather than to meet.

The tradition's own discernment

The strongest resource for testing this experience comes from inside it. In 1746, after the first Great Awakening had produced a flood of dramatic conversions and a flood of excesses, Jonathan Edwards published *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. It is still the most searching account any evangelical has written of how to tell genuine spiritual experience from its counterfeit.

His list of things that are *not* reliable signs is startling. Intense emotion is not a sign. Bodily effects are not a sign. Fluent talk about religion is not a sign. Scripture verses coming suddenly to mind are not a sign. Strong confidence that one is saved is not a sign. Even the approval of other believers is not a sign. Every one of these, Edwards argued, can be produced by something other than grace.

His positive signs are the ones this book has been reaching for throughout. Genuine grace produces humility rather than self-regard. It changes a person's nature, not just their feelings. It produces the temper of Christ: meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, mercy. And its chief sign, he said, is practice: how a person actually lives, over time, especially when it costs them.

That is an evangelical teacher, at the heart of the revival tradition, giving criteria almost identical to the Buddhist test of whether self-grasping is diminishing, and to the tantric warning against attachment to experience. A born-again experience judged by Edwards's standard is not being dismissed. It is being taken more seriously than most of its critics or its enthusiasts take it.

A relationship without an image

The Hesychast tradition offers something different again: a relationship with Christ that is fully personal and deliberately imageless.

It forbids imagination in prayer. Evagrius, the fourth-century desert monk, taught that pure prayer is prayer without images: do not try to form any picture of the divine, and do not accept any that comes. Gregory of Sinai, the fourteenth-century teacher of the Jesus Prayer, warned the monk not to accept forms, colours or lights appearing in prayer, however holy they seemed. The Orthodox word for what happens to those who do is *prelest*: spiritual delusion, and specifically the delusion of self-importance produced by taking one's own imaginative productions for divine visitation. Ignatius Brianchaninov, writing in the nineteenth century, criticised Western devotional practices that use the imagination for exactly this reason.

So here are two traditions, both deeply serious, facing the same danger and making opposite decisions about it. Vajrayāna says: imagination is going to construct the self anyway, so take hold of it and construct a pure one, then dissolve it, under strict view, until the construction loosens its grip. Hesychasm says: imagination is where pride breeds, so starve it, descend with the mind into the heart, and wait without images for what cannot be imagined. Both agree on the diagnosis. The imagining faculty is the favourite dwelling place of the self that mistakes itself for God. They disagree only on whether it is safer to use it or to refuse it.

Anyone who has stood in both kinds of building will find something odd in that contrast. Walk into an Orthodox church and then into a Tibetan gumpa, and the likeness is the first thing you feel: incense and flame, chant in an ancient tongue, bodies bowing to the floor, walls crowded with holy figures made to rules so strict that a wrong proportion is an error rather than a style. The iconographer works to a canon as the thangka painter works to a grid, and the Orthodox speak of writing an icon rather than painting one. The Christian East is not imageless. It fought for more than a century to keep its icons, and

still keeps a feast for their return.

What it refuses is the image taken inside. The icon stays on the wall, and looks back: its lines open towards the one who stands before it, and the honour paid to it, the Church declared in 787, passes to the one it shows. The Tibetan practitioner takes the image in, becomes it, and dissolves it. The Orthodox worshipper lets the image look, and stands before it as the one who is seen. One is relation carried all the way through to emptiness; the other is relation kept, until it becomes communion. The two buildings are as alike as two buildings can be. What happens in the people standing in them is not.

What makes the Hesychast refusal more than a prohibition is what it offers in place of the image. The Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," is not a visualisation. It is an address. It uses the vocative. It speaks *to* someone, by name, without picturing him. The relationship lives in three things that do not need imagination at all.

The Name. In this tradition the Name of Jesus is not a label but a mode of presence. To call on it with attention is to stand in relation, as one can speak to someone in a dark room without seeing their face. The image is not needed because the address is enough.

The heart. The characteristic instruction, associated especially with Theophan the Recluse in the nineteenth century, is to descend with the mind into the heart and stand there before God, who is present, sees all, and is within. Not to picture God, but to stand before him. The relation is one of being seen rather than seeing: attention held open in the presence of a gaze that is not one's own. This is the purest form of I-Thou the book has encountered. The Thou is not constructed as an object of perception at all. It is the one before whom one stands.

Repentance. *Metanoia*, the turning of the whole mind, is not a single event but the texture of the entire life. The prayer asks for mercy every time. Where the evangelical is born again once, the Hesychast is continually being turned. There is no moment at which one is finished and can stop asking.

And the goal is not a relationship with an image of Christ but participation in the life of God: *theosis*. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century defended the Hesychasts by distinguishing God's essence, forever

unknowable, from God's energies, in which one can truly participate. The light some monks reported seeing in deep prayer, he insisted, was not an imagined light, nor a sensory one, but the uncreated light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. The relationship ends not in dissolution into emptiness, nor in a pictured friend, but in being filled by the life of the one addressed while remaining oneself.

This tradition also contains a direct challenge to the Buddhist side of this book, and fairness requires including it. Archimandrite Sophrony, the twentieth-century elder whose monastery in Essex became one of the centres of Orthodox life in Britain, had explored Eastern meditation seriously as a young man before returning to the Church. In later writing he described those experiences as contemplation of the created mind's own natural light: real, beautiful, and not God. What they lacked, he argued, was the personal: the encounter with a living Thou, as against the discovery of the mind's own depth. One need not accept his verdict to see that it is Part Four's fork stated from the other side, by someone who had stood on both paths.

The fork can also be stated in the language of light, because both traditions reach for light at their summit. Palamas's monks saw the uncreated light of Tabor: God's own energy, shining from beyond the one who sees it. Tibetan teachers speak of the clear light, the luminous nature of mind itself, which in their account dawns briefly in every sleep and fully at death. Sophrony's phrase is very nearly the Buddhist one; an early discourse has the Buddha say that the mind is luminous, and only stained by what visits it. For Sophrony that light was created, and therefore not God. For a Dzogchen master it is neither created nor a God, because it was never made and is not anyone. Both agree that light is what is found when the mind is quiet enough. They disagree about whose light it is.

The Hesychast tradition, then, holds not only that a personal relationship with Christ needs no imagination, but that imagination is the thing most likely to get in the way. The face one constructs can stand between oneself and the one who has no need of a constructed face.

The Western tradition supplies a necessary counterweight. Teresa of Ávila, who knew imageless prayer as deeply as anyone, warned sharply against

abandoning meditation on the humanity of Christ too early, in the belief that one had outgrown it. She had tried, she wrote, and it had been a mistake. The image, for her, was not a crutch to be discarded but a door that stays open. Between Gregory of Sinai and Teresa, the tradition holds the question open: the image may block the way or be the way, depending on who is walking.

XLVIII

In service of truth

So how might the born-again experience be read, with care, without dismissing it?

Using Part Two's three senses of imagination, the Jesus of the personal relationship can operate at any of three levels. At the level of the *imaginary*, he is a comforting figure assembled from one's own needs, and the failures described above follow. At the level of the *imaginal*, he is the form in which something genuinely other meets a person: constructed in its shape, as every form is, but not therefore invented in its content, in the way Ibn 'Arabi understood the forms the Real takes to be met. And the image may become transparent to the *ground*: the friend in the heart opening, in time, onto the one Theophan speaks of, before whom one stands without any picture at all.

The born-again moment, at its best, is a small version of that turning over of the basis: a turning in which the self stops being its own centre. It is rarely complete. But it is the right kind of turning, and it faces the right way, away from self-authorship and towards gratitude. What the contemplative traditions can offer it is not correction from above but continuation: Edwards's discernment to keep it honest, Hesychasm's imageless standing to take it deeper, Teresa's permission not to discard the face too early, and the Buddhist reminder that whatever is constructed must eventually be held lightly, even the most beloved form.

And what the evangelical experience offers back is not small. It shows what surrender looks like when it is not sophisticated. It shows a self being dethroned by love rather than by analysis. It reminds the contemplative, who

may have learned to regard every image as a construction, that constructions can be the vessels through which something given arrives. "Born from above" and "born again" are the same word. The birth is new, and it did not come from here.

Part Seven

The One He Called Father

Part Six read the Friend in the heart as carefully as it could, and left one thing exactly where it found it. The Friend arrives through a doctrine: that a person is separated from God by sin, that Jesus died in their place, and that accepting this makes them new. Part Six described that doctrine and did not ask where it came from, or whether the man at its centre taught it.

Those are fair questions, and they have been asked for a long time, often by people who loved him more than most. They are asked here in the spirit of the rest of the book: with curiosity rather than contempt, and with one eye on the mirror, because every answer to them has a way of resembling the person who gives it.

XLIX

The religion of Jesus and the religion about him

At the turn of the twentieth century the historian Adolf von Harnack, lecturing in Berlin on what Christianity essentially is, put the matter in a sentence that has not stopped provoking since. The Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it, he said, has to do with the Father only, and not with the Son. Half a century later Rudolf Bultmann, a very different scholar, compressed the same observation further: the proclaimer became the proclaimed. Jesus announced the kingdom of God. The church announced Jesus.

The shift can be seen without any scholarship at all. Read the Sermon on the Mount from beginning to end and there is almost nothing in it about the one delivering it. Its subject is the Father who sees in secret, the kingdom, the heart, the enemy to be loved, the lilies, the house built on rock. It contains no doctrine of his person and no account of how his death will save anyone. The prayer at its centre asks for forgiveness directly, on one condition only, that we forgive others, and it names no one standing between.

Now read the creeds. The Apostles' Creed moves from "born of the Virgin Mary" to "suffered under Pontius Pilate" with nothing but a comma between them. Everything he said and did, the parables, the healings, the meals with the wrong people, the Sermon itself, falls inside that comma.

Emerson saw it in 1838, addressing the graduating class of Harvard Divinity School. Historical Christianity, he told them, had dwelt "with noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus." The soul, he said, knows no persons. He put into Jesus's mouth a sentence no creed contains: I am divine; through me God acts and speaks; would you see God, see me, or see yourself, when you think as I now think. Harvard did not invite him back for nearly thirty years. The line from that address runs straight into the soil Part One described, where New Thought would grow.

So the question can be asked plainly. When people call themselves Christians, are they practising the religion of Jesus, the way he prayed, forgave and lived, or a religion about him, a set of claims concerning who he was and what his death achieved?

