

# The Language of Mysticism

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Mysticism is an admittedly difficult concept to define. The word has been used loosely to describe anything occult, religious, pious or strange. By mysticism I mean what appears to be an experience of Self, God, *brahman*, the universe, or any divine presence, attained through some degree of transcendence of oneself. It is an insight into the nature of reality. Mystical experience is widely considered to be ineffable. Normally mystics are expected to be unable to talk clearly about their experiences, and those who try to write in a restrained, critical manner about mystical experiences may be suspected of not having enough faith.

But mystical experience or questionably mystical experience can be talked about a lot more clearly than it usually is, and can be examined critically. Perhaps at times it cannot be talked about completely, but facts of experience can be stated by the experiencer and those facts can be discussed carefully and perhaps lead us to better understanding. The language of mysticism, if it is to serve any other purpose than devotional, needs to be precise and discriminating. I have prepared six questions that can be asked about a mystical or questionably mystical statement, to help us look at it critically and perhaps understand it better.

For my example, I have taken a sentence from Emmanuel Vattakuzhy's *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiktananda*. This book is about the French Benedictine monk, Swami Abhishiktananda, who lived in India and

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practised and wrote about Christian spirituality in a Hindu context. The sentence we will look at here concludes a 1½ page section called "An Awakening to the Reality or Realities", in which a variety of awakening experiences are discussed. The sentence to be examined is, "In an awakened heart God is the light shining in silent stillness."<sup>1</sup>

1. *Is the sentence describing an actual event or speaking of a more general situation?* In this case, the question is whether Vattakuzhy's sentence describes an awakening that has actually happened or could happen, during which God in some manner shines, or whether it refers to some kind of general condition, an ongoing state with or without a recognizable beginning, in which God, though not dramatically perceived, in some manner shines. For example, when it is reported that while Paul was traveling on the road to Damascus, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him," (Acts 9 : 3) we understand that some actual event is being talked about. On the other hand, when John says, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1 : 5) we take it as a general truth, true over a period of time, not an event happening at one specific moment or another.

Grammatically, "In an awakened heart" can refer to a heart such as Paul's which is experiencing the moment of awakening. On the other hand, it may refer to a heart that has been awakened in the past and is thus now an awakened heart. If we look at the context of the sentence, which is the section that it concludes, we see that it contains reference to both experiences of awakening and the ongoing awakened state. Among the first, the writer says, "A sannyāsi's inner eye is opened."<sup>2</sup> "In this awakening a sannyāsi realizes within himself his real self."<sup>3</sup> "It is an experiential discovery, an enlightenment touching ones depth."<sup>4</sup> "His awakened 'I' pierces like a laser beam, and lights

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1. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, *Indian Christian Sannyāsa and Swami Abhishiketananda* Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1981), p. 108.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

up to its very depths the 'I' that is uttered by any conscious being."<sup>5</sup> These are statements about the moment of awakening. It may be that in our sentence the writer means that God is the light that shines in this awakening experience.

On the other hand there are other preceding statements that describe more a continuing condition resulting from awaking. "An awakened one is devoted to the Real."<sup>6</sup> "An illumined *jñāni* adopts a new attitude towards life."<sup>7</sup> "His illumination is a new way of knowing, a new way of looking at things."<sup>8</sup> Being devoted, and having a new attitude, a new way of knowing and looking at things are characteristics maintained over a period of time, not one-time events. Is the light of God in our sentence, then, what shines at the moment of discovery or is it a presence continuing over a period of time? The context allows for either interpretation. Even if the sentence is appropriate in both senses, it is not appropriate in the same way, nor would it be saying the same thing.

One reason why the sentence could be referring to the actual moment of awakening is that an awakening experience is sometimes associated with light. Vattakuzhy had just said, "His awakened 'I'...lights up..."<sup>9</sup> "There is nothing but pure light."<sup>10</sup> In other places Vattakuzhy quotes Abhishiktananda's descriptions of his own experience of awakening. Abhishiktananda speaks of "the apparition of the marvellous disk" and "a sudden eruption of the infinite column of fire and light of Arunachala."<sup>11</sup> "Here is only...a shoreless ocean of Light."<sup>12</sup> Abhishiktananda is not speaking here about lasting phenomena, but of a light associated with a moment of awakening.

