

Bahá'u'lláh and the Luminous Mind:

Bahá'í Gloss on a Buddhist Puzzle

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1: Non-Duality

The following considerations are an exercise in non-dual thinking.¹ Non-duality is of central importance to Buddhist thought and experience.² And if, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms, human essence reveals itself in thought (and mind) [PT 2], the core of which is mystical contemplation [PT 54], then the awareness of this profound mode of thinking (and experiencing) is not irrelevant to the spiritual existence of humanity. Non-duality is, however, often misinterpreted to exhibit monistic intentions, being the opposite of metaphysical dualism. If dualism, the simple differentiation between God (or ultimate Reality) and the world, is (wrongly or rightly) identified mostly with Abrahamic religions, from their perspectives (if dualism is adopted) monism stands as an accusation against Asian religious expressions, such as the Advaita Vedanta view in Hinduism,³ and against Buddhism in general.⁴ This opposition manifests itself as the impasse of an uncompromising alternative between the affirmation of the absolute difference between the world and God, on the one hand, and the inseparable unity of the world with ultimate Reality, on the other.⁵ Yet, it is precisely in this antagonistic

force field that Buddhist thought is already distorted and will be misrepresented if it is “identified” in this way, which often happens in the interest of an apologetic defense of seemingly unavoidable implications of Abrahamic notions regarding a “personal” God.⁶ Nevertheless, the current considerations want to demonstrate that neither of these mutually exclusive views is necessary or even necessarily true insofar as they are used to “identify” (or estrange) the religious other. As a matter of fact, non-dualism, which cannot only be found in Buddhism, but also in many mystical streams of Eastern and Western religious traditions (and their philosophical articulation) throughout all of their phases of existence, does not attach itself to either side – dualism or monism.⁷ Instead, by insisting on the *non-difference* between phenomenal reality and ultimate Reality, it begins at, and always reaches beyond, identity and difference, dualism and monism, transcendence and immanence, alike.⁸

Yet, there is one problem we must face from the outset when we try to understand the concept and reality of non-duality in the way it is actually meant to be operating in diverse religious systems, theoretically and practically. Since non-duality cannot be expressed in terms of difference, although it does also not comply to the terms of identity (of God and the world) either, the *expression* of non-dualism necessitates the use of a language that escapes both fallacies of identification and simple differentiation, but only for the price of following closer the semiotic conventions of a language that seems to be monistic, that is, a language of (seeming) identification.⁹ Especially since dualism, that is, the assumption of a *simple* difference between God and the world, appears to be the stronger adversary in the dual rejection of identity and difference (even linguistically), the language of non-duality needs some greater degree of sophistication for it to be discerned from monistic language, as it is rather clear that dualistic language does not capture the non-differential articulation of ultimate Reality from mundane reality in any intelligible way conceivable.

This can be demonstrated with one of the most important formulations of non-dualism in Western philosophy, although its potential Eastern background must not be ignored, and it can be found in various forms in Eastern thought and religious contexts, too.¹⁰ So is the statement “the All is one” seemingly monistic, as is the converse phrase “the One is all.” On the surface, they seem to be conveying not only the unity of the cosmos of all existence, but, especially in the reverse form, the divinity of this unity, be it named God or otherwise, and the One as being identical with everything. This formula was often (and sometimes falsely) accused of being pantheistic, where dualists and dualist understanding of the relationship of God and the world is concerned, or was even by some of its proponents affirmed in a pantheistic manner. However, even if such an accusation were true, although it is not, it already lacks the ability to address an “identity” of mundane reality with *God* where the concept of God is not utilized, as in Buddhism.¹¹ In any case, a closer look will reveal that both versions of this formula, in fact, exhibit neither a dualistic nor a monistic intention.

In one of its most iconic Western philosophical renderings, arising from the *Enneads* of great Egyptian philosopher Plotinus (ca. 204-270), the non-dual character of the meaning of these formulas should be readily evident: “The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; all things are its possession....” [*Enneads* V.2.1].¹² This is what the theosophical Sufi tradition, giving the same pair of formulas a “fitting” (although paradoxical) language, commonly refers to the “unity of Being” (*waḥdát al-wujúd*).¹³ As with other formulations that were based on mystical paradoxical language, such seeming “identity” of all beings with the One Being (God) was, in the Christian and Islamic orthodox context, habitually accused of heretical pantheism or monism. It happened to Meister Eckhart and al-Hallaj alike when they articulated their mystical unity with God in a language that seemed inevitably to imply the monistic identity of their own “being” with that of

the Godhead (*grunt*) or of ultimate Reality (*al-ḥaqq*), respectively.¹⁴ In the Islamic context, the instigation of this formula was ascribed to another seminal non-dual thinker: the great Andalusian Sufi philosopher Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-2140 CE), with all the suspicion of heresy that followed his and his followers’ thought patterns. But, as William Chittick has demonstrated, neither did Ibn ‘Arabi, in fact, use this formulation nor has he meant his thought to be simplified in this monistic, pantheistic way.¹⁵ But differentiations often, and often systematically, do not play a role in *antagonistic* exchanges, especially if the feeling of the entitlement to religious superiority of their respective orthodoxy motivates them. And so, while even followers of this philosophy might, over time, not have withstood the transformation of the non-dual language of their masters into monistic simplifications, the monistic interpretation of the “unity of Being” became the basis for the dualistic alternative of an only *apparent* unity of the All and the One, proposed as phenomenal (not ultimate) and epistemological (not ontological) “unity of witnessing” (*waḥdát ash-shuhúd*), devised by the Indian Sufi sheikh and philosopher Shaykh Ahmad al-Faruqi al-Sirhindi (d. 1624), and which in typical Abrahamic manner was again closely identified with the view of the orthodoxy.¹⁶ One may sense this antagonism to be furthered by the *misidentification* of monistic with non-dual language, however. It tends to arise from the attempt of non-dualists to mold the intellectual discourse on conceptually unfathomable mystical experience, provoking an impasse for the irreconcilable alternative thought pattern of dualism, which again is only effective under the already presupposed *exclusion* of the non-dual alternative (while it is itself not in need to further any oppositional energies). What is more, one may in these antagonisms also see the cultural restraints and prejudices impacting the mutual view of the religious other. Al-Sirhindi, being of Indian descent and cultural heritage, might have read Ibn ‘Arabi in the context of, and in similarity with, formulations of Advaita Vedanta or Buddhist non-dualisms, which for a long time, at least effectively from Nagarjuna (ca.

150-250 CE) and Sankara (ca. 800 CE) and their interpretation of certain Buddhist Sutras and the *Upanishads*, were pregnant with many formulations that insinuated monistic “identity” (of ultimate Reality with the world), even while instead (often) aiming at non-duality — note, for instance, the supposed “identity” of *atman* with *brahman* or of *samsara* and *nirvana*.¹⁷

That even a clearly *orthodox* rendering of non-duality in the context of a “theistic” differentiation of God from the world is not only possible, but rather a necessity of sophisticated thinking that wants to do justice to the implications of theism can be perceived from the great Catholic theologian Karl Rahner’s (1904-1984) formulation of God’s relation to the world as neither dualistic nor pantheistic. In Rahner’s subtle discernment of an orthodox Christian understanding, we observe that it is not at all close to “a more popular form of *dualism* which places God and the non-divine simply as two things alongside each other.” And while “we say against pantheism that God and the world are different, this statement is radically misunderstood if it is interpreted in a dualistic way.” Instead, he adds that the “difference between God and the world is of such a nature that God establishes and is the difference of the world from himself, and for this reason he establishes the closest unity precisely in the differentiation.”¹⁸ Rahner, thereby, actually defines the non-dualism sought here precisely by articulating it as the mystery of the *divine non-difference from the world*. If God *is* the difference from the world (that is, is identical with this difference), God is so close to the world that, while the world is not God, there is *no difference “between”* God and the world.

I have, over the course of the last decades, made this non-difference — as it appears, for instance, in mystical thinkers such as Meister Eckhart and Nicolas of Cusa in the West — the center of my philosophical endeavor to understand the mystical unity articulated in philosophical and religious discourses across religions.¹⁹ In our current context, now, as this deep non-dualism is beyond *any* opposition of categories, it does

also allow for the pursuit of an interesting transreligious conversation between Abrahamic “theism” and Buddhist “non-theism” from a Bahá’í perspective – that is, the one limited by the perspective and training of the author and in no way claiming any religious authority in its interpretation – namely, one of which the author thinks that it would be deeply appreciative of the principle that difference (in thought and practice) should never become opposition.²⁰ That is, if we could, on closer investigation, also find a place for non-dualism and non-difference in Bahá’í thought.²¹ In what follows, I will be concerned with one of the most profound expressions of this non-dualism in the Buddhist universe of thought and experience: the *Luminous Mind*. Reading selected Bahá’í scriptural texts and their conceptual formulations as a non-dualistic commentary on this Buddhist concept, this resonant, intertextual interference will also reflect back onto the Bahá’í texts so as to let their mutual transreligious correspondence in the articulation of the mystery of ultimate Reality in relation to our universe become visible.²²

2: Why Buddhism?

The conversation with Buddhism is a fascinating and pressing question for the Bahá’í understanding of the unity of religions. Given the overwhelming diversity of conceptualizations within and between the existing manifold of religions, a responsible Bahá’í understanding of this multiplicity by, at the same time, positing a fundamental agreement of all religions, becomes challenging. Bahá’í discourse has suggested diverse sites for situating such a unity, for instance, in the common source (God or ultimate Reality), the convertibility of ethical attributes and activities engaged in the religious transformation of the human character, or the corresponding mystical core of all religions.²³ But Buddhism, it seems, must be viewed as the furthest frontier in any such endeavor to create or adopt a conceptuality so profoundly pervading that it could be considered sufficient in establishing this proposed unity of religions, *because* the Bahá’í

writings appear, on the surface, to be contradicting the Buddhist worldview, while, at the same time, confessing the Buddha to be of the same essential Reality inhering in all divine Manifestations.²⁴ The reasons for the challenge that Buddhism provides for the Bahá'í understanding of transreligious unity in this regard, can be found, first and foremost, in the fact that Buddhism does neither use (or is compatible to) the “theistic” language that Abrahamic (and partly also Hindu) traditions employ, nor submit the metaphysical categories in which its religious tenets are expressed to that of the philosophical patterns with which all Western religious traditions have been pervaded.²⁵ Rather than signaling an underlying unity, Buddhist language and spiritual intentions appear to be *fundamentally* different from that of Western and Abrahamic categories and inclinations: they do not entertain the concept of God, but rather deny its very meaningfulness; they do not contemplate revelation, but offer methods of enlightenment; they do not aim at a divine world, but suggest the exhaustion of all worlds; they do not express themselves through messages of a Prophet, but encourage the imitation of the experience of the Awakened One; they do not claim immortality for the soul, but the selflessness of pure existence.²⁶