Fairness asks for one observation before any answer. The drift from a teacher's teaching to the teacher is not peculiar to Christianity, and it is not simply a corruption. When the sick monk Vakkali longed to see the Buddha's body, the Buddha asked what there was to see in it: whoever sees the Dhamma, the truth he taught, sees me. Within a few centuries his followers were venerating his relics, and the Mahāyāna would speak of a Buddha whose life on earth was only a skilful display, and of Amitābha, whose vow saves all who call on his name. The same movement, and the same protests against it. A religion about a teacher begins because people found that his life disclosed something his words alone did not. Whether that disclosure was then honoured or buried is the real question, and, as Part One said of relinquishment and acquisition, the line runs through each tradition rather than between them.

L

Christianity or Paulianity

The sharpest form of the question has a name attached to it. If a religion about Jesus replaced the religion of Jesus, the charge runs, it was Paul who made the exchange. Thomas Jefferson called him the first corrupter of the doctrines of

Jesus. Nearly a century later a German scholar called him the second founder of Christianity, and meant that the second had eclipsed the first; late in the twentieth century another argued that Paul had invented the religion outright. In its polemical form the charge comes with a jibe: not Christianity at all, but Paulianity.

Some of what supports it is simply documented. Paul never met Jesus during his life. His letters are the earliest Christian writings we have, composed in the fifties, a generation before the first Gospel, so the oldest surviving Christian voice belongs to a man who had not known its founder. Thirteen of the New Testament's twenty-seven books bear his name, seven of which scholars broadly accept as certainly his, and most of the second half of Acts is his story. By length the four Gospels still make up nearly half the collection, but they were written after him, and Luke's at least by a writer who plainly admired him. In all his letters Paul quotes Jesus only a handful of times: a teaching on divorce, the words over the bread and cup, a saying about supporting those who preach. There is no parable in Paul, and nothing of the Sermon on the Mount. He insists that his gospel came to him not from any human being but by revelation, and in one striking sentence says that even if he once regarded Christ "according to the flesh", he regards him so no longer.

Other evidence points the other way, and it matters as much. Paul says plainly that the heart of his message was something he received: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day." Most scholars take this as a formula already fixed before Paul wrote it down, going back to the Jerusalem community within a few years of the crucifixion, the very community he had once persecuted. The hymn in Philippians about the one who "emptied himself" is thought by many to be older than the letter that preserves it. And the Gospels, written after Paul, place words about his death in Jesus's own mouth: the Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many; this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many. Whether those sayings go back to Jesus himself is disputed. That they are not Paul's invention is not.

So the strong thesis, that Paul conjured the religion about Jesus out of nothing, is not where most historians have come to rest. What can fairly be

said is that the centre of gravity moved from the message of Jesus to the message about him, that it moved very early, and that Paul is where we can first watch it move, because he is the first whose writing survives.

And the Paul who is being blamed is also the Paul who wrote that without love he was a noisy gong, and that it was no longer he who lived but Christ who lived in him. Whatever else he was, he was not a man who had exchanged a relationship for a doctrine. Which raises what the jibe passes over: what exactly was Paul's relationship with Jesus?

LI

The first to know him afterwards

Part Six called the personal relationship with Jesus the largest living form of Christian experience. It is worth asking who first had it.

The disciples had something else. Peter had eaten with Jesus, walked the roads of Galilee beside him, denied him in a courtyard. When they spoke of him after his death, they spoke of someone they had known. Paul had none of that. His whole acquaintance with Jesus was with the risen one, met after the fact, and in his own telling, met inwardly. The Acts of the Apostles tells the Damascus story three times, with a blinding light and a voice. Paul's own account in Galatians is quieter and more startling. God, he says, was pleased "to reveal his Son in me." The Greek is *en emoi*: not to me, in me.

That makes Paul, in a precise sense, the first of a kind. He is the first person we know of whose entire relationship with Jesus was with someone he had never met in the flesh, and the first whose own words about that relationship survive. Every Christian since has stood where Paul stood, not where Peter stood. The believer of Part Six who speaks to Jesus while driving, whom Luhmann watched learning to hear his voice, is in Paul's position exactly: knowing him afterwards, and from within.

And the Western shape of that experience has come down through Paul very nearly letter by letter. In a garden in Milan in 386, Augustine heard a child's voice chanting "take and read", opened a book of Paul's letters, and

read a sentence from Romans that ended years of resistance. Eleven centuries later Luther found in the first chapter of Romans the sentence that became the Reformation: the righteous shall live by faith. And on an evening in May 1738, in a meeting room in Aldersgate Street, John Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed while someone read aloud Luther's preface to the letter to the Romans. The emblem of evangelical conversion this book chose took place while Luther was being read on Paul. If evangelical Christianity is Paulianity, it is Paulianity at third hand, through Augustine and Luther.

That is not a small qualification. In 1963 the Swedish scholar Krister Stendahl, later Bishop of Stockholm, published an essay called "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West." His argument was that the West had read Paul through a tormented conscience that Paul himself did not have. Paul describes himself, as to righteousness under the law, as blameless. His burning question was not how a guilty individual finds a gracious God, but how Gentiles could belong to Israel's God without first becoming Jews. The anguished inner search for forgiveness belongs to Augustine and to Luther, and it became the lens through which Paul was read for a thousand years. Much of what people object to as the religion of Paul may be the religion of Paul's readers.

So is it Christianity or Paulianity? In one sense the jibe is simply true, and need not be an insult: every believer after the first generation has known Jesus as Paul knew him, afterwards and from within. In another sense it misses its mark, because the Paul most people are arguing with is Luther's. And the conscience Stendahl described needed a remedy the size of its wound. It found one, and for much of the Western church the remedy became the whole of the gospel.

What was paid

The remedy is the one already described in Part Six: sin as a debt or a penalty owed to God, and Jesus, the Saviour of the world, paying it in the sinner's place. For many evangelicals this is not one doctrine among others. It is the gospel. It is worth being curious about where it comes from, and how it sits beside what Jesus taught.

Jesus spoke about debt a great deal, and in his teaching debts are forgiven, not paid. The prayer he gave says "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." In the parable of the unforgiving servant the king does not collect what he is owed; he cancels it, and the only condemnation in the story falls on the servant who will not do the same for another. In the parable of the prodigal, the father sees his son a long way off and runs down the road to him before the rehearsed apology is finished. No sacrifice is offered and no one is punished in the son's place, and the elder brother's complaint that this is unfair is exactly the complaint of accountancy against grace. Before any cross, Jesus looks at a paralysed man lowered through a roof and tells him his sins are forgiven.

When the Gospels do put the language of salvation in his mouth, it is startling. To the woman who touched the fringe of his cloak, to blind Bartimaeus by the roadside, and to the woman who washed his feet with her tears, he says the same words: your faith has saved you. The Greek means both saved and made well. Christians have always read it as faith in him, and rightly; but it is still her faith that he credits. New Thought would later build on exactly these sentences, as Part One noted.

The church has never defined how the atonement works. The creeds say he was crucified "for us and for our salvation" and leave the mechanism open; no ecumenical council chose between the theories. The early centuries spoke mostly of ransom and victory, Christ breaking the power of sin and death, the view the Swedish bishop Gustaf Aulén in 1931 called *Christus Victor*. The Christian East spoke above all of healing. God became human, wrote

Athanasius, the fourth-century bishop of Alexandria, so that humans might become divine, and the cross is part of one movement in which God enters the whole of human life, death included, and transfigures it from within. It was Anselm of Canterbury, in 1098, who framed the matter as a debt of honour that only one both God and human could repay, and the Reformers who sharpened this into penal substitution: the punishment due to us, borne by him. That is the form most evangelicals now hold, and it is the form of many of their best-loved hymns. "In my place condemned he stood."

Through the lens of this book the doctrine carries one characteristic risk, and it can be named exactly. The statement of the ground in Part Four said that no one can stand in credit with it, and that it was never owed. Accounting language turns the ground into a ledger. If the ledger must balance, someone must settle it, and God becomes, however unintentionally, a creditor who cannot forgive until paid. That is precisely the picture the father on the road refuses.

But the doctrine deserves its best defenders, and they have a reply that is continuous with what Jesus taught. Forgiveness, they say, always costs the one who forgives. To forgive a real wrong is to absorb it rather than return it, and anyone who has done that knows it is not free. On this reading the cross is not the price God demanded before he could love. It is what forgiving love looks like when it walks into a world that kills. Not the payment the father required before running down the road, but the running itself, carried all the way to where such running leads. Many who sing "in my place condemned he stood" mean something very like this, and mean it with their whole lives.

So the religion about Jesus, at its best, says the book's second word: given. No one saves themselves, the credit flows away, as Part Six saw, and the gift arrives before it could be deserved. At its most transactional it turns grace into a settlement, and a settlement is a relation of credit, which is the very thing grace came to end. On that point the red letters are not ambiguous. The debt was released.

Red letters

At the very end of the nineteenth century the editor of an American religious weekly printed a New Testament with the words of Jesus in red, and the red-letter edition became a fixture of Bible publishing. It made visible a question that had been asked for a long time. What if the red letters are the Gospel, and the rest is commentary?

Some took the question literally. Thomas Jefferson sat, first in the White House and later at Monticello, with a razor and several New Testaments, cutting out the teachings of Jesus and pasting them into a book of their own, leaving the miracles and the resurrection behind. Tolstoy took the verse this book began with for the title of *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* in 1894, set the Sermon on the Mount against the whole apparatus of church and state, and so moved a young lawyer in South Africa that Gandhi later wrote that the book overwhelmed him. The Sermon itself, Gandhi said, went straight to his heart. Howard Thurman, the African American mystic and pastor whose *Jesus and the Disinherited* Martin Luther King is said to have carried with him, remembered his grandmother, born into slavery, who let him read her the Bible but would not have the letters of Paul, except now and then the chapter on love, because the slave-owners' minister had preached from them that slaves should obey their masters. She had learned the difference between the religion of Jesus and a religion used against her, and she had learned it in her body. Even within evangelicalism, a movement calling itself the Red Letter Christians took up the same emphasis in the early years of this century.