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5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid, p. 77.

12. Ibid, p. 111.

If Vattakuzhy is speaking of an ongoing condition that follows an awakening, then he is saying that God is a continuing light in that condition. But for him to speak here of a light that is present in this lasting condition would be confusing because his only preceding references to light have been descriptions of the light at the moment of awakening. If he is speaking about the light at the moment of awakening, which according to Abhishiktananda's description involves a literal light, then he is saying that that literal light is God. Which leads to the second question.

2. *What is to be understood in the sentence as literal and what metaphorical?* Much of mystical writing is confusing because literal statements cannot be distinguished from metaphorical. The word "awakened" is a kind of metaphor designating a literal change in someone. The word "heart" cannot be taken literally, though it must be asked whether it refers to a literal or metaphorical place or circumstance. "In the heart" can mean "in ones thought" or "in ones deepest feelings". Or it can mean "unconsciously" or even the more concrete idea, "in some kind of dream or hallucinatory experience." Heart is always too vague a term to use to mean anything, except devotionally or medically, unless the author says what he or she means by it. Vattakuzhy has described "the cave of the heart" as "the interior centre of man",<sup>13</sup> but with that definition I do not feel closer to knowing how literal a place or circumstance is being referred to.

When we get to "in silent stillness," there is definitely a question of whether we have metaphor or literalness. If the rest of the sentence is metaphor, that is that God metaphorically shines in the heart of one who is awakened, then the silent stillness would almost need to be a metaphor. But a metaphor for what? If it is a metaphor, "in silent stillness" would add no sense to the sentence. Literal silent stillness means silence plus something being still. Abhishiktananda frequently wrote

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13. *Ibid*, pp. 9-10.

of the stillness one can achieve through yogic practice and the silence practised by some in the religious life. The awakening experience is enabled by an ability to become silent and still, passing beyond sense and thought. Abhishiktananda also speaks of the stillness that precedes the light. Vattakuzhy may be using the concepts of silence and stillness because Abhishiktananda did, but if so, there may be a transformation of these words from literalness to metaphor.

The most important question of literalness or metaphor centres around the word "light" and the literalness of the sentence as a whole may depend on it. If there is a literal light, it shines accompanied by silence and stillness and is experienced by the awakened one, and this surely during the awakening experience, not afterward. The one being awakened is silent and still in body, thought and perceptions. If literal light is then perceived, that light is God. And that is absurd. Though God is metaphorical light, can we say that he is literal light? Light accompanied Paul's experience of God on the road to Damascus. St. Teresa saw light and said that God is in the centre where the light is. Sadhu Sundar Singh experienced God in actually perceived light. But God is not the light itself. Also, Abhishiktananda in his descriptions of his own or others' awakening experiences never says that the light perceived is itself God. He speaks of "the dazzling light of this Presence".<sup>14</sup> The Father is the source from which the brightness radiates.<sup>15</sup>

Abhishiktananda in descriptions of his own experience consistently speaks of the light as a literal vision. Vattakuzhy, except when quoting others, appears to speak of the light only metaphorically. I would think that in this case Vattakuzhy almost assuredly means that God is a metaphorical light. If the light is metaphorical, the sentence seems to say that when there is any kind of awakening (with or without literal light)

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14. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer* (Delhi : I. S. P. O. K., 1969), p. 85.

15. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda : A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experiences* (Delhi : I. S. P. O. K., 1974), p. 108.

or an ongoing having-been-awakened condition, God has a part in it.

3. *Is one inner experience being confused with another?*

A variation of this question is whether one step in a mystical process is being considered simultaneous with what is actually a chronologically different step. This is more likely to be a confusion made by a non-experiencer than an experiencer. In our sentence in question the perception of light and experience of silent stillness are the two experiences mentioned. If no literal experience is being described, then two different experiences are not being confused. If we have here the description of a mystical event, we have light shining during silent stillness. Unless an experiencer speaks of light experienced during silent stillness, it would be most cautious not to assume the two would be simultaneous.

