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An Act of Faith

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AN ACT OF FAITH

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Arts

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in the Graduate School
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

AN ACT OF FAITH

By

Odessa Katrine Colombo

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Masters of Arts

in the field of Philosophy

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

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TITLE: AN ACT OF FAITH

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Douglas L. Berger

The purpose of this work is to examine the act of faith in three different texts: The Bhagavad Gita, Fear and Trembling, and Shobogenzo. I argue that karma-yoga, commitment, and *zazen* are each an activity of faith that adheres to an authentic experience of existence. Each individual must choose and enact what to believe as there are no universal rules to help make that decision. We are creators of our own reality to a certain extent by the beliefs that we hold. We are confronted with freedom of choice at every moment, regardless whether we are aware of it as a choice or not. We experience dread the moment we are fully aware of our own doubt in the uncertainty of a choice. This dread or anxiety from uncertainty is expressed in our emotions of despair that manifests in a crisis of faith. A crisis of faith is an experience of doubt that arises from conflicting beliefs and duties. When beliefs conflict, acceptance fails, and no reason is sufficient to compel the acceptance of one alternative over another. In the experience of doubt an inability to act may arise from the recognition that each act is a responsibility and the sheer terror of this is an existential crisis. The experience of an existential crisis confronts us to choose an act of a course of living in full awareness that we are ultimately responsible for our choice and the meaning of our experiences. This leads us to the question of faith and whether it concerns our actions of 'what one should do' or if it concerns knowledge of 'what one should be' or both. I propose that the unity of doing

and being in living an authentic life is an expression of wisdom. This is the most authentic life because we are completely responsible for the choices that we make, and making them leads to enactment and so defines who one is. Therefore, in human experience, the activity of faith is a spiritual condition of existence.

In the first chapter I present an exposition of faith in The Bhagavad Gita to examine a metaphysical conception of faith. I discuss Arjuna's existential crisis of faith and Krishna's advice to determine whether faith is an activity, knowledge or consists of both. Krishna confirms that faith is a metaphysical conception because each being in existence shares a spiritual condition. It turns out that this spiritual condition is an act of faith in itself. And it appears that this is a revelatory account of faith since it is a metaphysical condition of existence. However, I argue that this account of faith is a knowledge that requires a choice to act in accordance with one's specifically incarnated reality. The metaphysical condition constitutes a disposition towards action. Yet, there is a distinction between disciplined and undisciplined action. A disciplined action is a skill that is free from all attachments and the practice of this skill is karma-yoga. So then, karma-yoga is an activity of faith that consists of both being and doing. The unity of doing and being in living an authentic life is an expression of wisdom.

In the second chapter I expound a paradox of faith in Soren Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling. This text discusses the religious life and the choice of a religious life without any absolutes or guides. Kierkegaard believes that faith must be rooted in personal experience where the individual is free to choose such that the act of faith is a commitment without reason. We have to make a choice without knowing if it is the correct one and so it is 'a leap of faith.' This leap is risky and irrational because there is

no knowledge or evidence to support the act of faith. Kierkegaard illustrates this free choice of the individual in the exemplar of Abraham, the father of faith in the Bible. Free choice is an existential condition and as such the act of faith is an individual choice regardless if it originates a blind belief. As an individual we realize with anxiety that any choice we make is arbitrary. The act of faith as an irrational jump into the uncertainty of existence requires a commitment. This commitment is an activity of faith because it is marked by a passion to live in adherence to experience. This is the most authentic life because we are completely responsible for the choices that we make and the choice defines who one is.

In the third chapter I explicate Dogen's analysis of the 'eternal mirror' in chapter twenty of Shobogenzo Book I and how he re-creates the notion of the "eternal mirror" as a symbolic expression of the mind in a unified activity of *zazen*. Dogen synthesizes both abstract thought and concrete existence in the harmony of body and mind. The harmony of body and mind is the capacity of intuition and the practice of this intuition is wisdom that is expressed in faith. The practice of *zazen* is faith itself because the authenticity of practice comes from original enlightenment that is intertwined with faith in the unitary activity of thought and experience made in a choice of self fulfillment. Thus, *zazen* is an activity of faith that expresses the wisdom of an authentic life.

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CHAPTER 1

AN EXPOSITION OF FAITH IN THE BHAGAVAD-GITA

The purpose of this paper is to examine the metaphysical conception of faith in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in light of the distinction between doubt and faith. I will examine the central spiritual conceptions of the *Gita* to determine whether faith consists in either action or knowledge or both. The guiding question may be formulated as follows: is the spiritual conception of the *Gita* simply concerned with action according to the question what one should do, or is it also broader with respect to what one should be? Faith in the *Gita* remains to be assessed in terms of action and knowledge. However, before one can meaningfully assess the place of faith in the *Gita*, one must have a clear understanding of Arjuna's crisis. Therefore, I begin this paper with a discussion of Arjuna's crisis and the fundamental experience of doubt before undertaking the task of discussing the conceptions of faith in both action and knowledge.

The Bhagavad Gita¹ opens with the scene of two opposing armies on the Kuru field about to do battle for land and kingdom. The war is between the Pandava army and the Kaurava army; both armies are descendants from the same family lineage of Bharata. Arjuna, the son of Pandu, who heads the Pandava army, arrives on the field of 'sacred duty' in a chariot, eager to fight and gain his glory and honor. Arjuna represents what his name means in the Indian language which is noble, honest. In characterizing Arjuna, Śri Aurobindo says,

He justifies his name only in being so far pure and *sattwic* as to be governed by high and clear principles and impulses and habitually control

¹The *Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna's counsel in Time of War*, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam Dell a division of Random House, Inc., 1986). The following quotations attributed to Arjuna and Krishna will be from this translation.

his lower nature by the noblest Law which he knows. He is not of a violent [bad] *Asuric* disposition, not the slave of his passions, but has been trained to a high calm and self-control, to an unswerving performance of his duties and firm obedience to the best principles of the time and society in which he has lived and the religion and ethics to which he has been brought up.²

Arjuna is a strong warrior that exemplifies a virtuous character with self-control and prudence. Arjuna requests Krishna, his charioteer, to take him to the center of the two armies so that he can look around and see the faces of those he has sworn to kill. Looking at the faces of his army and his enemy, Arjuna sees his brothers, cousins, uncles, grandfathers, grandsons, in-laws, and friends. It is at this moment that he realizes the meaning of this war. Śri Aurobindo expresses this well when he says,

It is as he gazes that the revelation of the meaning of a civil and domestic war comes home to him, a war in which not only men of the same race, the same nation, the same clan, but those of the same family and household stand upon opposite sides. All whom the social man holds most dear and sacred, he must meet as enemies and slay, -- the worshipped teacher and preceptor, the old friend, comrade and companion in arms, grandsires, uncles, those who stood in the relation to him of father, of son, of grandson, connections by blood and connections by marriage, --all these social ties have to be cut asunder by the sword.³

² Sri Aurobindo Ghose. Essays on the Gita, (Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 1995) 22-23

³Aurobindo 23

Arjuna becomes aware that all the members of this battle are his relatives and in this sight, compassion fills his heart and overwhelms his body. He says, “My limbs sink, my mouth is parched, my body trembles, the hair bristles on my flesh” (1.29). The emotion of sorrow for his kinfolk not only affects Arjuna to the extent that he cannot control his body but he also cannot control his mind. Arjuna says, “The magic bow slips from my hand, my skin burns, I cannot stand still, my mind reels” (1.30). Arjuna experiences both bodily and mental responses that express the anguish that he feels. As Miller notes, “in Hindu aesthetic theory such responses are considered highly significant because they arise from inner feeling and cannot be simulated.”⁴ The emotion that Arjuna feels within is a spontaneous reaction to the recognition of his connection to the members of this battle, his family and community. Śri Aurobindo says, “That it is through his sensations that he awakens to the meaning of his action.”⁵ Arjuna recognizes that his actions will have consequences. This is not to say that he didn’t know this before, as a warrior he did, he just didn’t recognize the existential meaning of those consequences. Śri Aurobindo says,

It is not that he did not know these things before, but he has never realized it all; obsessed by his claims and wrongs and by the principles of his life, the struggle for the right, the duty of the [warrior] *Kshatriya* to protect justice and the law and fight and bear down injustice and lawless violence, he has neither thought it out deeply nor felt it in his heart and at the core of his life. And now it is shown to his vision by the divine charioteer, placed

⁴ Miller 6

⁵Aurobindo 23

sensationally before his eyes, and comes home to him like a blow delivered at the very centre of his sensational, vital and emotional being.⁶

In this recognition, Arjuna perceives the chaos that will incur from this civil war and he cannot see how there can be any good (kingship, delights, victory or 'life itself') in doing battle. There is no benefit in killing because all the good in this world is for the sake of relatives who are here in this battle willing to sacrifice their lives and fortunes. There is no purpose in life without the people you share life with, and there is no justice in killing family.

Any hope that Arjuna had previous to the sight of his kin has vanished and he would rather die than to kill. He says, "I do not want to kill them even if I am killed" (1.35). Arjuna does not want to kill his enemies because he no longer sees them as enemies and he knows that there will be no joy from this act, though they are willing to kill him. He knows that guilt will arise from killing them because he understands the cause of their evil and this understanding shows the goodness or virtue of his character. Arjuna says, "The greed that distorts their reason blinds them to the sin they commit in ruining the family, blinds them to the crime of betraying friends" (1.38). Arjuna argues that it is a sin to destroy the family in this way of battle because the laws that govern family duty from eternity will perish and when they perish so too will their duty and this will lead to confusion of duty. In the confusion of duty there is corruption among the women in the family and due to this the society will be in disorder. In a disorderly society, sacrifice will not be done and the ancestors will be neglected. Arjuna says, "The sins of men who violate the family create disorder in society that undermines the constant laws of caste and family duty" (1.43). He understands the necessity of both, family and

⁶Aurobindo 23-24

caste duty, for the moral order and he is torn between his duty of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) towards his family and his duty as a warrior towards his caste. Arjuna emotionally struggles between the moral contradictions of fighting in the battle or not fighting in the battle. If he does his warrior duty and fights he will be partaking in the annihilation of his family and if he does his family duty and not fight he will betray his caste duty. As a moral man, Arjuna knows that he cannot choose between these two moral alternatives. Thus, in tormenting anguish, Arjuna falls in his chariot dropping both bow and arrow.

Indeed, it is as if gravity fell beneath him with no ground for his being. There is no ground of being when the world is lost in the uncertainty of consequences. The walls of morality have crumbled before his eyes and any meaning derived from those walls have left him in inner ruin. Śri Aurobindo says,

It is the sensational, emotional and moral revolt of the man hitherto satisfied with action and its current standards who finds himself cast by them into a hideous chaos where they are in violent conflict with each other and with themselves and there is no moral standing-ground left, nothing to lay hold of and walk by, no *dharma*^{7, 8}.

Arjuna can no longer make sense or order of his world and as a result he bears the grief of his emotions. The emotions strike, wounding him without hope and leaves him naked to the moral contradiction and shock that confronts him. Arjuna is raw to his own frailty in the most existential way of being. He is experiencing actual physical and mental doubt from the inability to act and know what he should do. The extreme doubt that he is

⁷ “Dharma means literally that which one lays hold of and which holds things together, the law, the norm, the rule of nature, action and life.” Aurobindo 25

⁸Aurobindo 25

experiencing is a crisis of faith. In a crisis of faith there is intense turmoil of contradiction in once held beliefs and actions. Arjuna does not have the faith to know what his duty is and does not have the faith to act. A crisis of faith demands a reason to know, choose, and act because there is not an option between living with or without faith. In the practical day to day life, faith is a disposition towards action. Arjuna does not have the motive to act because he feels and thinks that he has lost his faith and so all he can do at the moment is weep.

While Arjuna sits in sorrow with tears blurring his eyes, Krishna rebukes him for acting like a coward and tells him to be courageous and stand up and fight as the warrior that he is. Arjuna admits that his compassion is a weakness because his moral duties conflict and leave him in confusion and so he asks Krishna for guidance. Arjuna says,

The flaw of pity
Blights my very being;
Conflicting sacred duties
Confound my reason.
I ask you to tell me
decisively—Which is better?
I am your pupil.
Teach me what I seek! (2.7)

In asking Krishna for guidance, Arjuna is not just asking what his duty is but more fundamentally why this is his duty. In asking the question “why,” he is asking for reasons to act and believe. The reason will enable Arjuna to dissipate doubt and have faith or confidence in himself. Krishna acknowledges the necessity faith when he says,

An ignorant man is lost, faithless,
and filled with self-doubt;
a soul that harbors doubt has no joy,
not in this world or the next (4.40).

