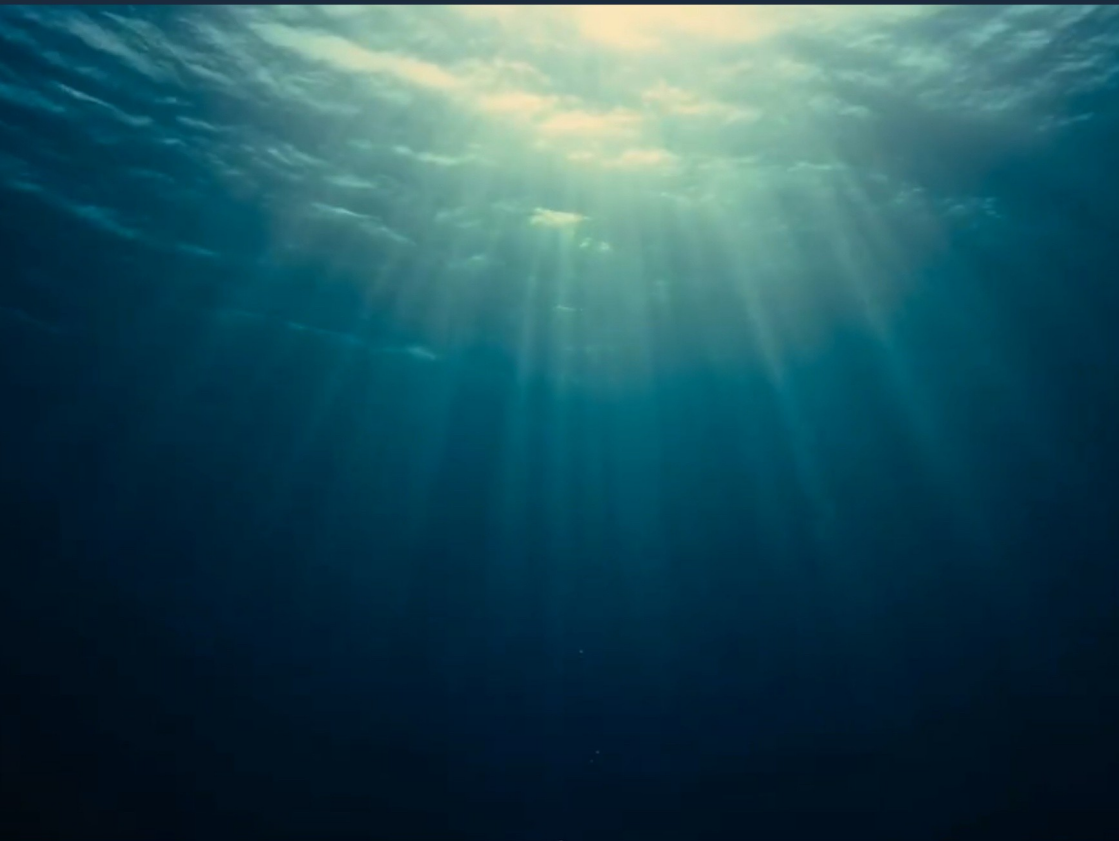


AN OCEAN JOURNEY

GOING DEEPER



"The wave rises, and falls, and the ocean remains."



Hosshin Ananda

HEARTMIND



A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

What follows is one person's perspective, offered rather than argued. I have come, through my own life and my own looking, to a single conviction: that beneath every tradition, every teacher, every serious attempt anyone has ever made to look honestly at reality, there is one and the same thing being pointed at, however differently each of them names it. That is my truth, and I hold it plainly, without apology, because it is what I have found.

But I want to be equally plain about what this book is, and is not. It is not a work of comparative religion or intellectual history, and I am not a scholar of the traditions it draws on. When I set a ninth-century Kashmiri sage beside a twentieth-century physicist beside a shopkeeper in Bombay, I am not claiming to have proven that they were describing one identical, verifiable fact. I am telling you where, in my own experience of reading and living, I keep finding the same shore, no matter which direction I happen to be walking from. A careful historian of these traditions would rightly say that a family resemblance across separate lineages is not the same thing as an identity between them, that most of the voices in this book never spoke to one another, were separated by centuries, oceans and languages, and would sometimes have disagreed sharply about what they were each describing. I do not dispute any of that. I simply do not think it is the whole of the matter, and where the two views part ways, I have chosen, for myself, to keep trusting the shore.

Consider this whole book, then, a finger pointing at the moon. The finger is mine, one person's, offered as honestly as I know how and

without any claim to final authority over what it is pointing at. Please do not mistake it for the moon itself. And please feel entirely free to look with your own eyes, in your own way, rather than only through mine.

A brief note on language: this book draws on Sanskrit terms that carry centuries of meaning no single English word can fully hold. Wherever one appears, I have added a short, plain-English gloss in brackets at its first use in each chapter, just to give you a foothold. Treat those glosses as a rough handrail, not a full translation, and turn to the glossary at the back of this book for a fuller account of each.

This companion volume goes deeper into each of the seven principles set out in *An Ocean Journey*, the traditions, thinkers, scientists and teachers whose separate paths, as I read them, keep arriving at the same single shore. It is offered as company rather than as proof.

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“Caitanyam ātmā.”

“Consciousness is the Self.”

– Shiva Sutras, 1.1

*given, tradition holds, to the sage Vasugupta,
on a rock face above the Jhelum river, Kashmir, ninth century*



PRINCIPLE ONE — GOING DEEPER

There Is Only One Reality

Consciousness is the ground of everything. It does not come from the body or the mind, it is what the body and mind arise within. It needs nothing outside itself to exist.

That is the whole of what I wrote in the original pages of this booklet, and if you stopped reading there, you would already have the principle entire. What follows is not a correction to that sentence, or an addition to it. It is the space around it, filled in: the tradition it grows out of, the researchers who arrived at something close to it from an entirely different direction, and the teachers who lived it rather than argued for it. I offer this not as proof, because a thing this fundamental was never going to be proved the way a bridge is proved sound, but as good company. It helps, I have found, to know you are not the only one standing at this particular edge of the ocean.

The Root in Kashmir

The seven principles in this book did not arrive out of nowhere. If they have a single deepest root, it is in the non-dual Shaivism that flowered in the Kashmir valley between roughly the ninth and eleventh centuries, a tradition often called Kashmir Shaivism, or Trika (literally “the triad,” after its three-fold view of reality). I did not set out to write a restatement of it. But the more I read, over the years, the more I recognised my own quiet

conclusions already sitting there, argued with far greater rigour and beauty than I could ever manage, centuries before I was born.

The tradition, as its own historians tell it, begins with Vasugupta, a teacher who is said to have received the eighty-one terse verses now called the Shiva Sutras, carved or dictated on a rock face above the Jhelum river. The very first line, *caitanyam ātmā* (consciousness is the Self), sets the tone for everything that follows. Notice what it does not say. It does not say the Self is conscious, which would leave consciousness as one property among others that a Self happens to have. It collapses the distance entirely: consciousness simply is what you are, all the way down, with nothing further behind it doing the perceiving. That single line is, as far as I can tell, the oldest clear ancestor of Principle One.

A century or so later, Utpaladeva systematised this insight into what became known as the Pratyabhijnā (recognition) school. His central claim, worked out with a philosopher's patience across the *Īśvara-pratyabhijnā-kārikā*, was that liberation is not an achievement, a state to be manufactured through years of technique, but a recognition of what was true before the technique ever began. You are not trying to become the ocean. You are trying to notice that the wave was never anything else. It is worth sitting with how directly that maps onto the seventh principle in this book, the return is available now, and I will come back to that resonance when we reach it.

The tradition found its most complete voice in Abhinavagupta, working around the turn of the eleventh century, whose vast *Tantrāloka* drew together philosophy, ritual, aesthetics and direct meditative instruction into a single, coherent vision. What

Abhinavagupta and his lineage insisted on, and what distinguishes Kashmir Shaivism from some other readings of non-dual Vedanta, is that the world is not an illusion laid over the one reality, something to see through and discard. The world is Shiva's own self-expression, real in exactly the way a wave is real: not separate from the ocean, not less than the ocean, simply the ocean choosing, for a while, to take that particular shape. The tradition has a word for the pulse by which consciousness does this, *spanda* (vibration, or throb), the vibration or throb by which the still, aware ground of everything becomes the moving, changing world without ever ceasing to be itself. You will meet *spanda* again properly when we go deeper into Principle Two, because that is where it belongs, but I wanted you to know it was already there, quietly, underneath the very first principle.

When Science Turned Inward

I find something moving, rather than merely convenient, in the fact that people working at the furthest edge of modern physics and cognitive science, with no particular interest in Kashmiri philosophy and often no religious commitment at all, keep arriving back at the same shore, at least as I read them. Not because it proves the principle, in the way a laboratory result proves a hypothesis. Consciousness is not that kind of thing, and I distrust anyone who tells you it has been settled by an experiment. But because it tells me the recognition is not a private eccentricity. It is a place the mind keeps finding, from every direction it is honestly willing to travel.