Swami Abhishiktananda was a student of the Upanishads and spoke of his own beliefs and experiences in Upanishadic terms. Vattakuzhy recognizes also the importance of the Upanishads in Abhishiktananda's work. In the Upanishads it is not at all certain that only one experience is being talked about. I see the experience of *neti neti*, not this not this, as an experience of silent stillness in which there is no second thing, only objectless consciousness. Even light is not an object. As opposed to an experience without object, are the experiences of all things, of the divine, or light, with devotion or joy. The variety of experiences indicated in the Upanishads cannot be reconciled into one, even by resorting to the convenient concept of paradox. In Western mystical literature also, there is not simply one experience. Light does not always accompany the experience of silence and stillness. When light is experienced, there may be sound and feelings of movement.

If Vattakuzhy is speaking metaphorically in our quotation, the use of "light" and "silent stillness" in the same context cannot be incorrect, because metaphors are only figures of speech, not factual description. However, these metaphors are in fact

language taken from literal experience. Abhishiktananda, whose teaching he is describing, uses the concepts of light, silence and stillness literally. He does not use the phrase "silent stillness" at all that I can find, but he speaks of the stillness that one can bring about through the practice of yoga. He says that "once the mind is emptied and the mental processes stopped, the deep power or light which normally lies hidden and inactive within every man rises up and shines forth by itself."<sup>16</sup> The light follows the stilling of the mind. The stillness enables the light to appear. That the experience of light is not characterized by silent stillness is even clearer in Abhishiktananda's descriptions of it. It is the falling into the flame.<sup>17</sup> At the appearance of the light, he is "torn to pieces". It is "a mad experience, a sudden eruption of the infinite column of fire and light".<sup>18</sup> It is an awakening out of silent stillness. Even if Vattakuzhy is not speaking literally, he takes language related to two different literal phenomena of mystical experience and joins them to speak metaphorically of mystical experience. This does not contribute to clarity.

There is also the question of whether the word "awakened" may refer to different experiences, all spoken of here as one. This is apparently so, and in this case, Vattakuzhy is simply repeating Abhishiktananda's own practice. In the section which our statement concludes, Vattakuzhy has spoken of awakening variously as the realization of one's real self, the discovery of *brahman*, the opening of the inner eye, becoming the self-luminous, the experience that the Buddha had, a new way of knowing and perceiving, and "an awakening to the mystery of God, to the mystery of man, and to the mystery of the world".<sup>19</sup> These are not all the same experience, though they may all be awakenings. The Buddha's experience was not an awakening to God. The Buddha had no use for the concept of

16. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p. 45.

17. Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi, I. S. F. O. K., 1979), p. 57.

18. Vattakuzhy, p. 77.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

God. Though these experiences differ, our quotation in question is saying that God is the light in them all. There is no basis for assuming there is a literal light in all the experiences referred to, so that God cannot be the literal light in them all. I suppose, however, that all the varying experiences can have a metaphorical light, and in this sentence it is said that that light is God.

When we see how Abhishiktananda combines the various experiences we see something different. He speaks of "all those rishis, mahātmas, gurus and buddhas, who throughout history have themselves been awoken."<sup>20</sup> Here he considers the experiences of these various types of people to all be awakenings as Vattakuzhy does. But he does not call them all experiences of God. Vattakuzhy, by saying that God is the light in an awakened heart, after describing these various types of awakenings, confuses God-experience with some experiences that are not experiences of God.

*4. Are the sense effects that are described, experienced through the waking physical body or through dream experience?* Literal sense experience may be divided into two kinds, waking experience and dream experience. Waking experience uses the sensing apparatus of the physical body. Dreaming consists of an alternate sensing experience appearing to be related to a dreamed body. This alternate sensing experience is also perceived in the physical body, but in a manner separate and different from waking sense perception. Usually there is no problem in distinguishing the two modes of experience. In mystical experience or questionably mystical experience the distinction is not always clear, so that we must ask whether an experience that is described is through the physical body or whether it is dreamed.