Krishna confirms the necessity of faith for joy and emphasizes the requirement of knowledge. In a similar vein Śri Rāmānuja says,

The ignorant, i.e., one devoid of knowledge received through instruction, ‘the faithless or one who has no faith in developing this knowledge taught to him, i.e. who does not strive to progress quickly, and the doubting one i.e., one who is full of doubts in regard to the knowledge taught—such persons perish, are lost. When this knowledge taught to him about the real nature of the self is doubted, then he loses this material world as also the next world.’⁹

Śri Rāmānuja does not only require knowledge but he also requires faith in knowledge. Faith is necessary for knowledge in order for the individual to progress. The individual must begin with some acceptance of knowledge and gain confidence to gain more knowledge. The tradition (*Shastra*) provides knowledge and the reasons for faith. As Gandhi says, “Faith consists in accepting the authority of *Shastra*.”¹⁰ This is the reason that Krishna tells Arjuna,

Let tradition be your standard

⁹Śri Rāmānuja, Śri Rāmānuja Gita Bhāṣya, trans. Svāmi Ādidevānanda, (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1992), 187.

¹⁰Mahatma Gandhi, The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi, Ed. John Strohmeier, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2009), 182.

in judging what to do or avoid;
knowing the norms of tradition,
perform your action here (16.24).

In advising Arjuna to abide by tradition (*Shastra*), Krishna emphasizes the knowledge of tradition (*Shastra*). What *Shastra* is, however, has had different meanings dependent on the commentator of the *Gita*. The Medieval Indian Scholars, Śri Rāmānuja and Madhusudana Sarasvati both define *Shastra* as scriptural knowledge. According to Gandhi, *Shastra* is “the path of self-restraint laid down by the seers and saints.”¹¹ Śri Aurobindo provides a broader meaning of *Shastra*. He says, “*Shastra* is the knowledge and teaching laid down by intuition, experience and wisdom, the science and art and ethic of life, the best standards available to the race.”¹² Śri Aurobindo does not apply this definition to any one particular race or religious culture but he extends this through all cultures. In clarifying *Shastra*, Śri Aurobindo says,

This is a general rule which humanity has always recognized wherever it has arrived at any kind of established and developed society; it has an idea of an order, a law, a standard of its perfection, something other than the guidance of its desires or the crude direction of its raw impulses.¹³

In the current times that we live, Śri Aurobindo’s interpretation of *Shastra* has an inclusive quality that offers a greater appreciation for the diversity of cultures that we live among. The tradition provides the rules of conduct for the individual to live morally

¹¹ Gandhi 181

¹² Aurobindo 23

¹³ Aurobindo 477

within their society. In order to adhere to tradition the individual must accept or have faith in those traditions. Śri Aurobindo says,

The religion, the philosophy, the ethical law, the social idea, the cultural idea in which I put my faith, gives me a law for my nature and its works, an idea of relative right or an idea of relative or absolute perfection and in proportion as I have a sincerity and completeness of faith in it and an intensity of will to live according to that faith, I can become what it proposes to me, I can shape myself into an image of that right or an exemplar of that perfection.¹⁴

Faith in a particular idea or belief requires a commitment. This commitment is marked by a passion to live in adherence to a belief that forms an ideal relative to the individual. A belief that forms the ideal consists in a conception of faith in both action and knowledge.

Faith constitutes the moral actions according to what the tradition teaches. Arjuna understands that his action requires faith and that the tradition provides that faith, however, he has a conflict between two rules of conduct that his tradition teaches. In expressing this crisis of faith, Śri Aurobindo says,

The individual, who is no longer satisfied with the law because he finds that it no longer corresponds to his idea and largest or intensest experience of himself and existence and therefore he can no longer bring to it the will to believe and practice. It does not correspond to his inner way of being, it is not to him *sat*, the thing that truly is, the right, the highest or best or real good; it is not the truth and law of his or of all being. The *Shastras* something impersonal to the individual, and that gives it its authority over

¹⁴Aurobindo 478

the narrow personal law of his members; but at the same time it is personal to the collectivity and is the outcome of its experience, its culture or its nature.¹⁵

Śri Aurobindo's quote clarifies the crisis of faith that Arjuna is experiencing because it goes to the core or condition of Arjunas' existence. At the core of his individual existence there is an inner law or truth that he adheres to. Yet, when Arjuna sees the contradiction of his duties he experiences doubt and realizes that the truth he held as his condition of existence has been shaken. It has been shaken because he no longer knows what beliefs or tradition to hold and without beliefs he cannot act. Krishna knows that the sole teaching of tradition will not satisfy Arjuna in this existential situation. So Krishna does not instruct him in just moral rules of conduct but rather in metaphysics and spiritual discipline.

In the Indian perspective, duty (*dharma*) consists of natural constitutions not just moral actions. The moral actions arise from the knowledge of the natural constitutions of the human being. The human being is a form of nature and as such has the qualities of nature. Krishna says,

Arjuna, the realm of sacred lore
is nature—beyond its triad of qualities,
dualities, and mundane rewards,
be forever lucid, alive to your self (2.45).

There are three qualities (*gunas*) of nature: inertia (*tamas*), passion, energy (*rajas*), and lucidity, harmony (*sattva*). The Indian term for quality is *guna* which literally means rope or strand. Every phenomenal in existence has its source in the qualities (*gunas*) of nature

¹⁵Aurobindo 479

which together pervades the universe. To get a little idea of the qualities (*gunas*) of nature and how they constitute existence I will briefly present a couple of combinations. The five sense organs (hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting, and smelling) and the organs of action (speaking, grasping, walking, excreting, and generating) are a combination of *raja* and *sattva*. The five subtle elements (sound, touch, form, taste, and smell) that generate the five gross elements (space, wind, fire, water, and earth) are a combination of *rajas* and *tamas*. Each human being consists of these three qualities. The spiritual self of the individual is the intertwining of the three qualities (*gunas*) of nature. Krishna says,

Know that both nature
and man's spirit have no beginning,
that qualities and changes
have their origin in nature (13.19).

Nature is the source of the *gunas* and the changes that they undergo which are constituted in the individual, yet, the spiritual self and nature are of the divine. Krishna makes a distinction between the spiritual self and nature by saying that,

Man's spirit is set in nature,
experiencing the qualities born of nature;
its attachment to the qualities causes
births in the wombs of good and evil (13.21).

The spiritual self of the human being is embodied in nature through the qualities (*gunas*). Though nature is the cause for the qualities (*gunas*), they are not the cause for the experiences of good and bad. The experience of good and bad arises from the attachment to a particular *guna*. As we have seen Arjuna has an attachment because he has the

conflict of duties in the terms of good and bad. The attachment initially arises from lack of controlling the senses. Krishna says,

Brooding about sensuous objects
make attachment to them grow;
from attachment desire arises,
from desire anger is born (2.62).

Attachment that arises from the lack of sense-control leads to the attachment of desires which lead to the birth of anger. Śri Rāmānuja says,

From anger there comes delusion. Delusion is want of discrimination between what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Not possessing that discrimination one does anything and everything. Then there follows the failure of memory, i.e., of the impressions of the earlier efforts of sense control, when one strives again to control the senses.”¹⁶

Śri Rāmānuja asserts that anger causes delusion in which delusion lacks the ability to discriminate. He seems to apply a stronger meaning that accounts for the inability to distinguish between what is real and what is not real. Krishna says,

From anger comes confusion;
from confusion memory lapses;
from broken memory understanding is lost;
from loss of understanding, he is ruined (2.63).

Confusion is the better term that aptly describes Arjuna’s conflict. This confusion led Arjuna to forget his *Shastra* and as the result he has doubt. Śri Rāmānuja says,

¹⁶Rāmānuja 107

From the loss of memory there comes the destruction of discrimination.

The meaning is that there will be destruction of the effect of efforts made earlier to attain the knowledge of the self. From the destruction of discrimination, one becomes lost, i.e. is sunk in worldliness.¹⁷

In presenting the progression of attachment as the reason of Arjuna's decline, Krishna relies on the metaphysical teaching of the qualities (*gunas*) of nature. The quality that dominates determines the disposition or character of the individual. The qualities (*gunas*) of nature determine all actions and the character of that action is a determination of the dominant quality (*guna*). Krishna says,

Actions are all affected
by the qualities of nature;
but deluded by individuality,
the self thinks, 'I am the actor' (3.27).

Krishna instructs Arjuna that the qualities (*gunas*) of nature are the cause of actions not the individual self as an agent of his own action. Śri Aurobindo says,

It is *Prakriti*, it is Nature, it is the great Force with its three modes of action that works through him, and he must learn to see that it is not he who does the work. Therefore the "right to action" is an idea which is only valid so long as we are still under the illusion of being the doer; it must necessarily disappear from the mind like the claim to the fruit, as soon as we cease to be to our own consciousness the doer of our works.¹⁸

¹⁷Rāmānuja 108

¹⁸Aurobindo 36

Śri Aurobindo emphasizes the ‘right to action’ to discourage the neglect of duties and the delusion of self-assertion. In presenting nature as the underlying cause of action and the mistaken individuality of the action, Krishna shows how an attachment to a *guna* occurs and then emphasizes that it is not the individual self that acts. The source of nature is the divine which acts through the spiritual self of the individual human being. Krishna says,

Eternal and supreme is the infinite spirit;
its inner self is called inherent being;
its creative force, known as action,
is the source of creatures’ existence (8.3).

According to Krishna, every creature has an innate infinite spirit that acts through each being as a creative force.

Its inner being is perishable existence;
its inner divinity is man’s spirit;
I am the inner sacrifice
here in your body, O best of Mortals (8.4).

This is the core of Krishna’s metaphysical teaching that underlies action and provides a strong argument on the basis of existence for Arjuna to fight in the battle. Krishna says,

No one exists for even an instant
without performing action;
however unwilling, every being is forced
to act by the qualities of nature (3.5).

There is not a single being that does not perform actions because every being is a constitution of the qualities (*gunas*) of nature that necessitates action. Inaction is not a

solution to the problem of action because a path of renunciation is another form of action in which one can cling destructively as one can cling to a path of action. Also, even without willing it one is made to perform action by virtue of the nature of the universe, action is present all the time, even when one thinks that are not acting. Arjuna cannot abstain from action through renunciation because it is against his nature. His nature is the combination of *gunas* that constitute him to be a warrior. In addition to this, renunciation is another form of action because beings cannot live without action. On the most basic level they must act in order to physically exist by procuring food. On the highest level they must act in order to sustain, enjoy and have meaning in their existence by spiritual nourishment.

It is on the basis of renunciation in action that Krishna instructs Arjuna to the spiritual discipline of Karma-yoga. Krishna says,

Disciplined by understanding,
one abandons both good and evil deeds;
so arm yourself for discipline—
discipline is skill in actions (2.50).

Arjuna must submit to the practice of karma-yoga in order to act morally with faith. Karma yoga is a discipline in action that is free from all attachments by equanimity of mind that is impartial to all duality. Krishna explains to Arjuna what karma-yoga is when he says,

Be intent on action,
not on the fruits of action;
avoid attraction to the fruits

and attachment to inaction! (2.47)

Krishna advises Arjuna to focus on the intentions of action not the results of action if one focuses on the intention rather than the consequences then it is the intention that informs the choice and not the consequences, which will occur regardless of what choice is made. A choice must be made and this pivots on intention. The intention is focused on the intrinsic value of the deed performed, and with knowledge of a clear distinction between what is perishable (the body) and what is imperishable (spirit).

Śri Aurobindo explains renunciation as an action of truth when he says, “The action with renunciation is to work without the ego. It is to do deeds not dictated by desire but by the law of right living or by the essential nature, its knowledge, its ideal, its faith in itself and the Truth it sees, its *śraddhā*.”¹⁹ This is similar to Krishna’s advice on focusing on the intention. Krishna says,

Perform actions, firm in discipline,
relinquishing attachment;
be impartial to failure and success—
this equanimity is called discipline (2.48).

There is no wisdom when there are desires or attachment, so action must be done without an attachment to the consequences. Arjuna can contemplate on any intent but not focus on results. The fruit of action as consequences fails because of attachment to desires. In relinquishing attachment Arjuna can perform actions on the basis of intention rather than consequences. This will clear up Arjuna’s doubt because it was the contradiction of the consequences and the attachment to those consequences that kept him from acting. It is

¹⁹Aurobindo 37

through detachment that Arjuna can know how to have knowledge in faith. Śri Rāmānuja says,

When a person is satisfied in himself with himself, i.e. when his mind depends on the self within himself; and being content with that, expels all the desires of the mind which are different from that state of mind—then he is said to be a man of firm wisdom. This is the highest form of devotion to knowledge.²⁰

A person of wisdom lives in harmony with the fluctuations of moods by eliminating desires and finding peace within and it is in this way that she expresses her devotion or faith. In eliminating desires, Krishna instructs Arjuna that karma yoga provides the means for detachment. He says,

Always perform with detachment
any action you must do;
performing action with detachment,
one achieves supreme good (3.19).

The performance of actions without attachment will enable Arjuna to succeed. Virtues follow the cultivation of self-control and self-control is advocated by the doctrine of a spiritual self. The animalistic life of passions and instincts can then be transformed into a virtuous life. In advocating a virtuous life an individual will not seek desires for their own sake. That is, it discourages acting for personal interest or gain. Instead of acting for the hopes of some desired end or result there is disinterested action. Harmony and peace arises from disinterested action and this ensures a greater good. Krishna confirms the supreme good by saying,

²⁰Rāmānuja 102

But when a man finds delight
within himself and feels inner joy
and pure contentment in himself,
there is nothing more to be done (3.17).

