

Éric Baret: Kashmiri Tantric Yoga and Non-Duality

[Interlocutor]: Good morning, Éric. And thank you very much for having accepted my invitation. To start, could you speak to us about your spiritual path? About your teachers, your influences, and what led you today to teach, to transmit yoga and the Kashmiri Tantric tradition?

[Éric Baret]: I would say that I had the luck of finding, on the margins of all "spiritual consciousness," some people who lived a deep resonance with silence. I had the luck of listening to *Ānandamayi Ma*, I was with her quite often. I spent time with *Nisargadatta Maharaj*. And I also listened intensely to *Gopinath Kaviraj*, the great Tantric master in Benares. All of that, finally, ended up resonating according to my own capacities upon meeting *Jean Klein*.

And to start with what you say, I don't teach "Kashmiri yoga." That formulation does not exist; it is a very recent and totally arbitrary label that has no meaning other than for people who want to categorize things. It is not the Indian tradition. The Kashmiri traditions are multiple and cannot be determined like that. The little resonance I share is what I assimilated with my teacher Jean Klein. It is a availability to silence that eventually serves itself of the body as a tool of perception.

When you leave a perception free of psychological interferences, it absorbs itself naturally into tranquility. And since there is no subject without an object, when the perceived object resorbs, the image of the "subject" also resorbs. When neither subject nor object remains, there is a perceiving, a perception, a tranquility. That is the heart of what we can call the Tantric traditions. But I do not know Sanskrit, so it would be inappropriate to say that I teach an "Indian approach" without knowing the language. To teach Tantra, one must master the language, understand the era and the culture. If not, it is pure romanticism. I do not have that knowledge; I have a resonance with Indian culture and I share the little I have.

[Interlocutor]: I understand. You evoked the non-distinction between the subject and the object. We are then in a tradition of non-duality, if I understand correctly. From what I know, there are several types of approaches, and the most well-known today is that of *Advaita Vedānta*. Is there a difference or distinction with what you transmit?

[Éric Baret]: Look, non-duality does not exist. It is a dualistic concept that comes from a lack of clarity. There is no non-duality because there is no duality. "Non-duality" would imply duality, which is one of the greatest illusions of life.

The difference between *Advaita* and what I lived with *Jean Klein* is that orthodox *Advaita* requires the presence of an authentic master. Only that presence, independently of their teaching, because there are masters who teach and others who do not. That presence is needed so that, when the body is about to disappear, that "basculement" (shift) occurs. In the absence of the body and the mind, the master sustains the presence of the student with their own presence. Being honest, that is not found on every corner. "*Advaita*" in the West is usually a conceptual discussion.

The Tantric approach is different. It aims at letting the perception live in an experimental way, be it joy, fear, desire, or surprise. That exploration allows the desire to deploy and resorb on its own. And, as we said, when the object resorbs, the subject resorbs simultaneously. This approach is open to everyone.

For me, the Vedanta taught today is a caricature. People reach a relative conceptual tranquility, but when a child dies, when the wife cheats on them, or when they have cancer, generally that inner freedom is affected. That means their conceptualization was only valid in an academic world, but it did not hold up against life.

I see no need to appropriate a foreign culture. Silence does not need any cultural appropriation, nor metaphysical, nor dualist nor non-dualist. All that is needed is listening, a humble exploration without expectations: to see our mechanisms, our fears, desires, anxieties, strategies, and defenses. I do not need to imagine that I am a "tantrika" or a "yogini." There is no need to imagine anything. Following Tibetan, Hindu, or Muslim paths seems outdated to me, unless you were born into that culture. If you were born in Paris today, I see no need to be anything, to follow anything other than the exploration of your own arrogance and pretension.

[Interlocutor]: However, there is an importance or necessity for some form of practice to be able to explore feeling, isn't there?

[Éric Baret]: When you are jealous, you feel it. When you are afraid, you feel it. When you are in love or in front of a beautiful landscape, you feel it. I don't think that needs any practice. Ritual practice is a celebration of clarity. As *Abhinavagupta* says: "It is not yoga that is the master of consciousness, it is consciousness that is the master of yoga." It is because someone intuited the perspective of life and realizes that their body and mind are not in agreement with

that evidence, that they are going to explore the impediments. The "less" cannot reach the "more."

The ritual is action without intention and without a goal. It brings nothing, and that is why it is deep. What brings you something fixes you in objectivity, in appropriation. The ritual is the renunciation of the need to obtain a result. There are Japanese chronicles of masters of weapons during wars. In the middle of combat, one of them sits and spends half an hour doing the tea ceremony. Meanwhile, they kill his friends, the army wins or loses. He beats the tea in a certain way, turns the cup... Why? Because he shows his freedom in the face of what is happening. His deep understanding that there is no victory or defeat.

All this business that the yogi must surrender to corporal cleansings or "purificatory" acts is a very late concept. Yoga is not a fascist art. The notion of purification came later, in the era of *Gorakhnath* with the *Nath Yogis*, who created that fantasy of "becoming a Yogi," something like becoming an SS: absolute purity, being insensitive to cold or heat. And the West, which loves heroes and frontal purities, appropriated that fantasy of the yogi above all. But that is not the Indian tradition.

The Indian tradition does not recognize hierarchy in that way. Everything is equal; that is why the caste system exists: you don't have to change because nothing is "better" to live. A *brahmin* who recites the *Veda* must be pure for that; a *kshatriya* must eat meat because he has to make blood flow; a peasant takes care of his harvest, and an employee serves. It is not worth changing because everything is equal. When I free myself from the will to change, I become available to the essential of life, which is not what we do, but from where we do it. King *Janaka* is the example: he did not renounce his kingdom to be a yogi; he lived in his palace and is considered a supreme sage. Spirituality is not an activity; it is a presentiment.