It was New Thought, though, that made the red letters most thoroughly its own, and here the book's two lines meet again. Unity, founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, called Jesus the Way-shower: not the one who does for us what we cannot, but the one who shows what every human being is. Emmet Fox, in *The Sermon on the Mount* in 1934, read the whole of Jesus's teaching as a key to the inner life. Joel Goldsmith's *Infinite Way* read it as a mysticism of the one Presence, in which prayer asks for nothing because there is nothing

apart from God to ask for. And Neville, as Part One described, read the entire Bible as a drama of consciousness enacted in the individual. To readers who had come to it from India, this sounded like Vedānta in the words of the Gospels, and Part One suggested why. Through a non-dual lens, the red letters seem to describe not a saviour to be believed in but a state to be realised. The kingdom of God is within you. If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. Before Abraham was, I am. I and the Father are one. Is it not written, ye are gods? Greater works than these shall he do. That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.

It is a beautiful reading and a serious one. It also has a difficulty its admirers rarely notice. Look at where those verses come from. The kingdom within and the single eye belong to the first three Gospels. But "before Abraham was, I am", "I and the Father are one", "ye are gods", and the prayer that they may all be one, are all from John. John is the Gospel most scholars think furthest from Jesus's own voice, and the one most thoroughly about him: in the first three Gospels Jesus speaks of the kingdom and seldom of himself, while in John he speaks of himself almost constantly. And "Christ in you", the phrase New Thought loves best, belongs to Paul or his school. The reader who sets aside the religion about Jesus for the religion of Jesus finds their clearest texts in the most exalted of the religions about him, and in the very apostle they were asked to leave behind. The line does not run between red letters and black, or between Jesus and Paul. As Part One said of the two inheritances, it runs through each.

There is a further caution, and it applies to everyone in this section, this book included. In 1909 the Catholic modernist George Tyrrell wrote that the Christ Harnack found, looking back through nineteen centuries, was only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face seen at the bottom of a deep well. Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus* had already shown the same pattern across a whole century of scholarship: each age found a Jesus who looked remarkably like itself. The liberal Jesus teaches liberal ethics. The New Thought Jesus teaches mental law. The evangelical Jesus, as Part Six noted, tends to agree with the evangelical. It is the mirror of Part Two once more, reporting back the state of the one who looks, and it holds for the Christ as

much as for circumstance.

Schweitzer's own conclusion is worth hearing, because it declines every side. The Jesus of history, he said, is a stranger to our time. He comes to us as one unknown, as he came by the lakeside to those who did not know who he was, and he says the same word: follow me. Schweitzer then trained as a doctor and spent much of the rest of his life running a hospital at Lambaréné, in what is now Gabon. His answer to the question of this part was neither a reading nor a doctrine. It was a following, done with a life, which is the one sign Jonathan Edwards finally trusted.

LIV

Four prepositions

"Of or about" is a good question, but it has turned out to be too small for what the tradition actually contains. Christian life has been lived by at least four prepositions, and every one of them is in the Gospels.

Of. The religion of Jesus: his teaching followed. The Sermon kept, the enemy loved, the cloak given, the other cheek turned. Tolstoy, Thurman, the Red Letter Christians. Its gift is that it cannot stay private; it is judged by what it does, which is why Schweitzer's final answer was a hospital. Its characteristic failure is that it hardens into a new Law, a moral achievement one can succeed at and be proud of, and that its Jesus quietly takes on the reader's face.

About. The religion about Jesus: what was done, trusted. The creed, the cross, the empty tomb. Its gift is gift itself: nothing to earn, and the credit flowing away from the self, as it does in the testimony of Part Six. Its characteristic failure is transaction. Belief becomes assent to propositions, the change of heart is taken as finished at the moment of assent, and God becomes the creditor who must be paid, with a ledger to balance.

With. The religion with Jesus: the Friend. This is Part Six, the relationship of prayer and presence, the one spoken to while driving and turned to in the night. Its gift is warmth and address, a self dethroned by love rather than by

analysis. Its characteristic failure is the Friend who agrees with me.

In. Christ in you: becoming what he was. Paul in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in his hearers. Eckhart insisting that it is of no use that the Son was born of Mary long ago if he is not born now in the soul, and the seventeenth-century poet Angelus Silesius putting the same thing in a couplet: were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem and not in you, you would still be lost. The Orthodox teaching of *theosis*. And, in a very different register, Neville's Promise, which read the whole Gospel story, the birth from above and the resurrection with it, as something that happens within the individual, and which he said had happened in him. The evangelical's "born again" belongs here too, though it is rarely heard this way; the word, as Nicodemus failed to notice, also means "from above". Its gift is that it takes seriously the most daring things the New Testament says. Its characteristic failure is the one this book has watched most closely since the knot at the centre: the self that says "I am" and means itself.

None of the four is the religion of Jesus alone, and none is merely the religion about him; each can find itself in the red letters and in Paul. The questions that matter are which of them a person actually lives, which stands at the centre, and whether the whole, however it is arranged, faces away from the self. A faith that holds only "about" drifts towards transaction; only "of", towards moralism; only "with", towards a mirror; only "in", towards inflation. The mature traditions have tended to hold several at once, and to let each keep the others honest.

Placed on this map, the evangelical faith of Part Six is a religion about Jesus lived as a religion with him, and its own reformers keep calling it back to the religion of him. New Thought has a stranger place. It claims the religion of Jesus, the Way-shower's own method, but what much of it has actually taught is the Law, drawn from a handful of red letters about asking and believing, and the Law is none of the four. It is not following, since it asks nothing of the Sermon's cost. It is not trusting, since the one who acts is oneself. It is not friendship, since no one is addressed. Its mystics knew this. Goldsmith's refusal to use God for anything, and Neville's Promise, both reach past the Law towards the fourth preposition.

And the four share something that is easy to miss. Each is a way of standing towards Jesus: following him, trusting him, speaking with him, becoming like him. None of them yet asks about the relationship in which he himself stood.

LV

Abba

It is the simplest question in this part, and the one that matters most for this book. What was Jesus's own relationship with the one he called Father? And is the relationship Paul describes the same one, or something else?

The Gospels remember the word he used. In the garden, in Mark's account, he prays *Abba*, and the Aramaic is kept inside the Greek, untranslated, the way a family keeps a word that belonged to someone it loved. A generation of scholars following Joachim Jeremias made a great deal of this, and some claimed the word meant something like "Daddy". Later scholarship, James Barr's especially, corrected that: it is simply the word for father, used by grown children as well as small ones. What is not in doubt is that it was treasured, and kept in the language he spoke.

In the earliest Gospel the relationship begins, as Part One noted, with his being addressed. At his baptism, before he has taught anything or healed anyone, a voice speaks to him: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." He has done nothing yet to earn it. The love comes first, and the life follows from it: the nights of prayer in lonely places, the authority to forgive, the freedom with outcasts, and at last the garden, where the same word is spoken into the worst hour of his life. *Abba*, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will. If there is a religion of Jesus, this is its centre. Not first a body of teaching, but a relationship of being loved and loving back, out of which the teaching came.

Now turn to Paul, and something remarkable appears. Twice, writing in Greek to Greek-speaking churches that knew no Aramaic, Paul keeps the same word. "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, *Abba*,

Father." "You have received the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, *Abba*, Father."

Look at the grammar of the first sentence. It is not the believer who cries *Abba*. It is the Spirit of the Son, in the believer's heart. Paul's relationship with Jesus is not, at its centre, a friendship with a second person standing beside him. It is being taken inside Jesus's own relationship with the Father, so that the prayer Jesus prayed is now prayed within us. The believer is not standing next to the Son, looking at the Father. The believer is in the Son, saying what the Son says.

Fairness asks for the other half. Paul also speaks to Jesus directly. The Aramaic *Maranatha*, "Our Lord, come!", which he quotes at the close of his first letter to the Corinthians, may be the oldest Christian prayer we have, and it is addressed to Jesus himself. He prayed three times to the Lord about the thorn in his flesh. The Friend is there in Paul. But the centre of his piety has three terms, not two: to the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit. The relationship with Jesus is the doorway into the relationship of Jesus.

So is Paul's relationship the same as Jesus's, or different? Paul's own word for it is adoption. The believer becomes a child of God not by nature but by being taken in, and so comes to share what the Son has, his prayer included. The Orthodox tradition puts it in a formula: what he is by nature, we become by grace. The same relationship, on a different footing: his by nature, ours by gift.

This changes the question the part began with. The religion of Jesus, at its deepest, is not his ethics, and not even his teaching. It is his *Abba*. And the one who insists most fiercely that his *Abba* is now ours is Paul. The critic who wants Jesus without Paul, and the believer who has Jesus as a friend but has not noticed where the friend is looking, may both have missed what Paul actually says. Not only a relationship with Jesus. The relationship Jesus had, given.

Part Six found in the evangelical experience something like divine pride turned into relation: not "I am he" but "I am his." Paul goes one step further in the same direction. Not only "I am his", but, in him, "I am the Father's."

I and the Father are one

In the tenth chapter of John, Jesus says, "I and the Father are one," and the crowd picks up stones. When he asks for which good work they mean to stone him, they tell him: for no good work, but for blasphemy, "because you, being a man, make yourself God." He answers by quoting a psalm. Is it not written in your law, I said, you are gods?

It was not the first time. Two chapters earlier the same Gospel has him say, "Before Abraham was, I am", and there too they take up stones. In John's telling, the name from the bush, spoken in the first person, drew stones before the claim of oneness did.

It is the knot at the centre in its most dangerous form, this time with a charge sheet. The same words sit on both sides of it. "I am God" can be the seventh consciousness enthroned, Baka on his throne, Rudra in his pride. Or it can be what is said when the self has gone quiet enough that only the ground is speaking. Nothing in the words tells them apart, and the crowd, not unreasonably, assumed the first.

John is careful about which kind of oneness he means. The Gospel that says "I and the Father are one" also says that the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; that he seeks not his own will; that the Father who dwells in him does the works. The one who says "one" has become transparent. It is the self-emptying of the Philippians hymn, what theology calls *kenosis*, told as a life: the oneness is spoken out of emptiness, not in place of it. And the same Gospel says, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." Empty, and given. Both words of this book's title stand in John's portrait of the one who said that he and the Father were one.