Erwin Schrödinger is as good a place to start as any, since he is one of the founders of quantum mechanics rather than a fringe figure. He had read the Upanishads as a young man, and it stayed with him. In his later, more philosophical writing he returned

again and again to the idea that what looks, from inside a single skull, like billions of separate minds is, at bottom, a single awareness appearing to itself as many, in the same way that a single ocean appears, to a wave, as countless separate crests. I hold that particular formulation lightly, since the precise wording gets repeated in different versions and I cannot vouch for every rendering of it that circulates. But the direction of his thought, from inside a career built entirely on equations, is not in doubt, and it is a striking thing for a Nobel physicist to have spent his later years pursuing.

The closest, and to me the most remarkable, of these modern voices belongs to Federico Faggin. Very few people are given credit for the actual object you are probably reading this on, in some form, but Faggin is one of them: he led the design of the Intel 4004, the world's first commercial microprocessor, and went on to found Zilog and later Synaptics, whose touch-sensing technology sits under the glass of a great many phones and laptops. He spent a career, in other words, inside the deepest, most literal understanding of how matter can be organised to compute. Which makes what happened to him in 1990, on a quiet evening at Lake Tahoe, all the more striking. He described being overtaken by a sudden and overwhelming experience of unity, of himself as, in his own words, an energy that was both scintillating white and self-knowing, love recognising itself without any object standing apart from it. It was not an idea he reasoned his way into. It happened to him, the way the sea happens to a swimmer caught by a wave, and it never fully left him afterward.

What makes Faggin unusual is that he did not simply have the experience and write a memoir about it, although he did write a fine one, called *Silicon*. He spent the following decades building,

together with the physicist Giacomo Mauro D'Ariano, an actual scientific proposal, grounded in quantum information theory, for how consciousness could be fundamental rather than manufactured by the brain. His later book, *Irreducible*, lays the claim out plainly: it is not the brain that produces consciousness, he argues, but consciousness, operating through quantum processes that classical computation cannot replicate, that produces the brain, and uses it as an instrument. A computer, on his account, can manipulate the symbol for love with perfect fluency and understand precisely nothing of what the word points to, because meaning, feeling and free choice are not the kind of thing that classical bits can ever generate, only the kind of thing that can be known from the inside. I do not ask you to accept his physics on my say-so, since it remains genuinely contested territory even among physicists sympathetic to his aims. But I find it hard to walk past the fact that a man who spent his life building the machines now finds, at the far end of that life, that the very thing which cannot be built into a machine is the one thing that was never made of matter in the first place.

Two other contemporary thinkers are worth naming, because they arrive at kindred conclusions from yet another direction, cognitive science and evolutionary theory rather than physics. Donald Hoffman, a professor of cognitive science, has spent years using the mathematics of evolutionary game theory to argue that natural selection shapes perception for usefulness, not for truth. On his account, the spacetime and solid objects we seem to see are closer to the icons on a computer desktop than to the wiring underneath: real enough to act on, entirely misleading if mistaken for the deepest layer of what is actually there. What is fundamental, in his proposal, which he calls conscious realism, is not matter arranged in spacetime at all, but

something more like a vast interacting network of conscious perspectives, of which our own is one small, useful, species-specific rendering. Bernardo Kastrup, who trained as an engineer and computer scientist before turning to philosophy, makes an even more direct version of the claim under the name analytic idealism: that a single field of consciousness is the one thing that actually exists, that the physical world we measure is simply how that field appears from outside, and that each of us is something closer to a dissociated fragment of one vast mind than a separate mind manufactured by a separate brain. Neither of these is a settled scientific consensus, and I want to be honest about that rather than borrow their credentials to dress up a conclusion I already held. But I notice, again, the direction of travel. Physics, cognitive science and Kashmiri metaphysics, arrived at independently, by people with no reason to flatter one another, seem to me to keep pointing the same way.

The Sages Who Needed No Laboratory

Alongside the philosophers and the scientists there is another kind of witness entirely, people who did not argue their way to this principle at all, but simply spoke from inside it, plainly, as though describing the view from a window rather than defending a theory.

Ramana Maharshi, who lived almost the whole of his life on and around the hill of Arunachala in South India, taught almost nothing beyond a single question, who am I, followed patiently back through every answer that was not quite true until nothing was left but the bare fact of being aware. “The Self is here and now,” he would say, “it is the only Reality. There is nothing else.” He did not mean this as a poetic flourish. He meant it as a report.

Nisargadatta Maharaj, a shopkeeper in Bombay who taught from a small room above his tobacco stall and whose recorded conversations became the book *I Am That*, put the same recognition even more starkly. “In reality there is only consciousness,” he told his visitors. “All life is conscious, all consciousness alive.” And, more bluntly still: “The world hangs on the thread of consciousness, no consciousness, no world.” Neither man was writing philosophy for publication. Both were answering, as directly as language allows, the question a stranger had just walked in and asked them, which is part of why I trust their words more than I trust most books, including, at times, my own.

A Different Door

Everyone I have mentioned so far reached Principle One through the mind, by argument, by physics, by patient self-inquiry. There is another way in entirely, and I want to name it here even though its fuller unfolding belongs later in this book, under Principle Five, because it would be dishonest to write about the one reality without mentioning the man who has taught me the most about it without ever writing a word of philosophy at all.

Neem Karoli Baba, known to those who loved him simply as Maharajji, kept no formal doctrine, and as far as anyone knows wrote nothing down himself. He lived and taught from a small ashram at Kainchi, in the Kumaon hills of northern India, until his death in 1973, and became known to the West largely through Richard Alpert, the Harvard psychologist who travelled to India and returned as Ram Dass, and through the extraordinary circle of Westerners who gathered around Maharajji in the years that followed, many of whom went on to shape fields as different as public health, music and technology. His teaching, as those

students remember it, was rarely an explanation. It was closer to a demonstration, repeated in a thousand small acts: love everyone, serve everyone, remember God. "It's better," he liked to say, "to see God in everything than to try to figure it out." "See all women as mothers," he taught, "serve them as your mother. When you see the entire world as the mother, the ego falls away." And of the one thing he considered unshakeable, in a world where everything else changes: "Everything is impermanent, except the love of God."

What Maharajji offers, that the philosophers do not, is a second door onto what feels to me like exactly the same room. Where Abhinavagupta and Faggin and Nisargadatta each, in their own idiom, argue or report that there is only one reality and that it is aware, Maharajji simply behaved as if it were already, obviously, true of everyone who walked through his gate, saint or thief, professor or beggar, and let that behaviour do the convincing no argument could. You do not have to out-think your way to Principle One. You can, instead, love your way there, treating every person you meet as what this principle already claims they are. Both doors, I have come to believe, open onto the same ocean.

The Wave and the Water

I have laid a good deal in front of you in this chapter: a rock face in Kashmir, a microprocessor inventor's evening at Lake Tahoe, a shopkeeper above a tobacco stall in Bombay, a small ashram in the Kumaon hills. None of it was necessary for the principle to be true, and none of it will substitute for your own quiet noticing, which is the only place this was ever actually going to be confirmed. I offer it, as I said at the start, as company rather than as proof. A philosopher, a physicist, a sage and a guru, none of

whom needed the others' permission, seem to me, standing where I stand, to keep independently arriving at the same single sentence: there is only one reality, and it is aware, and it is what you are made of, whether you call it Shiva, consciousness, mind-at-large, or simply love. That is my reading of them, offered rather than proven. The wave rises. The ocean, underneath it, never once stops being the ocean.

“Yasyonmeṣa-nimeṣābhyām jagataḥ pralayodayau.”
“We laud that Śaṅkara by whose mere opening and shutting of
the eye-lids
there is the appearance and dissolution of the world, and who
is the source
of the glorious powers of the collective whole of the śaktis.”
– Spanda Kārikās, verse 1, attrib. Vasugupta / Kallaṭa, ninth-
tenth century
(trans. Jaideva Singh)



PRINCIPLE TWO — GOING DEEPER

That One Reality Is Aware

This awareness is not cold or distant, it is loving, and it is not static either. Its very nature is to express itself, and that expression takes shape as waves. Each wave is not separate from the one reality, it is that reality, appearing for a while in one particular form.

In the last chapter I promised you a word, spanda (pulse, or throb), and said it belonged properly here rather than there. This is where I keep that promise. If Principle One establishes that there is only one reality, and that it is consciousness, Principle Two answers the question that follows immediately on its heels: an aware, unmoving ground is one thing, but why is there a world at all, why does anything happen, why does the ocean not simply lie flat and silent forever. The answer this tradition gives, and the answer I have come to trust with my own quiet noticing, is that awareness is not a still photograph. It is closer to a heartbeat.

The Pulse Beneath the Stillness

The classical text for this principle is a short one, fifty-odd verses known as the Spanda Kārikās, composed in Kashmir in the ninth or tenth century and traditionally attributed either to Vasugupta himself, the same sage who received the Shiva Sutras, or to his student Kallaṭa, who is thought to have first written the

verses down with his own commentary. Spanda means pulsation, throb, the faint trembling of a plucked string after the note itself has died away. The opening verse, which stands at the head of this chapter, praises Śaṅkara (a name for Shiva), as the one by whose mere opening and closing of the eyes the entire world appears and dissolves. Read it slowly and notice what it is not saying. It is not saying a god, somewhere outside the universe, decided to create it. It is saying that consciousness has, built into its very nature, a kind of blinking, an opening and closing, and that the world is simply what is seen in the instant the eye is open.

