"If Love Is Love, It's Free": A Vedantic Reading of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*

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> Ay, you may be astonished to hear that as practical Vedantists the Americans are better than we are.
> —Swami Vivekananda, *Advaita Vedanta*

> My postulate was that there was a core of the eternal in every human being.
> —Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift*

Seize the Day (1957)[1] is inarguably one of Saul Bellow's shortest and best novels. It is therefore no surprise that the Nobel Committee hailed it as "a classic" of the twentieth century. Such praise has attracted scores of scholars to the novel with as much interpretive enthusiasm, if not more, as in the case of Bellow's other popular works such as *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). These commentators have, over the years, offered diverse critical opinions, varying from psychoanalytical to sociological and from philosophical to cultural.[2] Amid this variety of existing studies, critics have neglected examining *Seize the Day* in light of the Hindu philosophy of *Advaitvedanta*, which has influenced writers of all genres worldwide by exploring the concepts of the cosmic "Wholeness" and "Universal Brotherhood." This article gauges the growth of the protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm, from an *ahmkari* (egoist) to a *samkari* (humanist) in the light of the Vedantic philosophy of *advaita* (non-dualism). In the process, the article attempts to demonstrate how Wilhelm's consciousness expands as the narrative action of the novel gravitates towards the final resolution signifying the inexorable cosmic oneness of all of humankind.

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Advaitvedanta

Swami Vivekananda's assertion, which forms part of the epigraph to this article, that Americans are superior Vedantists (*Advaita Vedanta* 56) in comparison to Indians is not intended to flatter Americans and increase their interest in his philosophy of Vedanta. Based on his personal experience in America, he elaborates—perhaps uncritically and naively—on how Americans, unlike Indians, *practically* live the principle of *equality* in letter and spirit (*Advaita Vedanta* 56-57).[3] His view arises from the pervasive Hindu belief that Vedanta is "the whole and the original whereof the different religio-philosophic systems are parts and variants" (Mahadevan 33). Here, Vivekananda implies that there is an ingrained substance of Vedanta in American society, perhaps referring to the legacy of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment as well as the US Declaration of Independence and its famous statement that "all men are created equal." Whatever the reason, the Hare Krishna movement spread within a short span of time and a host of Ramakrishna and Rajneesh *ashrams* (monasteries) sprung up throughout America. Hence, before we proceed to the examination of Bellow's Vedantic themes, it is appropriate to briefly discuss some of the dominant perceptions and postulates of the Vedanta doctrine, especially those that occupied several American writers' imaginations in the postwar period. Such a discussion will facilitate a comprehensive correlation of the Vedantic principles to Bellow's fictional ideas in *Seize the Day*.

Vedanta is the *anta* or final result of the four *Vedas* and is enshrined in the *Upanishads*, which mark the "highest and final" point of the Vedic and Vedantic teachings in Hinduism. In addition, Ved Vyasa's *Bhagavad Gita* (*Song of the Lord*) and *Brahmsutras* (*Divine Aphorisms*) also offer the essence of both the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* and therefore add to the corpus of the Vedanta. Hence, the philosophy of Vedanta streams from these three holy Hindu texts. Sri Sankaracharaya (Adi Sankra), the eighth-century Saivite saint and devotee of the Hindu god Shiva, was the earliest proponent of the philosophy of Advaitvedanta (Non-dualism). Though the philosophy was already ingrained in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, he systematically turned it into a long-lasting spiritual discipline of the universal import. The advaita branch of Vedanta is monotheistic, unlike the *Sankhya* and *Yoga*, which believe in the duality of the human soul (*jivatman*) and the Super-soul (*Pramatman*). The advaita believes that the *anantsatya* (eternal reality)—*Brahman*—is the sole *adhaar* (substratum) of the *nashwar samsara* (mortal or temporal universe). According to the *Upanishads*, Brahman is an Impersonal deity—Formless, Infinite, Pure (*nirguna*), True, Secular, and Eternal: "*braham satyam jaganmithya jivo brahmev napra*" (qtd. in Yogindra 48).[4] By knowing Brahman, one knows everything and becomes liberated from bondage to the world (*samsara*).