Nor is Buddhism in any substantial way or detailed differentiation considered in Bahá'í scriptures.²⁷ We miss its expositions compared, for instance, with Christianity, especially in the many conversations 'Abdu'l-Bahá had with Christian audiences and in culturally Christian lands when he travelled to Europe and America between 1911 and 1913.²⁸ In the mind of contemporary Bahá'ís of that time, this must already have been a challenge, as we know of Western Buddhist to converse with 'Abdu'l-Bahá;²⁹ of the presence of Buddhist teachers in America and Europe at the same time the teachings of which were, like the Bahá'í message, available to any open-minded religionist;³⁰ and also of the presence of Buddhists at the originally interreligious conversations in the wake of the first World Parliament of Religions (1893) at Sarah Farmer's

Green Acre gatherings.³¹ Despite several important attempts to bridge the missing discussion, we still lack a developed body of literature (from either side) for an informed transreligious discourse. In any case, such a discourse would have to raise fundamental questions of how to proceed conceptually and methodically in order to gain a deeper understanding of, and to be enabled to realize, the Bahá'í imperative to contribute to the reconciliation of religions with their vastly different worldviews.³²

Myron Phelps, one of the Western Buddhist who became a Bahá'í remembers, when he visited Akká, 'Abdu'l-Bahá to have said that, compared with Christ and his circumstances, the Buddha “came to a part of the world where civilization was much more advanced, ... ripe in philosophical and metaphysical speculations”³³ so that his teachings had to mirror this sophistication. This is a very apt observation, and one that we should take seriously in our engagement with Buddhism from a Bahá'í perspective. In other words, it is not enough to conclude from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, at one point, that while the Buddha has taught the “unity of God” (the doctrine of *tawhíd*), later Buddhism has lost contact to this original teaching (something 'Abdu'l-Bahá also says about Christianity) [SAQ 43], wherefore any conversation between Bahá'í and Buddhist conceptuality would basically be irrelevant since the original teachings are now obscured. Instead, we must match the sophistication of the Buddhist conceptuality in a fair Bahá'í conversation with historical and contemporary Buddhism(s); even more so since the sophistication of these Buddhist literatures (for Buddhists) not only reflect historical documents, but scriptures that, in concurrence with Bahá'u'lláh, exhort the power of the Word or Spirit present through them if we do not denigrate them — and we never should.³⁴

In fact, such a differentiated and non-oppositional approach will rather remind us of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's hint that, like the original doctrine of the Buddha, the “unity of God” (*tawhíd*) is meant to overcome “vain imaginings” in addressing the mystical

inaccessibility of the unspeakable ultimate Reality [SAQ 82].³⁵ In the same way, the conceptual sophistication of the Buddha and Buddhist scriptures as well as the deep reflections of Buddhist holy figures and teachers throughout the centuries was meant to *eradicate* the trappings of the labyrinths of thinking and the clinging to any *oppositional* categorizations of reality (*samsara*), which the Buddha and the Dharma-tradition as a whole view as hindrance for the salvific effectiveness arising from the direct experience of ultimate Reality (*dharmakaya*).³⁶ We note similar warnings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá not to get lost in conceptual speculation, but instead, against all imitation and prejudices, to directly investigate Reality (*al-haqq*) [PT 3, 41; PUP 26; GWB 125]. In fact, this is a sign, common to the diverse religious traditions, of the workings of mystical non-dualism in our mind and heart: Non-dual thought is meant to *overcome* thought *altogether*.³⁷ However, the *process* that the Buddha suggests cannot proceed without an appropriately engaged and sophisticated *deconstruction* of these categories, which otherwise, that is, by simple denial, only would lead to reiterations of imaginative projections onto Reality instead of helping us to free ourselves from such limitations.³⁸ Such is the challenge that the Bahá'í discourse faces in the light of Buddhism, especially if it does want to remain true to its own universal imperative to *connect* the threads of all religious traditions.³⁹ For this endeavor to succeed, it must, hence, *also* deconstruct the limitations of Abrahamic religious habits of thought and Western philosophical categories, as far as they limit the deeper understanding of their own scriptures: first, not to subsume Buddhist concepts and methods under Abrahamic categories and intentions; second, not to simply apply its own scriptural categories uncritically by assuming that our limited interpretations, which have historically developed predominantly in Western contexts, can be supposed to be universally explicative of their meaning;⁴⁰ and, third, not to simply abandon the conceptual maze with which we are confronted in the serious conversation with any religion, but in rare degrees of sophistication with Buddhism, by just

“agreeing” that such a conceptual engagement was not of ultimate relevance anyway.

Serious attempts of Bahá’í investigations into Buddhism are not lacking. They are of different kinds and exhibit various degrees of awareness of the methodological, philosophical, and linguistic complexities of such a transreligious discourse. Roughly, I find four approaches to *comparison* in Bahá’í literature, generally situated in the methodological approaches to religious studies, comparative religion, and comparative theology, at work: contributions in the prophetic proof-text tradition, demonstrating from Buddhist texts that Bahá’u’lláh is the expected Buddha Maitreya (Jamshed Fozdar);⁴¹ comparisons of Buddhist and Bahá’í concepts in the interest of finding textual evidences for similarities and differences (Ian Kluge);⁴² comparisons with broadly Buddhist or common intellectual and spiritual schemes as points of reference for Bahá’í resonances (Moojan Momen);⁴³ and rare commentaries that use Buddhist conceptual frameworks to inform Bahá’í readings of their own writings (Juan R. Cole).⁴⁴

Another kind of access altogether begins with overarching questions of *religious pluralism*,⁴⁵ which is mainly conducted from within Christianity and often in light of the perceived otherness of Buddhism.⁴⁶ In the Bahá’í context, although it has not been developed beyond a few applications to Buddhism, this discourse concerns itself mostly with the fundamental axiom of the relativity of religious truth and its relevance for questions of relating theism or dualism to monism or non-theism (Moojan Momen).⁴⁷ Much more work must be done in this venue in order for Bahá’í contributions to be taken seriously in related interreligious discourses that have, until now, mostly excluded Bahá’í impulses — especially since institutional dialogue between religions, of which the Bahá’í Faith has been an active partner over the last twenty years, cannot substitute spiritual and intellectual dialogue.⁴⁸

While the relativity of religious truth – as it is a central Bahá'í axiom⁴⁹ – is helpful to address these issues of difference from a Bahá'í perspective, we must not take a shortcut, assuming that the discovered differences are confined to, or merely expressive of, only cultural and linguistic questions, that is, the *social* side of the teachings of diverse religions, which Bahá'í scriptures understand to be changing over time.⁵⁰ Rather, we will only have taken the Buddhist conversation partner seriously if we also develop a sensibility for the fact that the perceived discrepancies of Buddhist language and spiritual intention from Western (and even many Eastern) religious traditions and philosophical conceptualizations reach deep into the respective *spiritual* identity.⁵¹ Only then will we have addressed the challenge that such a conversation implies for the proposed claim of transreligious unity⁵² and will have mounted a serious attempt to reconciliation in a meaningful and respectful conversation between them. Otherwise, any such attempt to address these challenges will always potentially face resistance from within the Buddhist universe of discourse, namely, whenever the feeling could arise that such an attempt tries to establish superiority over Buddhism by controlling the dialogue or to claim its inclusion in a new universe (such as the Bahá'í universe) that would be perceived to be equal to the erasure of Buddhist identity and existence – a move that would also appear to be counter to Shoghi Effendi's understanding of the Bahá'í reconciliation of religions.⁵³

If I am, at least in principle, to name my own approach, here, it is meant to seek Bahá'í scriptural articulations of non-duality and to view them as a commentary on Buddhist concepts in their own context, thereby not only harvesting insights for a deeper understanding of Bahá'í concepts, but also yielding an access to the meaning of Bahá'í scriptures and categories for Buddhist conversation partners. As this oscillation also reflects back onto the Bahá'í texts, it has the fortunate side effect to instigate the widening of *their* interpretation beyond Western limitations and to seek the

mutual immanence of both religious traditions from the deeply mystical articulation of ultimate Reality.⁵⁴ This mutual transformation may, then, also become available as an appropriate *procedure* of establishing unity *in a non-dualistic way*, that is, beyond and counter to the simplifications and presupposed limitations of the dialectic of monism and dualism.⁵⁵

The main Buddhist concept that is brought into this conversation of mutual resonance, is, as already mentioned, that of the *Luminous Mind*. It will allow us to reflect back on Bahá'u'lláh's surprising rendering of the very same formulas, which we find already in Plotinus, in which non-dualism expressed itself in Western philosophical and religious discussions on the correlation of ultimate Reality to our world of becoming over the centuries. It will direct our attention to the resonance of Bahá'u'lláh's discussion of the concept of the *Uncompounded Reality*, which again will enable us to view it as a commentary on the Luminous Mind. The choice is not arbitrary; rather it reflects two of the deep designations of the Reality of Realities in both Buddhism and Bahá'í Faith.

3: The Luminous Mind

The concept of the Luminous Mind is a central Buddhist signification of ultimate Reality, Westerners would say: God; but also of the essence of human existence, Westerners might say: the soul; and the essence of cosmic reality, Westerners might say: the infinite worlds of God – all in one. Peter Harvey in his book *The Selfless Mind* found that the concept of the Luminous Mind already appears in early Buddhist sutras of the *Anguttara Nikaya* (1.8-10 & 10-11). There, it is called *pabhassara chitta* or “brightly shining mind,” exhibiting a (clear) light metaphoric, and in some of the texts it importunately also implies that *loving-kindness* is a central quality of this mind (*chitta*).⁵⁶ One of the central text formulates its meaning with a (for Western minds) highly paradoxical puzzle:

Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements.

Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is freed from incoming defilements.⁵⁷

Several important aspects arise from this enigmatic account: Mind is in and of itself of *pure* nature. This is indicated with its luminosity, clarity, or unobstructedness. Yet, mind is also *defiled*, that is, in the state of darkness, murkiness, obstructedness, which means, mind is in some state of illusion and suffering.⁵⁸ The commentary on the same sutra understands this “defilement” to mean that which one of the most basic Buddhist ascriptions to the origins of sufferings designates as the culprit: namely, attachment. Attachment, in its own turn, signifies the most profound processes and activities by which we are bound to the inescapable repetition of this suffering.⁵⁹ These are the fundamental hindrances to ever reach enlightenment and liberation in Buddhist analysis such as ignorance, hate, delusion and greed.