This is where Kashmir Shaivism gives its clearest account of the relationship between Shiva and Shakti, the two names that between them do the work Principle Two is trying to do in English. Shiva is consciousness at rest, the witnessing awareness, the ocean with no wave yet risen on it. Shakti is that same consciousness in motion, its own inherent power to know itself, express itself, become form. The tradition is emphatic that these are not two things, a god and his energy, a substance and its property. They are one reality, described twice, once from the side of stillness and once from the side of movement, in the same way that you might describe a flame as both burning and giving light without meaning two separate flames. Spanda is the name for their inseparability caught in the act: the very throb, as one commentator on the Kārikās put it, of the divine I-consciousness recognising and delighting in itself. Awareness, on this account, was never going to stay still. Delight does not sit quietly. It moves, the way your own attention moves toward whatever you love the moment you notice it is there.

Wholeness in Motion

I did not expect, when I first read about spanda, to find its cousin in twentieth-century physics, but I did, in the work of David Bohm. Bohm was about as credentialed a physicist as it is possible to be, a collaborator of Oppenheimer's on the Manhattan Project in his youth and, later, a friend and correspondent of Einstein, who called him a kindred spirit. In his later work Bohm proposed that the universe should be understood as having two orders folded into one another. The explicate order is the world as we ordinarily perceive it, separate objects, separate waves, separate people, laid out across space and time. The implicate order is what he considered more fundamental, an unbroken, undivided wholeness in which everything is enfolded into everything else, the way every part of a hologram contains, faintly, the pattern of the entire image. He called the single underlying process by which the implicate continually unfolds into the explicate, and the explicate folds back into the implicate, the holomovement, and he meant that word quite literally: not a movement of things, but movement as the most basic fact there is, with things themselves being closer to temporary eddies in that movement, in the way that a whirlpool is not a thing dropped into a river but the river itself, doing something, for a while, in one place.

Bohm did not consider this merely a physicist's abstraction, either. In the last decades of his life he entered into a long, close dialogue with the philosopher and teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti, and the two of them spent years, in conversation and in print, pursuing the question of whether the fragmentation we experience, thought divided against itself, self divided against world, might be a habit of perception laid over a wholeness that was never actually broken. It is worth sitting for a moment with how closely this echoes Kashmir Shaivism's own claim, worked

out a thousand years earlier in an entirely different language and toward an entirely different audience: that the world of separate waves is real, in the way the explicate order is real, and that underneath it, sustaining it, giving it its shape, is a single unbroken movement that never actually breaks into pieces at all. Even the more austere language of quantum field theory gestures in the same direction, if you let it: what particles and waves both turn out to be, in that picture, are excitations of underlying fields that fill the whole of space, ripples in something continuous rather than separately existing objects bumping into one another. I do not claim the physicists intend a mystical meaning by this. I only notice, again, that the mathematics keeps landing near the same shore as the sages did, at least as I read it.

Awareness Is Not Neutral

The original line of this principle insists on something that is easy to skip past: this awareness is not cold or distant, it is loving. It would have been possible to write a purely structural account of consciousness, an impersonal field that happens to generate waves the way a pond happens to generate ripples when the wind moves across it. That is not what I believe, and it is not what the tradition I am drawing on believes either. Classical Vedanta names ultimate reality with three words joined together, *sat-chit-ananda* (being, consciousness, bliss), treating bliss not as an occasional mood that consciousness sometimes has but as a third, inseparable face of what consciousness fundamentally is, standing alongside the fact that it exists and the fact that it is aware. Kashmir Shaivism keeps the same triad in its own vocabulary, and Abhinavagupta describes the highest reality, *Parama Shiva* (Shiva in his supreme, unlimited fullness), in

exactly these terms: not merely existent and aware, but overflowing, ecstatic, ānanda (bliss), in its own self-recognition.

The contemporary teacher Rupert Spira, who came to this understanding through years spent as a potter before he ever taught a word of it, puts the same claim in strikingly direct modern language. Love and awareness, he says, are identical, two names for a single essential self, arrived at by two different roads, one through the intellect and one through feeling, the path of knowledge and the path of devotion. When attention stops chasing objects and rests quietly in its own source, that is what a meditator calls awareness. When longing stops chasing objects and rests in its own source, that is what a devotee calls love. On his account, they are not two different discoveries that happen to resemble one another. They are, as he teaches it, the same discovery, described from either side of the same door, and I find his teaching persuasive, though I hold it as his teaching and my own trust in it, rather than as a settled matter.

I think of Anandamayi Ma here too, the Bengali saint whose very name means she who is permeated with bliss, a name given to her by others because of how she was found to be, not a title she claimed for herself. “There is one unchanging indivisible reality,” she taught, “which, though unmanifest, reveals itself in infinite multiplicity and diversity.” That is Principle Two in a single sentence, as far as I can tell, arrived at from inside a life that looked nothing like a physics laboratory or a Kashmiri monastery. And when she spoke of what genuine happiness actually was, she was careful to distinguish it from anything that depends on circumstance: happiness that leans on something outside you cannot last, she said, but the happiness that is found in what is already everywhere is the real thing. That is not a mood layered on top of consciousness by good fortune. It is what

consciousness turns out to be made of, the moment you stop looking past it toward something else.

Why There Is Anything At All

Put plainly, then: reality does not sit still and occasionally, for no reason, throw off a wave. Its very nature is to move, to know itself, to delight in itself, and a wave is simply what that delight looks like from where you happen to be standing on the shore. The Kashmiri sages called this spanda, the divine pulse. Bohm called it the holomovement, wholeness caught in the act of unfolding. Spira calls it the identity of love and awareness. Anandamayi Ma simply was it, visibly, to everyone who ever sat in a room with her. None of these reads to me like a different claim wearing a different coat. I hear each as a report from a different vantage point on what feels, to me, like a single fact, though that hearing is mine to offer rather than a conclusion anyone else is bound to share: the one reality was never going to stay still, because stillness was never separate from its own aliveness in the first place. You are not watching that movement from the outside. You are, as the next principle will say, a place where it is currently happening.

“Tat tvam asi.”

“Thou art That.”

— *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.8.7,
Uddālaka's teaching to his son Śvetaketu



PRINCIPLE THREE — GOING DEEPER

You Are That

Your mind is not something separate from that one reality, it is its viewpoint, seen from where you stand. When that viewpoint narrows, life feels separate and small. But it never actually stops being what it truly is.

The first two principles could, if you let them, stay comfortably abstract. There is one reality, it is aware, it moves. Fine. Interesting, even, in the way a good idea about physics is interesting. Principle Three is where this stops being an idea about the universe out there and becomes a claim about you, specifically, reading this sentence. Tat tvam asi (thou art that) is one of the oldest sentences in Indian philosophy, one of the four mahāvākyas (the great sayings), that Vedānta considers a direct transmission rather than an argument, and it is worth noticing how it was actually delivered. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, the sage Uddālaka does not prove this to his son Śvetaketu with logic. He simply says it to him, nine times, after nine different illustrations, as though repetition itself were the method. I am doing something smaller here, but in the same spirit: not proving Principle Three so much as walking you around it enough times that you might, for a moment, simply see it for yourself.

The Point Where the Ocean Looks Out

Kashmir Shaivism gives the most detailed account I have found anywhere of how the single, infinite awareness of Principles One and Two comes to experience itself as a particular, limited someone, an *anu* (a limited individual self), reading a particular page, in a particular chair, with a particular history of joys and disappointments behind it. The tradition's answer is not that something went wrong. It is that Paramashiva (Shiva in his supreme, unlimited fullness), consciousness at its fullest, contracts itself, by its own absolute freedom, called *svātantrya* (absolute freedom, or self-determination), through a sequence of veiling powers known as the *kañcukas* (the veiling sheaths). Where full awareness knows itself as the one source of everything, *kalā* (limited creative power) narrows that into a limited creatorship, the sense of being able to make only some things, not all. Where full awareness knows everything, *vidyā* (limited knowledge) narrows that into partial knowledge. Where full awareness is already complete, *rāga* (desire, or attachment) narrows that into desire, the felt sense of lack that sends you reaching for what you think you do not have. *Niyati* (necessity, or restriction to one causal order) binds a universal capacity to act anywhere into the particular causal chain of one life, one body, one set of circumstances. And *kāla* (time) folds eternity down into the passage of time, so that what was whole and present becomes something stretched out into a past you have lost and a future you are waiting for. What remains after all five contractions is *purusha* (the individual experiencer, the soul). You.