Advaitvedanta articulates the Upanishadic belief that the individual consciousness (Man or Woman as progeny) and the Universal Consciousness (Brahman as Progenitor) are *One*. The cause (Brahman) and effect (Universe or *Srsti*) are not dif-

ferent; effect is a mere *reproduction* of the cause. Hence, Brahman (cause) and life on earth (effect) are the same. Brahman is the seed, source, and substance of the universe. He is *antaryamin* (indweller) who pervades everything from a grain of sand on the earth to the glowing celestial bodies in the sky. All the animate and inanimate things in the universe are His willful but illusory reflections, and He pervades them as the eternal (unmanifest/*Purusha*) and changeful (manifest/*Prakriti*) simultaneously (*sutratman*). By virtue of His pervasion in everything, all humans are One human; all animals are One animal; all material objects are One object; all insects are One insect, and all of these together constitute the indivisible universal *Whole* (Brahman): "I [Brahman] am the same as any other man, as any animal—good, bad, anything. It is one body, one mind, one soul throughout. Spirit never dies" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 17).

For that reason, the existence on the earth of everything from amoeba to human, ant to elephant, seed to tree is "dependent and interdependent, relative and correlative, the existence of one depends on the other" (Vivekananda, *Advaita Vedanta* 44). Each one thus bears an inexorable cosmic kinship with every other thing in the relative world. The separation or difference of one thing from the other(s) is merely *maya* (unreality or an illusion). The interrelativity of one person with everything else in the universe gives him/her not anonymity but a distinct identity and individuality. Advaita believes that "man is individual in being universal, and not in being particular. You are immortal only when you are the Whole" (Vivekananda, *Advaita Vedanta* 39).

It is therefore an error to violate, consciously or unconsciously, the unwritten cosmic code of inexorable kinship or relativity of one human to all others in the world. To enjoy the *ananda* or bliss of this cosmic realization, one need not go to the dark caves or distant forests, resort to any rituals, and wait until eternity; one even need not look back to the past or to the future. The past is mere imagination and future mere expectation. Both are elusive and ephemeral. Only the present is real and existent. One moment in eternity is complete and replete with all times: "All that is and was and will be is here in the present" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 16); all is one and is "here and now" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 18). Seize the day.

American Writers and *Advaitvedanta*

The postwar American writers showed an unusual receptivity to philosophical and theological ideas from both inside and outside of America. The 1960s in America witnessed a moral and spiritual tumult under the explosive impact of the New Left and "Counter Culture" values of "mockery," "'dirty' words, exhibitionistic sex, and personal unconventionality" (Dikstein 268). During this time, says Sydney Ahlstrom, "the old grounds of national confidence, patriotic idealism, moral traditionalism, and

even of historic Judeo-Christian theism, were awash" (3). The consequent cultural unrest turned many Americans toward such religions as Hinduism and Buddhism for spiritual solace and moral guidance. It was a period of "attraction to Eastern gurus and meditative practices, the short-lived Nirvanas" (Dikstein viii). Consequently, the Hippie cult and the Hare Krishna movement were in, and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Bhagwan Rajnish (Osho) were out to make lasting ripples in the American consciousness with their yogic ideas and transcendental meditation.

This movement was part of a cumulative national trend to negotiate the cultural and intellectual exhaustion of postwar America. An influence of the discourse of world religions was at the fore during the 1950s and 1960s when Bellow wrote his novels. Americans were drawn to visions of harmony of world religions as a result of Swami Vivekananda's lectures in the late nineteenth century and an influx of other pseudoscientific theories such as Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and Reichianism, and theological beliefs such as Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism, in the early twentieth century. The famous World Parliament of Religions (1893) in Chicago had a long-lasting impact on Americans for generations to come. As Georg Feuerstein rightly observes, "Ever since the appearance of the imposing figure of Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, there has been a steady flow of Hindu wisdom, especially Yoga and Vedanta, to the Euro-American countries" (86). Under the spell of Vivekananda and his fellow Vedantists and the subsequent influence of other religious preachers, Americans were seriously preoccupied with the defense of religions and their visionary potentials against coercive ideologies, some of which threaten to radicalize and destabilize the whole world even today. Though Bellow, unlike Salinger, Vonnegut, and Updike, was not a disciple of any eastern guru, he did partake of the interface between the East and West and responded to the prevalent awareness of India in his novels, particularly in *Seize the Day* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970).