Peace of mind is achievable through faith in action and knowledge, which is equanimity of being. Krishna asserts that spiritual discipline is the equanimity of being indifferent to the results of success and failure through the knowledge of discrimination. Krishna says,

When he can discriminate
the actions of nature's qualities
and think, "The qualities depend
on other qualities," he is detached (3.28).

Detachment consists in the discrimination between the qualities (*gunas*) of nature and spirit. This knowledge consists on indifference. The indifference or equanimity is on the basis of existential identity. Krishna says,

When he sees identity in everything,
whether joy or suffering,
through analogy with the self,
he is deemed a man of pure discipline (6.32).

Pure discipline lies in the identity of one's existence with all other existences and this is wisdom where the activity of faith as karma-yoga is the practice of wisdom. Arjuna questions Krishna for this assertion. He says,

You define this discipline
by equanimity, Krishna;

but in my faltering condition,
I see no ground for it (6.33).

Arjuna cannot understand how this spiritual discipline can cure him from his struggle because he is still experiencing confusion and lack of control over his sensations. Śri Aurobindo describes the lack of courage that Arjuna expresses when he says,

Unless we have the honesty and courage to look existence straight in the face, we shall never arrive at any effective solution of its discords and oppositions. We must see first what life and the world are; afterwards, we can all the better set about finding the right way to transform them into what they should be. If this repellent aspect of existence holds in itself some secret of the final harmony, we shall by ignoring or belittling it miss that secret and all our efforts at a solution will fail by fault of our self-indulgent ignoring of the true elements of the problem.²¹

Śri Aurobindo advises the examination of existence in all its conflicts in order to come to terms with our own error and discontinuity so that we can bring about a resolution.

This resolution is the activity of faith as a spiritual condition of existence. Krishna has instructed Arjuna of the *Shashtra* that he must realize and accept. Krishna says,

I exist in all creatures,
so the disciplined man devoted to me
grasps the oneness of life;
wherever he is, he is in me (6.31)

In the above quote, Krishna reveals to Arjuna his essence in union with all creation as the spirit that unites all existence. In a similar conception, Śri Aurobindo expressively says,

²¹Aurobindo 42

All which seems to show that here is an element in existence, perhaps the initial element, which we do not know how to conquer either because it cannot be conquered or because we have not looked at it with a strong and impartial gaze so as to recognize it calmly and fairly and know what it is. We must look existence in the face if our aim is to arrive at a right solution, whatever that solution may be. And to look existence in the face is to look God in the face; for the two cannot be separated, nor the responsibility for the laws of world-existence be shifted away from Him who created them or from That which constituted it.²²

In order for Arjuna to understand the knowledge that Krishna is instructing, he will have to muster the courage to reflect, to look at his self through reflection and see the truth. Śri Aurobindo says, “For truth is the foundation of real spirituality and courage is its soul. *Tasyaisatyamāyatanam.*”²³ In courage and reflection Arjuna recognizes Krishna as his guide, the dispeller of his doubt, and the object of his faith. Arjuna says;

Krishna, only you can dispel
this doubt of mine completely;
there is no one but you
to dispel this doubt (6.39)

Arjuna knows that is only by Krishna’s guidance that he will be able to adhere to a *Shastra* and have faith and Śri Aurobindo confirms this by saying that;

²²Aurobindo 44

²³Aurobindo 45

This movement is man's appeal to himself or to something potent and compelling in himself or in universal existence for the discovery of his truth, his law of living, his way to fullness and perfection. And everything depends on the nature of his faith, the thing in himself or in the universal soul—of which he is a portion or manifestation—to which he directs it and on how near he gets by it to his real self and the Self, or true being of the universe.²⁴

Once Arjuna accepts Krishna and devotes himself to Krishna, Krishna then reveals his true Divinity with all the unimaginable manifestations to Arjuna. After Krishna's revelation and Arjuna's awe, Arjuna with humility tells Krishna;

Seeing your gentle human form,
Krishna, I recover
my own nature,
and my reason is restored (11.51).

The revelation of Krishna resolves Arjuna's doubt whereby he regains his reason and recovers his nature thereby restoring his *Shastra* and faith.

Śri Aurobindo asserts that faith is a willingness to see, believe, know and act in accordance to a truth, the apprehension of which opens possibilities towards spiritual perfection or God. Śri Aurobindo says,

The soul's faith, not a mere intellectual belief, but its concordant will to know, to see, to believe and to do and be according to its vision and knowledge, is that which determines by its power the measure of our

²⁴Aurobindo 480-481

possibilities and outer self, nature and action towards all that is highest, most divine, most real and eternal that will enable us to reach the supreme perfection.²⁵

Faith consists in both action and knowledge and it is through faith that there is the possibility of growth in the spiritual self to attain the most divine thereby attaining liberation. After his total self-realization, Arjuna then asks Krishna about those who act with faith that is without knowledge.

Men who ignore the ways of tradition
but sacrifice in full faith, Krishna,
what quality of nature is basic in them—
lucidity, passion, or dark inertia? (17.1).

Arjuna asks this question to clarify his own recaptured faith. Śri Rāmānuja sums up Krishna's explanation in the following:

Threefold is the faith among all embodied beings. And it arises from their 'inborn nature.' What is called *Svabhava* is the state unique to one's own nature. It is the special taste or predilection caused by previous subtle impressions, *Vasanas*. To whatever one's predilection is directed, their faith is born in respect of it. For 'faith' is zeal or eagerness about any means in the belief that it is the way of action to achieve one's own desired object. Subtle impression, taste and faith are the qualities of the self born from its association with the *Gunas*. The *Sattva* and the other *gunas* are the qualities of the body, the senses, the internal organs and

²⁵Aurobindo 492

sense objects. They bring about their qualities in the self associated with them.²⁶

In presenting the descriptions of the three characteristics Krishna provides verification for his metaphysical arguments and sums this up in the following:

The faith each man has, Arjuna,
follows his degree of lucidity;
a man consists of his faith,
and as his faith is, so is he (17.3).

Krishna confirms that faith is a metaphysical constitution of each being thereby leaving no doubt that each being is an act of faith and as such is condition of existence. Śri Rāmānuja confirms the metaphysical condition of the act of faith when he says the following;

Sattva means internal organ (i.e., mind). The faith of everyone is according to his internal organ. The meaning is that with whatever *Guna* his internal organ is conjoined one's faith corresponds to that *Guna* (i.e., *Guna* as object). Man consists of faith, viz., is the product of his faith. Of whatever faith he is, viz., with whatever faith a man is possessed, that verily he is; he is a transformation of faith of that nature. The purport is this: If the person is associated with faith in auspicious acts he becomes associated with fruit of these auspicious acts. Consequently, attainment chiefly follows one's faith.²⁷

²⁶Rāmānuja 525

²⁷Rāmānuja 526

In concluding his metaphysical guidance, Krishna advises Arjuna to act according to his faith that is the constitution of his very existence, he says;

You are bound by your own action,
intrinsic to your being, Arjuna;
even against your will you must do
what delusion now makes you refuse (18.60).

Arjuna has no choice now but to fight in this battle because it is his existential duty to do so. And Arjuna will no longer quarrel with Krishna because Arjuna now has faith in both action and knowledge to heed to his calling. Śri Aurobindo eloquently describes this movement of faith in the in the following:

For if a man or the soul in a man consists of the faith which is in him, taken in this deeper sense, then it follows that the truth which he sees and wills to live is for him the truth of his being, the truth of himself that he has created or is creating and there can be for him no other real truth. This truth is a thing of his inner and outer action, a thing of his becoming, of the soul's dynamics, not of that in him which never changes. He is what he is today by some past will of his nature sustained and continued by a present will to know, to believe and to be in his intelligence and vital force, and whatever new turn is taken by this will and faith active in his very substance, that he will tend to become in the future. We create our own truth of existence in our own action of mind and life, which is another way of saying that we create our own selves, are our own makers.²⁸

²⁸Aurobindo 482

Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* has given us a description and instruction of what faith is, does and constitutes in the exemplar of Arjuna. The *Gita* began this instruction in the existential crisis that Arjuna felt at the inception of the battle. His discourses with Krishna throughout the *Gita* confirmed the metaphysical condition of faith and knowledge in accordance to our own nature. It is through our nature that we have a disposition towards action. Yet, there is a distinction between disciplined and undisciplined action where we can choose to practice karma-yoga or not. Karma-yoga is an activity of faith that expresses wisdom, the unity of mind and body. Finally, the *Gita* has taught us and gave us the permission to live by the activity of faith for a meaningful life. Therefore, the authentic life resides in the activity of faith as a spiritual condition of existence, an expression of wisdom.

CHAPTER 2

KIERKEGAARD'S PARADOX OF FAITH

Soren Kierkegaard illustrates a paradoxical concept of Faith in Fear and Trembling under the pseudonym of 'Johannes de Silentio' which literally means John of Silence. The significance of this name as a pseudonym emphasizes both the importance of words in the explanation of reason and the fact that words cannot explain faith in an intelligible manner so that one is left in silence. Kierkegaard conceals his identity under a pseudonym to present the message of individual responsibility in the act of choice in one's existence. 'Johannes de Silentio' is the man of reason in awe of the biblical story of Abraham. In Genesis 22: 1-18, Abraham is the Father of Faith, who is willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's Command. The primary theme is the paradox of faith, "which no thought can grasp, because faith begins precisely where thought stops."²⁹ This moment in which thought stops is "by virtue of the absurd"³⁰ in that it is an irrational jump into the uncertainty of existence. Kierkegaard believes that faith must be rooted in personal experience where the individual is free to choose so that the act of faith is a commitment without reason.

Kierkegaard introduces 'Johannes de Silentio' to distinguish himself from modern philosophers. He compares himself with the ancient Greeks in the presumption that the aptitude to doubt requires many years of study, unlike the modern philosophers who begin with doubting everything on a whim, without any reflective preparation. And

²⁹Soren Kierkegaard. Fear and Trembling & Repetition, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 53.

³⁰ Ibid. 35

yet, even Descartes was only able to truly doubt by denying himself everything. Johannes quotes Descartes as saying,

Thus my design is not here to teach the Method which everyone should follow in order to promote the good conduct of his Reason, but only to show in what manner I have endeavored to conduct....I found myself embarrassed with so many doubts and errors that it seemed to me that the effort to instruct myself had no other effect than the increasing discovery of my own ignorance.³¹

Descartes establishes a method of doubt for himself, and Kierkegaard criticizes this system because a system is not a process but an abstract form that has no basis in experience. We cannot just follow and accept Descartes' method of doubt, but we must go through the process ourselves to know and appreciate the meaning of doubt. Yet, Descartes did not assert that there was a method of faith, rather that faith is a revelation that may be in opposition to reason. Johannes quotes Descartes as follows:

I did not doubt with respect to faith.....Above all we should impress on our memory as an infallible rule that what God has revealed to us is incomparably more certain than anything else; and that we ought to submit to the Divine authority rather than to our own judgment even though the light of reason may seem to us to suggest, with the utmost clearness and evidence, something opposite.³²

For Kierkegaard, faith as an aptitude requires a lifelong struggle and cannot be taken for granted as an initial point of a system as modern philosophers would profess. This is

³¹ Ibid. 6 Kierkegaard quotes this from Descartes "Principles"

³² Ibid. 6

because faith requires reflection and growth through passion, which cannot be taught by a system or understood by even a conceptual form, because it requires experience. There is a distinction between doubt that concerns the mind and faith that concerns the heart.

Kierkegaard illustrates the distinction between doubt and faith by focusing on the story of Abraham's sacrifice in Genesis 22 1-19 (see Appendix 1).

In this illustration Kierkegaard begins with a tale about a man who reflects back upon his childhood when he heard the story of Abraham, who kept the faith in the face of great temptation of having to sacrifice his son Isaac. As a child he admired this story in Genesis, but as he grew older, he thought more and more of this story with even greater admiration and understood it even less. The man longed to be there with Abraham to see the temptation from beginning to end so that he would be able to understand what Abraham did and how. He reconstructs the Abraham saga in four scenarios, in each case rendering Abraham more understandable and with the analogy to a mother weaning her child.

In the first scenario, the interpretation is that Abraham explains to Isaac that he is to be sacrificed, saying to himself: "I will not hide from Isaac where this walk is taking him."³³ Abraham turns away and acts as if it is his desire, not God's command to sacrifice him, Isaac then turns to God. Abraham pretends to be against Isaac, severing the bond between father and son, so that Isaac does not lose his faith and blames him instead of God, as is shown when Abraham says "Lord God in heaven, I thank you; it is better that he believes me a monster than that he should lose faith in you."³⁴ The mother

³³ Ibid. 10

³⁴ Ibid. 11

blackens her breast in order to wean the child; the mother remains the same, while the breast changes-Abraham is no longer the messenger but brings Isaac directly to God by removing himself. Though Abraham appears to be against Isaac, he is still the same.