However, this is (at least for ears trained in Western categorizations) paradoxical: the Luminous Mind is not “fatally” bound to the repetition of attachment and its reasons that suggests the samsaric process; it *can* be freed from those defilements, those attachments, those modes of infliction and perpetuation of suffering, *because* it is already always free from defilements. An interesting puzzle emerges: In its purity, the Luminous Mind is (always and will always be) *untouched* by defilements and, hence, resides *always* in a natural state of luminosity and loving-kindness, *even while* it is defiled. This again is, in fact, the reason that the Luminous Mind *can* be freed from those defilements. The question is – how? The answer lies in what the Buddhist path of liberation is about, the eightfold path the ingredients of which are differently emphasized in the diverse Buddhist traditions.⁶⁰

In its development throughout the “three turnings of the wheel” from the early schools to Mahayana and Vajrayana, the Luminous Mind took on different, yet related functions, connected by, we could say, the Hermetic understanding of reality for which macrocosm and microcosm mirror each other. Hence, the Luminous Mind designates the non-dual “identity” of the Self, which is *anatta*, No-Self, the Self without substantial identity, with its cosmic non-substantial continuity beyond individual lives, also called *bhavanga* or mind-stream. It names the storehouse-consciousness or *alaya vijnana*, the root awareness of emptiness and all karmic seeds in the Yogacara. It expresses the Buddha-nature of all existence, the Buddha-seed or *thatagatagarba*. And it indicates the absoluteness of ultimate Reality, which is inexpressible, and is called *dharmakaya* or the Dharma-body of the Buddha.⁶¹ In its final appreciation, the Luminous Mind began to hold the key to the *essence* of Buddhist doctrine, experience, and Reality within Tibetan Buddhism as treasured by Dzogchen or the “Great Perfection” with which I will be concerned further here.

Dzogchen or Atiyoga is taught and practiced in all four classical lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, but especially harbored as the treasure of the Old School or Nyingma. Dzogchen understands itself as the highest and unsurpassable teaching of the Buddha. Being beyond all other Buddhist paths, it indicates the ultimate secret of the Buddhist Dharma.⁶² In this context, the Luminous Mind of Dzogchen indicates Reality itself, its awareness, and the path for attaining both of them, at once.⁶³ Most importantly, however, it is in its core, and can only be fathomed if we understand it to be, the expression of *radical non-dualism*.

Dzogchen, or the path of Great Perfection, concurs with earlier renderings of radical non-dualism, for instance, of the *Heart Sutra*. In this sutra, Avalokitesvara, the great Bodhisattva (but really the Buddha) of compassion, gains insight into ultimate Reality as that which in its “essence” is utterly empty (of self-existence), that is, that which has no “essence” that

could in any form be expresses as this or that, such that even form (structure, character, organization, energy) and emptiness (the formlessness itself) are *the same*.⁶⁴ Dzogchen builds also on the radical view of Madhyamika, which became famous (even in the West) for Nagarjuna's, the great Buddhist sage's and philosopher's, "equation" for which there is *no difference* between *samsara* and *nirvana*.⁶⁵ This radical non-duality is the essence of what Buddhists call the perfection of wisdom, *prajnaparamita*, elaborated in the notion of emptiness or *sunyata*.⁶⁶ And Dzogchen is, in its own understanding, the Great Perfection of *this* Wisdom that arises in (but always is already) *the pristine, luminous, empty, all-relational, spontaneous consciousness* (or *chitta*) *beyond any duality*, be it of subject or object, perceiver or perceived, phenomenal or ultimate, relative or absolute, *samsara* or *nirvana*, the temporal or the eternal. This *chitta* is not a regular "mind," which is always bound to the defiled state in which the dualism between these realities seems to be real and that even creates them as oppositional "realities." The Luminous Mind is the enlightened mind, the "*chitta beyond chitta*" – the essence and natural state of the mind and the essence of existence.⁶⁷ This Reality *is* the Buddha. In Dzogchen, this Reality, which is also *our* true identity, is experienced in the unperturbed presence of the "now," called *rigpa*; and in this experience, it releases the awareness of radical non-duality: that *the All is one*, and that *the One, the Buddha, is all*, as all (the All) exhibits the Buddha-nature.⁶⁸

A few contemporary textual witnesses will support the understanding of this non-dualism *as* non-dualism, that is, sufficiently clear so as for us not to fall into the trap of confounding it with a strict monism of simple "identity," which, to say it again, would already be a reaction to a mindset that presupposes dualism as natural state of existence and the operation of the mind – something that Buddhism strictly wants to overcome – but as genuine alternative to both dualism and monism in which the enlightenment experience consists.⁶⁹

In his book on *Sufism and Buddhism*, Yousef Daoud describes the Dzogchen view, which he relates to Ibn ‘Arabi’s understanding of ultimate Reality or God or *al-ḥaqq*, in these terms:

Everything that is, is interconnected. What lies behind it, hidden by a veil of our cognition and deluded consciousness, is Buddha-nature (dharmata) or the absolute reality of pure, enlightened Mind: dharmakaya, the experience of which is called bodhichitta. It is eternally abiding, unchanging, uncreated, and beyond our world of becoming.⁷⁰

Here, the Buddha-nature is the pure, enlightened Mind; and it is ultimate Reality. Its “character” compares with that of ultimate Reality or God (*al-ḥaqq*) in Sufism,⁷¹ indicating the “essence” of God as eternal, uncreated, but also as all-relational.

In the *Supreme Source Tantra*, one of the central scriptures of Dzogchen, *dharmakaya* (ultimate Reality as the Dharma-body of the Buddha) even speaks as “person” in the first person account of the Buddha Samantabhadra: “I am self-arising wisdom that has existed from the beginning.... I am the supreme source of everything, pure and total consciousness.”⁷² It is here that the two non-dual formulas appear in their most dense form: “The ineffable is the ultimate nature of existence: the ineffable essence is one. One is the supreme source, pure and total consciousness. The phenomena of creation are duality.”⁷³ The voice of Samantabhadra then explains further that

As the essence of mind, the fundamental substance, I am the source of all phenomena. ‘Supreme,’ refers to self-arising wisdom, the supreme maker that gives rise to all phenomena of existence. ‘Source’ refers to the ‘creator.’ ... ‘Total’ means that self-arising wisdom, the true essence, permeates and pervades the whole animate and inanimate universe.⁷⁴

Here, we find ultimate Reality to be understood as “creator” of the phenomenal world, but in its “essence” being all-relational, pervading the All, and without being any of the phenomena. It is the One of the All, and All-in-One. And it appears in the “personal” voice, while it is beyond any description.

Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, one of the primary living masters of Dzogchen, comments on the *Supreme Source Tantra*, saying:

Self-arising wisdom, the essence of all the Buddhas, exists prior to the division of samsara and nirvana and is beyond the limits of transmigration and liberation. As it ... is intrinsically pure, this original condition is the uncreated nature of existence ..., the ultimate nature of all phenomena. It cannot be identified with a stable and eternal substance ... and is utterly free of all the defects of dualistic thought.... It is given the name ineffable [because it is] ... beyond the conceptual limits of being and non-being.... Self-arising wisdom, primordially empty, is in the condition similar to space, and it pervades all beings without condition, from glorious Samantabhadra down to the tiniest insect on a blade of grass. For this reason that total state of dharmakaya, the inseparability of the two truths, absolute and relative, is called the “primordial Buddha.”⁷⁵

The absolute and the relative are non-different. Ultimate reality is all-encompassing and all-pervading, immanent and transcendent. It is beyond any simple differentiation of the relative world of *samsara*, as it is all-relational, *and* the absolute transcendence of *nirvana*, as it is all-encompassing. Its “name” is ineffable. As such, it is the uncreated essence of existence, while not being “identical” with anything of which it indicates the pure nature of its being. Reality is Consciousness, but this consciousness is neither caught in the dualistic opposition of subject and object nor caught in the illusion of the simple identity of subject and object. It is beyond the difference of

identity and difference. It is the consciousness that *is* non-different from anything.

One of the greatest masters of radical Dzogchen of all times, the Tibetan Nyingma teacher and (considered as the) manifestation of the Mahabodhisattva Manjushri, Longchenpa (1308-1364), in his fourteenth century *Treasury of the Dharmadhatu*, begins his first chapter with this poem on the Luminous Mind:

Everything arises in the vast matrix of spontaneity
 And Spontaneity is the ground of everything,
 But empty in essence, never crystallizing.
 The ground is nothing although it appears as everything.
 Samsara and Nirvana arise as spontaneity in the trikaya
 matrix ...
 It is the creativity of the luminous mind...
 Being nothing at all, yet appearing as everything
 whatsoever ...
 In its sameness it is the dharmakaya of luminous mind;
 ... empty of self, unchanging, unsublimating,
 ... self-sprung awareness in the now, reality itself⁷⁶

Here, the Luminous Mind is clearly indicative of ultimate Reality (*dharmakaya*); the non-difference between relative and absolute, *samsara* and *nirvana*; and, most importantly, it does not passively hide in its detached “rest,” but moves as pure “activity” or spontaneity or creativity. To be creative, here, is not an illusion, and to hold detachment and creativity *together* in one non-dual consciousness is the *original* nature of the mind – in all of us.

In his *Instructions on the Nonduality of Dzogchen*, Tulku Pema Rigtsal elaborates accordingly:

[W]hen we understand that... affirmation and negation of nirvana and samsara... are merely elaborate mental concepts, we realize that all discursive concepts are empty in themselves and are the sameness of reality itself. There is no view and meditation more profound than this.⁷⁷

Primal awareness, free of dualistic perception, is called “luminous mind.”... [T]he essence of the nature of mind is uncompounded and immutable. The primal awareness that is the true nature of mind is profound clarity... eternal life....⁷⁸

This gives us deep confidence on the difference between Buddha and sentient being. Repeating ... Longchenpa's The Treasury of the Dharmadhatu ... Recognition of the nature of mind is Buddha; in the absence of that recognition, we remain deluded and sentient beings.⁷⁹

In this exposition, it is clear that both the conceptualizations of immanence and transcendence, the Absolute and the Relative, affirmation and negation, are *constructions* of the mind. Nor is *nirvana* “in itself” the unconstructed Reality, the assumption of which would indicate another dualistic “identification” of the “essence” of Reality. Only in the overcoming of even *that* construction of the unconstructed do we gain a glimpse of the non-duality that is intended: that which is *nothing* and, hence, is not different from anything; that which is *everything*, yet, by being nothing at all, cannot be identified or named, or differentiated; that which is *one*, even *the One*, as it is the inexpressible unity of the All (and everything in it), and, yet, is closer to everything than the “self-identity” of anything with itself.