Yoga, in the traditional sense, is not a means to reach clarity, but one of the many possibilities of expressing it. Musicians play music, dancers dance, poets write. But practicing yoga brings you nothing. If someone intuited silence, they will lack nothing.

If you look at sculpture in India, there is none that represents the yoga poses we know. Temples represent the entire world of literature, all forms of art, but never *āsanas*. In *Chidambaram*, there are dancers, there are acrobats (who are part of the circus tradition), but the only pose represented is the seated position. And it's not even specific to Hinduism; the first seated representation is that of the Buddha, in the 2nd century B.C. You won't find a yogi standing on their head in an ancient temple; that did not exist. The first ones appear in the 13th century, and miniature paintings in the 15th. What is understood by yoga in the West (*āsanas*) is

extremely late and not at all traditional. It can serve to be able to sit quietly or so that the body doesn't rust, but nothing more.

Modern *hatha yoga* is the child of Western gymnastics and British muscular training in colonial India. And today it is decked out with mysticism and fundamentalist verbiage. The "International Yoga Day" is a joke. This practice is for fools, for those who do not have artistic gifts like dance, poetry, or music. Yoga is democratic in that sense: anyone can lift an arm or exhale without much capacity. If you don't have any artistic gift, yoga is a way to express yourself quietly.

For us, movement is a pretext to be together. We could do poetry, but yoga is easier. We do not have the notion of meditation as an activity. Deep silence is not something that is "done." Meditation is what is between two thoughts, between two perceptions. That is why *Jean Klein* did not use the word "yoga," because it was tainted with ambition; he preferred to say "corporal approach" to show the little interest he had in itself.

When my wife cheats on me, I go much deeper into myself than when I do a yoga pose. When my son has a car accident, I truly see if I am free or not. That is what matters; the rest is anecdotal. Otherwise, it becomes just another fantasy.

[Interlocutor]: You evoke a lot the place of sensations and emotions. How is an emotion faced in your approach? Because we usually want to get rid of the "negative."

[Éric Baret]: For us, there is no negative or positive. Things are not as black or white as the bourgeois imaginary would like. We see how the emotion works. An emotion is a security, it is a grip. If you try to eliminate it, it will compensate on another side. You can't take it out; you can put it in another place. If you have a tension in the hand (which symbolizes the body: the shoulder, the hip) and you try to release the fingers technically, you can do it, but the cause of the tension will seek another branch to hold on to.

The Tantric approach is to feel the emotion without appropriating it. When you feel an emotion, it deploys like a rose that opens and then dies. The problem is that when we feel fear, we don't want to have fear. That resistance is what blocks. If a dog attacks you and you feel the fear, you will be faster, you will react better. But if you "have" fear, you paralyze.

I experienced both things. When I was a kid, in Marseille, I saw a motorcycle coming from far away down a slope. I was so afraid that I was paralyzed in the middle of the road; luckily nothing serious happened, but I couldn't move. Many years later, in Nepal, we were carrying some bags with... let's say, sacred objects,

which were not meant to be taken to the border. The Nepalese police at that time tortured and killed Tibetans; there was much pressure from China. We approached a control and I felt fear, like everyone else. But we looked at each other and we burst out laughing. I felt fear without "having" fear. There was no paralysis. We passed without problems.

People pay fortunes to throw themselves off a bridge with an elastic; they pay to "feel fear." Why? Because there they don't defend themselves; they let the fear run through them and make them feel alive. It's like watching a horror movie: you can enjoy it because you don't reject the sensation. Trauma never comes from the event, but from the defense against the event. Life is non-defense. This is what the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra* says: emotions, instead of being fought, are the gateway. When local tension globalizes in the whole body and opens to space, it is no longer a tension.

I remember a very strong moment to see my own arrogance. I was young, 15 or 16 years old, and spent a lot of time in the nightclubs of Marseille. I would leave at 5 in the morning and sit on the Canebière. Opposite was a luxury jewelry store and a homeless man sleeping in front. Around 8 o'clock the owner of the jewelry store arrives. I saw in me the impulse to stand up and give that guy a kick for what he was doing to the poor man. I wanted him to know what it was like to receive a kick.

And simultaneously I saw that I was just like that jeweler. The jeweler was bothered by the homeless man because he ruined the aesthetics of his entrance. And I was bothered by the jeweler's violence. Since it bothered me, I wanted to hit him. I was like him. Seeing your own baiseness is fundamental. Each spasm relates your overflowing fear. Life is the master: losing your father, your wife, your child, your money... that's where you see how you function. Being available to life is the only teaching.

I remember that, after 15 years with Jean Klein, I sat with him and said: "Look, Jean, for 15 years I've had no teaching. I eat as one is supposed to eat, I make love as one is supposed to do it, I live like an old man... and in the end I'm still an imbecile." He looked at me coldly and said: "You are still waiting." And in an instant I saw that my whole idea of teaching was a form of appropriation. You can't appropriate anything. Action does not give knowledge. Submission to the evidence is the essential.

You don't have time to wait to find a guru with a long beard, nor to change your diet, nor to stand on your head, nor to learn Sanskrit or Arabic. There is no time. Life is now. Tomorrow a bomb could fall or you could have a heart attack. Stop fantasizing about *sādhana*, about purification. What happens now, in the middle of nothing? If you are in a plane and the plane falls, what do you practice? It is that

state of equilibrium in the fall that matters. Nothing can prevent it. Freedom is letting go of the past (desperation) and the future (hope). That intensity is the only thing there is.

[Interlocutor]: It is very liberating what you say. I thank you very much for this time and for sharing this intensity.

[Éric Baret]: Thank you very much for your time too. See you later.