Some eight centuries after John was written, the Sufi al-Ḥallāj said in Baghdad *ana al-Ḥaqq*, "I am the Real", *al-Ḥaqq* being one of the names of God. He was imprisoned for years and executed in 922. Rumi, three centuries on, said that people take the saying for arrogance when it is the reverse, and

his reasoning is worth slowing down for. The one who says "I am the servant of God" sounds humble, but the sentence quietly asserts two existences: there is God, and there is also me, standing before him, serving. The servant is still there, still someone, still in the picture. The one who says "I am the Real" has gone further. He has passed away in God so completely, in the state the Sufis call *fanā'*, that no one is left to claim anything; it is not al-Ḥallāj speaking about himself but the Real speaking from the place where al-Ḥallāj used to be. Rumi's image is iron left in the fire until it glows: red through, it can say "I am the fire", and it is not boasting, because it has no colour of its own left. That is why he calls it the utmost humility. The humble man still has a self to be humble with. Here there is no one left to be proud. Neville's *I AM*, as he meant it in the Promise, belongs in this company: not "I, Neville, want", but the name from the burning bush, spoken through one who has stepped aside.

Here the religion about Jesus and the non-dual reading of his words finally meet, and here they part. Orthodoxy says that this oneness is his uniquely and by nature, and that we share it only by grace, by adoption, as the previous section described. The non-dual reading says that his was simply the clearest case of what is true of everyone: ye are gods. Eckhart came close enough to the second that a string of his sentences was condemned after his death. The eye with which I see God, he preached, is the same eye with which God sees me: one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.

The difference between "what he is by nature, we become by grace" and "what he is, we are" is the whole difference between union and identity. The Christian mystical tradition has mostly said union: two become one without ceasing to be two, as Palamas insisted. It has approached identity only at its edges, and usually at some cost to those who did. But there is a tradition that says identity plainly, as its first and last word, and has said it for longer than Christianity has existed. Part One met its great teacher. Its name is the phrase John's Jesus was nearly stoned for. Not two.

Part Eight

Not Two

Śaṅkara has stood at the edge of these pages since Part One, and for most of the book the Buddhist side has been allowed to speak about him more than he has been allowed to speak for himself. Part Three counted the eternal Self among the wrong views, and its close proposed to read Brahman as a name for emptiness said with too much warmth. Part Four warned that Yogācāra would fail its own tradition the moment the *ālaya* became "a Brahman under a Buddhist name."

That was the Buddhist verdict, and the book let it stand as though it closed the matter. It does not. The tradition that speaks of Brahman has its own account of the self and its knot, its own practice, its own warnings against inflation, and a long quarrel with Buddhism carried on by people who knew each other's arguments very well. In the last three parts it has come steadily closer: in tantra's two who were never two, in the Friend who became the one Paul lived in, and in a teacher who said that he and the Father were one. This part lets it speak. Its name is *advaita*. It means, simply, not two.

LVII

The rope and the snake

Part One gave Śaṅkara's claim in outline: one reality, Brahman; the self not a part of it but it, entirely; what seems to be an individual person, Brahman misapprehended.

The misapprehension has a name, and readers of this book will recognise it. Śaṅkara opens his great commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras* with *adhyāsa*, superimposition: self and not-self, awareness and its objects, laid over one another and mistaken for each other, as a coiled rope in dim light is taken for a snake. The close of Part Three called the Promise "the removal of a superimposition that was never true." The book has been speaking Śaṅkara's language all along, and Yogācāra's teachers, as it happens, used the same rope and the same snake.

Nor is the world, on this account, simply unreal. Advaita calls it *māyā*, and the word is badly served by "illusion". The world is not real as Brahman is

real, since knowledge dissolves it as the snake is dissolved by seeing the rope. But it is not nothing, since it appears, and one can still trip over the rope. It is describable as neither. The statement of the ground in Part Four said that it is not a thing, and it is not nothing. Advaita says that of the world, and keeps its positive word for what lies beneath.

There the two traditions part, and the parting is exact. When the snake is gone, what remains for Advaita is the rope, and the rope is real: Brahman, named in the later tradition *sat-cit-ānanda*, being, awareness, bliss. Not neutral, like the *ālaya*. Bliss. The peace invocation of the Upanishads says it in a single breath: that is full, this is full; from fullness, fullness comes; take fullness from fullness, and fullness remains.

Part Four set out five strands of the theist's case, and one of them was that the ground is reported not as neutral but as loving. Advaita reports it as fullness and joy, and does so without any Thou at all. The ground is given, in this book's sense, with no giver standing apart from the gift. Part One touched this in passing. Here it changes the shape of the fork.

LVIII

Not this, not this

Śaṅkara did not think the teaching of identity could simply be announced. It had to be received by someone ready for it, and he was exact about what readiness meant. The student must have discrimination, *viveka*, between what lasts and what passes; dispassion towards the fruits of action, in this world and any other; a group of six disciplines, among them calm, restraint, endurance and faith; and a longing for liberation strong enough to carry the rest. Only then, and at the feet of a teacher, does "that you are" do its work. The tradition was never under the impression that the sentence alone would do it.

The practice itself is discrimination carried to the end. Whatever is seen is not the seer. The body is seen, so I am not the body. Sensations are known, so I am not the sensations. Thoughts appear and vanish before something that does not appear and vanish with them, so I am not the thoughts. A short hymn

traditionally ascribed to Śaṅkara, the *Nirvāṇa Śaṭkam*, walks the whole road in six verses. I am not the mind, nor the intellect, nor the I-maker, nor memory; not hearing, not tasting, not smelling, not seeing; not merit, not sin, not pleasure, not pain. And every verse ends with the same refrain: I am the form of awareness and bliss; I am Śiva.

Set this beside the root practice of the Buddha's line and the likeness of method is very close. The Vipassana meditator notes each thing that arises, the body, the feeling, the thought, and sees of each: this is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self. The Advaitin says of each: I am not this. The disidentification is the same, and in the first years it often feels the same.

Yet the two move in opposite directions through the body. The Advaitin steps back from sensation, towards the witness that knows it: I am not the sensations. The Vipassana meditator, above all in the lineages that make feeling the centre of practice, goes into sensation with complete attention, and stays, until there is no one left standing back to watch. One withdraws into the seer. The other enters the seen, and finds that the seer was part of it all along. Part One put it as the book's first finding: the one who seemed to be watching turns out to be made of the same passing stuff as what was watched.

The other difference is in how the verse ends. The Buddha's discourse on not-self ends not with a remainder but with release: seeing so, the disciple grows disenchanted, and through dispassion is freed, and no one is named as what remains. Śaṅkara's hymn ends with *śivo 'ham*: I am Śiva, the auspicious one, who remains.

One more line belongs here, from a text long attributed to Śaṅkara, though most scholars now doubt it is his, because it joins his tradition to the one Part Six explored. Among all the means to liberation, says the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, devotion is the greatest; and devotion is the search for one's own true nature. The line quietly redefines one of its own words, and it knows it. It will not let knowledge be cold, and it will not let devotion be a relationship with someone else. It says that the longing the evangelical feels for the Friend and the enquiry the Advaitin makes into the Self are, at the root, one movement of the heart towards what it already is. Whether that is true is the question the rest of this part keeps asking.

The knot of the heart

The Upanishads have their own image for what binds, and it is the one this book has used since Part Three. When that is seen which is both high and low, says the Muṇḍaka Upanishad, the knot of the heart is cut, all doubts are dissolved, and one's deeds come to their end. The Kaṭha places the Self, smaller than the small and greater than the great, in the heart of every creature.

The modern teacher who made this live for the world was Ramana Maharshi. In 1896, a sixteen-year-old schoolboy in Madurai, he was seized one afternoon by a sudden fear of death. He lay down on the floor, held his breath, and enacted his own dying to see what would die. The body would be carried off and burned. But the sense of *I* went on, untouched. Within weeks he had left home for the holy mountain of Arunachala, and he stayed there for the rest of his life.

His teaching, when he began to give it, was very nearly a single question: who am I? Not a riddle to be solved, but a direction for attention. Every thought, he said, arises for someone. Turn from the thought to the one it arises for, and trace the *I* back to its source. He called that *I*, the ego, the knot between consciousness and the insentient body, *cit-jaḍa-granthi*: neither real nor unreal, a formless phantom that lives only by grasping something other than itself, and that finds no footing when it is looked for directly.

Set this beside the eight consciousnesses and the correspondence is almost exact. The seventh consciousness watches the *ālaya* and misreads its continuity as a self. Ramana's *I*-thought rises between awareness and the body and misreads their junction as a person. Both are called knots, and both traditions place the whole of the path in their loosening. Ramana's method also answers a problem Part Two left hanging. There, affirmation at the level of the sixth consciousness failed because one hand of the faculty pushed against the other. Ramana does not push. He neither affirms nor denies. He turns attention round to face the one who would be doing the pushing, and the knot, looked at, has nothing to hold it together.

Ramana's name for the Self was the Heart. He did not mean the organ, and he did not mean the feelings. He meant the centre from which the *I* rises and into which it sinks back, which he would sometimes locate, when pressed, on the right side of the chest.

This book has now met three people who go into the heart. The Hesychast descends with the mind into the heart and stands there before the one who sees. The evangelical asks Jesus into the heart and finds a Friend there. Ramana rests in the Heart and finds that there was never anyone to go in. It is one cave, entered by three doors. What each finds inside is the question the rest of this part must face: a gaze, a friend, or oneself, known at last.

LX

Eating sugar

The Upanishads were not read in one way only, and their three great readings lay out, inside a single tradition, the whole ground that Parts Four and Six have been walking.

Śaṅkara's reading is identity: the Self is Brahman, and every relation between them belongs to the level of appearance. Rāmānuja, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, read the same texts as qualified non-dualism, *viśiṣṭādvaita*. There is one reality, but it is inwardly differentiated: souls and world are to God as a body is to its self, inseparable from him and never simply identical with him. Liberation is endless loving communion, and the lover is not abolished in it. Madhva, in the thirteenth, read them as dualism, *dvaita*. God and the soul are eternally distinct, and the soul's joy is to adore and to serve.

Lay these beside the Christian material and they fall into place with almost embarrassing ease. Madhva stands close to the evangelical: the Thou remains Thou, forever. Rāmānuja stands close to Palamas: filled by the life of the one addressed while remaining oneself. Śaṅkara stands where the Christian tradition has only approached at its edges. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* even gathers the three into a single verse: the knowers of truth say that the one

non-dual reality is called Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavān. The impersonal ground, the Self within, the personal Lord. One reality, named according to how it is approached.