In Paul's experience on the road to Damascus we have a waking experience. Paul was really on the way to Damascus.

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20. Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore* (Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1975), p. 43.

He saw a light and fell on the ground. He heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"<sup>21</sup> He heard the voice with his waking ears, a voice that according to one account others heard.<sup>22</sup> As a contrast, we have the appearance of an angel to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife..."<sup>23</sup> The vision and voice of the angel were dreamed. It was not an ordinary dream. It was a dream phenomenon as a means of hearing a message from God. The distinction between waking and dreaming phenomena may not be so clear, even to the experiencer. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know ...and he heard things that cannot be told."<sup>24</sup>

An experience may have some characteristics of waking experience along with some characteristics of dreaming. A person may hallucinate while awake. A person may hear real voices or feel real pain while dreaming. There is lucid dreaming in which the dreamer knows he or she is dreaming and exercises some control over the dream activity. There is meditation and yogic procedure by which one may eliminate all perception of the physical world including awareness of one's physical body, and until the state of dreamless sleep is reached, dream sensing can replace waking sensing. The yogin remains lucid, moving from waking consciousness, through dream consciousness, into dreamless sleep and finally *turiya*, the fourth state.<sup>25</sup>

Swami Abhishiktananda writes of telling the guru Sri Gnānānanda about having experienced the state of "sleeping without sleeping", which could be described in English as 'waking

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21. Acts 9 : 3-4.

22. Acts 9 : 7.

23. Matt. 1 : 20.

24. II Cor. 12 : 2-4.

25. See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 56-57.

sleep'." For the body sleeps, but one is aware. "If thoughts and images survive at all, they come and go rather as in a dream and have absolutely no connection with this essential deep perception." The guru replied that in this experience one must delve deeper until only pure awareness remains. Then the light will shine.<sup>26</sup>

Most mystical or questionably mystical phenomena do not seem to occur under waking conditions, and perhaps even those that do are mostly accounted for by dream phenomena experienced while awake. Most mystical phenomena seem to be experienced as dreams are experienced. There is no basis for assuming there is any non-waking sense experience that is not dream experience. A spiritual experience is not diminished by being experienced through dream phenomena, any more than it is by being experienced while awake, as was Paul's conversion experience. Unless otherwise convinced we must assume that dream phenomena account for experiences such as visions, locutions, "flights of the spirit" (projection or flying), and levitation. Such experiences can be entirely non-mystical, or they, particularly visions and locutions, may somehow be means of experiencing God.

In Vattakuzhy's statement we have several references to sensed experience, which if literal, are either experiences of the physical body or of the dream body. The first word in question is "awakened". An awakening consists of certain experiences either through the physical body, such as Paul's conversion experience, or dreamed, as was probably Paul's levitation and vision of Paradise, or a mixture of both. Since Vattakuzhy has grouped together a variety of awakening experiences, "an awakened heart" can refer to a heart awakened through physical experience or to one awakened through dream experience. The word is inclusive and we need not decide which is meant.

"In silent stillness" presents a different problem. If sound were heard, the question would be whether it was an objective

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26. Abhishikhananda, *Guru and Disciple* (London: S. P. C. K., 1974), p. 125.

sound heard through the physical ears or sound heard as one hears in dreams. However, silence is an absence of both waking and dream sound. We may still ask whether there has been a silencing of objective sound while awake, or a silencing of dream effects. The same can be asked of stillness. Is there stillness of the physical body, as through yoga, and/or stillness of the environment around the body, as can be achieved by finding a suitable quiet place in which to pray or meditate? Or is there stillness of a dreamed body, either by halting the dreamed body's movement or by making body awareness disappear altogether and/or the stilling of the appearance of non-body dream effects through concentration or otherwise? Or is this not even the stilling of the body or its environment, but of the mind, either in a waking or dream context? Or of the body, environment and mind together? If the silence is experienced by the physical body, so is the stillness. If the silence is in a dream situation, so is the stillness. Total silence and stillness of all the senses, both physical and dreamed, and of the mind, becomes dreamless sleep. We do not know whether this silent stillness refers to dreamless sleep, dream experience, waking experience or metaphor.