The puzzle of the Luminous Mind, as presented throughout these texts, confronts us with at least three complex or paradoxical questions. First, how can the Luminous Mind be pure, undefiled, *while* being defiled? In this paradox is based the Dzogchen view that the *way* toward, and the *aim* of, liberation

are the same. In fact, given the ancient teachings of the Buddha, this means that there is *no way to bridge samsara* in order to reach *nirvana*, because *we are already there and of its nature*.⁸⁰ Second, how can the Luminous Mind be both the relativity and absoluteness, or *samsara* and *nirvana*, at once? In this paradox is based the Dzogchen view that there are *two modes* of the Luminous Mind: on the one hand, it is the realization of *emptiness* (being nothing, or empty of Self) and, on the other hand, it names the realization of unobstructed *creativity* (being everything), which functions are called *trekcho* and *togal*, respectively.⁸¹ Third, how can *samsara* and *nirvana*, relative and absolute, emptiness and creative arising, be non-dually *one*, the One who is named the Buddha, the Buddha realm (*Dharmadhatu*), pure radiant spaciousness, pure emptiness, Samantabhadra, the primal Buddha, yet, *before* dualism and monism? In this paradox is grounded the Dzogchen view that ultimate Reality is *beyond* our dualistic interpretation of the One and the multiplicity of existence, but also their mutual identification. Instead, the One Beyond is the All-One.⁸²

4: Productive Interference

In relation to the Bahá'í writings, we find a plethora of resonances with these witnesses of the Luminous Mind. We could talk about the linguistic serendipity that the Sanskrit word *bha*, luminosity, enshrined in its concept as *pabhassara chitta*, is also implied in the Arabic root of *bahá'*. Although unrelated, they have virtually the same meaning of light, ultimacy, brightness, and purity, releasing the resonances of the light-metaphoric of Buddhist and Bahá'í scriptures.⁸³

Additionally, one is immediately reminded of the utilization of this luminosity in Sufi and Illuminist traditions within Islam and their counterparts in Indian, Chinese and East Asian Buddhist schools.⁸⁴ Note the closeness of the *nur muhammediyyah*, the Muhammedan light of Ibn Arabi and Persian metaphysics of Suhrawardi and Mullá Sadar al-Dín

Shirazi,⁸⁵ in a sense the counterpart to the Greek and Christian Logos, the manifest aspect of the invisible and inaccessible Reality of God,⁸⁶ to the light imagery expressed, for instance, by Amitabha, the Buddha of infinite light,⁸⁷ or, in Dzogchen, by Samantabhadra, the primordial Buddha, who personifies the Luminous Mind, and who/which is called by its nature the “Immutable Light.”⁸⁸

We could, of course, with equal interest, also immerse ourselves more into the implications of the concept of *chitta*, mind, and its relation to the Bahá'í understanding of the Primal Mind, or Will, or Manifestation [SAQ 53],⁸⁹ nurtured by a long tradition through Jewish, Hellenistic, Christian and Islamic (religious) philosophy in the interchange of Greek, Persian and Indian thought patterns. We would find deep resonances with similar concepts in the Jewish and Hellenistic Wisdom Literature, Philo of Alexandria, Heraclitus's and again St. John's Logos, but also the Stoic Pneuma, and, Aristotle's and Plotinus's First Intellect. It would be worthwhile to investigate the astonishing non-duality of some of these concepts of the manifest Reality of the unknown essence of the Godhead, for instance, the oneness of its all-encompassing and all-pervading nature, with the Báb's, Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's insistence that both this transcendence and immanence are indicative the *same* ultimate Reality.⁹⁰ We could also think deeper of the consequences that the intellectual and material nature of the Spirit in some of these traditions finds a reflection in the Báb's characterization of the Primal Will as “matter” and activity and its non-dual indifference from the Divine Purpose as the origin of all “forms” of existence.⁹¹ Arising from the Shaykhi process philosophy of the pure activity of the Primal Will,⁹² we could find astonishing connections with the Buddhist non-duality of form and emptiness, eternal rest and infinite spontaneity, *samsara* and *nirvana*. In fact, given the theme of my transreligious considerations, I will take up this line of thought with the

maybe most profound aspect of the Luminous Mind, namely its *radical non-duality*. Let me elaborate with six related points:

First, the indicator of non-dualism in Buddhist thought, and, I would claim, also in the Bahá'í writings, is, as already stated, non-difference. Since it is often simply named *Oneness*, it is easy to miss that it is not the same as identity, or simply difference from (the differentiations of) multiplicity. Instead, it means that Reality is *not composed* and, hence, cannot be explicated in any analysis or construction. Construction is the sign of attachment from which the Buddhist path wants to liberate all sentient beings.⁹³ It is the *illusion* of “reality” and indicates the incapability of *samsara*, the cyclical bind of causality, of birth and death, of becoming and perishing. Composition and decomposition are the signs of the *defiled* mind. Hence, Buddhist analysis of this defilement, its reasons, and the suffering they cause, whether philosophically in reflection of the intellectual mind or practically in the immediate insight gained (in general) by meditation, aims at demonstrating that any *substantial* unity, such as the possessiveness of self-identical Self, can, in fact, be analyzed into components, which never lead to any self-subsisting base or un-composed oneness and, hence, exhibits *only* impermanence.⁹⁴

Yet, as the Buddha affirms in a famous and often quoted statement in *Udana 80:18* of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* in the Theravada *Sutta Pitaka*, there is a way out of the samsaric reality of impermanence. There is salvation from its inherent suffering, created by attachment. There is a way beyond this ignorance. The reason is that there is — as in the Bahá'í writings⁹⁵ — an *Uncompounded Reality*, which is without (and before) construction and change, and that is what *nirvana* means.⁹⁶ Since this Reality is beyond all composition, it is also beyond any *conceptual* construction, that is, it is beyond the inherent duality of thought.⁹⁷ In this sense, it is non-duality itself. *Therefore*, it is inconceivable, imperceptible, and inaccessible. It is at once Reality itself, but also *experienced* in

the realization of the emptiness of all composed appearances, and it communicates the immediate bliss of cessation in perfect calmness.

Second, as this “uncompounded Reality” *excludes* dualism and monism alike, its non-difference can neither be expressed by substantial oneness nor by duality. Nevertheless, in order not to fall back into monistic and dualistic patterns, it must, paradoxically, be expressed *as both at once*: as inaccessible oneness *and* an infinite manifold.⁹⁸ As Yousef Daoud with regard to Sufi-Buddhist dialogue confirms: If we seek God or ultimate Reality, we must do both at one, cease to name Reality, that is, accept that the Reality of God appears in no name *and*, as we must articulate (and realize) this namelessness, we must do so in the irreducible infinite multiplicity of different names and attributes.⁹⁹ Nagarjuna expresses this same insight as the non-difference of *samsara* and *nirvana*.¹⁰⁰ It is a consequence of the uncompounded nature of ultimate Reality that Reality cannot appear in mere difference *from* composed reality, but neither as the identity *of* it. Since uncompounded Reality is beyond all conceptuality, it cannot be named, but no name can be different from it either. This is also the secret of Plotinus’s scheme of emanation of which Michel Sells has made this most interesting analysis: While the apophatic One emanates the Intellect as its (first) manifestation, *it is not different from it*, as long as the Intellect “looks into” the undifferentiated One. Only when the Intellect “looks at” itself it creates difference, the difference of Self, which – similar to the Báb’s and Bahá’u’lláh’s renderings of this relationship between unmanifest and manifest Reality – is still the Self of ultimate Reality.¹⁰¹ And from this movement of the Intellect, for Plotinus, creation springs. We find ample evidence for this logic in the Bahá’í writings: from the adaptation of the Islamic *ḥadīth* “He who knows himself hath known his Lord”¹⁰² by all of the central figures of the Bábí-Bahá’í religions – which, following Henry Corbin, has its own history with Ibn ‘Arabi¹⁰³

– to statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on the non-difference of the Self from the Manifestations.¹⁰⁴

Third, regarding the characterization of the universal manifest Reality of the Godhead or the Primal Will or Mind, which the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh identify with the Primal Manifestation, the same logic prevails in Bahá’u’lláh’s assertion of the *non-dual unity* of unmanifest Divinity with its Primal Manifestation.¹⁰⁵ In his *Commentary on a Verse of Rumi*, for instance, Bahá’u’lláh designates this *indistinction*: “*the essence of belief in Divine unity*” as it regards “*Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same*” [GWB 84].¹⁰⁶ This does, of course, not imply any monistic identity of unmanifest and manifest Reality, of Manifestation and the Godhead, which is not only clear from countless apophatic passages in Bahá’u’lláh, even from the same tablet, but also from the non-dualistic *logic itself* by which Uncompounded Reality is *indifferent (in itself) to* and, hence, *non-different from* its manifestations [SWB 58].¹⁰⁷ This again corroborates Plotinus’ and Nagarjuna’s, as well as Dzogchen’s, understanding of the Luminous Mind.

Fourth, the same logic also underpins Ibn ‘Arabi’s speculation on the nameless oneness of God as it expresses itself in infinite attributes. An attribute of God has *no “identity” in itself*, but only as it inheres *in the essence* of God, the Reality from which all attributes are non-different.¹⁰⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates the same thought, which, thereby, reveals its non-dualistic intention, when he confirms that in God’s essence *there are no attributes distinct from it* [SAQ 37]. Yet, as this divine essence is inaccessible *to* these attributes, their *unity* is always *beyond* themselves.¹⁰⁹ In Buddhist terms, this affirms their *essential emptiness*.¹¹⁰ As these attributes, for Ibn ‘Arabi and Bahá’u’lláh alike, are most perfectly *mirrored* in the Primal Manifestation,¹¹¹ *it is their* unity, although the Self of the Primal Manifestation is itself *empty of substantiality*

[GWB 22],¹¹² except being the Self *of* the essence in which the attributes are indistinct [PM 54, 176].

As for Longchenpa all phenomenal existence is only a creative dream of the Luminous Mind (as long as it is not reiterated in dualistic oppositions of subject and object), so is for Ibn 'Arabi all existence only "realized" as it manifests the attributes of God in actualization.¹¹³ As for Longchenpa, so for Ibn 'Arabi and Bahá'u'lláh, all is empty of self-existence (as only the unmanifest God emphatically exists); and it is this emptiness (*sunyata*) which is the Self of the Buddha or the Primal Manifestation.¹¹⁴ And as for Longchenpa as well as for Mahayana traditions in general the root-expressions of this Reality of the Luminous Mind, the Buddha, are *wisdom* of emptiness and *compassion* of non-difference,¹¹⁵ in Ibn 'Arabi its root-attributes are divine *knowledge* and *mercy*.¹¹⁶ However, while this is also true for the Bahá'í writings [PM 99, TB 118], it may be interesting to note that in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Commentary on the Islamic Tradition "I was a Hidden Treasure"* the root attributes of divine manifestation and creation are *Love* and *Beauty*¹¹⁷ – and we may wonder as to the implications of this shift for a Bahá'í commentary on the Luminous Mind.

Fifth, the logic of non-difference has another consequence: We must not confound, as already mentioned earlier, *language* utilizing the Greco-Islamic heritage by the Bahá'í conceptuality with its *meaning*, as if Greek thought defines the meaning of the Bahá'í writings for us. Not only does Bahá'u'lláh warn us that revelation is not exhausted by any linguistic mold (or language as such);¹¹⁸ and as it is always relative to its diverse audiences,¹¹⁹ it functions much like the "skillful means" (*upaya*) of Buddhist scripture by which the Buddha addresses each sentient being according to its spiritual horizon.¹²⁰ But the influx of Shaykhi and Sufi terminology in Bábí-Bahá'í scripture, as their "genetic language code" is not exclusively bound by Western patterns of substantialism and often presents alternatives to it,¹²¹ relieves us of the assumption that we are

bound by dualistic Greek categories, or even that we must defend them against Buddhist non-duality.