In the second scenario, Abraham embraces Sarah while she kisses Isaac. Abraham does not understand what God has ordered him to do, he is full of sorrow and he cannot comprehend the demand of sacrificing Isaac and what good could come from such a task, but he follows God's command and he sees the ram that God selected and sacrifices him instead of Isaac. Abraham has changed his mind and has lost his faith, as is illustrated when Johannes remarks: "but Abraham's eyes were darkened, and he saw joy no more."³⁵ The child no longer has a mother to draw milk from when the mother conceals her breast-Abraham no longer has faith to help Isaac become closer to God.

In the Third scenario, Abraham thinks of Sarah's, Isaac's birth mother, and knows that his first duty is to Isaac. He understands God's command to be an ethical test in which he should not sacrifice his son at any cost. Abraham believes he has failed because he had forgotten his duty and was willing to sacrifice Isaac; he had committed a sin that he could not understand and could not be forgiven. The weaning of the child is mourned by both the mother and the child, the child will be closer to the breast than the mother-with Abraham the messenger between God and Isaac, Isaac is closer to God through Abraham.

In the fourth scenario, Abraham does everything that is planned according to God's command, but he tries to understand and fails to do so and so he loses his faith, when at the last moment he clenches the knife in despair and Isaac sees this and also loses his faith. The mother should have stronger food at hand than the breast, in order to

³⁵ Ibid.12

wean the child. Abrahams loses faith and without stronger sustenance from God, Isaac loses faith as well.

‘Johannes de Silentio’ explains that the man reconstructed Abraham’s journey to Mount Moriah pondering the event in many other ways as well and each time states “No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?”³⁶ He could not understand the faith that is required that Abraham, the father of faith, had. Any rational reconstruction cannot go beyond a superficially ethical understanding of Abraham, because the faith Abraham had is beyond any comprehension.

Section: 1 Abraham’s Tribute

Kierkegaard makes a tribute to Abraham when Johannes suggests that if there was no progress or sign of change, “no sacred bond that knit humankind together”³⁷ generation after generation, life would be meaningless, and he asks “if a vast, never appeased emptiness hid beneath everything, what would life be then but despair?”³⁸ God created the poet and the hero because of “how empty and devoid of consolation life would be!”³⁹ Yet, for Johannes, life is not meaningless. A poet will eventually come to every hero so that no one who is great will ever be forgotten. He will become attached to the hero and immortalize him through recollection of the forms that he has learned. He then comes closer to the good by applying this knowledge. The distinction between the hero and the poet is that the hero is the master and the poet is the servant. “Johannes de Silentio” is the servant of Abraham, his master, because he can do nothing that Abraham

³⁶ Ibid. 14

³⁷ Ibid. 15

³⁸ Ibid. 15

³⁹ Ibid. 15

had done, he could only have admiration. Abraham is the ‘knight of faith’ who demonstrates what faith is. The ‘knight of infinite resignation’ is “Johannes de Silentio” who cannot comprehend the sacrifice and thus cannot crossover to faith.

In this tribute to Abraham, Johannes remarks that Abraham is greater than all other heroes and there is no shortage of poets to immortalize him. He also asserts that if his praises are not spoken well enough, he must beg forgiveness from Abraham because he sees himself as a Greek poet who recollects his hero Abraham. Abraham is of the religious way of life, not of the ethical in which progress occurs through repetition. The poet is the hero’s better nature because he sings praises for who his hero is and what his hero does.

Johannes points out that Abraham did not tremble or beg when God spoke to him and commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham simply said “Here I am” (Genesis 22: 2) then without saying a word to anyone he went to Mount Moriah. Isaac was the impossible son, not just any son, and Abraham was told to do the killing himself, he was not just losing his son. Abraham could have chosen the ethical way of life and may have been considered a hero, however he chose the religious life that made him the father of faith.

According to Kierkegaard there is a distinction between three ways of life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The life felt by experience is the aesthetic life in that it always relates the single individual to something else, the aesthetic values secrecy and privacy. One man may become great by expecting the possible, by struggling with the world and by loving himself. The life where the common good of all people that abandon individual desires or pleasures in favor of the universal is the ethical life. The ethical life is the highest that can be understood, because it transcends the personal in the

realization of moral principles that we all share in common. One man may become great by expecting the eternal, by struggling with himself and by loving other men. The life in which the single individual is in a direct and personal relationship to God, the single individual in absolute relation to the absolute, is the religious life which Kierkegaard believes is the highest form of life which cannot be justified or explained on an ethical level because it is a personal matter that exists in finitude and total isolation. The greatest of all becomes great by expecting the impossible, by struggling with God and by loving God. Abraham had faith in God and precisely because of this; he was the greatest of all. Everyone will be remembered and is great by the degree to which they expected, struggled and loved.

Johannes contrasts the ethical and religious life because he thinks that the religious life is better and higher than the ethical life. The ethical way of life can be put into words, unlike the religious. The greatness of Abraham is highlighted in a story that Johannes creates to show what Abraham might have done if he had lived an ethical life instead. God commanded Abraham to leave his home, which he did without lamenting his fate. Abraham was promised by God that he would be a father to a nation, and given a son to carry on his line. Abraham never lost his faith in God even as time passed and he became old and the possibility of him having children became impossible. In this way, Abraham could have given up hope in Isaac. Finally, God blessed Abraham with Isaac, a son, contrary to all that was naturally possible at the time. But then God took away the posterity he had promised Abraham by demanding the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham could have earned himself eternal admiration by offering himself as a sacrifice instead. Abraham never doubted, because he had faith in God, a faith not in the next life, but in

this life, as God had promised him and he expected a great name and family on this earth in which he became “a guiding star that saves the anguished.”⁴⁰

Section 2: Groundwork for Faith

Kierkegaard provides the groundwork for faith by reflecting on a passage in the Bible, II Thessalonians 3:10 proclaims “only one who works earns bread.”⁴¹ He interprets this in light of the realm of the spirit that he believes is the only true realm, because the mundane unjust world does not hold true to this. Both the world of the spirit and the mundane world are subject to the law of indifference. The mundane world with its imperfection is the fundamental law, it wants more. As for Spirit, Kierkegaard asserts, “it is enough to be great”⁴² since there prevails an order that is eternal and divine. Kierkegaard explains that the ethical obligation that Abraham had to his son was manifested in the anxiety he felt at his choice to embrace the ethical or religious way of life. That is, he felt fear of having to define himself by choosing his own fate; he had become aware of his own freedom because he was responsible for his final choice. Abraham was set directly in opposition to the dictates of the ethical life when his deeds and choices defined him as the ‘knight of faith’. Few of us are willing to do the necessary work to understand Abraham’s story because we think that it is sufficient to just know the story and the greatness of Abraham.

Kierkegaard contrasts the religious and the ethical way of life in which he states that, on the ethical level, Abraham would be considered a murderer. Johannes interprets this by imagining a man who returned home planning to kill his son by following the

⁴⁰ Ibid. 21

⁴¹ Ibid. 27

⁴² Ibid. 27

words of the preacher whom he heard praise Abraham's sacrifice. The preacher condoned the man's behavior because he failed to convey what made Abraham great. Abraham tried to sacrifice Isaac and his behavior instead exemplified the truly religious. If he had murdered Isaac, then he would have been judged on ethical terms. On the ethical level, that is, any murderer could emulate Abraham. But it requires faith to emulate Abraham on the level of the religious.

Kierkegaard asserts that if Johannes were to speak about Abraham he would emphasize four main points. The first point is that, because God tested him, Abraham was God-fearing. Secondly, Abraham had a far greater love for Isaac than the usual love between father and son, and he would describe this in detail. Third, at any moment, Abraham did not have to sacrifice Isaac; he could have changed his mind. Fourth, Johannes would admit that he could not emulate Abraham; he could only speak about him, because he himself is a man without faith.

Kierkegaard points out that Johannes does not understand Abraham, however he does understand that, for modern philosophers' faith is all too easy of a thing. However, philosophy cannot give us faith. God's will was expressed in a private covenant between Abraham and God, and this was by God's will which is the only justification for Abraham's behavior. Abraham cannot explain it and no one knows what God said to Abraham. We would not be able to justify Abraham's behavior by referring to any moral code, because it is on the religious level that is beyond the ethical. Johannes wonders whether if he were in Abraham's shoes, he would be capable of following God's command. He concludes that he would not behave as Abraham because he would be

tormented because of having to sacrifice his son, and would think that “all is lost.”⁴³ He would, at best simply substitute faith with resignation to this fate. Johannes also remarks that he would not have gone in the first place if he had loved his son as Abraham did. Even if he had done as God commanded, he would have trouble being happy with Isaac after rescuing him at the last minute, because he would not be able to overcome the pain of the whole experience.

There is nothing logical about the command of God, nor is there anything logical in Abraham’s faith, because it goes beyond everything that can be understood or said. It goes beyond all reason, transcends all intelligible and human possibility “by virtue of the absurd.”⁴⁴ That is, it cannot be explained rationally nor justified. Abraham maintains his faith even if there is no intelligible way to get Isaac back. Infinite resignation is required to give up Isaac, in which Abraham’s faith is regained once more by virtue of the finite double movement.⁴⁵ Johannes states that people may think they understand Abraham’s story and may be moved to faith, but in this faith they would fail to make the first movement of resignation misunderstanding the story, and failing the double movement of faith themselves.

The ethical way of life puts emphasis on the universal, in that it demands surrendering one’s individual desire for the greater good to the universal. This is opposed to the aesthetic and religious way of life, which place their emphasis on the single individual. The religious requires the double movement of faith that is not required by the

⁴³ Ibid. 31

⁴⁴ Ibid. 35

⁴⁵ Ibid. 36

aesthetic. The double movement is demanded by the religious way of life in that the individual renounces and regains everything by 'virtue of the absurd' and requires 'a leap of faith.'⁴⁶ This 'leap of faith' is a personal venture into the absurd realm, enabling the individual to have a direct relationship with God.

Kierkegaard warns that we can only be taught amazement by Abraham's story because we cannot derive worldly wisdom from the paradox of Abraham. As the finite is higher than the infinite, so the single individual is higher than the universal. Abraham contradicts ethical principles because his faith cannot make sense; it is an absurdity that goes beyond rational understanding.

Furthermore, Kierkegaard presents Johannes' own ignorance at the recognition of a 'knight of Faith.' A knight of faith looks no different from any one else. Outwardly, he looks like any other person, regardless of whether that person is simple, rich, or even a businessman. The reason for this is that there will not be any sign of sorrow on his face. He has regained the finite by making the infinite 'leap of faith'. The comparison of the ballet dancer and the 'knight of faith' are offered as an illustration; the ballet dancer maintains a particular posture while also having the skill to make a leap from the ground. Most of us don't even bother to involve ourselves in the dance, but instead cling to the passions and joys of this world. In contrast, the 'knight of infinite resignation' has detached himself from the grounded world of sensory pleasure and is a little awkward in landing, but makes the leap just as nicely.

Kierkegaard presents a story of unrequited love to draw out the distinction between the knight of infinite resignation, the slave of the finite and the knight of faith. The 'slave of the finite' expresses the aesthetic way of life in his inability to tolerate the

⁴⁶ Ibid. 36

yearning or gap between his desires and himself and this shows him to be the slave of the finite. The 'knight of infinite resignation' is the ultimate expression of the ethical way of life, because he deals with the universal. He sees that his love for the princess will never be realized because it requires passion, not reflection. He makes the movement of infinity because he is content to let her go and reconciles himself with the pain. However, he does not let her go completely, because he has allowed his love to fill him entirely as the substance of his life, and he could never contradict himself by giving her up. He retains his love so that she will remain the same, even if he never sees her again or even if he marries her, regardless of whatever she does. Through the memory of their first meeting, he retains the novelty of her site and this site continues to live within him. And if the princess keeps him in her memory, the two will remain spiritually true to one another forever. The princess becomes this ideal form that he has set up in his mind as a guiding light to be followed, but never attained. Even if he doesn't realize this, the memory of this love is a betterment and guide through his life experiences.

The 'Knight of infinite resignation' becomes infinite by virtue of his resignation, in which he participates with the universal by becoming part of the universal, and this expresses the absolute truth and the infinite. He needs nothing outside himself in order to sustain him, because he is self sufficient, giving up his own individuality in favor of the universal. This is a deed done for the greater good of everyone.

The religious way of life deals with paradox and is expressed by the 'knight of faith.' The 'knight of infinite resignation' is similar to the 'knight of faith' in that he also reconciles himself to the pain by renouncing his love. However, the 'knight of faith' goes one step further and makes the leap of faith saying "Nevertheless I have faith that I will

get her –that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible.”⁴⁷ The ‘knight of faith’ makes the leap of faith as a purely personal matter in that this is the second step in the double movement. He has faith that goes beyond understanding. He is connected to the single individual that moves him beyond the universal as well as reason or rational explanation. He makes the movement of finitude whereby he detaches from the universal and the infinitude.