Ramakrishna, the nineteenth-century mystic of the Kālī temple at Dakshineswar, knew all three from the inside. He was a devotee of the Divine Mother to the point of ecstasy, and in the 1860s an Advaitin monk named Totāpurī led him into the formless absorption in which neither Mother nor devotee remained. He would not choose between them. The devotee of God, he said, wants to eat sugar, not to become sugar. And he told the opposite story too: a doll made of salt went to measure the depth of the ocean, and as soon as it entered the water it melted, and there was no one left to come back and report.

His most useful teaching for this book, though, concerns the knot. Ramakrishna spoke of two kinds of ego. The unripe ego says: I am the doer, I am learned, I am rich, how dare anyone slight me. The ripe ego says: I am the servant of God, I am the child of the Mother. Since the ego will not go while the body lasts, he advised, let the rascal be God's servant. Such an ego, he said, is like a burnt rope: it keeps its shape, but it can bind nothing. That is the evangelical's "not I, but Christ" in a Bengali temple garden. It is the ego not destroyed but re-owned, as Part Five found the heruka wearing what remained of Rudra.

And Śaṅkara himself, if the attribution holds (tradition credits him with many devotional hymns, and scholars doubt a number of them), left a verse to Viṣṇu that belongs at the centre of this book. Even when difference has gone, Lord, I am yours, not you mine; the wave belongs to the ocean, never the ocean to the wave.

That verse settles something the book has been circling since Part Three. Non-duality does not have to abolish direction. Even where there are not two, belonging runs one way. The wave that says "I am the ocean", meaning the ocean is now mine, is Baka on his throne. The wave that says "I am the ocean's" is the ripe ego, and it can say "not two" in perfect safety. Part Six found in the evangelical Friend "not 'I am he' but 'I am his.'" Śaṅkara, the great teacher of identity, says the same thing from the far side of identity.

Rumi, it will be remembered, gave the opposite counsel: "I am the servant of God" asserts two existences, and "I am the Real" is the greater humility. Two masters, two opposite pieces of advice about the same few words. Which confirms what was said first, at the knot. The words do not decide. Only the honesty of the one saying them does.

LXI

Further, or the same by another name

That brings the book to a question it has carried since Part Four without quite setting it down. Is the Buddhist teaching of not-self a step beyond the Self of the Upanishads, or the same thing seen from the other side?

The Buddhist case for "further" is strong, and it begins from a striking likeness of method. The Buddha taught not-self by a procedure very close to *neti neti*: form is not self, feeling is not self, nor perception, nor the formations, nor consciousness; none of these is mine, none is what I am. But where the Upanishadic sage negates everything in order to uncover a remainder, the Buddha declines to posit one. In one discourse he rejects the view "this is the world, this is the self; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting", a formula very close to Upanishadic language. In another he rebukes a monk named Sāti for teaching that one and the same consciousness runs on from life to life. And to the ascetic Bāhiya he gave the most radical instruction in the canon: in the seen, let there be only the seen; in the heard, only the heard; then you will not be "with that", you will not be "in that", you will be neither here nor beyond nor in between, and that is the end of suffering. No witness is left standing. The later Buddhist schools classed the Self of the Upanishads among the eternalist views. On this reading Advaita removes the snake and makes a god of the rope; Buddhism looks closely at the rope, finds strands, and finds the strands empty too.

The Advaitin has an answer, and it is not a weak one. The Self, he says, is not one of the aggregates. It is not consciousness as an object, which can indeed be watched arising and passing, but the seeing in which that arising

and passing appear. Negate every object and the negating remains, and it cannot itself be negated, because it is never an object. And the Buddha, notably, never said that there is no self. When the wanderer Vacchagotta asked him directly whether the self exists, he was silent. Asked whether it does not exist, he was silent again. Afterwards he told Ānanda that to say "it is" would side with the eternalists, and to say "it is not" with the annihilationists. Not-self may be a discipline rather than a denial.

History complicates it further. Gauḍapāda, the teacher of Śāṅkara's teacher, wrote verses so close to Nāgārjuna's that scholars have argued for a century about the debt. The best known of them could stand in the Heart Sutra, the short Mahāyāna scripture chanted daily from Japan to Tibet: there is no dissolution and no birth, no one bound and no one striving, no seeker of liberation and no one liberated; this is the highest truth. Ramana regarded it as the final word. Śāṅkara's Vaiṣṇava opponents called him a Buddhist in disguise, *pracchanna buddha*, while Buddhists remembered him as one of their fiercest critics. Part Four described the *rangtong* charge that the *shentong* had smuggled a Self into Buddhism. Here is its mirror: the charge that Śāṅkara smuggled Buddhism into the Self. Each tradition's nearest neighbour is accused of being the other in disguise, which is just what Part Four would predict. Each system's characteristic failure is a drift into the other's territory.

And the line runs through Buddhism too. The Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* takes the four inversions of Part Three, which wrongly find permanence, bliss, self and purity in the world, and says that these four are true of the Buddha's awakened nature. A Buddhist sūtra uses the word *ātman*, self, for what a Buddha is. The *shentong* of Part Four stands on texts like this one.

The scholar and Zen teacher David Loy argued in *Nonduality*, in 1988, that the Buddhist and Advaitic categories are mirror images of one another, and that in the end a formless Being and a formless nonbeing become very hard to tell apart. Revisiting the book three decades later, he named the difference he felt he had underplayed. Advaita looks for the unconditioned behind the conditioned. The Mahāyāna finds the unconditioned as the true nature of the conditioned itself.

That seems to this book the most exact answer available. Both traditions remove the same snake. Both say that what remains cannot be made an object. They part over where to look, and over what, if anything, to call what is found. Advaita turns from appearance to the Self behind it, and names it: full. The Mahāyāna turns to appearance itself, finds it empty and luminous just where it is, and declines to name a remainder, lest the naming become the last thing grasped.

Whether that is a step further depends partly on what one is afraid of. Advaita is medicine for the fear of annihilation: nothing real can be lost, because you are it. The teaching of not-self is medicine for grasping: nothing can be held, not even that. Nisargadatta Maharaj, a teacher in the Advaita line who received visitors in a small upstairs room in Bombay, put both medicines into one breath. "Wisdom tells me I am nothing. Love tells me I am everything." Between the two, he said, his life flowed. It is very nearly the title of this book, spoken above a street in Bombay.

So: the same thing by another name? At the edge where names give out, quite possibly. Further? In the sense that Buddhism will not let even the Self be kept, yes; though Advaita at its best agrees that the Self cannot be kept, since there is no one other than it to keep it. What survives the comparison is not a difference at the summit, which no one can report on from outside. It is a difference in the direction of travel, and in the dangers of each road.

LXII

What remains

Part Four said that emptiness and God are two operations on one mistake, and that they leave different residues: emptiness none at all, God relation. With Advaita in view the fork has more tines than two. Ask what remains when the small self falls quiet, and four answers come back.

Relation. Someone remains, before whom one stands. The Thou remains Thou, forever, and the joy of the soul is to adore. This is the evangelical Friend, the Jesus Prayer's address, Madhva's devotee. Its formula is the one

Ramakrishna gave it: to eat the sugar, not to become it.

Union. Two become one without ceasing to be two. The lover is filled by the life of the beloved and is not abolished. This is Palamas and theosis, Rāmānuja's body of God, Paul's Spirit crying *Abba* in the heart. Its formula was written about Christ himself, when the Council of Chalcedon in 451 described his divine and human natures as united without confusion, without change, without division, without separation: four negatives that refuse both one and two, which the mystical tradition later extended, with care, to the soul united with God.

Identity. Only oneself remains, and it was never small. There was never a second to be united with. This is Śaṅkara and Ramana, al-Ḥallāj in Rumi's reading, Eckhart at his edge. Its formula is the Upanishad's: one only, without a second.

Emptiness. Nothing remains that could be anyone, and nothing is named in its place. This is the Buddhist not-self, carried through. Its formula is a silence. In the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* a gathering of bodhisattvas each give their account of entering non-duality. Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, says that it lies beyond all words, and then turns to the layman Vimalakīrti for his account. Vimalakīrti says nothing at all, and Mañjuśrī praises the silence as the true entry.

Two, two in one, one, and a silence that declines to count.

The same part found that emptiness and God-language treat each other's characteristic disease. Identity has a disease of its own, and it is easy to name. It is the Self enlarged: "I am Brahman" in the mouth of the seventh consciousness, Baka with a Sanskrit vocabulary. It has a quieter form too, familiar from some modern teaching given in Advaita's name: since there is no one here, nothing needs doing; grief is only a story; harm is only *māyā*. That is the nihilism and the spiritual bypassing of Part Three in Vedāntic dress. The tradition knew the danger, which is why Śaṅkara demanded discrimination, dispassion, discipline and a teacher of anyone who would take up the teaching of identity, and why Ramakrishna prescribed the ripe ego for nearly everyone.

What Advaita offers the others is just as clear. To emptiness, which can grow cold, it offers fullness: the ground as bliss, not merely as absence. To the Thou, whose disease was the slow return of the bargaining god, it offers a ground with no one out there to bargain with. And the others offer it their correction in turn. Relation says: remember that the wave belongs to the ocean. Emptiness says: do not make the ocean into a larger wave.

The theologian Raimon Panikkar, son of a Catalan Catholic mother and an Indian Hindu father, proposed that these are not rivals at all but the faces of the Trinity: the Father as silence, where he placed the apophatic and the Buddhist; the Son as the personal, where he placed devotion; the Spirit as the immanent and non-dual, where he placed Advaita. It is the most beautiful attempt yet made to hold them together, and it deserves to be read. It is also a Christian map with room made on it for others, and a Buddhist might fairly decline to be the Father's silence. Part Nine will name the perennialist temptation to declare every summit the same. Panikkar is its finest form, which is exactly why it should be held and not adopted.

Four answers, then, and no argument that closes them. But one man lived all of them, and the way it ended for him says something no map can.

LXIII

What Christ is

Henri Le Saux was a Benedictine monk from Brittany who came to India in 1948 and took the name Abhishiktananda. In January 1949 he sat for the first time in the presence of Ramana Maharshi, and it undid him. Over the following years he spent months in the caves of Arunachala, much of the time in silence, and he never recovered from what had been opened in him there. With Jules Monchanin he founded an ashram at Shantivanam on the banks of the Kaveri and called it Saccidānanda, after the Vedāntic name for Brahman, being, awareness and bliss, in which the two monks heard an echo of the Trinity.