Case in point is the conjecture, held by some Bahá'í scholars, that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá use the categories of "essence" and "attribute" in an Aristotelian substantialist manner.¹²² Yet, in light of Ibn 'Arabi and Longchenpa, this proves to be not an inescapable conclusion to make. If we care to be open to a Buddhist reading of these categories, a very interesting insight will surface: namely, that for both Bahá'í and Buddhist thought "essence" is *inaccessible in principle* [SAQ 120-121]. As Roger Corless has demonstrated: While in Aristotelian lore, the underlying dualistic substantialism of Aristotle's philosophy seems to imply that we *can* know the unknowable essence of God, and really the essence of anything, *to some extent* through its inherent attributes, the Buddhist non-dualism asserts that *there is no essence that could be differentiated from its attributes*. And this means that no "essence" can be *identified* (which presupposes dualism) or, more cautiously: It is not that there is no essence, but that it is *intrinsically inaccessible*.¹²³ In this sense, we must say that the uncompounded Reality is inaccessible — period.¹²⁴ In Buddhist terms, this allows for the mutual emptiness of all *dharmas*, and of them with the inaccessible, but indistinct essence, which then connotes *emptiness itself*, the Self of emptiness, the Buddha.¹²⁵

Sixth, the anthropological implications of this don-dualism, already hinted at earlier, should now become obvious if we take into account the Bahá'í and Buddhist resonance of the Hermetic mirroring of the universal Reality or Mind and our mind or self or soul. I agree with Fozdar's analysis on this point: that the Bahá'í concept of the soul, including related concepts such as the heart (*qalb*) or the secret (*sirr*),¹²⁶ mirrors the Buddhist concept of the mind or *chitta* [PM 114]. And it does so precisely *not* in its Western, Aristotelian, dualistic sense, as Bahá'ís, at least in the West, might be inclined to think of the soul's reality: namely in dualistic opposition to the body (simple, non-relational immortality)¹²⁷ and, more importantly, here, in terms

of a dualistic consciousness that is not able to overcome the samsaric illusion of the opposition of subject and object,¹²⁸ although this transformation is essential to mystical consciousness in any religious tradition¹²⁹ and is, in fact, an empirical reality.¹³⁰ Instead, non-dual consciousness would have to be understood in the non-dual sense of being *beyond* simplistic monism and dualism. Its reality is like the Luminous Mind (which is its very nature) a *chitta non-chitta*, beyond all grasping of images and concepts, formless, beyond imaginings and self-projections, being the pure awareness of *itself as it*, as uncompounded Reality [SWAB 47]. To this testifies not only 'Abdu'l-Bahá's direct claim that the soul *is not composed* and, hence, eternal [PT 29]. It is, moreover, deeply engrained in Bahá'u'lláh's understanding of the soul, for instance, in his *Commentary on "He who knows himself knows his Lord,"* as that which (as the rational soul) analyzes everything in its constructedness, but can itself not be analyzed in such a way, and, hence, is a secret to itself and as such a sign of God [GWB #82]. In its purity-uncompoundedness-eternity, it is — as Bahá'u'lláh [GWB #80] and 'Abdu'l-Bahá [PT 110] state alike — untouched by any kind of limitations and debilitations, like the Luminous Mind. As it cannot be known in its essence, it is also empty of Self, or its Self is beyond itself; and to know oneself *as such* is to know God, as both are apophatically indifferent [GWB #1, 49]. As the soul or human mind is all the divine attributes [GWB #27], that is, as they are its very reality, its reality again mirrors, or better, is indifferent from the reality of the Primal Manifestation. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Makátíb-i Abdu'l-Bahá'*, declares that "*the Primal Will which is the Universal Reality ... becomes resolved into the innumerable forms*"¹³¹ such that we are *like waves of one ocean*. This is also true for the Luminous Mind: the universal *dharmakaya* is the "essence" of our very being such that we are already always the Buddha *in nuce*, the *thatagatagarba*, of Buddha-nature. It is the secret of the Luminous Mind, that we *are* already this purity, *although* in ignorance defiled, as it is the secret of the Bahá'í understanding of soul-mind-heart that it is already always the

brightly shining sun even if it seems to be hidden under the clouds of limitation and infliction [GWB #80].

5: Uncompounded Reality

We can now relate this non-dualism to a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh that, in my view, represents one of the most interesting sites for a Bahá'í gloss reflecting the Luminous Mind as well for the transreligious Bahá'í discourse with Buddhism in general: the *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqá* or the *Tablet on the Uncompounded Reality*.¹³² It can function as commentary on the Luminous Mind, because it reflects its “characteristics”: that *all is one* and that *the One is all*; that Reality must be understood in a non-dualistic way; and that the language used to indicate its mystery (*al-ḥaqq*) is not fixated on either its monistic expression, a field of spacious emptiness, or a theistic one, the Thou of a personal God.¹³³ As with the ultimate Buddha Samantabhadra, who is the Luminous Mind itself and its Self, in this tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, *al-ḥaqq*, ultimate Reality, can be expressed as both while being beyond any such annotation.¹³⁴

Bahá'u'lláh's tablet is itself a commentary.¹³⁵ It elaborates ultimate Reality by way of relating it to the seemingly monistic maxim, affirmed by the theosophical Sufi tradition in the wake of Ibn 'Arabi and Mullá Sadra, commonly referred to as *waḥdát al-wujúd* or unity of being and opposed by al-Sirhindi's *waḥdát ash-shuhúd* or unity of appearance, by taking this opposition back to its roots in the ancient non-dualistic formula, already expressed in Plotinus and even much earlier in the *Upanishads* as well as in Dzogchen, namely: that *the One is all things*. Bahá'u'lláh answers the confusion that issued from this ancient non-dualism and its erroneous confounding with monism or pantheism, as it was discussed in the Islamic philosophical disputes, especially, in the concrete context of Bahá'u'lláh's tablet, in and after the great Persian philosopher Mullá Sadra.¹³⁶ In this way, Bahá'u'lláh's discussion of the non-dualistic

formula indirectly comments on all the characterizations of the Luminous Mind that we have discovered so far. First of all, we must acknowledge, as the maybe most important observation from which all else will follow, that Bahá'u'lláh's answer in the tablet begins with the *affirmation* of the formula of Plotinus that "the One is all things," indicating its relevance for a Bahá'í understanding of non-dualistic argumentation as well as its Buddhist connotations.¹³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, then, goes on to give basically four arguments *for* the truth of this formula while, at the same time, releasing its *non-dualistic* understanding and safeguarding it against *both* its monistic *and* dualistic misconstruction. Here are Bahá'u'lláh's four arguments:

The first argument: Bahá'u'lláh takes the formula apart by interpreting their parts for themselves in a non-dualist manner. He renders "all things" not as meaning "all phenomena," but as indicating *all the divine attributes: they* must be viewed as the "essence" or "nature" of all phenomenal beings. That is, the phrase "all things," here, indicates the *pure reality* of all existents.¹³⁸ Further, Bahá'u'lláh takes "the One" of the formula to mean the *Uncompounded Reality* itself in which these attributes *indistinctly inhere while being its emanations*.¹³⁹ Like the Luminous Mind, the *reality* of all things is not their phenomenal existence, but the *purity* of their essential nature, which is constituted by the divine attributes as that which is realized when "all things" realize themselves. As with the puzzle of the Luminous Mind, in Bahá'u'lláh's view, while all things are already pure in their nature (the divine attributes that makes them real), all else is only illusion, vain imaginings, unreality, defilement, and attachment [GWB #100 136; HW Arabic #11, #13, #22]. Their reality again is *empty* since it has no self-existence either. What is more – as the more unexpected implication of non-duality rather than monism: As the *reality* of the divine attributes (which are the reality of all things) is itself *beyond* themselves, they are, like the Reality of the Luminous Mind, *empty of Self*, inhering in the Self of God, which is the Primal Manifestation. Yet, the manifest Self of God is itself again

empty of Self, as it finds its “nature” only in and through the inaccessible, apophatic essence of God.¹⁴⁰ And, finally, to close the non-dual circle: Without any dualistic differentiation (or even opposition) and without any monistic identification, we must now also say that the essence of God is again *empty of Self* as it has no “essence” that can be differentiated from its attributes or identified with anything and, hence, cannot be differentiated from (although it *is* the difference from) its Self, the manifest God, which again means that it cannot be differentiated from “all things” of which its attributes are their non-dual nature.

The second argument: Bahá’u’lláh *affirms* the non-dualistic *meaning* of this formula already simply by *quoting* Plotinus, probably as inherited by the discussion of it in Mullá Sadra. It means what it conveys: that although the One *is* all things, it is, at the same time, *none* of them. Thereby, Bahá’u’lláh equally affirms identity and difference; or stated differently: Bahá’u’lláh affirms that the Reality of all things can neither be grasped as identical with all things nor as different from them. It is apophatically, inexplicably beyond both identity and difference. Yet, as it manifests itself in them, Reality must always be addressed with both the *seeming* “identity” of apophatic oneness and the *seeming* difference of the multiplicity of all names and attributes. This insight is virtually indistinguishable from the meaning of the Luminous Mind, who/which must also always be expressed as both: the emptiness of all things, and, as such, as their essence; yet, not as “being” any of the phenomena, but rather their spontaneous arising and cessation of *its* creativity. With Ibn ‘Arabi, Uncompounded Reality, *al-ḥaqq*, is non-dual “Supreme ... Consciousness,” disclosing “itself in the three realms of cosmos, self, and scripture,” as Chittick remarks.¹⁴¹

The third argument: As with the Luminous Mind, Bahá’u’lláh differentiates between *two modes* of the non-dual, indistinct Uncompounded Reality: as *tawḥíd-i-wujúd* or oneness of being, *only* the Uncompounded Reality really exists;¹⁴² and as *tawḥíd i-*

shuhúd or oneness of appearance, the same Uncompounded Reality is indistinctly present in all beings.¹⁴³ Overcoming the traditional opposition between monism and dualism, theism and non-theism, Bahá'u'lláh here indicates that both modes of indistinct unity are *equally valid* in naming the non-conceptual nature of Uncompounded Reality, as the Beyond that is all-encompassing *and* as the Presence that is all-pervading all existence.¹⁴⁴