If the light is shining in silent stillness achieved while awake, the light may be an objective light visible to others, or a hallucination (dream effect) visible only to the experiencer. If the light shines in an inner private silence in which dream effects have been largely stilled, the light must also be a dream effect, seen as lights in dreams are seen.

If we knew that our sentence was based on Abhishikta-nanda's own experience, and if we knew that the writer understood Abhishiktananda to have had a literal awakening experience, then we would know that the sentence refers to an inner experience of light, experienced as dreams are experienced, seen as a shoreless ocean of light, not accompanied by any experience of the waking world. We know that it could not be a waking experience because when only light is experienced, all waking elements of experience are eliminated. If one's body,

clothes, floor and walls were still experienced, it would not be an experience of only light. However, since the writer has referred previously to a variety of literal experiences while probably intending a metaphorical light, any need to decide whether the light is waking or dream experience is eliminated.

5. *What in the sentence describes experience and what is interpretation of that experience ?* If the light is metaphorical and the awakening not a literal event, we have no actual details of experience to be interpreted. If the light is metaphorical, but the experience of awakening is a literal event, as it may be in Vattakuzhy's statement, then the metaphorical light in that experience, meaning that which has helped one to see things in a new way, or that which has enlightened, or opened the inner eye so to speak, is being interpreted as God. If the literal light that is perceived during an awakening is referred to, the interpretation is that that literal light is God. Whether the sentence is describing a literal or a metaphorical experience of light, the interpretation of experience is being presented as part of the experience. Whatever an experience has been, there is no way to be certain that it has been an experience of God. Just as what seems certain during a dream, is questioned and even denied upon awaking, what seems certain during mystical or questionably mystical experience, whether while awake or dreamed, must be questioned when it is over. Whether or not the light, metaphorical or literal, seems to be God at the time, the explanation that the light is indeed God can only be interpretation.

If we are to learn about mystical experience, an experiencer must be able to state the facts of experience—what is seen, heard, or otherwise sensed and what the experiencer thought, believed, and did, being careful in this statement not to draw conclusions. After that the interpretation can be made. This is rarely done however and in a mystical statement we have to try to distinguish experience from interpretation.

For example, we can examine a description given by Abhishtananda of an experience of his, quoted in Vattakuzhy's

book, the source of which I cannot locate. "Here is only the unlimited sea of Being, *Sat*, a shoreless ocean of Light, a brightness of which all things—men and *devas* to beingwith—are simply manifestations in time and space."<sup>27</sup> In this description the sensed experience is evidently of light. Only light could be seen, thus it appears like an ocean of light whose limits could not be seen. As soon as this light is called an ocean we start to get beyond the facts of the experience to a mention of what it somewhat resembled—an ocean. Certainly it was not an ocean, but since only light could be seen, in any direction so to speak, it was like an ocean. Why is this light also called a sea of Being? Was the presence of Being somehow obvious or was this an interpretation after the experience? Even if knowing it to be Being were part of the experience, would not the correct description of the experience be that the experiencer thought at the time that it was a sea of Being, or reasoned it was, or was informed it was, or simply "knew" it was, rather than that it was. When we read that this light is what becomes manifested as men, *devas* and other things, may we not suspect that this is interpretation after the experience based upon one's belief? For after all, the experience supposedly was of the light out of which these things are manifested, not of the light's manifestations in time and space, which we experience every day.

Abhishiktananda interprets the light as a sea of Being, the light of which men, *devas* and all other things are manifestations. Vattakuzhy interprets the light as God. It may still be that the experiencer is speaking of the literal light in the awakening experience, and Vattakuzhy, the reporter, is speaking of an ever-present power that enables an awakened one to look at things in a new way. But it would be better if the reporter would interpret the light that the experiencer has talked about, not a different light. If, on the other hand, the reporter is speaking of the same light that the experiencer is, then we have a real difference of interpretation. This leads to the last question.

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27. Vattakuzhy, p. 111.

