

Viewpoint

VIA NEGATIVA, SUNYAVADA AND CREATIVE VOID – THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED IN BUDDHISM, WORLD MYSTICISM & SCIENCE

by Ivan Frimmel

Why are you so unhappy?

*Because 99,9% of everything you think and everything you do
is for yourself and there isn't one.*

- From Ask the Awakened by Wei Wu Wei (Terrence Gray)



In most philosophical, spiritual, religious and mystical traditions (Oriental and Occidental) we find two distinct approaches to the realisation of the Absolute, Ultimate Reality, Truth, God, True Self, Brahman, Tao, Buddha Mind, Oneness, Enlightenment, Nirvana: the better-known Via Affirmativa - the Way of Affirmation - and the much less known, spoken about and travelled Via Negativa - the Way of Negation.

Some Vedic and Vedantic teachers and philosophers before and after Buddha used the Way of Negation (e.g. *Neti Neti* = Not This, Not This) as the best means to point to the Unknowable, Indescribable, Ultimate Reality, Self, Brahman... *Abhava* is a form of Yoga in which the Yogi sees himself as zero, nothing, void of all pride and vanity...

One of Buddha's most important teachings is about *anatta*: the negation of a permanent personal "self", ego or soul, as a permanent thing or entity (*anatta* = no *Atman* = no permanent self)... The Heart Sutra is a classical example of Buddha's profound teaching via negation, as well as Nagarjuna's *Madhyamaka*, *Sunyavada* and many other Buddhist teachings on Void (*Sunyata*). Most enlightened Taoist, Ch'an and Zen masters, past and present, have been teaching the Way of Negation as the supreme means to enlightenment, e.g. *Wu* (non-being), *Wu-hsin* (no-mind), *Wu-nien* (no-thought) and *Wu-wei* (non-acting)...

In medieval Christian mystical teachings of Meister Eckhart, St. John of the Cross & The Cloud of Unknowing, and more recently, in Bernadette Roberts' writings, etc, Christianity has the most eloquent exponents of the Via Negativa – all teaching union with God, Oneness, Wholeness, through self-negation... *Let thy Will be done, not mine...* Western and Eastern "nihilists", absolutist monist idealists, and other philosophers and mystics, including Sartre, Nishitani, Alan Watts, Ram Dass, Wei Wu Wei, Meher Baba, Osho, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi, Ramesh S. Balsekar, etc. all spoke and wrote much about the Way of Negation... For example, Jiddu Krishnamurti often asked his audiences: "Is it possible to live in this world and be nothing, to negate one's knowledge, to be empty of thought and of one's conditioning, of one's idea about one's 'self'?"

Even the modern science, influenced by some startling discoveries of quantum physics, is now confirming the insights of the Vedantic, Taoist, Buddhist and Christian mystics and philosophers about *sunyata*, voidness, emptiness... by finding out and pointing out that the substratum of all that exists, the cause of all that is manifest, of the so-called phenomenal world, lies hidden in the all-pervading, ever-present creative "empty" space, field of infinite possibilities, the so-called Zero-Point Energy, Creative Vacuum, Void... Sub-atomic particles are observed to pop-out of "nowhere" in a total vacuum of an acceleration chamber — and interact with the observer's mind, thus demonstrating beyond any doubt the essential Unity, Non-Duality, or Oneness, and the inseparable interconnectedness between the observer and the observed, subject and object, thinker and thought, inner and outer, energy and matter, phenomenon and noumenon, relative and absolute, This and That, One and Many, All and One, One and None...

Contrary to some people's belief, the Way of Negation is only "negative" — in the sense of being destructive — to that which is false and unreal. Since all genuine spiritual enlightenment & liberation must involve a total transformation, turning-around, metamorphosis, i.e. a sudden realization of the pre-conceptual non-dual Reality as the Reality of All Being, Here & Now, not just a gradual improvement and cultivation of one's personality —and since that can happen only through the destruction of all false notions and delusions we so proudly cherish about our "self", I, the Self, God, Universe, Reality— the Via Negativa and its iconoclastic "tough-love" approach is, paradoxically, the most positive, therapeutic and enlightening intellectual and practical means available to anyone seriously interested in such a transformation.

The Via Negativa, whether realized and practiced through one's meditation, contemplation, religion, philosophy, art, mysticism or science is (due to some fear, ignorance and misconceptions) still very seldom used and often avoided spiritual highway towards enlightenment, i.e. towards the realization of the essential Oneness of ALL THAT IS.