Kierkegaard asserts that anyone can be a ‘knight of infinite resignation;’ all it takes is courage, strength, energy, and spiritual freedom to renounce the temporal and finite to gain the infinite, eternal consciousness. The ‘knight of faith’ moves beyond infinite resignation by means of the incomprehensible, in that he regains everything and the finite by virtue of the absurd. The ‘knight of faith’ experiences repetition while the ‘knight of infinite resignation’ experiences recollection. Repetition is the regaining of what was given up in order to appreciate it completely and fully for the first time. The ‘knight of faith’ gave up his love, only to regain her again by virtue of the absurd. The relationship of Abraham and Isaac is similar in that they could be separated by distance, death, or by time. However, Abraham regained Isaac after losing him, and in this way he was able to see everything else on earth and even his son as a temporary gift from God. Through God, Abraham is connected to Isaac and his love for Isaac expresses his love for God, both are unbreakable and eternal because his finite love for worldly things expresses his love for God. The aesthetic and the religious are both linked to the worldly, the single individual, and the finite, and that is why, on the outside, the ‘knight of faith’ is no different from a normal person. They both take delight in the sensory pleasures of this world. The distinction is that the aesthete does not relate to God, but takes delight in a

⁴⁷ Ibid. 46

selfish way as opposed to the religious ‘the knight of faith,’ who takes delights as a gift from God.

Section 3: Three Dilemmas

In supporting his argument, Kierkegaard fleshes out three dilemmas. In the first dilemma, he asks: “Is there a teleological suspension of the ethical?”⁴⁸ With this question, he defines telos of ethics in the following way: “The ethical as such is the universal, and as the universal it applies to everyone”⁴⁹ at all times. Telos is a Greek word meaning goal or end. Kierkegaard asserts that there is no telos or end goal beyond the ethical, the ethical is the telos of everything outside itself. All actions are thought to be done with a particular purpose in mind, and due to this definition ethics is teleological. The telos of the single individual annuls his singularity by becoming a part of the universal. To sacrifice oneself for the good of all to be a tragic hero is the highest good on an ethical level. It is also to be noted that it would be correct to call the single individual a “moral form of evil”⁵⁰ if the ethical is the highest we can aspire to, but it would be wrong not to condemn Abraham as a murderer. Johannes presents the example of Agamemnon, who was tempted by the aesthetic in that he had to rise above his fatherly affection toward his daughter in order to renounce his person, so that he could do what was good for the Greeks as a whole.

The question that Kierkegaard is asking is: ‘Is there some higher end goal, some higher cause, which might cancel out our ethical obligations?’ That is the question of

⁴⁸ Ibid. 54

⁴⁹ Ibid. 54

⁵⁰ Ibid. 55

whether there is a teleological suspension of the ethical. If we had only to choose between the ethical and the aesthetic in characterizing Abraham, since Abraham could not participate in the universal, Abraham would have to be considered aesthetic. But the single individual can rise above the universal, and that is especially paradoxical of faith, and if this were not true, then faith has never existed and Abraham is lost, “precisely because it has always existed.”⁵¹ If faith was merely an expression of the aesthetic, then it would become low and petty, we all have faith insofar as we must all move on. If this were the case, then we would be wrong to admire Abraham because then there is nothing special about him. We must acknowledge that Abraham does not express the aesthetic, but there is a category above the ethical, which is the religious. The father should love his son more than himself, and that is the ethical relationship that Abraham has with Isaac. However, he does not follow this ethical principle because he is either a ‘knight of faith’ or a murderer, but no tragic hero. In this light, Abraham is a murderer because he is willing to murder his son, not for the benefit of any higher ethical principle, but for his own sake. Abraham suspended his ethical obligation to Isaac, and precisely in that is a teleological suspension of the ethical, the telos of faith. Mediation takes place by virtue of the universal in which faith cannot be mediated since it is above the universal. We must acknowledge the greatness of Abraham by recognizing the religious way of life.

Kierkegaard notes that the ethical can be mediated and in light of this, Abraham’s ordeal cannot be mediated because it was his experience as a single individual that is not universal. His ordeal is not the ethical way of life because it cannot be mediated; it cannot exist in the realm of thought, and so it cannot be understood.

⁵¹ Ibid. 59

In support of this argument, Kierkegaard presents three examples that show fathers sacrificing children without moving beyond the ethical. Julius Brutus put his sons to death for plotting against the state, Jephthah sacrificed his daughter because he promised God a sacrifice if he should defeat the Ammonites and Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia so that the Greeks could win the Trojan War. The fathers had killed their children in each case for the good of the people as a whole, and because of that they were wept for and understood as tragic heroes.

Abraham acts for his own sake to prove his faith, and only for God's sake, demanding this proof of faith; these are one in the same; it is a private matter between himself and God in which he is not related to the universal. There is a need for the category of the religious because it is above the ethical, which Abraham expresses, and not that of the aesthetic and the ethical that both the Greeks seem to deal with only. Abraham expresses the religious because he experiences the *temptation of the ethical itself*, which might have held him back from his duty to God. If Abraham had refused God's command, he would have behaved ethically by observing his ethical obligation to love his son. However he rose above the ethical and his love, to obey God's command and fulfill his duty to God. Abraham cannot speak about this ordeal because speech expresses the universal, nor can he be wept for or understood as a 'tragic hero' because what he does is a sin according to the ethical, which appalls us and yet arouses our admiration. Abraham situates himself as a single individual precisely because of this he is not justified by anything universal, he is in absolute relation to the absolute, which is a paradox.

Abraham cannot be understood as a ‘tragic hero’ because he cannot be justified by the result of getting Isaac back. A deed is made heroic only by the motives that shaped it and by its origins, not by the results. To pass over all the distress, anxiety, and paradox involved in the deed itself is to judge greatness in terms of results. The Virgin Mary’s suffering was personal and therefore similarly great, she could not speak to anyone about her giving birth to Jesus. When speaking of the Virgin Mary Johannes states;

She needs worldly admiration as little as Abraham needs tears, for she was no heroine and he was no hero, both of them became greater than these, not by being exempted in any way from the distress and the agony and the paradox, but became greater by means of these.⁵²

Kierkegaard puts the choice to us, the readers, and it is we who must decide whether to acknowledge faith or whether Abraham is a murderer. In making this very choice, we are individuals of freedom. The closing paragraph of the first dilemma illustrates the point of the matter when Johanna states;

When a person walks what is in one sense the hard road of the tragic hero, there are many who can give him advice, but he who walks the narrow road of faith has no one to advise him—no one understands him. Faith is a marvel, and yet no human being is excluded from it; for that which unites all human life is passion, and faith is passion.⁵³

⁵² Ibid. 65

⁵³ Ibid. 67

In the second dilemma, Kierkegaard echoes Kant when he asks, “Is there an absolute duty to God?”⁵⁴ And the answer is “The ethical is the universal, and as such it is also the divine.”⁵⁵ Insofar as God is the divine and is the universal, every duty is a duty to God. Johannes gives the example of the duty to love thy neighbor that is an ethical duty to the universal and as such to God. This duty to God however is not a direct duty but rather an indirect relation according to our duties that may be traced back to God.

In our own day, just as in Kierkegaard’s day, there is, on the Kantian view, no absolute duty to God. We cannot say ‘God told us to’ in order to justify our actions rationally, we can only act in accordance with our free will in observance to a universally applied law. Kant argues that we can act in accordance with laws that we freely will ourselves, not in obedience to some external law, in order for us to be responsible and autonomous for our moral choices. Kierkegaard suggests that there is an absolute duty to God and that there are cases in which one should act in opposition to all universal ethical principles as Abraham did. And if this is true, then it is wrong to speak about Abraham and faith in this way because the single individual can relate absolutely to the absolute as a single individual, since the inner is higher than the outer and this is the paradox of faith. The single individual’s absolute duty is to God, though this does not invalidate the relativity that the ethical becomes. As absolute, the duty to God cannot be expressed in the universal because it cannot be mediated: if it were expressible then it would be a spiritual trial, not faith.

As an illustration of the teaching of an absolute duty to God, Kierkegaard cites the Bible; “Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers,

⁵⁴ Ibid. 65

⁵⁵ Ibid. 65

sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).⁵⁶ The word hate brings such strong connotations, yet this word is not used in its regular sense in this passage. Rather it is to show that God demands absolute love, and is not asking us to stop loving our family. The ethical expression of what Abraham does at Mount Moriah is hatred, but Abraham did not hate Isaac; on the contrary he loved his son dearly.

The universal is identified as a more inspiring goal because it is easier to exist as a single individual, and it is considered most sublime for the single individual to aspire to the universal. However, if one speaks with ‘fear and trembling,’ knowing that existing as the single individual is the greatest and the most awful existence there is, living properly under one’s own scrutiny, then actions that are demanded by God cannot be justified in the universal. The ‘knight of faith’ must value and know the universal, to be misunderstood and alone, to know what it’s like to be higher than the universal. The ‘knight of faith’ has a private relation to God that cannot be justified by an appeal to the universal, he acts in total isolation from everyone else. Abraham seemed mad and not heroic to others. In the end, however, the ‘tragic hero’ can only use the third person to speak about his actions, while the ‘knight of faith’ can address God in the second person singular, as he has an intimate relation to God.

The ‘knight of faith’ is constantly being tested because his moral judgment is always available to him. He is asked to abandon entirely his own judgment as to what is right, to act against the ethical, and to act in unquestioning obedience to God. Either, Abraham was a murderer or he was obeying God. It took great faith for him to never doubt that he might in fact be a murderer, to never question God or to question himself.

⁵⁶ New Jerusalem Bible

The temptation then is to do what one knows is right complying with the universal, not to acquiesce with faith, which is far stronger than any temptation to pursue unethical, personal pleasures.

The 'knight of faith' must recognize without doubt or question that it is God who works in him through the constant testing he undergoes, which prompts Johannes to allude appropriately to Philippians 2: 12-13 which urges Christians to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Since the 'knight of faith' knows that the option to recoil into the ethical is always open to him and he is going against the ethical he must necessarily face the test with 'fear and trembling.'

The 'knight of faith' has a more difficult task than the 'tragic hero'. The 'knight of faith' is faced with the possibility of returning to the universal and is constantly being tested. The 'tragic hero' can know that he has successfully achieved the universal after the deed has been done and there is rest. The passion to remain in absolute isolation is what distinguishes the knight of faith. When the universal and ethical is preferred, we lose a sense of the privacy and the anxiety with which one enters into a relationship with God, in which the open, the public, the outer is valued. Kierkegaard declares that either Luke 14:26 is overblown nonsense, Abraham is lost and there is no absolute duty to God, or there is. We must decide which is correct.

In the third dilemma, Kierkegaard asks the question: "Was it ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking from Sarah, from Eliezer, and from Isaac?"⁵⁷

The answer by Johannes is that "the ethical as such is the universal; as the universal it is

⁵⁷Ibid. 82

in turn disclosed.”⁵⁸ In contrast to this, the single individual is hidden. Hiddenness is the hero’s free act, no longer a result of his ignorance. The aesthetic deals with the private experiences of the single individual and it is natural that it should be hidden. This being so, it makes sense that the ethical should be associated with the disclosed. The distinction between the hidden, which is associated with the religious and the aesthetic, and the disclosed is that the ethical is brought out by its relations. Johannes presents a number of stories to demonstrate this.

The first story tells of a woman and man who are in love and keep it a secret because the woman is being married off to another man. The free act of hiddenness makes them responsible as aesthetics, but rewards the hiddenness demanded by working things out for them. Ethics on the other hand, is offended that they should take responsibility for a secret, for since it demands disclosure, there is no room for coincidence.

Next Johannes refers to Euripides’ “Iphigenia at Aulis”, which tells how Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, is to be sacrificed by her father. Since it would be unseemly for Agamemnon to seek comfort in sharing his sorrow, aesthetics demands his silence. However, for him to endure the spiritual trial of seeing his daughter weep at the news, ethics demands disclosure. An old servant tells Iphigenia that she is to be sacrificed. Agamemnon keeps nothing hidden and is wedded to the universal because, as a tragic hero, disclosure is demanded by ethics.

The ‘tragic hero’ and disclosure are both human phenomena. Johannes recalls the story of Amor and Psyche, where Psyche is impregnated by Amor, and Psyche was told that her child would be divine if she kept her pregnancy a secret, but her child would be

⁵⁸ Ibid. 82

human if she disclosed her pregnancy. The ethical and the 'tragic hero' are thoroughly human. The divine and the demonic are the realm of hiddenness.