Bellow and *Advaitvedanta*

Amid such a climate of cross-cultural influences, Bellow exhibited awareness of Indian spirituality through his fictional allusions to the supreme Hindu gods such as Shiva and Brahman and to the salient Hindu spiritual concepts of *karma, moha, maya*, and *yoga*. In Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), Joseph is aware that the Hindu god Shiva, the keeper of Time, has many arms (6). Furthermore, in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Augie knows from Kayo, one of his would-be teachers, that the external force of the world is *moha*, or love-based earthly attachment, "a Navaho word and also Sanskrit, meaning opposition of the finite. It is the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces. Love is the only answer to *moha*, being infinite" (519). In *Herzog* (1964), Moses is thrilled over the divine mystery of the natural surroundings while riding the train to Martha's Vineyard: "God's veil [*maya*] over

things makes them all riddles [known as "world bewilderer"]. If they were all not so particular, detailed and very rich I might have more rest from them. But I am a prisoner of perception, a compulsory witness. They are too exciting" (72). In *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Sammler recalls the Sanskrit words *Lingam* (phallus/Siva) and *Yoni* (vagina/Sivani), thinking that their knowledge and cosmological implications might be "enlightening" about the existing "sexual madness" (55) among the youth of America. The dialogue between Sammler and the Indian scientist Gobind Lal carries the crux of Bellow's metaphysical views concerning relationship of man's soul to God. In *Humboldt's Gift*, Citrine is caught in the perplexing problems of his American life, worried about "sleep, death, metaphysics, karma, the presence of the universe in us, our being present in the universe itself" (110), and therefore constantly craves mental and spiritual equilibrium to penetrate through the "painted veil of Maya" (6). For this, Charlie practices yoga and performs the yogic posture of *sirasasana* by standing on his head (*Humboldt's Gift* 12). Bellow's inclusion of these Indian allusions and invocation of the mystical Hindu doctrines concerning the spiritual governance of life may not necessarily imply deep knowledge of or keen interest in Hindu philosophy. Nevertheless, it does acceptably exemplify his acquaintance with the essential aspects of Hinduism. According to Chirantan Kulshrestha, Bellow's "Indian images enter his work as mental impressions of objects and events that have moved him profoundly and left an impress on his sensibility. At one level these impressions are manifested in casual references […] at a deeper level, however, they develop out of moments of singular import in India's political, cultural, and religious life" (47).

In fact, Bellow was an "unorthodox" Jewish writer, and it would therefore be tenuous to associate him with Hinduism or any other specific belief system. However, his exploration of the belief in the soul and rebirth, especially in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and *Humboldt's Gift*, might have drawn him to distant and diverse philosophical fields while searching in the "universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what was fundamental, enduring, essential" (*SD* 88). Bellow's foray into the metaphysical facts of life is driven by his firm belief that "there is something invariable, ultimately unchangeable, native to the soul" (Roudané 276). In the process, Bellow's mystical ideas about man as a divine self, the inscrutable realities of man's life, and the timeless truths of man's universe interestingly show a *unique* proximity with the Advaitvedantic philosophy of the individual's archetypal craving of what Bellow calls "higher consciousness" or "higher wakefulness." Moreover, "the truth," as Swami Prabhavananda says, "is no monopoly of any race or nation, and with spiritual growth the same truth is often realized by different peoples independently of one another" ("The Mystic Word 'ÓM'" 151).

I do not claim here that Bellow was directly influenced by Vedanta or that he drew Vedantic ideas *exclusively* from Adi Sankara, Ramakrishna, or Vivekananda. His views may have sources in other humanistic systems as well. All great literatures usually show a marked affinity to great religious and metaphysical traditions to benefit in

terms of wisdom. Whatever may be the case, Bellow's ideas curiously correspond to the Vedantic views, and, therefore, it would not be out of place to juxtapose Bellow's observations about humanity's life in the material universe with Vedantic beliefs in order to gloss the wider cultural and spiritual implications of his novels.