The crucial thing this tradition insists on, and the reason I trust it more than accounts that treat individuality as a mistake to be corrected, is that the *kañcukas* are not a wall built between you and Shiva. They are Shiva's own powers, still Shiva, simply folded

inward, the way an actor does not stop being themselves by fully inhabiting a part, however far they let themselves forget it during the performance. This is what Utpaladeva's Pratyabhijnā (recognition) school, which I introduced when we went deeper into Principle One, is actually asking you to do: not to become something you are not yet, but to recognise, the way you recognise an old friend under a disguise, that the narrowed viewpoint currently reading these words was never actually cut off from what it is narrowing. That is the whole of Principle Three, stated in the vocabulary of tenth-century Kashmir: your mind is not something separate from that one reality, it is its viewpoint, seen from where you stand.

No Head to Be Found

I want to give you a way to check this for yourself, right now, rather than simply take the philosophy on trust, and for that I am indebted to an Englishman named Douglas Harding. Harding trained as an architect, not a philosopher, and spent a decade of his spare time trying to draw an accurate diagram of what he actually was, from the inside, rather than what he looked like from outside in a mirror or a photograph. In 1943, walking in the Himalayan foothills, the answer arrived all at once. Looking down, he found, in his own words, “khaki trouser-legs terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes... and a khaki shirt-front terminating upwards in — absolutely nothing whatever!” Where he had always assumed a head must be, sitting on top of his shoulders the way it sits on top of everyone else's shoulders when he looks at them, there was, from his own first-person vantage point, no head at all. Only a kind of boundless open space, already filled with hills, sky, larks, and the whole of the visible world.

He did not stop at having the experience himself. He spent the rest of his long life turning it into what he called experiments, simple enough that anyone could try them in under a minute: point a finger out at a tree, a chair, a passing car, and notice you are pointing at an object. Then slowly turn that same finger around and point it at what is, right now, doing the looking. What do you find there. Not a face, which is something other people see, not a head, which exists only in mirrors and photographs and other people's accounts of you, but the same open, aware space Harding found in the Himalayas, already full of whatever you happen to be looking at. He founded, with Richard Lang, what became known as the Headless Way to keep sharing this. What I find remarkable is how directly Harding's simple pointing experiment seems to arrive at the very thing Utpaladeva spent a treatise arguing for: that the narrowed viewpoint you take yourself to be, when you actually look for its edges, turns out to have none. It was never a bounded head at all, or so it appears to me each time I try it. It was the ocean, looking out, and mistaking the view for a viewer.

When the Boundary Softens in the Laboratory

In the last fifteen years or so, neuroscience has started to produce its own, much more cautious, version of the same observation. Robin Carhart-Harris and his colleagues, first at Imperial College London and later at UCSF, have used brain imaging to study what happens during the experience researchers call ego dissolution, most often studied under psilocybin, the compound in so-called magic mushrooms, though related states are reported in deep meditation and other contexts too. What they have repeatedly found is a marked drop in activity and connectivity within what is called the default

mode network, a set of interlinked brain regions strongly associated with self-referential thought, the constant low hum of mental narration that maintains the felt sense of being a separate, continuous someone moving through the world. As that network's activity quiets, people commonly report exactly the kind of loosening Principle Three describes: the felt boundary between self and everything else softening or briefly disappearing altogether, without the world itself vanishing, only the sense of a narrow viewpoint standing apart from it.

I want to be careful here, in the same way I was careful about Faggin's physics and Hoffman's cognitive science. A change in brain activity correlating with a reported experience is not proof of Kashmir Shaivism's metaphysics, and I do not think the researchers involved would claim it is. But the shape of the correlation is hard to ignore: heightened self-referential neural activity tracks with the felt sense of being a small, bounded, separate self, and its quieting tracks with a felt sense of being far larger, or far less locatable, than that self ever was. Principle Three says the same thing in a single sentence, when that viewpoint narrows, life feels separate and small. It is, at the very least, a striking thing to find turning up on a brain scan.

The Viewpoint That Never Left

Three very different witnesses, then, converging, as I read them, on one claim. The Kashmiri philosophers describe, patiently and technically, how infinite awareness narrows itself through the *kañcukas* into a particular viewpoint without ever actually leaving what it is. Harding hands you a finger and a minute of your own attention and lets you check it directly, for yourself, without taking anyone's word for anything. The neuroscientists watch, on a screen, the boundary loosen when the networks that

manufacture the sense of separateness go quiet. I do not experience them as describing three different phenomena. As I read them, they are describing the same one, from a treatise, from a hillside in the Himalayas, from a brain scanner, though I offer that reading as mine, not as a finding any of them signed their names to together. You are that. Not eventually, not after enough practice, but right now, underneath whatever degree of narrowing happens to be in place this particular moment, which is exactly the question the next principle takes up: why the narrowing happens at all, and why, even at its tightest, nothing about it was ever a mistake.

*“One who has made in sport the suns and seas
Mirrors in our being his immense caprice.”*
– Sri Aurobindo, from the sonnet “Lila,” 1939



PRINCIPLE FOUR — GOING DEEPER

The Forgetting Is Not a Mistake

Reality rises and falls the way a wave rises and falls. Nothing is wasted in this. It is simply how it unfolds, awareness moving through every degree of clarity, from tightly closed to fully open.

Principle Three left us with a question I did not fully answer, because it deserves its own chapter. If the one aware, loving reality of Principles One and Two is already complete, already blissful, already lacking nothing, why would it ever contract itself through the *kañcukas* (the veiling sheaths) into a narrow, forgetful, occasionally quite miserable individual viewpoint at all? Any account of these seven principles that cannot answer that honestly has not really explained anything, it has just relocated the mystery. This chapter is my attempt at an honest answer, and I have found the clearest versions of it in two places a very long way apart: a Kashmiri concept called *lila*, and a modern Indian philosopher who spent forty years working out its implications in painstaking detail.

Play, Not Punishment

Kashmir Shaivism's answer to why consciousness would ever contract itself is a single word, *lila* (play). Not play in the sense of something frivolous or beside the point, but play in the very specific sense of an activity a complete being undertakes not out of need but out of sheer creative delight, exactly as Principle

Two already described awareness's own overflowing nature. The tradition insists that the contraction I described in the last chapter, the narrowing of Shiva's infinite freedom down through the *kañcukas* into a limited individual viewpoint, is undertaken by that same absolute freedom, *svātantrya* (absolute freedom, or self-determination), for no other reason than the joy of losing itself in order to have the joy of finding itself again. Think of the games you played as a child, hiding somewhere you knew you would be found, not because you actually wanted to remain lost, but because the delight lived entirely in the interval between the hiding and the being found. Or think of the way you might deliberately avoid the ending of a good novel a chapter early, protecting a pleasure that only exists because you do not, for now, know how it turns out. Consciousness, on this account, had nothing outside itself to explore, being the whole of what exists, so it built the exploration inward, into degrees of forgetting, so that finding itself could remain a real and living discovery rather than a fact it already possessed and could never freshly encounter.

Sri Aurobindo's sonnet, quoted at the head of this chapter, catches the same thought in four lines: the Spirit who has made, in sport, the suns and seas, finds his own immense caprice mirrored back in our being. Caprice is a carefully chosen word. It does not mean carelessness. It means an act undertaken freely, for its own sake, answerable to nothing outside itself, which is the only kind of act a being that already lacks nothing could ever perform.

Involution and Evolution

The most rigorous working-out of this idea I have found belongs to Sri Aurobindo, the Cambridge-educated Indian nationalist

who, after years in politics and a spell in a British colonial prison, withdrew to Pondicherry and spent the following decades developing what he called Integral Yoga and writing *The Life Divine*, one of the most sustained attempts of the twentieth century to reconcile spiritual realisation with the fact of evolution. Aurobindo proposed that existence unfolds through two matched movements. The first he called involution, the process by which the Divine Reality deliberately conceals itself, descending by stages ever deeper into form, until at the level of bare matter consciousness appears, on the surface, to have vanished entirely into blind mechanism. This concealment, in his account, is not an accident or a fall from grace. It is a purposeful veiling, spirit choosing to forget itself completely enough that what follows can be a genuine discovery rather than a foregone conclusion.

The second movement, evolution, is involution run in reverse: the same consciousness that buried itself in matter gradually re-emerging, first as the bare sensitivity and desire Aurobindo called Life, then as the divided, comparing, fragmenting activity of Mind, and, in the extension he added to nineteenth-century biology, pressing on toward what he named Supermind, a truth-consciousness beyond the divisions the mind creates. On this view, evolution is not a blind accumulation of accidents, complexity piling on complexity for no reason. It is consciousness climbing back up the very ladder it deliberately descended, remembering a little more of itself at every rung. Framed this way, Principle Four stops sounding like a strange consolation and starts sounding, to me, close to necessity: nothing in the descent is wasted, because the descent was never separate from the return it was always quietly building toward, or so Aurobindo's account leads me to believe.

Every Degree of Clarity

It is worth noticing how precisely this maps onto the plain English of the original principle: awareness moving through every degree of clarity, from tightly closed to fully open. Kashmir Shaivism's thirty-six tattvas (levels, or categories, of reality) chart exactly this kind of graded descent, from Paramashiva at the most open end down through mind, the senses, and the five gross elements at the most contracted, treating every intermediate rung as a real and necessary station rather than wasted ground to be hurried past. Aurobindo's ladder of Matter, Life, Mind and Supermind does the same work in a more modern register. Neither tradition asks you to despise the tightly closed end of the spectrum, the rock, the instinct, the narrow fear, as a mistake that should not have happened. Both ask you to see it as a genuine, necessary degree of the one unfolding, exactly as a wave's lowest trough is not a failure of the wave but simply the part of its shape that lets the crest mean anything at all.