What is peculiar, however, in Bahá'u'lláh's discussion of the fallacies of dualism and monism is that it even *heightens the non-dual character* of the classical opposition by *reversing the meaning* of both sides against their respective antagonistic, that is, dualistic, schematization in the tradition.¹⁴⁵ This is a subtle, but nevertheless important point to acknowledge so as to really be able to recognize the non-dualist intention of Bahá'u'lláh's answer to both sides of the divide: While *waḥdát al-wujúd* did, in the classical discourse (but already in its simplification that does not hold true, for instance, for Ibn 'Arabi), allow to be intended to express a *monistic* unity (the One *is* all things), Bahá'u'lláh's different formulation *tawḥídi-wujúdi*, "wherein all things are negated with a 'no' and only Absolute Reality is affirmed,"¹⁴⁶ indicates the absolute *transcendence* of ultimate Reality. And while *waḥdát ash-shuhúd*, was (in the context of a monistic reading of the formula "the One is all things") meant to uphold the orthodox dualistic *transcendence* of God infinitely beyond all creatures, Bahá'u'lláh's formulation *tawḥídi-shuhúdi*, seemingly identical with the classical one, conversely indicates the absolute *immanence* of the indistinct uncompounded Reality in all creatures "where the signs of the Primal Divine Unity the manifestation of Eternity, and the effulgences of the Singleness can be observed in all things."¹⁴⁷

The fourth argument: Bahá'u'lláh now *unites* both modes of indistinction, which are only *relatively* true in themselves, as *indistinctly* true *in the self-manifestation* of Uncompounded Reality.¹⁴⁸ This move captures the essence of Bahá'u'lláh's new concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í understanding.¹⁴⁹ As

with the Luminous Mind, who/which comprises the Absolute and the Relative, unity and multiplicity, *samsara* and *nirvana*, emptiness and spontaneity in the luminosity of the *dharmakaya*, for Bahá'u'lláh the indistinction between apophatic Reality and its Manifestation is expressed in the *relative uncompoundedness* of the Primal Manifestation. Although the “*locus of the Divine Unity, even though outwardly it is given a name and appears to be bound by limitations,*” Bahá'u'lláh states, the Manifestation “*is in His inner reality uncompounded (basit), sanctified from limitations.*” Yet, this “*uncompounded state is,*” at the same time, “*relative and attributive (idafi wa nisbi) and not,*” as Bahá'u'lláh adds, “*uncompounded in an absolute sense (min kull al-jihat).*”¹⁵⁰ The Manifestation is the *non-difference* of its Self from the apophatic Uncompounded Reality, much as we have found in Plotinus and Longchenpa. The Manifestation is the *ultimate non-dual indistinction*.¹⁵¹ This self-manifestation is Samantabhadra, the Self of immortal light, and the *Bahá' Alláh*, not Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Núrí, but the apophatic luminosity of God's Self [SAQ #31]. It is the *chitta* that “is” beyond itself *it: pabhassara chitta*¹⁵² [SAQ #31].

What is more, this *ultimate oscillation of indistinction* is an important instrument in Buddhism to hinder any new *reiteration* of any fixed labels by which we would again fall into the ignorance of defilement, clouding the luminosity of its detachment.¹⁵³ As the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have made clear in many passages of their writings: Although the Primal Manifestation can declare itself “God,” it is never identical with God;¹⁵⁴ and although the Manifestation creates, it is not the creator.¹⁵⁵ Or with Plotinus: Only the intellect that understands *itself* indistinct from, but not identical with, the inaccessible essence of Uncompounded Reality, that is, does neither claim identity with Reality nor difference from it, *is* the Manifestation of *it*.¹⁵⁶

And we can take even one more step, which is the ultimate consequence arising from this movement of indistinction beyond identity and difference, a step expressed by Nicolas of

Cusa and Nagarjuna alike,¹⁵⁷ and ultimately presenting to us the mystery of the Luminous Mind as Uncompounded Reality in reciprocal resonance between the deepest intentions of Buddhism and the Bahá'í writings: that the inexpressible Reality is itself even *beyond any distinction and indistinction*,¹⁵⁸ even that of the unmanifest and manifest Reality of itself, which Bahá'u'lláh indicates in his rendering of the ultimate meaning of the Bahá'í understanding of the *unity of God (tawhíd)* [GWB #24].

6: Mutual Learning

In this final section, I want to at least touch on a few implications that such a transreligious dialogue can offer. Transformation, as has been demonstrated by decades of experience with, and reflection on, interreligious dialogue,¹⁵⁹ and as was mentioned in the beginning, must be viewed as a *mutual* endeavor.¹⁶⁰ This necessity of mutual learning is also confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh's deeply relational insight in the difference of the intentions, situations, and limitations of the revelation related to any Manifestation¹⁶¹ [GWB #22]. This mutual "otherness" of revelations is, in its meaning, by no means exhausted through the "inclusion" of earlier revelations in later ones in the process of progressive revelation.¹⁶² Rather, while the novelty of a later revelation will overarch the limitations of the situational aims of an earlier one, the latter one remains *relative* to the former one (or "other" one) by the fact that no revelation exhausts all revelations completely and, hence, as it adds meaning and purpose, also can generously refer to the *unique* meaning and purpose of any other revelation. In other words, instead of supersession and superiority,¹⁶³ *organic relatedness* may be a better model to understand the unity of revelatory development, not by depriving any revelation of its unique impulses while viewing the emergence of new ones such that all others through its novelty appear in a new light.¹⁶⁴

So, what can Bahá'ís learn from Dzogchen's non-dualism? Let me recall one of the initial questions arising from the puzzle of the Luminous Mind: If *chitta* is, in its nature, already luminous, how does Dzogchen understand the *process* of liberation from defilements? As our mind *is* (indistinct from) the Luminous Mind, there is *no way towards* it, no *path* of salvation, no *process* of liberation that could reach it. Dzogchen draws the radical consequence that, as we *are* already *it*, we have (almost in Daoist manner) *nothing left to do* to achieve it (*wu wei*),¹⁶⁵ not even to meditate – arguably the most essential Buddhist act “on the way toward” liberation imaginable.¹⁶⁶ Hence, Longchenpa's radical Dzogchen was opposed to any *gradualism*, expressed in so many ways in Buddhist orders of meditation or states and levels of advancement. Dzogchen, to the contrary, needs nothing of it. All that is necessary is to *realize* the moment of *rigpa*, nothing more. As Bahá'ís are often advised to exert all possible *effort* on the strait path [GWB #125] – holding the laws, developing their character, their organization, the order that will come to fruition in the spiritual realization of the Most Great Peace, and climbing the ladder of mystical stations – it seems almost paradoxical to find Dzogchen to undermine all Buddhist “efforts.” This is the reason that Dzogchen has been deeply hidden in gradualist teachings throughout Tibetan schools – its adherents, at times, being persecuted. But it is also the reason that Dzogchen today increasingly sees itself as independent of its Buddhist context, actually any religion, becoming universally accessible.¹⁶⁷ This is, I think, something to ponder for a religion like the Bahá'í Faith that claims the same universality: Can the unity of religions be reached from different paths?¹⁶⁸ And how, given their mutual claim of universality, would they relate to one another? It is interesting that Bahá'u'lláh makes similar statements that avoid gradualism, that is, avoids the implication of superiority and supersession. In the *Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh refers to the wayfarer, who is potentially everyone in every religion, to be able to, indeed, escape all gradualism and traverse all stations at

once, “*in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath*”¹⁶⁹ [SVFV 65].

Conversely, what could Buddhists learn from the Bahá'í writings? Let me back up for a moment and mention a surprising connection of Dzogchen with Abrahamic renderings of God as creator. Buddhism in general, although not universally, negates the meaningfulness of calling this Reality God.¹⁷⁰ It rests its argumentation precisely on the refutation of the concept of the creator. Instead, ultimate Reality is not a creator; rather is the All infinite and without cause, but it is also ultimately illusionary (*samsara*).¹⁷¹ Dzogchen, however, represents an interesting, maybe only apparent, turn to, first, an *affirmation* of phenomenal reality as momentous expression of the creative nature of ultimate Reality. This means that, although the world might still be viewed in terms of illusion, its phenomenal reality is, in its essence, *indistinct* from the creativity of the Luminous Mind.¹⁷² While the *Supreme Source Tantra* and Longchenpa name Samantabhadra as *creator*, they mean the spontaneity of emptiness.¹⁷³ But Diidjom Lingpa, a contemporary of Bahá'u'lláh, confirms in his *Vajra Heart Tantra* that the infinite creativity of the Luminous Mind, again represented by Samantabhadra, *actively creates* all mental and physical elements from its primordial modes of wisdom, although mysteriously through ignorance and defilement.¹⁷⁴ This resonates with the Bahá'í view on creation, which can, in one perspective, be understood as illusion and mirage [GWB #153; SAQ #79], but is in its root nature nothing but the *creative emanation* of Uncompounded Reality [SAQ #53-54]. Being without beginning and end, as in Buddhism, in its origin, however, phenomenal reality arises not by ignorance, but by effortless *love* and *beauty*, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in his *Commentary on the Islamic Tradition* “*I was a Hidden Treasure.*”¹⁷⁵ And since the Primal Manifestation is the creative origin of the material universe¹⁷⁶ [SAQ #82], it is so by being indistinct from Uncompounded Reality *and* by being indistinct

from *this* creative process and its motives: love and beauty. Listen to Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Manifestation:

*Know thou that, verily, the "Manifestation" is not composed of... elements, nay, rather. He is the Mystery of Oneness, of... the Eternal Essence and the Unknowable Reality... which has never been nor shall ever be separate from all else....*¹⁷⁷

Finally, we can look back and ask whether that which Bahá'u'lláh claims to be the foundation of religion, namely, their *unity*, can be expressed with the *mutual immanence* of both Bahá'í and Buddhist *non-dualism*. Two final Bahá'í quotations will corroborate this luminous oscillation. Bahá'u'lláh's *Seven Valleys* indicate the emptiness of the world in the *indifference* of ultimate Reality from it, by saying: "*This is the plane whereon the vestiges of all things are destroyed in the traveller, and on the horizon of eternity the Divine Face riseth out of the darkness and the meaning of 'All on the earth shall pass away, but the face of thy Lord...' is made manifest*" [SV 36-37, quoting Qur'an 55:26-27]. And the first of the *Arabic Hidden Words* may indicate the Luminous Mind as our immanent reality: as the pure and undefiled "being" of our own nature, which we must nevertheless discover and fulfill: "*O SON OF SPIRIT! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.*" [HW Ar. #1]

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- ¹⁸ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, (62)
- ¹⁹ Non-Dualism has played a central role in my own work in process thought, postmodern thought and interreligious discourse over the last two decades, and has found expression in concepts like in/difference, mutual immanence, transpantheism, polyphilia and theopoetics. See, for instance: Roland Faber, *The Divine Manifold*. Lanham: MD, Lexington Books, 2014; Roland Faber and Catherine Keller, "Polyphilic Pluralism: Becoming Religious Multiplicities," in Chris Boesel and Wesley Ariarajah (eds.), *Divine Multiplicity: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, 58-81; Roland Faber, "The Mystical Whitehead," in Marc Pugliese and Gloria Schaab (eds.), *Seeking Common Ground: Evaluation and Critique of Joseph Bracken's Comprehensive Worldview*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2012, 213-34; Roland Faber, "Bodies of the Void: Polyphilia and Theoplicity," in Christian Boesel and Catherine Keller, eds, *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationship*. New York: Fordham, 2010, 200-226; Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World*:

Exploring Process Theologies. Louisville: WJK, 2008; Roland Faber, “Der transreligiöse Diskurs: Zu einer Theologie transformativer Prozesse,” in *Polylog* 9 (2002): 65-94; Roland Faber, *Prozestheologie. Zu ihrer Würdigung und kritischen Erneuerung*. Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2000; And there is a stunning resonance between them and both Buddhist metaphysics and the Shaykhi background of Bahá’í thought, yet to be engaged with properly. But this connection will, at best, remain only in the background of the following thought experiment. See: Idris Samawi Hamid, *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i: Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of Observations in Wisdom*. Ann Arbor, MI: university of Michigan, 1998.

²⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablet to Jamal-i-Burujirdi (Lawḥ-i-Jamál-i-Burujirdí)*. transl. Khazeh Fananapazir, in *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, 5:1-2 (1991) 4-8, hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/journals/bsb.

²¹ In the discussion of monism and dualism, theism and non-theism, at least their relativity it is affirmed by some Bahá’í scholars (Momen) as being essential to Bahá’í scriptures, it is accepted in a qualified, but hierarchically limited form by others (Saiedi), and rejected by yet others (Kluge). Many of the related problems could be avoided if they would be understood on the basis of the third alternative, however, non-dual thought. See: Moojan Momen, “Relativism: A Basis For Bahá’í Metaphysics,” in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, 185-218; Moojan Momen, “Relativism: A Theological and Cognitive Basis For Bahá’í Ideas,” in *Lights of Irfan* 12 (2010): 367-97; Ian Kluge, “Relativism and the Bahá’í Writings,” in *Lights of Irfan* 9 (2008): 179-238; Ian Kluge, “Relativism and the Bahá’í Writings,” in *Lights of Irfan* 9 (2008): 179-238; Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010, Introduction.

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²⁴ Michael Sours, *The Station and Claims of Bahá’u’lláh*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 1997, ch. 2.

²⁵ Moojan Momen, “A Bahá’í Approach to Other Religions: The Example of Buddhism,” in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá’í Faith and the World’s Religions*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003, 167-188.

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- ³⁹ Zain Lundberg, "From Adam to Bahá'u'lláh: The Idea of a Chain of Prophets," in *Lights of Irfan* 3 (2002): 59-82.
- ⁴⁰ Momen, Bahá'í Approach, 167.
- ⁴¹ Jamshed Fozdar, *Buddha Maitrya-Amitabha Has Appeared*. New Delhi, Bahá'í Publishing, 1976.
- ⁴² Ian Kluge, "Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings: An Ontological Rapprochement," in *Lights of Irfan* 8 (2007): 125-78.
- ⁴³ Moojan Momen, *Buddhism and the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1995.
- ⁴⁴ Juan R. Cole, "A Zen Gloss on Bahá'u'lláh Commentary on 'He who knoweth his self knoweth his Lord'" @ www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bhzen1.htm.

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- ⁴⁵ Seena Fazel, “Religious Pluralism and the Bahá’í Faith,” in *Interreligious Insight* 1:3 (2003): 42-49.
- ⁴⁶ Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multicultural History of Their Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.
- ⁴⁷ Moojan Momen, “The God of Bahá’u’lláh,” in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá’í Faith and the World’s Religions*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.
- ⁴⁸ Seena Fazel, “Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá’í Faith: Some Preliminary Observations,” Jack McLean (ed.), *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá’í Theology*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997, 137-152
- ⁴⁹ “*The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh...is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society....*” [PDC 1]
- ⁵⁰ Julio Savi, “Religious Pluralism: A Bahá’í Perspective,” in *World Order*, 31.2 (2000): 25-41.
- ⁵¹ Raimondo Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989, chs. 1-3.
- ⁵² J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era: An Introduction to the Bahá’í Faith*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2006, ch. 8.
- ⁵³ “Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world’s religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coördinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations.” [WOB 114]
- ⁵⁴ Helen Bassett Hornby, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*. New Deli: Bahá’í Publishing, 2010, #1704.
- ⁵⁵ Roland Faber, “Gottesmeer – Versuch über die Ununterschiedenheit Gottes,” in Thomas Dienberg and Michael Plattig (eds.), “*Leben in Fülle*”: *Skizzen zur christlichen Spiritualität*. Münster: LIT, 2001, 64-95.
- ⁵⁶ Peter Harvey, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvana in Early Buddhism*. London: Routledge, 1995, 157-160.
- ⁵⁷ *Pabhassara Sutta: Luminous*. Transl. from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu @ www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an01/an01.049.than.html.

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- ⁵⁸ Kogen Mizuno, *Essentials of Buddhism: Basic terminology and Concepts of Buddhist Philosophy and Practice*. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1996, chs. 3-4.
- ⁵⁹ Mizuno, *Essentials*, ch. 8.
- ⁶⁰ Williams, *Thought*, chs. 4-7.
- ⁶¹ Harvey, *Mind*, ch. 10; Khenpo Sodargye, *Heaven of Peace: Finding our True Home in the Mind and Heart*. Bodhi Institute of Compassion and Wisdom, 2013, 80-1.
- ⁶² See Keith Dowman, "Introduction," in *Spaciousness: The Radical Dzogchen of the Vajra-Heart. Longchenpa's Precious Treasury of the Dharmadhatu* (Kathmandu, Nepal: Vajra Publications, 2013), xiii-xxix.
- ⁶³ Tulku Pema Rigtsal, *The Great Secret of Mind: Special Introductions on the Nonduality of Dzogchen*. Boston: Snow Lions Publications, 2012, ch. 1.
- ⁶⁴ John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1995, 140-141.
- ⁶⁵ Nancy McCagney, *Nagarjuna and the Philosophy of Oneness*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997, ch. 3.
- ⁶⁶ Williams, *Thought*, ch. 5; Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche, *Luminous Mind: The Way of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993, 146-7.
- ⁶⁷ Harvey, *Mind*, 169-175.
- ⁶⁸ Kalu Rinpoche, *Mind*, 15-26.
- ⁶⁹ Whalen Lai, "Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey," in Antonio S. Cua (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2003, 8-19.
- ⁷⁰ Yousef Daoud, *The Rose and the Lotus: Sufism and Buddhism*. Xlibris Cooperation, 2009, 55.
- ⁷¹ Izutsu, *Sufism*, ch. 2.
- ⁷² Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of the Szogchen Semde Kunjed Gyalpo*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lions Publications, 1999, 55.
- ⁷³ Norbu, *Source*, 56.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 20.
- ⁷⁶ Dowman, *Spaciousness*, 5-6.
- ⁷⁷ Rigtsal, *Secret*, 48.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57-8.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xxvii-iii.
- ⁸¹ Dowman, *Spaciousness*, xvi.

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- ⁸² Faber *God*, §41.
- ⁸³ Stephen Lambden “The Word Bahá: Quintessence of the Greatest Name,” in *Bahá’í Studies Review*, 3:1 (1993): 19-42; see also the revised version: *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 8:2 (1997-1998): 13-45.
- ⁸⁴ Bruce Watson, *Light: A Radiant History from Creation to the Quantum Age*. New York, Bloomsbury, 2016, ch. 3.
- ⁸⁵ John Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001, ch. 3.
- ⁸⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the doctrine of the Incarnation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996, ch. 7.
- ⁸⁷ Lambden, *Word*, 19-42; D. T. Suzuki, “Shin Buddhism,” in Alfred Bloom (ed.), *Living in Amida’s Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004, ch. 4.
- ⁸⁸ Norbu, *Source*, 21.
- ⁸⁹ See also Savi, *Summit*, 273-277.
- ⁹⁰ Momen, *God*, 23-26.
- ⁹¹ Saiedi, *Gate*, 201-204. We can find a similar view in the West virtually only in the philosophy of Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. ed. by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978, 21-2.
- ⁹² Keven Brown, “Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to Darwinism: Its Historical and Philosophical Context,” in Keven Brown (ed.), *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to Nineteenth-Century Darwinism*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2001, 68-74. Again, this move is unparalleled, except for Alfred North Whitehead, see: Faber, *Poet*, § 32.
- ⁹³ Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its evolution from early Buddhism to the trik ya theory*. New York: Routledge, 2010, ch. 4.
- ⁹⁴ Mizuno, *Essentials*, ch. 4.
- ⁹⁵ “To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress” [GWB #93]. “It should be remembered in this connection that the one true God is in Himself exalted beyond and above proximity and remoteness. His reality transcendeth such limitations. His relationship to His creatures knoweth no degrees. That some are near and others are far is to be ascribed to the manifestations themselves.” [GWB 19]
- ⁹⁶ Brian Edward Brown, *The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004, 5.
- ⁹⁷ Strong, *Experience*, 143-151; “Exalted, immeasurably exalted art Thou, O my Beloved, above the strivings of any of Thy creatures, however learned,

to know Thee; exalted, immensely exalted art Thou above every human attempt, no matter how searching, to describe Thee! For the highest thought of men, however deep their contemplation, can never hope to outsoar the limitations imposed upon Thy creation, nor ascend beyond the state of the contingent world, nor break the bounds irrevocably set for it by Thee.” [PM #184]

- ⁹⁸ I have called this the necessary contrast between *apophasis* and *polyphilia*: Faber, *God*, Postscript; *Manifold*, chs. 8, 15, and passim; Roland Faber, ““Ecotheology, Ecoprocess, and *Ecotheosis*: A Theopoetical Intervention,” in *Salzburger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 12 (2008): 75-115.
- ⁹⁹ Daoud, *Rose*, 63.
- ¹⁰⁰ McCagney, *Nagarjuna*, 95.
- ¹⁰¹ Sells, *Languages*, ch. 1.
- ¹⁰² Bahá'u'lláh, *Commentary on the Islamic Tradition “He who knoweth his self hath known his Lord (Man ‘arafa nafsahú faqad ‘arafa Rabbahú)*. transl. Shoghi Effendi and Juan Cole, 1996 @ bahai-library.com/bahaullah_knoweth_himself_cole.
- ¹⁰³ Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 120.
- ¹⁰⁴ Momen, *God*, 20.
- ¹⁰⁵ The term “Primal Manifestation” is related to, and identical in its meaning with, terms such as “Primal Will” or “Primal Point,” often used in the Bahá'í Writings to indicate the divine nature of the Manifestations, and their essential unity in the Mind, Will, or Word of God, indicating the manifest God, not the unmanifest Godhead; see: Momen, *God*, 23-24. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh uses this term, for instance, in this passage of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, indicating that “by ‘divine Presence’ is meant the ‘Secondary Revelation of God,’ interpreted as the ‘Holy Outpouring,’ [which] is admittedly applicable to the world of creation, that is, in the realm of the primal and original manifestation of God. Such revelation is confined to His Prophets and chosen Ones, inasmuch as none mightier than they hath come to exist in the world of being. This truth all recognize, and bear witness thereto. These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible”; Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 1974, 141.
- ¹⁰⁶ See also: Bahá'u'lláh, *Commentary on a Verse of Rumi*. transl. by Juan R. Cole. @ whoisbahaullah.com/windflower/translations-on-this-site/translations/127-commentary-on-a-verse-of-rumi.