Seize the Day and *Advaitvedanta*

Bellow integrates his humanistic beliefs into almost all his novels, but most particularly in *Seize the Day*. Here, he explores the supremacy of common human kinship over family ties or blood relationships.[5] The protagonist Tommy Wilhelm lives in New York, where his surroundings sizzle with "darkness," "deception," "disillusionment," "disease," and "death." The whole culture appears as a heap of broken relationships in which "fathers were no fathers and the sons no sons" (*SD* 90). The darkness of *avidya* (ignorance) and *ahmkar* (ego) have driven everyone into the dragnet of lust, greed, and avarice: "There's money everywhere. Everyone is shoveling it in" (*SD* 13). According to Vedanta, *avidya* breeds *ahmkar, ahmkar* bears *iccha* (desires), *iccha* begets *moha* (bondage), and *moha* brings *swarth* (selfishness) and *vicched* (separation) from other human beings or the cosmic Whole.[6] Both selfishness and separation trigger the same unhappiness and suffering as one experiences on the severance of a limb from the living body. The Advaita says, "the less we think of ourselves as separate from that One, the better for us. The more we think of ourselves as separate from the Whole, the more miserable we become" (Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta* 71). Wilhelm—at the helm of his will to make some quick money—believes that he has escaped from the unfortunate and outcasts of the world, not knowing that this is the root cause of his misery. Tommy is an ordinary American who cherishes an extraordinary ambition to live a wealthy and comfortable life. His appetite for money arises from his lack of *jnana* (knowledge) about *satya* (true nature of life) and *tattava* (eternal reality). One superimposes the "unreal" upon the "real" and vice versa in the mist of *maya*, as though one mistakes a *rope for a serpent* in the darkness, a known Upanishadic analogy. Tommy therefore strays from the right path of reality and self-realization: he turns away from the light of knowledge and the love of his fellow men (Hism), and instead walks the way of woes and wailing in pursuit of an airy illusion (Ism). He separates himself from his family and other ordinary people, and thus disregards the irrefutable rule of cosmic relativity. Ironically, Wilhelm is unaware that the individual soul is never separate from the Whole. The separation of the two is merely an illusion (darkness), which disappears at the slightest touch of the Reality (Sun). In Bellow's opinion, the evolutionary aim of the self is to realize the Reality amid all the din and disturbance of life; Vedanta says: "Man is like an infinite spring, coiled up in a small box, and that spring is trying to unfold itself. And all the social phenomena that we see are the result of this trying to unfold" (Vivekananda, *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* 58).

Tommy obsessively pursues the mirage of unreality and brings unrelenting grief to himself. His haunting search for money exhausts him, and he therefore suffers the agony of his painful existence. However, Bellow does not ignore the economic reality of American life. For instance, in *The Victim* (1947), Allbee's life is miserable without money, and therefore he pursues Leventhal for help to find a new job. In *Herzog* (1964), Moses needs money to support his love and litigations in the court. In *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), Citrine is in a cutting financial crunch and needs money to meet his obligations. What Bellow implies is that a spiritual view should not risk glossing the determining conditions of American life and a material view should not overtake spiritual concerns. One should not hinder the other in favour of a balanced (Buddha's middle path) approach to life.

Bellow therefore ridicules the money-hunting Wilhelm, albeit with sympathetic humour. Tommy becomes a laughing stock for his complex thoughts and "tendency to be confused under pressure" (*SD* 29). Indeed, his shaky psychic state bears adversely on his domestic, professional, and social life. Under the stress of his circumstances, Wilhelm takes sedatives (*SD* 39), bears an "obsessive look" (*SD* 121), and appears gullible: "I couldn't tell you what day of the week this is. I can't think straight" (*SD* 119). He commits the first mistake of his life by abandoning his college education halfway, much against his mother's wishes, to become an actor in Hollywood. The decision amply evidences his love for material prosperity over knowledge and learning. However, he is duped by Maurice Venice, a dubious movie agent who later turns out to be a pimp (*SD* 20-30). Thereafter, Tommy serves as a sales agent with Rojax Corporation in Roxbury, but he falls out with his employer and resigns from his job out of a false sense of "honour" (*SD* 40-42), a decision that subsequently drives him into a severe financial crisis. On the domestic side, Wilhelm is married to Margaret and has two sons, but he stays separate from them and carries on with another woman, Olive. Margaret refuses to divorce him and continues to extort money on the pretext that she has children to look after. Tommy's mundane life is thus a quagmire of monetary and marital contradictions and conflicts.