Kierkegaard also relates a tale from Aristotle's Poetics. A bridegroom is told that he will suffer a calamity in his marriage when he consults the Oracle at Delphi. The man has three options according to Johannes. First he could marry the girl and remain silent, but then he would be making her partially responsible for the disaster due to implicating her in his own disaster. Second, he could not marry the girl and remain silent, which would be offensive to the girl and the reality of her love, in which case this choice would be sanctioned by the aesthetics. Third, instead of trying to conceal his fate out of concern for the girl he could choose to speak up, which would be sanctioned by the ethics since he would be valuing disclosure. Since prophecy is not a private matter between the God and the bridegroom, in the third option the 'tragic hero' can go no further: he will be understood if he speaks. He would remain silent only to retain an absolute relation to the universal as a single individual. Had the prophecy been a private affair, he wouldn't be understood even if he spoke. As a result, the aesthetic hero is constantly disturbed by the demands of the ethical, but the 'knight of faith' finds inner peace despite those demands.

Kierkegaard's examples all deal with situations that people are faced with when the decision to keep their unhappy knowledge a secret or to cause great dismay by speaking occurs, the ethical sides with disclosure and the aesthetic with secrecy. The aesthetic hero in each case is motivated to protect those he cares about. In order for the aesthetic hero not to burden anyone else, he takes the responsibility for the unhappy knowledge fully upon himself. In so doing, he is isolated from the ethical by isolating himself as a single individual. He is trying to enter, as a single individual, into a relation

with the absolute by acting privately as a single individual because he is doing what he thinks is right. There is an ever-present possibility that the aesthetic hero is really taking on the burden of secrecy to comfort or protect himself. Since the tragic or ethical hero keeps nothing secret, he is motivated by the desire to be totally open about everything. The 'tragic hero' surrenders the pretension that he can protect or save anyone by his silence as a complete surrendering to the universal. The hero can choose for himself to either be a 'tragic hero' or an aesthetic hero as presented in each of the examples. The ideas that certain decisions are fundamentally definitional of the kind of person one is and that one is fully responsible for one's decision are central themes in Kierkegaard's thought.

The aesthetic hero remains hidden by choice, not by necessity; his tension is that he is always free to speak up. He could easily be understood if he was to explain himself and his secrecy violates the demands of the ethical. The aesthetic hero is distinguished from the 'knight of faith' in this way because the 'knight of faith' has no choice to remain hidden, he cannot be understood and he cannot speak. The single individual in isolation from the universal functions differently in the religious and the aesthetic realms; in the religious realm we find the single individual whose faith brings him above the ethical, whereas in the aesthetic realm dwells the single individual, who isolates himself in an attempt to relate to the ethical as a single individual.

Section 4: Justification against Principles

In a justification against principles, Kierkegaard tells the story of Agnes and the merman in a lengthy discussion. In Johannes' version, the merman seduces Agnes and is about to bring her back with him into the sea, but is unable to violate this innocence after

seeing the faith and humility in her eyes; he returns her to her home instead. The merman has the choice between disclosure and hiddenness as in the other examples. The repentance that consists of hiddenness leaves both Agnes and him unhappy. Agnes will be unhappy at being deprived of him because she genuinely loves him, and he will be burdened with the new guilt of making her unhappy because he also loves her. The merman could try to save Agnes by making her no longer love him and deceiving her by surrendering to the demonic element in repentance as Johannes suggests. The merman becomes the single individual who, as a single individual, is higher than the universal by surrendering to the demonic. The merman could be rescued from the demonic in repentance in accordance with two possibilities. He can allow himself to be saved by Agnes and marry her. On the other hand he can remain hidden and have faith that the divine will save Agnes. This movement would be similar to Abraham's in that it would involve a paradox. The merman's guilt brings him higher than the universal by bringing him to the movement of repentance. However he must make a further movement, by virtue of the absurd, in order to return to the universal, because he cannot do this by his own power.

Next, Johannes suggests that the real hero is Sarah in the book of Tobit and not Tobias who had the courage and desire to marry Sarah, even if Sarah had seven previous husbands in the past who were all killed on their wedding night by a demon that was in love with Sarah. Sarah is the hero because she allowed herself to be healed of her past and was willing to accept the responsibility for Tobias' fate. She has faith that she won't grow to hate or resent him for being so deeply in his debt, if Tobias survives. Sympathy is a kind of humiliation, and a woman in her position has to endure a great deal of

sympathy. The demonic expresses itself as hatred of sympathy and contempt for others. Sarah is naturally in the paradox where she can choose either the divine or the demonic by virtue of being in unique circumstances, outside the universal. Sarah's faith is expressed in the divine.

Sarah and the merman are in similar situations in that they are prevented from realizing the universal in marriage by their guilt. Their circumstances in both cases have placed them necessarily in the paradox of the single individual and have isolated them from the universal. The demonic is one option for them; for Sarah this would be to shut herself off from others and to resent pity, for the merman it would be to free Agnes from her love for him by making Agnes hate him. A rejection of the universal from which they have been isolated is expressed in the demonic. The merman wanted to face the ethical duties that everyone must face by desiring to return to the universal in spite of the obstacles. The merman achieves individuality by virtue of the absurd because he realized that the universal is humanly impossible. Sarah makes a leap of faith back into the universal by virtue of the absurd rather than isolate herself from the universal.

According to Johannes, where he addresses the story of Faust, he states that Faust is sympathetic even though he is a doubter. He remains silent because he knows that he would throw the world into chaos if his doubt was spoken. If the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute, the silence is authentic, even though ethics condemns this silence by telling him he should have spoken. In this case, Faust finds himself in the paradox and doubt becomes guilt. Sometimes, clearly it is necessary to deceive in those cases when one's personal life is incommensurable with reality. Johannes refers to the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus recommends the fasters to

wash their faces and anoint their heads so that no one can see that they are fasting, in case anyone doubts that silence is sometimes called for. In their different ways both the fasters and Faust enter into a private relation to God in which their actions need not be justified through the universal.

Section 5: Disclosing the Ethical

Kierkegaard claims that since aesthetics demands that Abraham remain silent in order to save someone, he is not an aesthetic hero. His silence was a way of concealing his intention to kill Isaac, it was not meant to save Isaac. The ethical would demand disclosure, and so Abraham is not a 'tragic hero' either. He is neither a 'tragic hero' nor an aesthetic hero, Abraham is either lost or he is higher than the universal. Abraham cannot be understood and he cannot speak, unlike the 'tragic hero'. It may not be ethically defensible for Abraham to conceal his undertaking, but his relation to God brings him above the ethical. Abraham's ordeal would become merely a spiritual trial if at any moment he spoke and stopped it all. Abraham enters into a private relationship with God because God's command is made only to him, it is unique to Abraham. He is isolated from the universal as a result of God's command. He cannot explain the movement of faith, nor is there any way to explain the ethical itself is his temptation. Abraham plans to kill Isaac; who would understand that? Who would understand that he has faith he will get Isaac back by virtue of the absurd? How can Abraham explain to others that the ethical is his temptation: "I am suffering great anxiety because I am faced with the constant temptation to do what I, and everyone else, know to be right?"⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Ibid. 112

Johannes discusses the value of last words in which he suggests that a ‘tragic hero’ does not need last words because it is unnecessary chatter that distracts from his actions, and his heroism lies in action. However the intellectual tragic hero needs last words because they are what make him immortal and are the culmination of his life. Abraham’s journey to Mount Moriah is attested to by only one speech in Genesis. Isaac asks his father why he has no burnt offering and is so calling for his father to speak. Abraham did not break his covenant with God, he did not tell the direct truth nor did he lie, but he answered in a way that could not be understood “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:12). The ‘tragic hero’ and Abraham share their orientation toward the spirit. Abraham as the father of faith needs to say something, but he cannot according to the paradox. He would be giving up everything if he were to answer Isaac with the truth that he is to be sacrificed. Abraham speaks, but his speech is not understood because he answers by virtue of the absurd that it is possible that God will provide a lamb, his answer is not a lie and at the same time he fully intends to sacrifice Isaac and has made the movement of resignation. Johannes speaks of Abraham when he states;

He remained true to his love. But anyone who loves God needs no tears, no admiration; he forgets the suffering in the love. Indeed, so completely has he forgotten it that there would not be the slightest trace of his suffering left if God himself did not remember it, for he sees in secret and recognizes distress and counts the tears and forgets nothing.⁶⁰

Kierkegaard reasserts that Abraham stands above the ethical in an absolute relation to the absolute that cannot be communicated and he is the father of faith, or else Abraham is

⁶⁰ Ibid. 120

lost. No one can go further than faith because it is the highest passion of all. The value of faith lies in throwing oneself passionately into it and not in reflecting upon it disinterestedly. It cannot be intellectualized, faith must be experienced.

Section 6: Remarks

Johannes remarks that everyone thinks they can go further than faith because no one is content with beginning in faith. We are presented with four alternative paths that Abraham could have taken. All paths would have made Abraham less than the father of faith, but they all would have rendered him more understandable. Abraham simply obeyed God's orders, he didn't weep or complain, he didn't explain himself to anyone, and he didn't question God. In the Tribute to Abraham, it is asserted that there is no way that we can understand Abraham or what he did. It is suggested that Abraham's faith is incomprehensible, just as faith is incomprehensible to a 'tragic hero'. The 'tragic hero' is a man of reason who cannot suspend his reason to believe in something higher, he cannot even comprehend the task that Abraham is committed to, he can only see it as murder. Yet, Abraham did not hesitate with reason; instead he grasped that 'with God all things are possible' as faith is a private endeavor 'by virtue of the absurd.' Johannes poetically summarizes this when he says: "For he who loves God without faith reflects upon himself; he who loves God in faith reflects upon God."⁶¹ The distinction lies in the object of reflection, himself or God, and this is illustrated by the characters referred to as the 'knight of faith' and the 'tragic hero'.

The distinction between the 'knight of faith' and the 'tragic hero' expresses the religious and the ethical approaches, respectively. The 'tragic hero' expresses the universal by making the movement of infinite resignation by giving up

⁶¹ Ibid. 37

everything. The 'knight of faith' makes another movement 'by virtue of the absurd' that goes past the movement of infinite resignation, so that, by taking a leap of faith, he gets everything back. The three dilemmas are set up to draw out the distinction of where the 'knight of faith' cannot be understood by anyone while the 'tragic hero' is wept for and universally admired. All three dilemmas draw upon the shared premise to the claim that the ethical is universal. The first dilemma suggests there must be a teleological suspension of the ethical because according to the ethical Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac cannot be understood in terms of the universal and Abraham had attempted murder. In order for Abraham to fulfill his higher duty to God, he suspended his obligation to the universal. In the second dilemma it is suggested that there is an absolute duty to God. Abraham had held fast even though he was constantly tempted by the ethical. This was a result of him performing what God asked of him directly by passing on all his ethical obligations. In the third dilemma, the reason as to why Abraham did not disclose his undertaking to anyone is provided by the disclosure of the hidden. Hiddenness is associated with the single individual and disclosure is associated with the universal. Abraham's actions could not be disclosed or explained because he was isolated from the universal, acting as a single individual.

The main distinction that runs through Fear and Trembling is between the ethical and the religious. The ethical is associated with the 'tragic hero', the universal, with the system, mediation, recollection, infinite resignation, understanding, and infinitude. Basically, this is the idea that we must never act on our own behalf but annul our individuality, as our highest aim to always be for the greater good finds expression in the universal. The religious is associated with the 'knight of faith', the leap of faith, the

anxiety, the absurd, and the repetition, with the single individual, the paradox, with finitude and with the double movement. In essence it is the idea that the single individual can enter into a private relationship with God as a single individual that transcends the ethical. There is something higher than the universal just as the religious is higher than the ethical. It is a paradox that cannot be understood, nor expressed adequately in words, but it exists 'by virtue of the absurd.' Kierkegaard suggests that at the core of our humanity, there is something fundamentally non-rational. We have to make a choice without knowing if it is the correct one. According to Kierkegaard the most authentic choice an individual could make is a commitment to the belief in God because for him it was the ultimate example of an arbitrary choice. This commitment is an activity of faith because it is marked by a passion to live in adherence to experience. This is the most authentic life because we are completely responsible for the choices that we make and the choice defines who one is.

CHAPTER 3

FAITH IN DOGEN'S MIRROR OF WISDOM

In China, as well as Japan, from ancient times to the present, the mirror has been a symbol for the mind. In chapter 20 *Kokyo: The Eternal Mirror*,⁶² Dogen explicates the eternal mirror as a symbolic expression of the mind. This chapter, at first glance, appears to follow the teaching of previous Buddhist Patriarchs. However, if we read closer to Dogen's metaphors and explications, we will see a re-creation of the mirror symbol. The re-creation will be from the symbol of the ancient mirror to a symbol of an eternal mirror that identifies enlightenment. Dogen's sophisticated analysis of the mirror symbol consists in the activity of both thought and concrete existence. The mirror is not only a symbol for the thoughts of the mind but is also a symbol for sense perceptions. For Dogen, the eternal mirror symbolizes both the abstract and the concrete in unison. As a representation the eternal mirror as a symbol for mind expresses *dharmā*, the ultimate reality. The realization of the mind is the indescribable experience of an impermanent and empty reality in the activity of *zazen*. In this paper, I will elucidate Dogen's analysis of the eternal mirror. First, I will show Dogen's interpretation of a couple of previous Buddhist Patriarchs' conception of the ancient mirror as the symbol of the mind. Secondly, I will show how Dogen re-creates the eternal mirror as a symbolic expression of the mind. Third, I will show how Dogen synthesizes both abstract thought and concrete existence in a unified activity of *zazen* for the realization of timeless experience itself. Finally, I will argue that *zazen* is an expression of an existential faith.