Nothing Wasted

So when the original line of this principle says reality rises and falls the way a wave rises and falls, and that nothing is wasted in this, I no longer hear that as a comforting phrase offered to soften a real loss. I hear it, for myself, as a description of a process with the return already built into its own architecture from the very first contraction onward. The forgetting was never a wrong turn that grace has to go back and correct. It was, in the Kashmiri vocabulary, delight choosing to hide from itself; in Aurobindo's vocabulary, spirit deliberately involving itself in matter so that it could have the genuine experience of evolving back out again. Either way, as I have come to see it, the trough and the crest belong to the same wave, and the wave was never,

at any point, in any danger of being anything other than the ocean. What is left to explain is only why it should have started as love in the first place, rather than as need, or fear, or accident, and that is exactly where the next principle begins.

“Everything is impermanent, except the love of God.”
– Neem Karoli Baba (Maharajji), d. 1973,
as remembered by his students



PRINCIPLE FIVE — GOING DEEPER

Love Is the Structure of Reality

Love is why there is anything at all, rather than stillness and silence. Everything that appears is love in motion.

I owe you a debt in this chapter, because I have mentioned this man twice already and put him off both times. When we went deeper into Principle One I said his fuller unfolding belonged here, and it does. Everything so far in this book has been reached by the mind, however patiently, whatever door it eventually used, argument, physics, direct pointing, a brain scan. This chapter is the one place in the whole of Going Deeper where the path is not thought at all. It is devotion, bhakti (the path of loving devotion), and the man who has taught me the most about it left behind no philosophy, no system, not even, as far as anyone can tell, a single written word.

Maharajji

Very little is reliably known of Neem Karoli Baba's early life, and he discouraged the few who asked about it. What is well documented is the shape of his later years: decades spent as a wandering sadhu (a wandering holy man, or renunciate) across northern India, an accumulating reputation for extraordinary acts of love, humour and apparent omniscience that he consistently deflected away from himself, and, from around 1964, a settled base at a small ashram he founded at Kainchi, in

the Kumaon hills below the Himalayas, where he lived until his death in September 1973. He became known in the West almost entirely through one encounter. In 1967 a Harvard psychologist named Richard Alpert, who had already lost his university post over his research into psilocybin alongside Timothy Leary, travelled overland to India, disillusioned with what psychedelics could and could not deliver. He met Neem Karoli Baba at Kainchi, was profoundly undone by him in ways his own later writing struggles to fully explain, and returned to America as Ram Dass. Around him gathered an extraordinary circle of other young Westerners, among them Krishna Das, who became one of the most influential kirtan (call-and-response devotional chanting) singers of his generation, and Larry Brilliant, who went on to lead the World Health Organization's campaign to eradicate smallpox. When a young Steve Jobs travelled to India in 1974 hoping to meet the teacher he had heard so much about, he arrived at Kainchi to find that Maharajji had already died the previous year, a detail I find quietly moving rather than merely sad: love, on this principle, was never something you could arrive too late for, only someone.

Maharajji left no treatise, because his teaching was never primarily verbal. It survives mostly as the actions his students remember and the handful of short sayings they wrote down afterward. "Love all men as God," he told them, "even if they hurt you or shame you. Be like Gandhi and Christ." "See all women as mothers," he taught, "serve them as your mother. When you see the entire world as the mother, the ego falls away." "It's better to see God in everything than to try to figure it out." "The best form to worship God is every form." "Love is the strongest medicine." These are not, on inspection, five different pieces of advice. They read to me as the same instruction, love everyone, serve

everyone, remember God, as his students eventually distilled it, approached from five different angles, because Maharajji never seemed interested in a doctrine you could learn once and set aside. He was interested in a practice you could not stop doing.

What makes him the right teacher for this particular principle is that he never argued for Principle One, Two, Three or Four in anything like the way this book has. He simply behaved, toward every person who came through his gate, saint or thief, professor or beggar, as though the whole of what those principles claim were already, self-evidently true of them. He did not conclude that love was the structure of reality. He demonstrated it, repeatedly, as a matter of daily practice, and let the demonstration do whatever convincing an argument never could.

Delight Recognising Itself

It would be a mistake, though, to treat Maharajji's path and the Kashmiri philosophy in the rest of this book as two unrelated things running in parallel. They meet directly, in Kashmir Shaivism's own account of Shakti. I described her in the last chapter as consciousness in motion, the dynamic power by which Shiva knows and expresses himself. The tradition is equally insistent that this power is not neutral energy, the way electricity is neutral energy indifferent to what it powers. Shakti is repeatedly described as Shiva's own beloved, inseparable from him the way warmth is inseparable from fire, and the two are sometimes represented in a single image, Ardhanarishvara (the single form, half Shiva and half Shakti, that pictures them as one being), one body, the right half Shiva, the left half Shakti, to make the point as plainly as an image can that consciousness and its loving, creative power were never actually two things courting

one another from a distance. Camatkāra (the wonder of self-recognition), the word I will return to properly in the next chapter on beauty, names the wonder, the delight, in which this self-recognition is felt directly, and the tradition treats that delight, ānanda (bliss), not as a pleasant side effect of existing but as one of the three inseparable faces, alongside being and consciousness, of what existence fundamentally is. Put plainly, and this is the tradition's account rather than a fact I can hand you independently of trusting it: the universe was not built by a neutral force that happens, incidentally, to permit love. It was built out of love, the way a wave is built out of water rather than merely wet by it.

A Devotion Older Than Any Single Name

I do not want to leave the impression that this recognition belongs to Kashmir alone, or to Maharajji alone. Bhakti, the path of love as the direct route to the one reality rather than a decoration on top of philosophy, runs through a great many traditions that never spoke to one another. The Sufi poets of Persia, Rumi chief among them, spent entire lifetimes turning romantic longing into a vocabulary for divine union. The Bengali saint Ramakrishna, in the century before Maharajji, moved through devotion to different forms of the divine, Kali, Christ, Allah, and arrived, each time, at what he took to be the same single reality, teaching that as many faiths as there are, so many are the paths to it. I mention them briefly rather than at length, because their fuller stories belong to books other than this one, and because I would rather point honestly at a horizon than pretend to have walked all of it. I know these were separate lives, separate centuries, separate languages, and that a historian would rightly resist collapsing them into a single movement.

What I offer, holding that caution in mind, is my own sense of what they share with Maharajji, and what I think this principle is ultimately claiming: that love was never merely one respectable path among several equally good alternatives. It is what the other paths, argument, direct pointing, brain scan, meditation, seem to me to be quietly trying to arrive back at.

Why I Wrote This Book At All

I said, right at the start of this whole project, that I share these principles in the hope that they might help you find and understand love in your own life. I did not fully realise, writing that first sentence, how literally true it would turn out to be: that of the seven principles, this is the one the other six are quietly in service of. There is only one reality, and it is aware, and you are it, and the forgetting was never a mistake, all of that is true as I have come to know it, but none of it would matter very much if the one reality being described were cold. It is not, or so my own life has taught me. Maharajji spent a lifetime showing that in the plainest way available to him, by loving everyone who arrived at his door as though love were simply the obvious thing to do. It is, I have come to believe, the most trustworthy teaching anyone in this book has offered, delivered without a single argument.

*Camatkāra –
the wonder in which the one who tastes beauty,
for one unguarded instant, tastes nothing
other than their own consciousness.
– at the heart of Abhinavagupta's aesthetics, Kashmir,
eleventh century*



PRINCIPLE SIX – GOING DEEPER

Beauty Is the Language It Speaks

Look closely at creation and you find pattern everywhere, the spiral of a shell, the unfolding of a fern, the shape of a galaxy. This is not decoration. It is love's own order, made visible. Beauty is what happens when we notice it.

If Principle Five is right that love is the structure of reality, this principle asks what that structure looks like from the outside, the way a smile is what a feeling looks like once it reaches a face. This is the chapter I promised right at the start of Going Deeper, the one where the cymatics and the sacred geometry belong, and I want to begin exactly where the last chapter left off, with a single Sanskrit word.

The Taste of Your Own Consciousness

Abhinavagupta, the same eleventh-century synthesiser who gave Kashmir Shaivism its most complete philosophical form, was also one of the great aestheticians of classical India, and he saw no reason to treat those two projects as separate. His *rasa* (aesthetic savour, or flavor) theory, developed from earlier work on Sanskrit drama, proposes that great art does not simply transmit an emotion from performer to audience. It transforms an ordinary, personal feeling, grief, longing, fear, anger, into *rasa*, an aesthetic savour, by stripping it of narrow self-interest until what remains is universal enough for anyone with, in the

tradition's phrase, a receptive heart, sahr̥daya (a receptive heart), to taste it purely, as pattern and feeling fused, rather than as something happening to them personally. The peak of that tasting is camatkāra (the wonder of self-recognition), a wonder so complete it briefly obliterates the ordinary, calculating, narrating mind altogether. And here is the claim that turns an aesthetic theory into a spiritual one, on Abhinavagupta's own account: in that unguarded instant of wonder, what you are actually tasting is not the painting, the raga, or the poem. It is your own consciousness, briefly undistracted by the habitual sense of being a separate self with preferences and complaints. Beauty, read this way, is not a pleasant extra laid on top of an otherwise neutral world. It is one of the most direct doors back to Principle Three's you are that, arrived at through feeling rather than argument, and I find this the account that rings truest to my own experience of beauty, even though I know it is a claim, not a demonstration.