6. *Does the sentence reflect the words and intentions of the experiencer or is it the reporter's own statement?* In this case, is Vattakuzhy reflecting Abhishiktananda's experience and belief or is he making a statement of his own?

Part of the question is, whether the reporter uses words to mean the same thing that the experiencer means by them. Aside from the fact that some words used by Abhishiktananda literally, appear to be used by Vattakuzhy metaphorically, one word, "heart", is not used completely in the same way. We saw that for Vattakuzhy, "the cave of the heart" means, in a phrase that reflects the words of Abhishiktananda, "the interior centre of man," which could refer to a place of a sort, but is vague enough not to imply anything literal. But the heart, to Abhishiktananda, is also more specifically "the 'cave' within,... what is beyond the reach of sense or thought." It is the place of *brahman* and of *ātman*.<sup>28</sup> Abhishiktananda's awakened heart, then, would refer to the circumstance of the elimination of sense and thought. *Brahman* or *ātman* is experienced in that circumstance. If the sentence in question is understood to be using the word "heart" as Abhishiktananda does, "in an awakened heart" would mean "when sense and thought are eliminated," a literal experience. If the word "heart" is being used only in the more vague sense, which appears to be so, "in an awakened heart" does not imply a literal experience.

As for the sentence as a whole, the nearest that I can find to a source for it in Abhishiktananda's works is his statement, "At the heart of every thinking being, of every consciousness that awakes to itself, the eternal Presence is shining and making itself known—the Light that enlightens every consciousness that awakens in the world (cp John 1 : 9 )."<sup>29</sup> In this sentence we have the heart, the awakening, the light, and shining. "At the heart...of every consciousness that awakes," becomes "In an awakened heart." "The eternal Presence is shining...—the Light that enlightens," becomes "God is the light shining."

28. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p. 54.

29. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 179.

However, when Abhishiktananda speaks here of every being that awakens, he is not talking about the awakening experience that we have been talking about. He is speaking of awakening in the world, that is being born. He is saying that this Presence enlightens every heart, the heart of every thinking being, that is every one, as indeed John 1:9 says. Vattakuzhy's sentence is saying that the light enlightens one who has the mystical awakening experience.

Vattakuzhy in our sentence uses the word "God" where Abhishiktananda in the last quotation has spoken of "the eternal Presence." If this is indeed the source of Vattakuzhy's sentence, he has substituted God for the eternal Presence, or has called the light of that Presence God. This would be to change what Abhishiktananda was saying. Further substantiation that Vattakuzhy may want to make God more central in this statement of Abhishiktananda's is that he does so elsewhere. Abhishiktananda says, "The Presence is always shining on us as the sun..."<sup>30</sup> Vattakuzhy says, "He suggests that the presence of God should shine on us as the sun..."<sup>31</sup> Abhishiktananda says, "Sannyasa is an inner experience—just that."<sup>32</sup> Vattakuzhy says, "Sannyāsa is an unfathomable abyss of God-experience, an inner experience and it is just that."<sup>33</sup> Abhishiktananda does use elsewhere the phrase "unfathomable abyss" but it is not of God experience.<sup>34</sup> Abhishiktananda writes, "Now that he has discovered the true centre of himself in that very principle from which the world itself originates, his 'personal' interests henceforth coincide wholly with the divine plan..."<sup>35</sup> Vattakuzhy writes, "Since he has discovered the centre of his being in God, the very principle from which everything origi-

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30. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p. 16.

31. Vattakuzhy, p. 159, n. 111.

32. Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore*, p. 38.

33. Vattakuzhy, p. 112.

34. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 175.

35. Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart* (Delhi: I. S. P. C. K., 1976), p. 63.

nates, 'his personal interests henceforth coincide wholly with the divine plan...'36

These examples indicate that Vattakuzhy spoke of awakenings in terms of God-experience in cases where Abhishiktananda had avoided doing so. Thus he is not reporting Abhishiktananda correctly. In fact, Abhishiktananda normally allots to God only an indirect relationship to the awakening experience. He says, "Man cannot attain to his Source without disappearing in it; when he reaches the sphere of Being itself, there is no longer either God or himself, only the blinding glory of He-who-is."37 Awakening is "much more an awakening to an unsuspected depth in oneself, an awakening to oneself, to things, to the mystery which, when projected, is called God."38 "In this experience the supreme agony for the Christian is this—that not only is he stripped of himself in his own deepest being, but literally everything is torn from him...This radical purification seems at the same time also to deprive him of the Lord himself, his Lord, together with the forms in which he revealed himself."39

Another question is, does Abhishiktananda, when speaking of what he himself believes, ever refer to the light as God, either literally or metaphorically? I have not found that he has. He has called the light a sun 40 or "the light of an interior sun."41 These are metaphors for the light looks like a sun. It is "the light of self-realization"42. This does not tell what the light is, but describes the occasion upon which it is seen. In Hindu terminology it is light of *sat* (Being)43,

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36. Vattakuzhy, p. 141.

37. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 85.

38. Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore*, p. 62.

39. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 66.

40. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p. 32.

41. Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore*, p. 80.

42. *Ibid*, p. 3.

43. *Ibid*. p. 88; *Saccidānanda*, p. 62.

the light of the *aham* (I),<sup>44</sup> the light of the *ātman* (the Self),<sup>45</sup> and the light of the Presence<sup>46</sup> (the presence of the Self to itself.)<sup>47</sup> The light is *of* Being, *of* the *aham*, *of* the Self. The light is not the Self, just as the light of a lamp is not the lamp. The Self shines.<sup>48</sup> The self is the source of the light and is not the light itself. This is an important distinction. Abhishiktananda does not name the light itself in Hindu terms, except to call it by Sanskrit words for light, *tejas*<sup>49</sup> and *jyoti*.<sup>50</sup>

Abhishiktananda usually spoke of his own mystical experience, which was foremost related to his stay at the Hindu holy site of Arunachala in South India, and the experience of others, using this Hindu vocabulary. When relating Christian theology to the Hindu terminology, he has called the light "the Word", and, "Jesus" in the context of John 1:1-5 and 1:9.<sup>51</sup> *Sat* Being), the source of the light, he has called the Father.<sup>52</sup> The light of Being, then, is the word of the Father, Jesus who comes forth from the Father.<sup>53</sup> The light is Jesus, the Son, the word, Jesus as *cit* (awareness), the self awareness, of the Father<sup>54</sup>. We saw that in describing his own awakening experience, Abhishiktananda interpreted the light as an ocean of Being. Likewise, his calling the light Jesus, the Word, or the self-awareness of the Father, is interpretation. This sounds much more like theological language than the details of an experience. He has not said that anyone sees Jesus as literal light.

"In an awakened heart God is the light shining in silent

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44. Abhishiktananda, *Towards the Renewal of the Indian Church* (Bangalore : Dharmaram College, 1970), p. 33.

45. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 85.

46. Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, p. 35.

47. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, p. 179.

48. *Ibid*, p. 45.

49. Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore* p. 73.

50. Abhishiktananda, *Gurus and Disciple* p. 21.

51. Abhishiktananda, *Saccidānanda*, pp. 91, 108, 179.

52. *Ibid*, pp. 178-179.

53. *Ibid*, p. 110.

54. *Ibid*, p. 178-179.

stillness." In the end we must ask, what does the sentence do? Although Abhishiktananda speaks literally of light, silence and stillness in descriptions of awakening experience, Vattakuzhy normally uses such words metaphorically. Therefore, although the writer may give the impression that actual mystical experience is being talked about by using the words "light", "silent" and "stillness," there is most likely nothing literal intended in the sentence except the presence of God. "In an awakened heart God is the light" seems to be a way of saying that God is the source of the various types of enlightenment described in the preceding section. This is consistent with Vattakuzhy's concern elsewhere to speak of awakening experiences in terms of God, even though Abhishiktananda did not. "In the silent stillness" adds no meaning to the sentence. To the person who is trying to learn about Swami Abhishiktananda or mysticism, the sentence is misleading. To the person who is somewhat familiar with Swami Abhishiktananda, the sentence appears as an attempt to make him sound more theologically acceptable to Christians.