⁶²Dogen, Kigen, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo* Book I, Trans. Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross, (Tokyo: Kanazawa Bunko Co. Ltd., 1994), 207.

First, Dogen presents a childhood story of the 18th patriarch who was born with the mind of a sage. The mind of a sage is represented by a round mirror that reflects flawless enlightenment as a virtue. The round mirror functions as the manifestation of enlightenment. The flawless enlightenment of the child is shown by the intelligence he possesses. The possession of this intelligence is the round mirror that is always with the child. Dogen says:

When the child goes away, he seems to be going with the round mirror on his back, yet the child's body is not hidden. When the child sleeps, the round mirror covers him like a flowery canopy. Whenever the child sits up straight, the round mirror is there in front of him, it follows [all his] movements and demeanors, active and passive.⁶³

The child seems to have been born with an intelligence that is transmitted from one enlightened Buddha to the next. Seng Chao writes a similar notion in The Emptiness of the Unreal that I will quote as follows:

The supreme Vacuity, which neither comes into [nor goes out of] existence, is probably the subtle principle in the reflection of the mysterious mirror of *prajñā* (wisdom) and the source of all existence. Unless one possesses the intelligence and special penetrating power of a sage, how can he harmonize his spirit with the realm of neither existence nor nonexistence? Therefore the perfect man penetrates the infinite with his wonderful mind and the finite cannot obstruct him. He applies to the utmost his ears to listen and his eyes to see, and sound and color cannot restrict him. Is this not because he leaves the vacuous self-nature of things

⁶³Shobogenzo 209

as it is and therefore they cannot affect his spiritual intelligence?

Therefore the sage exercises his true mind and is in accord with principle (*li*), and there is no obstruction which he cannot pass through. He views the transformation of all things with the clear understanding that [they are all of] one material force and therefore this is in accord with whatever he may encounter. Since there is no obstruction which he cannot pass through, therefore he can mix with the impure and achieve purity, and since he is in accord with whatever he encounters, he sees the unity of things as he comes in contact with them. Since this is the case, although the ten thousand forms (phenomenal things) seem to be different, they are not so in themselves. As they are not different in themselves, it follows that these [apparent] forms are not the real forms. As these forms are not the real forms, although they [appear to be] forms, they are not [real] forms at all.⁶⁴

Dogen disagrees with the schools of Buddhist idealism that attribute all phenomenal appearance to the activities of the mind because they do not consider the boundless interpenetration between mind and concrete existence. Now, when a child leaves home for instruction, he loses the openness and truth of his own existence. The transmission of the texts and sutras for the attainment of past and present illumination is more obscure than the clear surface of the round mirror. Dogen advises us to “Remember, there are *sutras* which have changed into trees and rocks, and there are [good] counselors who are

⁶⁴A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, Trans. & Compiled, by Wing-Tsit Chan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 350

spreading [the Lotus Sutra] in fields and in villages; they too may be a round mirror.”⁶⁵

The transmission of the *dharma* can occur through personal interaction as well. The possession of intelligence and the construction and transmission of thoughts cannot alone present original enlightenment. We may possess intellections, but they are not the experience of reality itself and so this is not original enlightenment.

Dogen does not discount the wisdom of the Buddhas but rather advises that the Buddha’s truth is not ultimate but progresses. He quotes the Venerable Samghanandi as follows:

The great round mirror of the buddhas
has no flaws or blurs, within or without.
We two people are able to see the same.
Our minds, and our eyes, are completely alike.⁶⁶

In presenting this quote, Dogen is showing how all Buddha faces are alike in the transmitting of wisdom. Elsewhere, he says “This face skin is the great round mirror of all buddhas. Because they have the great round mirror as their face skin, they are unmarred inside and outside. A great round mirror transmits to a great round mirror.”⁶⁷ In asserting that there are no flaws inside or outside, Dogen is emphasizing that the mirror functions perfectly and that there is no duality of thoughts and experience in one reality. Dogen says, “Saying that this mirror *has no blurs on the inside or the outside* neither

⁶⁵Shobogenzo209

⁶⁶Shobogenzo 209

⁶⁷Dogen Kigen, Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen, Ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi, (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 149.

describes an inside that depends on an outside, nor an outside blurred by an inside.”⁶⁸ Not only is there one reality, but the eternal mirror expresses this reality in an unbroken unity. This is what Dogen means when he says, “The great round mirror is neither wisdom nor reason, neither essence nor form.”⁶⁹ The Buddhas may have wisdom that we can see, touch or feel or they may be beyond all wisdom in enlightenment. In regards to the 3rd and 6th patriarch, they are similar in that they both express a truth. The 3rd Patriarch was called ‘Mirror Wisdom’ and the 6th patriarch was called ‘Great Mirror’. They both expressed the eternal mirror in their faces, each with their own truth.

In contrast to intellections of the mind, Dogen presents a parcel of the Platform Sutra by the 6th Patriarch. Master Daikan, who wrote a verse on the wall as follows:

In the state of bodhi there is originally no tree,
Neither does the clear mirror need a stand.
Originally we do not have a single thing,
Where could dust and dirt exist?⁷⁰

Here, Dogen emphasizes that a clear mirror itself is a symbol of the original enlightenment in that it is pure. The *sutra* conveys how a mirror reflects the actual physical form of things without obscurity. The reflection of myriad images in the mirror manifest concrete reality by means of the bodily sense perceptions, and this may imply that there is just a physical substance. We can get a clearer understanding by reading an excerpt of Saho Yung in which he says:

⁶⁸Shobogenzo 209

⁶⁹Shobogenzo 209

⁷⁰Shobogenzo 210

A mirror reflects because it does not obscure the physical form of things. But water (with its purity) does even better because it reveals the universal character of the physical form of things as they really are. And the sage does still better because he reflects the universal character of the feelings of all things. The sage can do so because he views things as things view themselves; that is, not subjectively but from the viewpoint of things. Since he is able to do this, how can there be anything between him and things?⁷¹

Shao Yung presents reality as the external myriad phenomenon revealed in their own nature through the sensations of the body. Dogen says, “a mirror is neither of gold nor of precious stone, neither of brightness nor of an image, but that it can be instantly *cast into an image* is truly the ultimate investigation of a mirror.”⁷² What Dogen means here is that the mirror has the ability to cast an image. He says:

‘To what place does the luster return?’ is the assertion that the possibility (of) of a mirror being cast into an image is just the possibility of a mirror being cast into an image; [it says,] for example, [that] an image returns to the place of an image, and [that] casting can cast a mirror.⁷³

I think that it is important to also quote the editors note to this quote as follows: “the monk’s question is not only abstract speculation, but it includes recognition of possibilities as they are, of concrete things as they are, and of the state of action which

⁷¹Chinese Philosophy 488

⁷²Shobogenzo 211

⁷³Shobogenzo 212

makes all things possible.”⁷⁴ This is significant to Dogen’s recreation of the eternal mirror as symbol of a non-dual reality. Another passage I think is significant for an insight into Dogen’s recreation is another quote from The Platform Scripture and is as follows:

Calmness (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are the foundations of my method. First of all, do not be deceived into thinking that two are different. They are one substance and not two. Calmness is the substance of wisdom and wisdom is the function of calmness. Whenever wisdom is at work, calmness is within it. Whenever calmness is at work, wisdom is within it. The meaning here is that [calmness and] wisdom are identified. Seekers of the Way, arouse your minds. Do not say that wisdom follows calmness or vice versa, or that the two are different. To hold such a view [would imply that] the *dharma*s (elements of existence) possess two different characters. In the case of those whose words are good but whose hearts are not good, wisdom and calmness are not identified. But in the case of those whose hearts and words are both good and in whom the internal and the external are one, calmness and wisdom are identified.⁷⁵

In this passage there is identification of wisdom with the practice of calmness, which is more precisely understood as the activity of meditation. In another chapter titled Maha-Hannya-Haramitsu: Maha-prajna-paramita⁷⁶ which translates into the accomplishment

⁷⁴Shobogenzo 209

⁷⁵Chinese Philosophy 433

⁷⁶Shobogenzo 21

that is ‘great real wisdom’. Dogen presents the balance of both mind and body as a fundamental activity. This harmony is an intuitive capacity that Dogen will call wisdom and the practice of this wisdom is the essence of *zazen*. Here, we have the unity of abstract thought and concrete experiences. This is the synthesis that Dogen expresses in his re-creation of the eternal mirror as the symbol of reality. Elsewhere, he explicates mind as the ultimate reality.

Mind-only is not one or two. It neither is the triple world nor overpasses it—perfect as it is in nonduality. It is at once the conscious mind and the nonconscious mind. It is walls and tiles, mountains, rivers, and the great earth. Mind is the “skin-flesh-bones-marrow” and the “raising-a-flower-and-bursting-into-laughter.” There are: the mind of being and the mind of nonbeing; the mind of body and mind of nonbody; the mind prior to physical formation and the mind posterior to it. The body is variously begotten from a womb, eggs, moisture, or metamorphosis. Blue, yellow, red, white—these are mind; long, short, square, round—these are mind. Birth and death, coming and going constitute this mind, and years, months, days, hours form this mind. Dreams, visions, and the illusory flowers in the sky are mind; bubbles and flames are mind. The spring flowers and the autumn moon are mind, and rush and confusion are mind. Despite all this, mind should not be abandoned. For the aforementioned reason, it is the mind in which all things themselves are ultimate reality

(*shoho-jisso-shin*), and the mind which communicates between a Buddha and a Buddha (*yuibutsu-yobutsu-shin*).”⁷⁷

The mind as the mirror reflects all of existence and is at the same time itself a reflection of existence. When a person holds up the mirror to his face, at first glance, he sees the reflection of his face as an image. This reflection of the features of his face in the mirror seems to imply that there is a difference between his reflection and his actual face. In this way there is a duality of the reflection and reflected that shows a difference between appearance and reality. The external myriad phenomena are actually the appearances of the universe reflected as the mind.

Dogen synthesizes the external myriad phenomena with the original mind in a unity, non-dual reality. He explicates this in a dialogue between Seppo, a master monk and his student Gensa. Instead of presenting the conversation verbatim I will substitute some names and contemporize the discussion for greater clarity. Now let’s say that Professor B says, ‘If you want to comprehend this state of reality, my actual state is like one face of an eternal mirror. When a stranger comes, a stranger appears. When a Mexican comes, a Mexican appears.’ Dr. B. likens her actual state of reality to ‘one face’ of an eternal mirror for three reasons. First, she cannot explicitly say what her actual state of reality is because this state is indescribable. In using the term indescribable for the Buddhist term ‘thusness,’ I mean that there is no representation or pointing to this state but rather that this state is ‘as it is.’

True Thusness or Suchness (*tathatā*) means truth and it-is-so. As truth, it is antithesis to illusion and falsehood, and “being so” it is eternal, unchangeable, indestructible, without character or nature, and is not

⁷⁷Hee-Jin Kim, Dogen Kigen: Mystical Realist, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1975), 118

produced by causes. It is the Absolute, Ultimate Reality, or True Reality, the Storehouse of the Thus-come, the Realm of *dharmas*, *dharma*-nature, and Perfect Reality.⁷⁸

Since this state is indescribable, the mirror is a symbol for the state of reality which is original enlightenment. Though the mirror is a symbol, there is not a duality between the symbol and the symbolized. Hee-Jin Kim points out that what Dogen “does in effect is to show how we can use the symbol in such a way that it becomes the total realization (*zenki*) or presence (*genzen*) of the symbolized.”⁷⁹ In this way, there is no difference between abstract thought and a personal reality.

Secondly, what Dr. B means when she says ‘one face’ is that there are no borders or individual differences of reality. Each individual has one back and one face just as each back of a person or a monkey has one face, so too does the eternal mirror have one back and one face. There is one common reality among all individual things whether they are conscious or unconscious. The eternal mirror expresses original enlightenment, a conscious activity.