Sound Made Visible

If that claim sounds too mystical to hold weight, there is a strand of very literal, very physical evidence worth setting beside it. In 1787 the German physicist and musician Ernst Chladni discovered that if you scatter fine sand across a flat metal plate and draw a violin bow along its edge, the sand does not scatter randomly. It leaps away from the places where the plate is vibrating most and settles into the places where it is still, tracing out intricate, symmetrical patterns, different for every note, that are now called Chladni figures. Nearly two centuries later, the Swiss physician and natural scientist Hans Jenny took the same basic fact and turned it into a life's work. Jenny coined the word cymatics, from the Greek kyma (wave), and used crystal

oscillators and a device of his own design called a tonoscope to send precise, controllable vibrations through sand, fine powders and fluids spread across membranes. What emerged, frequency after frequency, was never noise. It was, in his own description, a dynamic but ordered pattern, growing more intricate as the pitch rose, spontaneously arranging itself into forms that look uncannily like mandalas, honeycomb lattices, flowers and shells, published across two volumes titled *Cymatics: The Study of Wave Phenomena* in 1967 and 1972.

I find it hard to look at a cymatics photograph without thinking immediately of spanda (pulse, or throb), the pulse this book went deeper into under Principle Two, the throb by which the Kashmiri sages said the one aware reality expresses itself as form. Jenny's plate is, for me, a small physical illustration of that same claim: vibration meeting a receptive medium and producing, not chaos, but geometry, every single time, as a plain mechanical fact rather than an act of decoration added afterward. Sound, the most literal kind of wave there is, becomes visible pattern the instant it has something to press against. It is not proof that the universe is built this way at every scale. But it is, to me, a striking, repeatable demonstration that pattern is not something we impose on vibration from the outside. It is what vibration does, left to itself.

The Same Proportion, Everywhere You Look

The same recurrence turns up in living form, not just in sand on a plate. A number mathematicians call the golden ratio, close to 1.618, and the closely related Fibonacci sequence, in which each number is the sum of the two before it, show up again and again across natural growth, approximately rather than with perfect precision, but far more often than chance alone would predict: in

the spiralling chambers of a nautilus shell, in the packing of seeds across a sunflower's head, in the branching of trees, in the sweep of a hurricane and, at a scale almost too large to picture, in the spiral arms of galaxies. The Scottish biologist and mathematician D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson devoted his landmark 1917 book, *On Growth and Form*, to exactly this observation, arguing that a living shape is never arbitrary, that the same logarithmic spiral mathematics governing a ram's horn also governs a whirlpool and a spiral galaxy, because the same underlying growth law is doing the same underlying work wherever it appears. Long before Thompson, artists and builders across a great many unconnected cultures had already been drawn to a related family of forms, among them the Flower of Life, a motif built from nineteen evenly overlapping circles said, by those who study it closely, to contain within its structure the outlines of the five Platonic solids and much of the geometry the natural world keeps independently rediscovering.

I want to be careful here, in the same spirit as I was careful about Faggin's physics and Hoffman's cognitive science. Not every claimed appearance of the golden ratio in nature survives close measurement, and I would rather you trust me a little less than trust a pattern that turns out, on inspection, to have been exaggerated. But even the sober, cautious version of this observation is remarkable enough: a small, specific set of mathematical relationships keeps resurfacing, independently, across scales that have no way of communicating with one another, a shell and a galaxy sharing no mechanism except the shape of the mathematics both of them are obeying. Whether you are looking at a Kashmiri temple carving, a photograph from Jenny's cymatics laboratory, or the seed-head of a sunflower in your own garden, the same handful of proportions keeps quietly

repeating, as though pattern were not incidental to matter but native to it, at least as I have come to see it.

What Happens When We Notice

The original line of this principle ends carefully: beauty is what happens when we notice it. Not what happens when we invent it. The pattern in the shell, the sand on Jenny's plate, the proportion running through the sunflower, all of that was already there, doing exactly what it does, long before anyone stood close enough to call it beautiful. What noticing adds is not the beauty itself but the recognition of it, which brings this chapter back around, one more time, to Pratyabhijna (recognition), the recognition this whole book keeps circling. Camatkāra is what that recognition feels like from the inside, in the moment art or nature briefly stops your usual narrating mind. Cymatics and the golden ratio are what it looks like from the outside, pattern surfacing wherever vibration meets a willing medium. Both feel, to me, like the same single fact, described twice: love, which Principle Five named as the structure of everything that appears, was, I believe, never going to stay silent about itself. It was always going to have a language. This is what that language looks like to me, and what remains to be said is only that the same recognition it invites is not a future reward. It is, as the final principle insists, already available, right now, to notice.

Be Here Now

— the title a blessing, given at Kainchi, made possible;

Ram Dass, New Mexico, 1971



PRINCIPLE SEVEN — GOING DEEPER

The Return Is Available Now

This is not becoming something new. It is simply remembering what was true all along. The sense of separation quietly falls away, and you keep living, rising and falling like a wave, only now you know what you have always been.

Six chapters have brought us here, and I want to gather them up briefly before this last one, because Principle Seven is not really a new claim. It is what happens when the other six are held together at once. There is one reality (One), and it is aware and alive with its own movement (Two), and that includes you, exactly where you are standing (Three), and the narrowing that makes you feel separate from it was never a mistake (Four), because underneath the narrowing is love (Five), which is visible, if you look, as the pattern running through everything (Six). Once you actually see all six of those at the same time, a seventh recognition follows on its own, at least it has for me, without needing a single further argument: none of this is something you are travelling toward. It was never anywhere else to travel to.

Recognition, Completed

I have mentioned Pratyabhijna (recognition), the school of recognition founded by Utpaladeva and carried forward by Abhinavagupta, in nearly every chapter of Going Deeper, and I have been deliberately saving its full weight for this one, because

it is the most direct philosophical statement of Principle Seven that I know. The school's central and, at first, almost too-simple-sounding claim is that liberation, mokṣa (liberation), is not the manufacture of a new state that did not exist before. It is recognition, the specific, sudden shift that happens when you realise the stranger across the room is actually an old friend you had simply failed, until this moment, to see clearly. Nothing about the friend changed in that instant. Only your seeing did. And because nothing had to be built, travelled to, or earned, the recognition, once it happens, is already whole. It does not arrive in instalments.

This is why the tradition insists, and why the original line of this principle insists in turn, that what is on offer is not becoming something new. Every contraction described across these seven chapters, the kañcukas narrowing infinite awareness into a particular viewpoint, the forgetting lila (play) plays for the sake of its own rediscovery, was always, on this account, a veiling rather than a departure. I have come to believe, as my own truth rather than as something I can prove to you, that Shiva was never actually somewhere else, that he was, this whole time, reading these words, wondering whether any of this was true. The return this principle promises is available now for the same reason a recognition is always available now and never at some later date: because what is being recognised was never, for one instant, absent. I offer that as my conviction, not as a verdict you are obliged to share.

Be Here Now

I want to close this book's philosophical argument with a story rather than a further abstraction, because Principle Seven is, in the end, less something to be reasoned toward than something

to be practised. When Richard Alpert returned from Kainchi as Ram Dass, he carried home a manuscript about his time in India that publisher after publisher turned down. He let it go, on the reasoning that Maharajji had blessed the book into existence and so its fate was no longer really his to manage. The manuscript that eventually did reach print, in 1971, compressed everything Alpert had been given into a title that needed no further explanation: *Be Here Now*. Its central instruction reads, to me, as Principle Seven stated as a command rather than a philosophy, because that, in the end, is the only form this particular truth can usefully take. Not here, eventually. Not now, once you have finished preparing for it. Here. Now.

I find it worth sitting with the detail I mentioned back in the last chapter, of a young Steve Jobs arriving at Kainchi in 1974 hoping to meet the teacher whose reputation had reached him secondhand, only to find that Maharajji had died the year before. It would be easy to read that as a story about arriving too late. I read it instead, for myself, as an accidental illustration of the very principle it seems to interrupt. What Jobs was travelling toward, across continents, was never only a person in a particular place. It was a recognition that a person can only ever point you toward, and a pointer, once its direction has been received, does not actually need to still be standing there. The teaching had already arrived, in the students who carried it home. What remained available, at Kainchi or anywhere else, was never a meeting you could be too late for. It was simply now, wherever you happened to be standing when you finally noticed it.