He never stopped saying Mass. And he never managed to make the Trinity and *advaita* sit comfortably together. His diaries, published in English as *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, record the tension across decades with a painful honesty that anyone drawn to an easy synthesis should read before deciding it is a comfortable place to stand. He would not give up the Christ he had served all his life, and he would not pretend that what he had tasted at Arunachala was anything less than what it was.

On 14 July 1973 he collapsed with a heart attack on a road in Rishikesh. He lay in the street, partly paralysed, and something happened there that he spent the remaining five months of his life trying to describe. In letters to friends he wrote that he had found the Grail. And he wrote a sentence that gathers this whole part into five words: "what Christ is, I AM."

He did not soften what it cost. In the same months he wrote that the discovery of Christ's *I AM* was the ruin of every Christian theology, and that all his notions of Christ had burned in its fire. It would be easy to read that as the victory of *advaita* over the Christian in him, and some have. Yet it is worth noticing what his sentence on the road actually says. It does not say there is no Christ. It does not say "I am Christ", as the Brahmā of the old story said he was the Maker. It says that what Christ is, is *I AM*: the name from the burning bush, the name John's Jesus spoke when he said that before Abraham was, I am, the same bare *I* that Ramana traced to its source in the Heart. Ramana himself loved the line from Exodus. Asked what he meant by being, he answered that *I am that I am* sums up the whole truth, and that the method is summed up in two words from the Psalms: *be still*. The Grail is a Christian image, the object of a quest that only one made pure enough can complete, and Abhishiktananda glossed it himself: the quest for the Grail, he wrote, is the quest for the Self, and the Grail is close at hand for anyone who will open their eyes. *I AM* is the name the Christian and the Vedāntic traditions both give to what lies beyond every name. He reached for both languages at once because neither alone would hold what had happened.

He did not settle the question this part has been asking, and he would not have wanted it settled on anyone else's behalf. What he shows is that the question is finally not argued but undergone. The Friend, the gaze, the Self

and the silence were not, for him, four positions to choose among. They were the stations of one life, and at the end, on a road in the Himalayan foothills, they were apparently not four.

Part Seven found Paul saying that the Son's own prayer is prayed in the believer's heart. Abhishiktananda, lying in the road, seems to have found where that prayer is prayed from. Whether to call it the Father, the Self or the Heart was, by then, the least important question he had.

Part Nine

Empty and Given

Where it has always been said

There is one place where the question at the centre of this book is not a comparison at all but a settled doctrine, held from inside a single tradition. The tradition is Dzogchen. Its near twin, Mahāmudrā, the Great Seal, taught above all in the Kagyu school, points to the same nature of mind by its own road, and much of what follows could be said in either language.

Dzogchen, the Great Perfection, describes the ground with two terms held together. *Ka dag*, primordial purity: empty from the beginning, not made empty by practice, never having been a thing. And *lhun grub*, spontaneous presence: self-arising, luminous, displaying without being made to display by anyone. Neither is subordinate. Neither is a stage towards the other. Their inseparability is what the word *rigpa* points at.

Most Dzogchen teachers name a third aspect beside these two, and this book cannot leave it out. The ground's essence is empty. Its nature is luminous: the clear light that dawns, unrecognised, at the door of sleep. And its energy, *thukjé*, is usually translated compassion, sometimes responsiveness: an unceasing, all-pervading capacity to meet whatever arises. It is not a person, and Dzogchen would not call it a Thou. But it means that the sentence Part Four could not get past needs a qualification here. In the tradition this book uses as its lens, compassion is not only what follows from seeing through the self. It is counted among what the ground is.

Read the statement of the ground at the close of Part Four again and it is the same shape. Empty, so that nothing can be possessed and no one stands in credit. Given, so that it was not made by anyone who uses it and does not have to be summoned. The difference is that Dzogchen is not proposing this as a reconciliation of rival traditions. It has simply always said it.

It would be easy to say more than this, and the book should not. *Ka dag* is not the Buddha's emptiness renamed; it is that emptiness, in the Buddha's own line. *Lhun grub* is not the Father's love, and Dzogchen would decline the word Father, as it would decline Śaṅkara's word Self. But the shape is

unmistakable. What the Buddha found, that the ground cannot be grasped; what the Gospel finds, that it was never made, never earned, and does not have to be persuaded to give itself; and what Śaṅkara insisted on, that the one who finds it is not a second thing standing apart: Dzogchen holds all three in a single word, and treats the holding not as an achievement of synthesis but as the plain description of what was always the case.

The same teaching says that at death this luminosity dawns for every being, and that one who has come to know it in practice recognises it then, as a child runs into its mother's arms. The book has twice stood at that threshold already: with a schoolboy lying on a floor in Madurai, enacting his own death, and with a Benedictine lying in a road in Rishikesh. A Tibetan teacher would have a name for what dawned there, and the book need not borrow it. But it should notice that the threshold recurs, and that on neither occasion did it open onto nothing.

Dzogchen has one further thing no book can supply, and it is a matter of genre. Its central instruction is not an argument but an introduction. The three statements of Garab Dorje, remembered as the first human teacher of Dzogchen, set the path in that order: direct introduction to one's own nature; decide upon that one thing and no other; continue with confidence in liberation. The first term is not a proposition to be assessed. It is a showing, given by someone who sees, to someone capable at that moment of recognising what is shown.

So a pointing, offered as a gesture towards the genre and not as a substitute for it.

There is awareness here. You have not manufactured it, and you cannot find it, and it has not been interrupted once since you began reading.

It is empty. Look for its edge, its colour, its location, and there is nothing to take hold of. This is not a lack. It is what it has always been like.

And it is not blank. Sound is arriving in it. These words are appearing in it. It did not have to be persuaded to do that.

Empty, and displaying. Not two things held together by effort. One thing, which was never assembled and does not need your maintenance.

Do not conclude anything. Conclusions are the sixth consciousness, arriving late as usual, to take credit.

Said honestly: in the tradition itself that is not how it is done. Dzogchen is transmitted, requires a qualified teacher, and the pointing-out instruction is given within a relationship, with preparation behind it and guidance after. A paragraph in a book is a signpost, not the road. What it can do is show that the position this book reached by argument exists somewhere as a living practice with a lineage, which is more than most philosophical conclusions can claim.

LXV

The whole path in one sitting

The Introduction said that this book looks through the Buddhist path in its complete form, and promised a reason. It can now be given, because every piece of it has been met.

The path has three vehicles, and they are not three religions but three depths of one. The first is the Buddha's own teaching of seeing: body and mind watched until their passing is plain and the one who clings to them is seen through. This is the root, the practice of the Vipassana hall, the one Part Two found standing awake in the door of sleep. The second, the Mahāyāna, draws out two things the first contained in seed: the emptiness of all things, carried through without exemption, and the vow to awaken for the sake of every being. The third, the Vajrayāna, adds the given: the deity received in empowerment, the blessing of the lineage, devotion to the teacher, and the teaching that the nature of mind is not only empty but luminous and full of qualities. The vehicles are not discarded as one climbs. The Tibetan traditions insist that each contains the ones before it, which is why a tantric practitioner still sits and watches the breath.

Now lay a single sādhana beside Part Eight's four answers to the question of what remains when the small self falls quiet.

It begins, very often, with the deity in front: a form of enlightened presence, visualised before the practitioner, in whom refuge is taken and from whom blessing is asked. That is **relation**. The Thou is there, and the practitioner stands before it as the evangelical stands before the Friend and Madhva's devotee before the Lord.

Light and blessing pour from the deity into the practitioner, and the deity dissolves into them. That is **union**: the one addressed filling the one who addressed, as Palamas described the energies, as Paul described the Spirit crying *Abba* in the heart.

Then the practitioner arises as the deity and holds the conviction: I am this. That is **identity**, divine pride, the ripe form of "I am", which Śaṅkara's hymn sings as *śivo 'ham*.

Then all of it dissolves. Deity, practitioner, the whole visualised world, resolve into emptiness, and for a while there is nothing to report. That is **emptiness**, Vimalakīrti's silence.

And then the practitioner rises again into the ordinary day, seeing forms as the deity's body, sounds as mantra and thoughts as wisdom, all appearing and empty, and gives away whatever good was done. That is the **given**, handed on.

In twenty minutes on a cushion the practitioner passes through each of the stations Abhishiktananda lived across a lifetime, and lets each of them go. Nothing in the practice requires a decision that the Friend was an error, or the Self a delusion, or the silence a loss. Each is entered fully, and none is kept.

That is the reason for the lens. It is not that Buddhism has the last word on the others. It is that this practice has made room, inside itself, for what each of the others found, and has a way of holding each without letting it harden into the whole. The teaching of the two truths, with its long, patient account of skilful means, gives a particular freedom in reading other traditions: to take a teaching as true at its own level and in its own language, to see where it points, and to decline either to convert it or to dismiss it. Pure view supplies the rest. It asks the practitioner to see every being, and every teacher, as luminous in nature, and so it gives permission to meet the Christ of the Gospels and the Śaṅkara of the commentaries at their best, which is where this book has tried to meet them.

Honesty requires the other half. The order of a sādhanā is itself a decision, and it is a Buddhist one. It puts relation first and emptiness last. A Christian would reverse them, or rather would say that after every silence the Thou is still there, and that the last word is not dissolution but communion. Śaṅkara would say that the emptiness at the end is only the absence of what was superimposed, and that what remains when it is gone is not nothing but the Self, which never needed to arise. Dzogchen itself would say that the four are not stations at all but facets of one presence, seen in sequence only because the practitioner has not yet recognised it all at once. A lens is not a verdict. It is a way of seeing clearly enough to know where the others would disagree, and to leave the disagreement standing wherever it is honest to leave it.

LXVI

Company on the road

Nothing in this book is new. Worth saying plainly, because the temptation in comparative work is to feel one has discovered something, when what has happened is that a century-old conversation has been rejoined.