Third, when Dr. B says, ‘eternal mirror’ she means that the mirror is always present in the ‘here and now.’ Each moment contains the past, present, and future. At any present moment in time the past is remembered and the future is expected. Yet, in the practice of daily life we learn to see the details of appearances directly and do not recognize the distinction between coming and appearing. Often times we associate coming and appearing as the same so that ‘when a stranger comes, a stranger appears.’ In

⁷⁸Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy 399 n.19

⁷⁹ Kim, Hee-Jin. 84

this way, Dogen says. “[Mirrors] that thus illuminate the past and present may be eternal mirrors.”⁸⁰ In actual daily life there are 12 hours and for each hour there is a mirror that illuminates the past and present as functions of time. The subordination of the idea of past and present to the hours of the day occurs through the recognition of coming and appearance in general, such that ‘When a Mexican comes, a Mexican appears.’ However, Dogen says, “We should not always learn that coming-and-appearance is recognition or understanding.”⁸¹ The recognition of coming and appearance is not the same. The recognition of appearance occurs in thought whereas coming is an activity that concretely occurs. The point is not that ‘When a stranger comes, a stranger appears.’ But rather, when a stranger comes, that particular individual stranger comes. The stranger coming is not the same as the Mexican appearing. A Mexican coming is a Mexican coming and a Mexican appearing is a Mexican appearing. Dr. B could instead have easily said that ‘When a German comes, a German appears; When a Indian comes, an Indian appears.’ Or, ‘When a Buddha comes, a Buddha appear’ etc. The point is not who or what comes and appears but rather a distinction between the abstract and the concrete. And though Dogen makes this distinction it is a matter of convention because it shows the function of interdependence in Buddha-nature. Kim says:

The impermanence of Buddha-nature is that aspect of Buddha-nature which eternally comes into being and out of being with the universe—all existence. It pulsates with the arising and perishing of the universe, at any given moment, in accordance with the infinitely intricate functional

⁸⁰Shobogenzo214

⁸¹Shobogenzo214

interdependence of its constituents. Buddha-nature gives birth to a new creation from moment to moment, sharing the fate of the universe.⁸²

Each moment of the universe is vital with existence coming in and out of being and this illustrates the impermanence of Buddha-nature.

Back to the conversation with Dr. B: cynic that I am, asks her; ‘What if suddenly another mirror, a clear one comes along, what then? So now there are two mirrors, an eternal mirror and a clear mirror. By clear, I mean that the mirror is completely sharp, still, and bright. ‘A stranger or a Mexican is definitely not a clear mirror. “A clear mirror coming is a clear mirror coming.”⁸³ The clear mirror is bright in every aspect so that there is identity of object and subject that manifest the likeness of each. Here I can say, ‘I am like that, and you are also like that.’ Now if there exists a clear mirror and an eternal mirror and there is no duality in reality then how do we see these two mirrors? Do we see them as the same or different? That is, is the eternal mirror clear? Is the clear mirror eternal? Granted that clarity is not a necessity of eternity but does the eternal mirror require polishing or for that matter does a clear mirror require polishing? And in regards to the words of the ancient Masters, Do we adhere to their instruction to continue polishing or not? If their teachings are wise should they not also apply to a clear mirror? My questions are pointing to the fact that if there is no duality in reality and it appears that there is both an eternal mirror and a clear mirror, then how do we account for one reality? Dr. B answers that, ‘In the moment of the clear mirror, both the stranger and

⁸² Kim 136

⁸³Shobogenzo215

Mexican become invisible.’ The clear mirror is just a clear mirror itself so that there is no reflection of any images.

Dogen synthesizes the teachings of both the ancient Masters by affirming that one Master taught one face of the clear mirror and the other taught one face of the eternal mirror. In this way there can be an adherence to the wisdom of both. He says, “Practitioners should remember that to preach about wisdom is never the ultimate preaching of the Buddha’s truth.”⁸⁴ Dogen does not thwart nor deny the metaphor of the clear mirror nor the eternal mirror. Rather, he synthesizes both metaphors to independently co-exist. ‘When a stranger comes a stranger appears, as well as when a Mexican comes a Mexican appears, is just in the case of the eternal mirror. Notice it is ‘in the case of the eternal mirror’ not on the eternal mirror, nor on the exterior mirror, nor in the eternal mirror, nor in the same state as the eternal mirror. With this, Dr. B reprimands me by saying that I have disregarded the concrete coming and was ‘blind to appearance’ by insisting that the mirror will remain even when the stranger and the Mexican are both invisible.⁸⁵ I tell Dr. B that ‘I am not like that.’ And she asks, ‘Well, how is it then, in your case?’ And I plead, ‘Dr. B, do you really have to ask?’ These brief comments show the intimate relationship between Professor and student, a sincere commitment between not just Professor and student but between practitioners. Kim says:

⁸⁴Shobogenzo 209

⁸⁵Shobogenzo 216

Intimate words are those words spoken and acted out by us in such a way that there is no hiatus between words and referents, thought and reality, mind and body, expressions and activities.⁸⁶

The face-to-face transmission of two human beings, such as master and student, shows how wisdom is the activity of both intellectual thought as well as bodily perceptions for both participants. They meet eye to eye in likeness. Dogen says:

There being no face or back, two individuals are able to see the same. Minds and eyes are alike. Likeness describes a human being meeting a human being. In regard to images within, they have mind and eyes, and they are able to see the same. In regard to images without, they have mind and eyes, and they are able to see the same. Object and subject which are manifest before us now are like each other within and like each other without—they are neither I nor anyone else. Such is the meeting of two human beings, and the likeness of two human beings. That person is called ‘I’, and I am that person. ‘Minds and eyes are totally alike’ means mind and mind are alike, eyes and eyes are alike. The likeness is of minds and of eyes; this means, for example, that the mind and the eyes of each are alike. They are akin to the eternal mirror.”⁸⁷

Both Master and student are akin to the eternal mirror in that their mutual exchange of thought and interaction conveys wisdom and expresses the activity of original enlightenment. Kim says:

⁸⁶Shobogenzo 83

⁸⁷Shobogenzo 209-210

Metaphors, images and symbols chosen from an ordinary context are used and function quite extraordinary in the realm of enlightenment. Words are no longer just something that the intellect manipulates abstractly and impersonally, but, rather, something that works intimately in the existential metabolism of one who uses them philosophically and religiously in a special manner and with a special attitude. They are no longer mere means or symbols that point to realities other than themselves but are themselves the realities of original enlightenment and Buddha-nature. In this view words and symbols inevitably call for activities so that activity is embedded in expression and expression in activity.⁸⁸

The interactions between professor and student are an expression of activity that identifies each in a sharing of enlightenment.

Once Dr. B and I have identified with each other and shared in enlightenment, Dr. B continues our discussion with a question. She asks, ‘So then, what if suddenly another mirror, a clear one, comes along, how will it be then?’ This is a sincere question that Dr. B asks me, the student, in hopes of learning this one eternal mirror together. I respond to Dr. B. by saying, ‘If suddenly another mirror, a clear one, comes along, and then smash that mirror into a hundred thousand myriads of bits and pieces! At the moment that the clear mirror comes along, I face the experience by smashing it into bits and pieces. It would appear that “just this moment is miscellaneous bits of utter delusion, in hundred thousand myriads of shining mirror reflections”⁸⁹ that suggest a dual reality of abstract

⁸⁸ Kim 84

⁸⁹Shobogenzo 212

thinking and the concrete experience. However, this is not the case because in the place of the clear mirror there are just dangling bits and pieces that will no longer be a clear mirror again. The myriad bits and pieces do not describe the clear mirror or the eternal and neither is there a transformation of the mirror that contains both. In Cleary's translation of his parts of his treatise, entitled Moon in a Dewdrop, Dogen says, "Bits and pieces of straightforward mind' means all the bits and pieces moment after moment are straightforward mind. Not only one or two pieces, but all bits and pieces."⁹⁰ Regardless of the shattering of the mirror into myriad shards it is still one mirror in the abstract thought. Yet, Dogen also illustrates a phenomenal unity with these words:

The lotus leaf is perfectly round,
Round as a mirror.
The tip of the water chestnut is extremely sharp,
Sharp as a gimlet.⁹¹

Following the above words, Dogen says that "Although straightforward mind resembles a mirror, it is bits and pieces. Though it resembles a gimlet, it is bits and pieces."⁹² The broken pieces of the mirror still resemble the mirror but the mirror is still shattered into a many that is no longer a unity in the concrete. The paradox represents the synthesis of both the abstract and concrete.

In expressing the clear mirror as myriads of bits and pieces, I confront both the abstract and the concrete and I express the activity of both in one reality. At the moment

⁹⁰ Dewdrop 90

⁹¹ Dewdrop 90

⁹² Dewdrop 90

of seeing the clear mirror, I make a choice that is in harmony with both my thoughts and concrete existence. In the activity of this choice, I abide by my *dharma*-position and this is the practice of *zazen* which is faith itself. Kim says,

Zazen-only cannot be fully understood apart from the consideration of faith—the element fundamentally important in Dogen’s thought. If enlightenment is realized at the moment one sits in meditation, does this, nonetheless, allow some latitude for degrees of intellectual depth and stages of spiritual progress that is infinite individual variations and differences? Dogen’s answer is affirmative and provides faith for it. Dogen’s view that even the practice of a beginner is entirely made up of original enlightenment because practice is based on enlightenment, and that what matters most in religion is the authenticity of practice.⁹³

Faith as a practice of *zazen* is an activity of both mind and body. Dogen emphasizes that this practice of synthesis is an activity of wisdom. Wisdom may appear to be just intellectual or just phenomenal, but it is both. This activity is an effort of learning that he symbolizes by the polishing of the tile. Dogen says, “we learn in practice that flaws appear even on the eternal mirror and that even [mirrors] on which flaws have appeared are the eternal mirror; this is learning the eternal mirror in practice.”⁹⁴ The polishing of the tile is the polishing of a mirror. We practice polishing the tile to make the eternal mirror, to become wise. Kim says,

⁹³ Kim 62

⁹⁴Shobogenzo 218

The tile is not transformed into the mirror, but the tile is the mirror; the act of polishing the tile itself is to unfold the purity of the mirror.

Consequently, *zazen* likened to the act of polishing the tile in this case, is nothing other than the unfolding enactment of original enlightenment, that is, the mirror.⁹⁵

The activity of wisdom is the practice of *zazen* that is the realization of timeless experience itself, enlightenment. Dogen says,

This is why the making of mirrors through the polishing of tiles has been dwelt in and retained in the bones and marrow of eternal buddhas; and, this being so, the eternal mirror exists having been made from a tile. While we have been polishing this mirror—in the past also—it has never been tainted. Tiles are not dirty; we just polish a tile as a tile. In this state, the virtue of making a mirror is realized, and this is just the effort of Buddhist patriarchs.”⁹⁶

This timeless experience is the ultimate reality that is the enlightenment of wisdom that is expressed by the eternal Mirror. Kim says that “Dogen is concerned with the logical structure of the *Samadhi* of self-fulfilling activity, which is the criterion for spiritual authenticity. Thus, for Dogen faith lies in original enlightenment, and enlightenment comes from original faith. Kim says;

It is imperative for those who practice the Way to believe in it. Those who have faith in the Way should know for certain that they are unfailingly in

⁹⁵ Kim 65

⁹⁶Shobogenzo 223

the Way from the very beginning—thus free from confusions, delusions, and disarray, as well as from additions, subtractions, and errors. Believing in this manner and penetrating the Way thus, practice it accordingly. Such is fundamental to learning the Way. [*Gakudo-yojinshu*]⁹⁷

Faith is an activity of practice that fulfills the spiritual of concrete experience because it is an embodiment of expression. Kim says;

The virtue of faith is engendered neither by the self nor by others. Because it is [generated] neither by forcing oneself nor by one's contrivance, neither by being coerced by others nor by fitting in a self-made norm, faith has been imparted intimately through ancestors in India and China. Faith is so called when the entire body becomes faith itself (*konshin-jishin*). Faith is one with the fruit of enlightenment; the fruit of enlightenment is one with faith. If it is not the fruit of enlightenment, faith is not realized. Indeed where faith is attained, there is the realization of the Buddhas and ancestors [*Shobogenzo: Sanjushichihon-bodaibumpo*].⁹⁸

The harmony of body and mind is the capacity of intuition and the practice of this intuition is wisdom that is expressed in *zazen*. In the activity of this choice, I abide by my *dharma*-position and this is the practice of *zazen* which is faith itself. In religion or spirituality, what is important is the authenticity of practice and this authenticity come from original enlightenment. For Dogen, original enlightenment and faith are intertwined so that any 'self-fulfilling' activity requires both thought and concrete experience for any

⁹⁷ Kim 62

⁹⁸ Kim 63

true spirituality. Therefore, *zazen* is an activity of faith that expresses the wisdom of an authentic life.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

It happened some time later that God put Abraham to the test. ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ he called. ‘Here I am,’ he replied. God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, your beloved Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, where you are to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I shall point out to you.’ Early next morning Abraham saddled his donkey and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He chopped wood for the burnt offering and started on his journey to the place which God indicated to him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to his servants, ‘Stay here with donkey. The boy and I are going over there; we shall worship and then come back to you.’ Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, loaded it on Isaac, and carried in his own hands the fire and the knife. Then the two of them set out together. Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. ‘Father?’ He said. ‘Yes, my son’ he replied. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ Abraham replied, ‘My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering. And the two of them went on together. When they arrived at the place which God had indicated to him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood. Then he bound his son and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven. ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ He said. ‘Here I am’ he replied. ‘Do not raise your hand against the boy,’ the angel said. ‘Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your own beloved son.’ Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham called this place ‘Yahweh provide’, and hence the saying today: ‘On the mountain Yahweh provides’ (Genesis 22:1-19).

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