The contemporary teacher Eckhart Tolle, working in an entirely different idiom decades later, arrived at what reads to me as a compatible instruction in his widely read book *The Power of*

Now: that the past exists only as memory and the future only as anticipation, both of them thoughts occurring in the present, and that whatever you are calling ultimate reality, Being, consciousness, God, can only ever actually be touched at the one point where thought itself is standing, which is always, without exception, now. I mention him briefly rather than at length, since his teaching strikes me as close in spirit to the same single instruction Maharajji gave without ever putting it in a book at all.

The Ocean Remains

This book opened with a single line: the wave rises, and falls, and the ocean remains. Seven principles and seven chapters later, I find I have nothing truer to add to it, only a great deal more company to offer alongside it. Vasugupta found it, as the tradition tells it, on a rock face above the Jhelum. Federico Faggin found it on an ordinary evening at Lake Tahoe that stopped being ordinary. Douglas Harding found it by pointing a finger at his own throat. Sri Aurobindo spent forty years at Pondicherry working out its architecture in painstaking detail. Neem Karoli Baba simply lived it, at a small ashram in the Kumaon hills, and let everyone who ever sat near him catch it the way you catch warmth from a fire, without needing a single word of explanation.

I do not offer this as a settled historical claim, and I want to say that plainly at the very end of the book rather than only at the beginning. These were seven different lives, seven different centuries and languages, most of them never in contact with one another, and a careful scholar of these traditions would be right to say that noticing a family resemblance between them is not the same thing as proving they shared one identical discovery. I have no argument that overturns that caution, and I am not

trying to win one. What I can tell you honestly is how it looks from where I stand: I do not experience them as seven different discoveries. I experience them, and have come to trust with my whole heart, as one, seen from seven different shores. That is my truth, offered rather than imposed, a finger pointing at a moon I cannot make you see except by asking you to look for yourself. You do not have to travel to any of those shores to have what they found, because, as this final principle has been trying to say the entire time, and as I have come to believe it of myself, you were never anywhere else. The return is not a destination still ahead of you. Beneath whatever wave you happen to be, right now, rising or falling, tightly closed or wide open, it was already, quietly, the whole ocean.



BACK MATTER

Glossary of Terms

The terms below appear across these seven chapters, drawn from Kashmir Shaivism, Vedanta, bhakti traditions, and the modern scientists and philosophers this book keeps in company with. Each gloss is my own plain-English attempt at a foothold, not a scholarly definition, and none of them will substitute for the fuller context each word carries in its own chapter.

Ānanda

A Sanskrit word usually translated as bliss, though that English word undersells it. In Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism, ānanda is not a pleasant mood that consciousness happens to feel from time to time, the way a person might feel cheerful on a good day. It is treated as one of the three inseparable faces of ultimate reality itself, alongside being (sat) and consciousness (chit), so that whatever exists, in its deepest nature, is already overflowing and delighted rather than neutral. In this book, ānanda is what makes Principle Five, that love is the structure of reality, more than a comforting metaphor: it is the tradition's technical name for the delight built into existence at the most fundamental level.

Analytic idealism

A contemporary philosophical position associated with Bernardo Kastrup, who trained as an engineer and computer scientist before moving into philosophy. It proposes that a single

field of consciousness is the one thing that actually exists, that the physical world we measure and touch is simply how that field appears from the outside, and that individual minds, yours and mine, are something closer to localised, dissociated fragments of one vast mind rather than separate minds manufactured by separate brains. It is not a settled scientific consensus, and Kastrup himself would present it as a rigorously argued philosophical position rather than a proven fact, but it is one of the more developed modern attempts to put Principle One into the vocabulary of contemporary philosophy of mind.

Anu

The Sanskrit term Kashmir Shaivism uses for the individual, limited self, the particular someone each of us takes ourselves to be, reading from a particular chair with a particular history behind us. The tradition does not treat the anu as a separate creation, a soul stamped out independently of the divine. It is understood as the same infinite awareness described in Principle One, experienced through the narrowing of the kañcukas, so that the anu is a genuine, if contracted, viewpoint of consciousness rather than a wholly separate being.

Ardhanarishvara

A single composite image found across Kashmir Shaivism and wider Hindu iconography, in which one body is shown as half Shiva and half Shakti, split down the centre. The image is a visual argument rather than a decorative flourish: it insists that consciousness (Shiva) and its dynamic, expressive power (Shakti) were never two separate things courting one another from a distance, but a single reality that can be described, and pictured, from either side at once. This book draws on Ardhanarishvara in

the chapter on Principle Five to make the case that love and awareness are not two different discoveries, but one.

Ātman / Ātmā

The Sanskrit word for the Self, used across Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism to mean not the personality or the ego, but the innermost awareness a person actually is. The opening line of the Shiva Sutras, caitanyam ātmā, consciousness is the Self, identifies this Ātman directly with consciousness itself rather than treating consciousness as something the Self merely possesses, which is the philosophical seed this whole book grows from.

Bhakti

The path of devotion, love directed toward the divine as a direct route to the one reality rather than a sentimental add-on to philosophy. Bhakti traditions run through Hinduism, Sufism, and many other lineages that never spoke to one another, from the Bengali saint Ramakrishna to the Persian poet Rumi to Neem Karoli Baba. In this book, bhakti is presented as the one path among the seven principles that is not primarily reached through the mind, argument, or self-inquiry, but through loving and being loved.

Caitanyam ātmā

The opening line of the Shiva Sutras, traditionally received by the sage Vasugupta on a rock face above the Jhelum river in ninth-century Kashmir. It translates as consciousness is the Self, and this book treats it as the oldest clear ancestor of Principle One, that there is only one reality and it is consciousness.

Camatkāra

A Sanskrit term from Abhinavagupta's aesthetics naming the wonder that arises when beauty, art, or nature briefly stops the ordinary, narrating, self-referential mind. Its full claim, as this book presents it, is that in that unguarded instant, what a person is actually tasting is not the object of beauty itself but their own consciousness, momentarily undistracted by the habitual sense of being a separate self. Camatkāra is the aesthetic version of the same recognition Pratyabhijnā describes philosophically.

Chladni figures

The intricate, symmetrical patterns first observed in 1787 by the German physicist and musician Ernst Chladni, who found that fine sand scattered on a metal plate arranges itself into distinct geometric shapes when the plate is made to vibrate by a violin bow. Different notes produce different, repeatable patterns. This book cites Chladni figures, and the later field of cymatics they inspired, as a literal, physical demonstration that vibration produces pattern rather than chaos.

Conscious realism

A proposal by the cognitive scientist Donald Hoffman, built on mathematical models from evolutionary game theory, arguing that natural selection shapes perception for usefulness rather than for truth, so that the solid objects and spacetime we seem to see are more like icons on a desktop than an accurate rendering of what is actually there. What Hoffman proposes as fundamental instead is a vast interacting network of conscious perspectives, of which ordinary human perception is one small, useful rendering. This book presents conscious realism as one of several contemporary scientific routes that arrive near Principle One from an entirely different direction than Kashmiri metaphysics.

Cymatics

A field of study founded by the Swiss physician and natural scientist Hans Jenny, who coined the term from the Greek kyma, meaning wave. Using controlled vibrations sent through sand, powders, and fluids, Jenny photographed the patterns that emerged, finding that they consistently formed complex, ordered, often mandala-like shapes rather than randomness. This book uses cymatics as physical evidence, in the chapter on Principle Six, that pattern is native to vibration rather than something imposed on it from outside.

Default mode network

A set of interlinked brain regions, studied extensively by researchers including Robin Carhart-Harris, that is strongly associated with self-referential thought, the constant background narration that maintains a person's felt sense of being a separate, continuous self. Neuroimaging studies have found that activity in this network drops markedly during experiences of ego dissolution, most commonly studied under psilocybin, and that this drop correlates with a felt loosening of the boundary between self and world. This book cites the default mode network as a contemporary neuroscientific echo of Principle Three.

Ego dissolution

The term researchers use for the experience, most often studied under psilocybin but also reported in deep meditation, in which the felt boundary between a person's individual self and the rest of the world softens or briefly disappears, without the world itself vanishing. This book treats ego dissolution research as one of three independent lines of evidence, alongside Kashmiri

philosophy and Douglas Harding's headless experiments, that converge on Principle Three.

Explicate order

A term coined by the physicist David Bohm for the world as it ordinarily appears to us: separate objects, separate people, laid out across space and time. Bohm considered the explicate order real, but not the deepest layer of reality, proposing instead that it continually unfolds out of, and folds back into, a more fundamental implicate order.

Fibonacci sequence

A sequence of numbers in which each number is the sum of the two before it, closely related to the golden ratio. It shows up, approximately rather than with perfect mathematical precision, across a wide range of natural growth patterns, from the packing of seeds in a sunflower's head to the branching of trees. This book cites it, alongside the golden ratio, as part of the recurring mathematical pattern underlying Principle Six.

Golden ratio

A mathematical proportion, approximately 1.618, that recurs across natural forms including nautilus shells, sunflower seed heads, hurricanes, and spiral galaxies. The Scottish biologist D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson documented many of its appearances in his 1917 book *On Growth and Form*. This book treats the golden ratio, and its cautious, sober interpretation among scientists, as one strand of evidence for Principle Six, that beauty is pattern made visible.