The conversation is much older than its modern chapter. When Buddhism reached China in the first centuries of the common era, its translators reached for Daoist words to carry Indian ideas, and emptiness travelled for a while under Daoist names for non-being. What grew from that meeting, Chan, and later in Japan Zen, carries a good deal of Lao Tzu in its bones. The *Tao Te Ching*, the short book of eighty-one chapters traditionally ascribed to him, has a sentence for each word of this book's title. Thirty spokes share one hub, and it is the empty space at the centre that lets the wheel turn; shape clay into a bowl, and it is the hollow that holds. And of the Way itself: it gives life and does not possess, it acts and claims nothing, it raises and does not rule. Empty, and given, in one small book, with no Thou and no Self needed to hold them together.

In its modern form it begins with D. T. Suzuki, who did more than anyone to carry Zen to the West. He spent his later years arguing that of all Western

thinkers it was Eckhart who came closest to Zen, and set *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* on exactly the ground Part Four occupies: the Godhead beyond God, and emptiness, side by side, to see whether the resemblance is real.

Thomas Merton took it further by living it. He read Suzuki, corresponded with him, and in the last months of his life went east to meet Tibetan and Zen practitioners as a Cistercian monk rather than a tourist. Three years earlier he had published his own renderings of Chuang Tzu, the other great voice of early Daoism. His formulation is the best single sentence the dialogue has produced: that the deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. That names what the comparison is for. Not the reconciliation of two doctrinal systems, which may be impossible, but recognition at a level where doctrine is not yet operating.

Thich Nhat Hanh, whom Merton called his brother, made the move this book has tried to make. *Living Buddha, Living Christ* goes back past the systems built in each founder's name to the two teachers themselves, and finds them closer to each other than to much of what was later said about them.

The figure who matters most for our particular difficulty is Abhishiktananda, whom Part Eight followed from the caves of Arunachala to the road at Rishikesh. He lived the fork Part Four declined to close, would not resolve it in doctrine, and refused equally to pretend the two sides sat comfortably together. What came to him at the end did not arrive as a solution, and his diaries are the best warning anyone could have against mistaking this position for a comfortable one.

The line Abhishiktananda began at Shantivanam was carried on by Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine who lived there from 1968 until his death in 1993 and wrote, in *Return to the Centre* and *The Marriage of East and West*, some of the most careful reflection yet made on the meeting of Christ and Vedānta. He did not settle it either. But he showed that the meeting could be lived in the open, in community, for decades, and that the Mass and the Upanishads could be said in the same chapel without either being made smaller.

On the philosophical side the work was done by the Kyoto School, the twentieth-century Japanese philosophers who brought Zen into dialogue with

Western thought. Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* takes the field of emptiness as where the Western problem of nihilism can be addressed rather than evaded. Abe Masao pressed a point a Christian could feel: the self-emptying of God in Philippians is not a property God has but what God is, so that God is God precisely in not being a self-affirming God. Whatever one makes of it as theology, it is structurally the argument of Part Four: two operations, one mistake.

And this book's particular synthesis has been attempted before, by a theologian rather than a meditator. John Keenan's *The Meaning of Christ* is a Christology written through Yogācāra, reading the incarnation by way of the three natures and the *ālaya*. He does with Christ what Part Two did with the modern manifestation teachers: claims that machinery described in India in the fourth century can carry a Christian account of reality without deforming it.

The conversation has a laboratory chapter now too, and it needs the same care. The nearest science comes to this book's subject is not physics but the study of perception. Researchers working on what they call predictive processing describe the brain as forever generating the world it expects and correcting the guess against the senses, so that ordinary perception is, in a phrase Anil Seth has made familiar, a controlled hallucination. That is not Yogācāra, and it does not prove Yogācāra. But a reader of Part Two will hear the rhyme: experience as the ripening of what was laid down before, met a little late, as a world outside.

Physics is a harder case. Some of the founders of quantum theory took these traditions seriously: Schrödinger kept the Upanishads close and called consciousness a singular with no plural, and Bohr put the Chinese sign of yin and yang on his coat of arms, under the motto that opposites are complementary. In our own time Carlo Rovelli has found Nāgārjuna the best philosophical company for a relational reading of quantum theory. None of them, at their most careful, claimed that physics had confirmed a teaching, and the honest course is to follow them. On most readings the observer of quantum mechanics is any measuring interaction, not a meditating mind, and entanglement does not make everything one in the sense the mystics meant.

What physics can offer this book is an example rather than evidence: Bohr's complementarity, two descriptions of one reality that cannot be merged and cannot be dropped, each true within the frame that shows it. That is very close to the mutual correction of Part Four, and it is offered in the same spirit, as company on the road rather than proof of the destination.

So the position has colleagues, a literature, and a track record. It also has its characteristic failures, which the dialogue has catalogued: the perennialist flattening that declares all summits identical because the descriptions rhyme, and the opposite failure of a comparison so scrupulous that nothing is ever allowed to be the same as anything. The first takes its name from the perennial philosophy, which Aldous Huxley's book of 1945 made famous: the conviction that every mystic, rightly read, describes the same summit. The rest of this part tries to walk between them.

LXVII

Three questions

Every practice in this book has been asked the same three questions, and it is time to say so plainly. Who is imagining? Where did the image come from? And what happens to it afterwards?

They first became visible in the Law, which leaves all three open. Who is imagining? Whoever sits down to practise, unexamined. Where did the image come from? From the one who wants. What happens to it afterwards? It is kept, and defended against doubt. That is not a charge against Neville, who knew it, and whose Promise was his own answer to all three: the one imagining was not who he had seemed, what mattered came from above, and it could not be produced. It is simply a description of deliberate imagination when nothing holds it.

Every tradition that has lasted has answers, and each answers differently. The tantric deity is imagination held by emptiness: arising from it, returned to it, never owned. The Friend in the heart is imagination held by gift: received, addressed, and credited elsewhere. The Hesychast, standing before God

without an image, shows that the holding can be done with no picture at all. Ramana, asking who is imagining, shows it done from the other end, by turning round to face the one who holds. And the Vipassana meditator, noting the image as it arises and passes, shows it done by the simplest means of all: seeing that it comes and goes, and that nothing in it stays long enough to be anyone's.

This also explains why the question raised in Part Three, whether Yogācāra is metaphysical idealism or a phenomenological claim about the structure of experience, never needed settling. That would matter a great deal if the subject were only how appearance is produced. It matters much less once the subject is what the ground is, because the apophatic, the Advaitic and the emptiness traditions all refuse to let the ground be the kind of thing that idealism and realism are arguing about.

One begins wanting to know how the mirror works and ends up asking what is behind it, and discovering that behind it is not a location. That is the shape of Neville's own distinction, and the shape of this book: the Law is a nursery, and the Promise is what one finds on ceasing to operate the world and noticing who was going to be enriched.

LXVIII

Six ways of holding an image

Those three questions sort the practices this book has met more cleanly than any doctrine does.

The Law. The image is chosen by the one who wants. It is held with feeling, persisted in, and kept; doubt is not allowed to erase it. Who is imagining is left unexamined, and so by default it is the seventh consciousness. The image is made, and the image is kept.

The noting. The Vipassana meditator neither designs the image nor receives it as sacred. It arises, as images do, and is noted as it arises, "seeing, seeing" or "imagining, imagining", and watched as it passes. It is held for exactly as long as it lasts and no longer. Nothing is kept and nothing is

addressed, and in time the one noting is found to be one more thing that arises and passes. The image is not made, and it is not kept. It is simply seen.

The deity. The image is received, from a lineage, in an empowerment, with its proportions fixed. It arises from emptiness after the one who would claim it has been dissolved. It is held with conviction and then released. The image is received, and the image is let go.

The Friend. The image is received from scripture, a community and a long inheritance. It is not dissolved but addressed, and the relationship remains. What stops it becoming a possession is the direction of the credit: everything good is attributed to the one addressed. The image is received, and kept as a Thou rather than as property. When it is kept as property, as a Jesus who agrees with me, it has quietly become the Law.

The Name. The Hesychast refuses the image altogether and keeps only the address. Nothing is made, so nothing needs releasing. One stands before a gaze rather than holding a picture.

The enquiry. Ramana's way holds no image and addresses no one. It takes the first of the three questions, who is imagining?, and makes it the whole of the practice. Attention turns from the picture to the one it is appearing to, and finds no person there. Nothing is made, so nothing needs releasing; nothing is addressed, so nothing needs keeping.

Two lines run through these six. One is whether the image is made or received, which is the question of the given. The other is whether it is kept or released, which is the question of the empty. The noting sits lightly across both lines, since it neither makes the image nor keeps it, and simply lets pass what would pass anyway. The Name and the enquiry step outside both lines by having no image at all, and between them they hold the two poles of Part Eight in miniature: one keeps only the address, the Thou; the other keeps only the question, and finds no one asking it. The Law is the only one of the six that fails both, and that is the whole diagnosis of manifestation teaching in a sentence: an image made by the self, for the self, and kept by the self. Whatever is true in the Law, and much is, it can only be safely practised inside something that answers the other two questions.

The vision of Amitābha in Part Five sits exactly at the hinge. The Buddha is received, seen with perfect clarity, and then seen through, until the one seeing cannot be found either.

LXIX

The frame

That suggests something practical, and it belongs to no one tradition. Whatever form of imaginative or devotional practice a reader already has, affirmation, visualisation or prayer, it is safer and truer inside a frame. The tantric sādhana is the most complete example, but the shape can be carried anywhere.

Before. Set the motive wider than yourself: for whom is this, finally? Then let the one who is about to practise go quiet. Rest for a moment in bare awareness, or, if your language is theistic, in the plain sense of being seen. Begin from there rather than from the wanting.

During. Imagine clearly, if the practice uses images. Remember what the image means, so that it stays a sign and does not become a possession. Hold it with conviction, and notice, gently, who is claiming it.

After. Let it go. Dissolve the image, hand the prayer back, stop guarding the scene. Then give away whatever good came of it: to the people in your life, to all beings, to God, in whatever words you use.

Anyone who practises the Law, in Neville's sense or any other, can practise it inside this frame. Begin in the bare I AM rather than in the wanting self. Assume a state that serves more than you. Release the scene rather than defending it against doubt. Dedicate the outcome. Some will say that is no longer Neville. It may be closer to what he meant by the Promise than most of what is taught in his name.

Signs

Jonathan Edwards's great discovery was that the signs people most trust are the least reliable: intensity, certainty, vivid experience, fluent talk. Every tradition in this book agrees, and each supplies a question that goes deeper. Gathered together, they make a single test that can be applied to any practice, including the ones in these pages.

Is the knot loosening or tightening? After months of practice, is there less need to be someone, or more?