- ¹⁰⁷ See also Bahá'u'lláh on the Báb: *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas* pp. 42-3; on himself and all Manifestation: *Gleanings*, #22.
- ¹⁰⁸ Izutsu, *Sufism*, ch. 7; Corbin, *Alone*, 114-115.
- ¹⁰⁹ Juan R. Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings," in *Bahá'í Studies* 9 (1982) @ bahai-library.com/cole_concept_manifestation, Chart II.
- ¹¹⁰ Savi, *Summit*, 255-260; Dowman, *Spaciousness*, 43.
- ¹¹¹ Corbin, *Alone*, 120.
- ¹¹² Coming from the Primal Will, all Manifestations have their "essence" in the station of pure abstraction and essential unity "indistinct, that is without substantial differentiation (and based on substantialist philosophical categories), from one another.
- ¹¹³ Sells, *Languages*, 75-77; Corbin, *Alone*, 105-112.
- ¹¹⁴ Saiedi, *Gate*, 164, following the Hadith of Imam Sadiq, to which the Báb often refers in characterization of the non-duality of the Primal Point (Will, Mind), namely, that "servitude is a substance the essence of which is divinity."
- ¹¹⁵ Dowman, *Spaciousness*, Canto IV; Massao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives (eds.), *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, 3-68.
- ¹¹⁶ Sells, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 991.
- ¹¹⁷ Momen, *God*, 20.
- ¹¹⁸ Sours, *Syllable*, chs. 1-2.
- ¹¹⁹ John S. Hatcher, "The Validity and Value of an Historical-Critical Approach to the Revealed Works of Bahá'u'lláh," in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation: Papers presented at the First Irfan Colloquium*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, 27-52.
- ¹²⁰ Williams, *Thought*, 170; Faber, *Manifold*, ch. 4.
- ¹²¹ Vahid Brown, "The Beginning that Hath No Beginning: Bahá'í Cosmogony," in *Lights of Irfan* 3 (2002): 21-40.
- ¹²² Ian Kluge, "Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan* 4 (2003): 17-78; "The Bahá'í Writings and the Buddhist Doctrine of Emptiness: An Initial Survey," @ bahai-library.com/kluge_buddhist_doctrine_emptiness.
- ¹²³ R. Corless, "Can Buddhism Validate the Truth of God Incarnate?" in *Modern Theology* 3:4 (1987), 336-7.
- ¹²⁴ This is a truth of virtually all Western and Eastern religious traditions if we are inclined to see it as consequential and not as an item of a dogmatic system that, despite this profound ultimacy of the apophatic nature of Reality, goes on to, in its further discussions of God or ultimate Reality

in relation to the world, as if this insight has no real implications. See also Lambden, *Background*, *passim*.

- ¹²⁵ Dowman, *Spaciousness*, Canto XIII; Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1982, part I.
- ¹²⁶ Savi, *Summit*, ch. 12.
- ¹²⁷ Roland Faber, "Bodies of the Void: Polyphilia and Theoplicity," in Christian Boesel and Catherine Keller (eds.), *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationship*. New York: Fordham, 2010, 200-226.
- ¹²⁸ Kluge, *Buddhism*, 155; see however: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2005, ch. 1; Roland Faber, "Multiplicity and Mysticism: Toward a New Mystagogy of Becoming," in Nicholas Gaskill and A. J. Nozek (eds.), *The Lure of Whitehead*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 187-206; Roland Faber, "Becoming Intermezzo: Eco-Theopoetics after the Anthropoc Principle," in Roland Faber and Jeremy Fackenthal (eds.), *Theopoetic Folds: Philosophizing Multifariousness*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013, 212-238.
- ¹²⁹ Teasdale, *Heart*, ch. 3; F. Samuel Brainard, *Reality and Mystical Experience*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2000, ch. 8.
- ¹³⁰ Louis Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, ch. 3.
- ¹³¹ Momen, *God*, 20.
- ¹³² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa)*. intro. and trans. Moojan Momen: "Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa)*," in: *Lights of Irfan* 11 (2010): 213-21.
- ¹³³ Izutsu, *Sufism*, ch. 2.
- ¹³⁴ See also the fascinating tablet of Bahá'u'lláh on al-ḥaqq: Bahá'u'lláh, *The Lawḥ-i ḥaqq (The Tablet of the Ultimately Real)*. transl. Stephen Lambden @ hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/379; Stephen Lambden, *Introduction to The Lawḥ-i ḥaqq/Lawḥ al-Ḥaqq (Tablet of Truth/True One/Ultimately Real)* @ hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/378.
- ¹³⁵ Moojan Momen, "Introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa)*," in: *Lights of Irfan* 11 (2010): 203-212.
- ¹³⁶ Momen, *Introduction*, 204-205.
- ¹³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa*, 213; Sells, *Apophysis*, 60.
- ¹³⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa*, 213.

- ¹³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa*, 213-214.
- ¹⁴⁰ Cole, Concept, Chart II.
- ¹⁴¹ Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi*, 920.
- ¹⁴² Ibn 'Arabi writes in his *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* I:272 "The is naught in existence (al-wujúd) save God and none knoweth God except God..." (Reference by Stephen Lambden).
- ¹⁴³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa*, 214-215.
- ¹⁴⁴ Momen, *God*, 9-11; *Relativism*, 7-14. Because of the non-substantialist and non-dualist understanding I affirm here, the arguments against Momen by Kluge (see note 23), which are still based on substantialism and dualism, are not applying. For my own development of non-dualism as basis for this transreligious conversation, see: *Faber, God*, §40.
- ¹⁴⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa*, 214-215.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.
- ¹⁴⁹ Roland Faber, *The Garden of Reality: Transreligious Relativity in a World of Becoming* (forthcoming), ch. 7.
- ¹⁵⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa*, 215.
- ¹⁵¹ Momen, *God*, 25; Faber, *God*, §40; *Garden*, ch. 7.
- ¹⁵² Sells, *Languages*, ch. 1.
- ¹⁵³ Kalu Rinpoche, *Mind*, 146-147. Bahá'u'lláh, KA, m54: "...on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things."
- ¹⁵⁴ Momen, *God*, 25.
- ¹⁵⁵ Saiedi, *Gate*, 190-192; Vahid Brown, "The Beginning that Hath No Beginning: Bahá'í Cosmogony," in *Lights of Irfan* 3 (2002): 21-40.
- ¹⁵⁶ Sells, *Languages*, ch. 1.
- ¹⁵⁷ Faber, *Garden*, ch. 7; Gottesmeier, *passim*; Roger J. Corless, "Speaking of the Unspeakable: Negation as the Way in Nicholas of Cusa and Nāgārjuna," in *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 2 (1982): 107-117.
- ¹⁵⁸ Faber, *Manifold*, ch. 13; *God*, §40; Roland Faber, *Prozeßtheologie. Zu ihrer Würdigung und kritischen Erneuerung*. Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2000, §31.
- ¹⁵⁹ Paul Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, chs. 1-2.
- ¹⁶⁰ Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999, chs. 4-5; Fazel, *Dialogue*, 2-3.
- ¹⁶¹ Sours, *Station*, chs. 4-6.

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- ¹⁶² Here, we approach the difference between religious inclusivism (by which one can ultimately only be saved to the truth of one religion) and religious pluralism (by which this truth is found in all religions): David Griffin (ed.), *Deep Religious Pluralism*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2005, chs. 1-2; Fazel, *Pluralism*, passim; Roland Faber and Catherine Keller, "A Taste for Multiplicity: The Skillful Means of Religious Pluralism," in John Cobb (ed.), *Religions in the Making: Whitehead and the Wisdom Traditions of the World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012, 180-207.
- ¹⁶³ Jorge N. Ferrer, "The Future of World Religion: Four Scenarios, One Dream," in *Tikkun* (Winter 2012): 14-6, 63-4; Seena Fazel, "Bahá'í Approaches to Christianity and Islam: Further Thoughts on Developing an Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 14 (2008): 41-53.
- ¹⁶⁴ Faber, *God*, §36; Roland Faber, "On the Unique Origin of Revelation, Religious Intuition and Theology," in *Process Studies* 28:3-4 (1999): 273-289; Roland Faber, "The Sense of Peace: A Para-doxology of Divine Multiplicity," in C. Keller and L. Schneider (eds.), *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*. London: Routledge, 2011, 36-56.
- ¹⁶⁵ J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformation of Taoist Thought*. New York: Routledge, 2000, 84-6.
- ¹⁶⁶ Rigtsal, *Secret*, ch. 2.
- ¹⁶⁷ Dowman, *Spaciousness*, Introduction.
- ¹⁶⁸ GWB #128; John Hatcher, *From Sin to Salvation: The Ascent of the Soul*. Wilmette: IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 273. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, 71: "Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself. Verily, such a man is reckoned, by virtue of the Will of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, with the people of Bahá who dwell in the Crimson Ark."
- ¹⁶⁹ Similar statements may be found for instance: "O SON OF LOVE! Thou art but one step away from the glorious heights above and from the celestial tree of love. Take thou one pace and with the next advance into the immortal realm and enter the pavilion of eternity..." [HW Persian #7]; or "He should forgive the sinful, and never despise his low estate, for none knoweth what his own end shall be. How often hath a sinner attained, at the hour of death, to the essence of faith, and, quaffing the immortal draught, hath taken his flight unto the Concourse on high! And how often hath a devout believer, at the hour of his soul's ascension, been so changed as to fall into the nethermost fire!" [GWB 265].
- ¹⁷⁰ Dharmasiri, *Critique*, ch. 2.
- ¹⁷¹ Kalu Rinpoche, *Mind*, 67-172.
- ¹⁷² Dowman, *Spaciousness*, Canto VII.
- ¹⁷³ Nurbu, *Source*, 135-203.
- ¹⁷⁴ *The Vajra Heart Tantra: A Tantra Naturally Arisen from the Nature of Existence from the Matrix of Primordial Awareness of Pure Perception*

(Tib. *Dag snang ye shes drva pa las gnas lugs rang byung gi rgyud rdo rje'i snying po*). Collected Works of H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, in Alan Wallace, "Is Buddhism Really Nontheistic," AAR 1999, www.alanwallace.org/Is%20Buddhism%20Really%20Nontheistic_.pdf).

¹⁷⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Commentary on the Islamic Tradition 'I Was a Hidden Treasure'*, transl. by Moojan Momen, in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, 3:4 (1995): 4-35

¹⁷⁶ Saiedi, *Gate*, 97-8.

¹⁷⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet of Manifestation*, bahai-library.com/bahauallah_lawh_zuhur, §2; see also Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet of Manifestation*, trans. Stephen Lambden, @ hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/450.