Holomovement

A term coined by the physicist David Bohm for what he considered the single underlying process of the universe: not a movement of pre-existing things, but movement as the most basic fact there is, with objects and people being more like temporary eddies within that movement than separately existing things bumping into one another. This book draws a direct parallel between Bohm's holomovement and the Kashmiri concept of spanda in the chapter on Principle Two.

Implicate order

The physicist David Bohm's term for what he considered the more fundamental layer of reality underlying the everyday, separate-seeming world (the explicate order): an unbroken, undivided wholeness in which everything is enfolded into everything else, comparable to the way every part of a hologram contains a faint trace of the entire image.

Kalā

One of the five kañcukas, or veiling sheaths, in Kashmir Shaivism. Kalā narrows the infinite creative power of full awareness into a limited sense of creatorship, the felt experience of being able to make or accomplish only some things rather than everything.

Kāla

One of the five kañcukas, or veiling sheaths, in Kashmir Shaivism. Kāla, the Sanskrit word for time, folds eternity down into the passage of time, so that what was originally whole and present becomes stretched out into a remembered past and an anticipated future.

Kañcukas

The five veiling sheaths of Kashmir Shaivism, kalā, vidyā, rāga, niyati, and kāla, through which Paramashiva, infinite consciousness, contracts itself into the experience of being a particular, limited individual. The tradition insists these are not a wall separating a person from the divine, but the divine's own powers, folded inward. This book relies on the kañcukas to explain Principle Three, why the one reality can experience itself as narrow and separate without ever actually ceasing to be what it is.

Kirtan

A form of call-and-response devotional chanting, widely practised in bhakti traditions, in which a leader sings a line, often a name or quality of the divine, and the group sings it back. This book mentions kirtan through Krishna Das, one of the Western students who gathered around Neem Karoli Baba and went on to become an influential kirtan singer.

Lila

A Sanskrit word meaning play, used in Kashmir Shaivism to explain why an already complete, blissful consciousness would ever contract itself into a narrow, forgetful individual viewpoint at all. Lila is not play in the sense of something frivolous, but the specific kind of undertaking a being with no unmet need engages in purely for the delight of the activity itself, comparable to a game of hide-and-seek in which the joy lives entirely in the interval between hiding and being found. This book uses lila, alongside Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, to answer Principle Four, that the forgetting built into life is not a mistake.

Mahāvākyas

The great sayings of Vedanta, a small set of especially direct statements found across the Upanishads that are treated as a direct transmission of ultimate truth rather than an argument to be reasoned toward. Tat tvam asi, thou art that, is one of the four traditionally recognised mahāvākyas, and it is the source text for Principle Three of this book.

Mokṣa

The Sanskrit word for liberation, understood in the Pratyabhijnā school not as the manufacture of an entirely new state that did not previously exist, but as recognition of what was already, quietly, true. This book treats mokṣa as the philosophical name for Principle Seven, the return that is available now.

Niyati

One of the five kañcukas, or veiling sheaths, in Kashmir Shaivism. Niyati binds the universal capacity to act anywhere and in any way into the particular causal chain of one life, one body, and one set of circumstances.

Paramashiva / Parama Shiva

The Kashmir Shaivite name for Shiva, or consciousness, in its supreme, unlimited fullness, prior to any of the contractions described by the kañcukas. Abhinavagupta describes Paramashiva as not merely existent and aware but overflowing and ecstatic in its own self-recognition, which this book treats as the fullest statement of Principle Two, that the one reality is not only aware but loving.

Pratyabhijnā

Literally recognition, the school of Kashmir Shaivite philosophy founded by Utpaladeva in the tenth century and carried forward

by Abhinavagupta. Its central claim is that liberation is not an achievement built through years of technique, but a sudden recognition of what was true the entire time, comparable to recognising an old friend who had simply gone unnoticed. This school is the single most direct philosophical source for Principle Seven of this book, that the return is available now.

Purusha

The Sanskrit term, used here in its Kashmir Shaivite sense, for the individual experiencer, the soul, that remains once the five kañcukas have narrowed infinite awareness down into a particular viewpoint. It is the philosophical name for the you referred to throughout this book.

Rāga

One of the five kañcukas, or veiling sheaths, in Kashmir Shaivism. Rāga narrows the completeness of full awareness into desire, the felt sense of lack that sends a person reaching for what they believe they do not already have.

Rasa

A term from Abhinavagupta's theory of Sanskrit aesthetics, usually translated as aesthetic savour or flavour. Rasa theory proposes that great art does not simply transmit an emotion from performer to audience, but transforms an ordinary, personal feeling into something universal enough for any receptive person to taste directly, as pattern and feeling fused together. This book connects rasa to Principle Six, treating beauty as one of the most direct routes back to the recognition that you are that.

Sadhu

A wandering holy man or renunciate in the Indian religious traditions, someone who has set aside conventional life, property, and often a fixed home in pursuit of spiritual realisation. Neem Karoli Baba spent decades of his life as a wandering sadhu before settling at the ashram in Kainchi described in the chapter on Principle Five.

Sahr̥daya

A term from classical Indian aesthetics meaning a receptive heart, referring to the kind of listener or viewer capable of tasting rasa, aesthetic savour, purely, without narrow self-interest getting in the way.

Sat-chit-ananda

A compound Sanskrit term from classical Vedanta, joining sat (being), chit (consciousness), and ānanda (bliss) into a single description of ultimate reality. Rather than treating existence, awareness, and delight as three separate qualities that happen to coexist, sat-chit-ananda treats them as three inseparable faces of one single fact. Kashmir Shaivism keeps the same triad under its own vocabulary, and this book leans on it to argue, in the chapter on Principle Two, that awareness is not cold or neutral but loving by its very nature.

Shakti

In Kashmir Shaivism, Shakti is consciousness in motion, the dynamic, creative power by which Shiva knows and expresses himself. The tradition insists Shakti is not a separate deity or a neutral force, but Shiva's own inseparable power, sometimes pictured together with him in a single form, Ardhanarishvara. This book treats the relationship between Shiva and Shakti as

the clearest classical statement of Principle Two, that the one reality is aware and its nature is to move and express itself.

Shiva

In Kashmir Shaivism, Shiva names consciousness at rest, the witnessing awareness underlying all experience, prior to and inseparable from its own dynamic expression, Shakti. This book uses Shiva as one of several names, alongside consciousness, mind-at-large, and love, for the single reality described in Principle One.

Spanda

A Sanskrit word meaning pulsation or throb, the subject of the Spanda Kārikās and one of the central concepts of Kashmir Shaivism. Spanda names the vibration by which consciousness, otherwise still and aware, expresses itself as the moving, changing world, without ever ceasing to be what it is. This book treats spanda as the classical answer to Principle Two's question of why there is a world at all, and draws a direct comparison to David Bohm's holomovement and to the physical patterns of cymatics.

Sufism

The mystical dimension of Islam, associated in this book with the Persian poet Rumi, whose lifetime of poetry turned romantic longing into a vocabulary for divine union. This book mentions Sufism briefly, in the chapter on Principle Five, as one of several devotional traditions that arrived, independently, at love as a direct route to the one reality.

Svātantrya

The Sanskrit term for absolute freedom or self-determination, used in Kashmir Shaivism to describe the power by which Paramashiva, infinite consciousness, freely contracts itself through the kañcukas. This book treats svātantrya as central to understanding Principle Four, since it is this same freedom, rather than any external constraint, that the tradition credits with choosing the play, or lila, of forgetting and rediscovery.

Tantrāloka

Abhinavagupta's vast eleventh-century synthesis of Kashmir Shaivite philosophy, ritual, aesthetics, and meditative instruction, considered the tradition's most complete single text. It is cited in this book's opening chapter as the fullest classical statement that the world is Shiva's own real self-expression, rather than an illusion to be seen through.

Tat tvam asi

One of the four mahāvākyas, or great sayings, of Vedānta, translated as thou art that. Found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where the sage Uddālaka repeats it to his son Śvetaketu nine times after nine different illustrations, it is the source text for Principle Three of this book, that your mind is not something separate from the one reality but its viewpoint, seen from where you stand.

Tattvas

The thirty-six categories, or levels, of reality mapped out in Kashmir Shaivite philosophy, charting a graded descent from Paramashiva, the most open and unlimited level of consciousness, down through mind, the senses, and the five gross elements at the most contracted end. This book cites the tattvas, in the chapter on Principle Four, as treating every

intermediate degree of contraction as a genuine and necessary station rather than wasted ground.

Trika

Literally the triad, an alternative name for Kashmir Shaivism, referring to its three-fold view of reality. This book uses Trika and Kashmir Shaivism largely interchangeably to refer to the non-dual tradition that flowered in the Kashmir valley between roughly the ninth and eleventh centuries, and that forms the single deepest root of the seven principles in this book.

Vidyā

One of the five kañcukas, or veiling sheaths, in Kashmir Shaivism. Vidyā narrows the complete knowledge of full awareness into partial knowledge, the everyday experience of knowing some things and not others.



*With love,
Hosshin*

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