Are other people more real to me, or less? Solipsism is quiet. It shows up as a slight loss of interest in anyone else's inner life.

Can I let go of the image, and of the outcome? If not, the practice has become a possession.

Am I meeting what is here, or avoiding it? Spiritual bypassing always feels like progress.

Which way is the credit flowing? Towards me, as authorship, or away, as gratitude.

What is my life like, over years, when it costs me something? Edwards's final sign, and the hardest to fake.

None of these asks whether the practice worked. The manifestation question is always "Did I get it?" Every tradition in this book replaces it with another: what did getting it, or not getting it, do to me, and to those around me?

These questions have rarely been more practical. A great deal of modern life is imagination with the brackets removed, practised at a scale no teacher of the Law could have dreamed of: images made to be wanted, refreshed by the second, kept and never dissolved, never given away; and a world shown to each person in the shape of their own preferences, which is solipsism with a business model. The traditions in this book were not written for that world. They describe it with uncomfortable precision, and each offers what it most lacks: a frame, a pause between the feeling and the craving, and a way to let

an image go.

LXXI

The Law inside the Promise

None of this says: do not want. Jesus said ask. Tantra has its wealth deity. The Buddha did not forbid householders their livelihoods. What every tradition in these pages insists on is not the absence of wanting but its order and its holding. Seek first the kingdom.

Put practically, it might run like this. Want honestly; pretending not to want is only another way of wanting. Offer the wanting, in whatever language you pray or dedicate in. Remember that whatever you plant ripens in a field that is not only yours, among everyone else's seeds, and that much of what arrives was never yours to author. And meet what does arrive, wanted or not, without planting fresh craving or aversion in response. That last step is the only lever the Buddha finally grants, and it turns out to be enough.

Practised this way, the Law trains the very thing the Promise completes. Each deposit, made and released, is a small rehearsal of the discovery that the one at the controls was never there. The Law makes you the dreamer. The Promise ends the dreaming. And the dreaming ends more gently for those who learned, while they were dreaming, to hold what they imagined with open hands.

It is worth saying once more where the Buddha's lever is found, because the book began there. The discourse on mindfulness opens by naming its own purpose: this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lament, for the ending of pain and grief. Purification, in the Vipassana halls, does not mean scrubbing. Old seeds, the *saṅkhāras* of the Vipassana halls, ripen as sensation in the body and are met with awareness and equanimity, which in the line of S. N. Goenka is very nearly the whole instruction; and each, neither fed nor fought, ripens out and is not replanted. The classical map of insight, set out in Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification*, places equanimity towards all formations just short of

awakening.

The traditions in this book purify differently, and the difference is the book in miniature. Śaṅkara let purification ready the mind and kept liberation for knowledge. The Vajrasattva practice of Part Six receives it from above, as nectar poured down: purification as gift. The Vipassana hall allows it, by not stirring. Lao Tzu, who knew none of them, asked who can make muddy water clear, and answered: leave it still, and it clears by itself. The meditator does not make the water clear. The meditator stops stirring it.

LXXII

What a tradition does that a book cannot

A book can hold a question open indefinitely. That is its privilege and, in a sense, its job.

A life cannot, or at least not comfortably, and a community certainly cannot, because a community has to know what it does on a Tuesday evening. So living traditions commit where a comparison does not. Dzogchen commits to the luminous presence of the ground. Śaṅkara commits to the one without a second, and Rāmānuja, reading the same Upanishads, commits to the love that needs two. Ibn 'Arabi commits to the Real, making the holding together of incomparability and immanence a formal requirement rather than a tension to be resolved. The Kyoto School, for all its ecumenism, takes nothingness as the more fundamental term. Each has decided.

Which leaves this book in an odd place, and honesty requires naming it. It is not a faith. It has a lens, which this last part has tried to justify, and a lens is not a practice. The nearest thing to a home it has is the long conversation between the Buddha's line, the Christ's and the Upanishads', which is not a religion but a conversation, held mostly by people who kept their own practice while refusing to pretend the other traditions were dialects of it.

That is not nothing. But it is not what any of the sources described here were actually doing. They were practising.

This book has offered frames, signs and practices, and they are meant to be used. But they are signposts, not the road. Anyone moved by these pages will be better served by one practice done for years, one teacher who can see them, and one community that knows what it does on a Tuesday evening, than by any number of comparisons, including this one.

The book began with a young god who, in a former life, walked for a hundred years to reach the end of the world and died without arriving. The Buddha told him that the world, its arising and its ending are found in this fathom-long body. A book of comparisons is a kind of walking, and this one has gone a long way: to Galilee and Kaladi, to Arunachala, to a road in Rishikesh. It has not reached the end of the world, and could not have. That is found where the Buddha said it would be, by sitting down and feeling what arrives, with awareness and with equanimity, until the one who was walking turns out to be made of the same passing stuff as the road.

The dialogue is downstream of practice and worth very little without it, which is the last thing worth saying: every argument in these pages was produced by people who sat down, for years, and then tried to say what happened. It cannot be entered from the other end.

Whatever is true in these pages was given before it was written. Whatever good they do is given away: to everyone on the road, whichever door they came in by, and to all beings, in whatever words they pray.

Glossary

Terms that recur in these pages, with the sections where they are first or most fully explained.

Abba: Aramaic for father, the word Jesus used in prayer (II, LV).

Advaita Vedānta: the reading of the Upanishads as "not two", whose great teacher is Śaṅkara (III, LVII).

ahamkāra: the I-maker, the function that says "I" (IX, XIII).

ālaya (ālaya-vijñāna): literally a dwelling; the deepest consciousness in Yogācāra, often translated storehouse, a moving stream that receives, carries and ripens impressions (VIII, IX).

anōthen: Greek for both "again" and "from above" (XXXIX).

ātman: the self; in Advaita, the Self that is Brahman (III).

bodhicitta: the resolve to awaken for the benefit of all beings (XXIX).

bodhisattva: one who has vowed to awaken for the sake of all beings (XXIX, LXII).

Brahman: in the Upanishads, the one reality (III, LVII).

clear light (ösel): the luminous nature of mind, said in Tibetan teaching to dawn briefly in sleep and fully at death (X, XLVII, LXIV).

dependent arising (paṭicca-samuppāda): the teaching that whatever arises does so in dependence on conditions; in experience, the chain in which contact brings feeling and feeling brings craving (I, V).

Dharma (Pali Dhamma): the Buddha's teaching and the truth it shows; the holy Dharma of Tibetan usage (I, XXIX).

dukkha: unsatisfactoriness, the suffering that clings to whatever is impermanent (XII).

Dzogchen: the Great Perfection, the Tibetan teaching that the nature of mind is empty, luminous and responsive from the beginning (LXIV).

emptiness (śūnyatā): the absence of own-being in whatever depends on conditions; not a void behind things, but how they are (V, XXIII).

equanimity (upekkhā): non-interference with the natural flow of experience; an all-embracing, spacious impartiality that neither clutches the pleasant nor pushes away the unpleasant; not indifference (XVII, LXXI).

feeling (*vedanā*): the pleasant, unpleasant or neutral tone with which every contact arrives (I).

Hesychasm: the Orthodox tradition of stillness (Greek *hesychia*) and the Jesus Prayer (V, XLVII).

icon: in Orthodox Christianity, a holy image made to canon, through which the honour paid passes to the one shown (XLVII).

Īśvara: the Lord; in Advaita, Brahman with qualities, real at the level of the world (XXII).

ka dag: primordial purity, the empty essence of the ground in Dzogchen (LXIV).

kamma (Sanskrit *karma*): intentional action, which the Buddha defined as intention itself (I, XVII).

kenosis: the self-emptying of Christ in the letter to the Philippians (V, LVI).

kliṣṭa-manas: the afflicted mind, Yogācāra's seventh consciousness, which mistakes the *ālaya* for a self (IX).

lhun grub: spontaneous presence, the luminous nature of the ground in Dzogchen (VII, LXIV).

Madhyamaka: the Middle Way school of Nāgārjuna (V).

Mahāmudrā: the Great Seal, the Kagyu teaching on the nature of mind, near twin of Dzogchen (V, LXIV).

Mahāyāna: the "great vehicle", the Buddhism of emptiness and of the vow to awaken for all beings (V).

māyā: in Advaita, the appearing world, neither simply real nor simply unreal (VII, LVII).

metanoia: Greek for the turning of the whole mind; repentance (XLVII).

neti neti: "not this, not this", the Upanishadic way of negation (III, LVIII).

nirguṇa and saṁguṇa: Brahman without and with qualities (XXII).

prelest: in Orthodox teaching, spiritual delusion, above all taking one's own imaginings for a visitation (XXXVII, XLVII).

refuge: entrusting oneself to the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (XXIX).

rigpa: in Dzogchen, awareness that knows its own nature (LXIV).

sādhana: a tantric practice text, and the practice it sets out (XXIX).

saṃskāra (Pali saṅkhāra): a stored impression or conditioned reaction; in Vipassana, what equanimity allows to surface and pass away (IX, LXXI).

saṃsāra: the round of birth and death (XXXVI).

sat-cit-ānanda: being, awareness, bliss; the later Advaita name for Brahman (III, LVII).

tat tvam asi: "that you are", the great saying of the Upanishads (III).

tathāgatagarbha: buddha-nature, the awakened nature said to be present in every being (XXVIII).

theosis: in Orthodox Christianity, participation in the life of God (XLVII).

thukjé: compassion or responsiveness, the unceasing energy of the ground in Dzogchen (LXIV).

trīśabhāva: the three natures of Yogācāra, constructed, dependent and perfected (XVIII).

upekkhā, see equanimity.

Vajrayāna: tantric Buddhism, the vehicle of deity, devotion and the body (Intro, V, XXIX).

vāsanā: perfuming, the impression an act leaves in the mind (VIII).

vedanā, see feeling.

Vipassana: insight meditation, the practice of watching experience arise and pass (I, LXXI).

viveka: discrimination between what lasts and what passes (LVIII).

YHWH (Yahweh): the name of Israel's God, set beside I AM THAT I AM at the burning bush (XIII).

yidam: a meditational deity, a form of enlightened mind (XXIX).

yoga: the Indian discipline of body, breath and mind, first named in the Upanishads and systematised by Patañjali (III).

Yogācāra: the Mahāyāna school of mind-only, shaped by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (V, VI).

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