According to Vedanta, *jivatman* (the embodied soul) always flows, slow or fast, depending upon the individual *pravirttis* (karmic latencies), toward *Pramatman* (Supreme Soul) undeterred by earthly obstacles. It does so because "the very purpose of the human soul is to realize the Truth" (Ranganathananda 114). Hence, the facilitation of the spirit's evolutionary wish is the business of life. Wilhelm tries many tricks to subvert the growth of his inner self toward transcendental realization. He constructs false pretensions to prevent the intrusion of reality into his make-believe world. Tommy is the "pretender soul" that avoids the facts of life and hides the "real soul" that loves the truth (*SD* 76-78). He "wears a hat" and "smokes a cigar" to look "passably well" to others (*SD* 7), including his father. Wilhelm lies about his education and family background out of a vain sense of prestige (*SD* 17). He is a human being but likens himself to voluptuous beasts such as a bear (*SD* 19) and a hippopotamus (*SD* 27). In addition, he is forty-four years old but lives with old people in the

Hotel Gloriana where his estranged father, Dr. Adler, a retired physician, also resides. In general, a hotel symbolizes temporal life in a perpetual flux of nature (*maya*); in particular, the hotel Gloriana represents Wilhelm's innate wish for glory and glamour. People check into hotels for a temporary sojourn and check out after a few hours or days or weeks, mostly never to come back. The process metaphorically replicates the *samsaric avagaman*, humanity's arrival into and departure from the phenomenal world. In this ever-moving stream of life, nothing lasts except the selfless love of fellow beings. Ironically, however, Wilhelm's sole objective is to make money for a stable life in the mutable world. Wilhelm and the other hotel residents are therefore acutely indifferent to the stark reality symbolized by the messenger pigeons flapping around their dwellings. In bird lore, pigeons signify spirituality, love, peace, and togetherness (flock), but Wilhelm and his fellow sojourners evade the message in their mad pursuit of money. In the process, Tommy isolates himself from his fellow "outcasts" with whom he presently admits no connection whatsoever. In his efforts to avoid their fate, he piles mistakes upon mistakes until the day of his final reckoning.

Vedanta informs us that the "Divine spark is hidden within all" (Ranganathananda 129) irrespective of one's goodness, grief, and greed: "Only it lies dormant. It needs to be awakened" (Prabhavananda, "Worship and Meditation" 120). Wilhelm's "real soul" remains covered within the crusty coverings of his "pretender soul." Still the "real soul" glimmers through the "thickets" of his "pretender soul," waiting to burst in full blaze sooner than later. The spirit, as Bellow informs us elsewhere, "knows what it knows and the knowledge cannot be gotten rid of. The spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of nature" (*Mr. Sammler's Planet* 189). Some of Tommy's physical features and psychological symptoms do symbolically indicate the possibility of his recovering his original self. For instance, Tommy has a "Buddha like head and shoulders" (*SD* 8), a "big round face" (*SD* 10), and "round and somewhat circular eyes" (*SD* 16, 19), and "when he laughed and puffed his cheeks grew round" (*SD* 9). Here, the figure "round" or "circular" (zero/nothing) suggests Tommy's mortality, and also his mental vacuity due to his wrong priorities in life. Contrarily, it is a *shubh* (auspicious) *cakra* or *mandala* (circular figurative symbol) for the ultimate state of spiritual enlightenment in both Buddhism and Hinduism. The circle signifies *nothingness* as well as *perfection*, both of which further signify the Buddhist *shunya* (non-being) of *nirvana* or the Hindu *moksha*—a state of total perfection (bliss) where nothing exists, following the realization of the Truth of the cosmic relativity, the all-pervasive Brahman. Tommy is, at the moment, "Nothing," which indirectly means that he is a temporal being (mortal) and that he is amenable to transcendental realization ("uncoil") by the nullification of his ego. For that reason, Dr. Tamkin subsequently tells Wilhelm: "'What art thou?' Nothing! That's the answer. Nothing. In the heart of hearts [where the soul resides]—Nothing!" (*SD* 76). Nothing lies, according to Sartre, "coiled" in the heart of being "like a worm." However, Sartre further notes that "man's *relation* with the being is that he can modify it" (59-60; emphasis mine). Tommy needs to modify his self by moving from material nothingness to

spiritual Nothingness (*nirvana* or *shunya*) for a lasting resolution to his existential pain and suffering. In addition, Wilhelm's wide mouth is "red" (*SD* 10) and his "grey eyes" are "stuffed with darkness" (*SD* 29). The dark shade of the eyes and red pigment of the mouth respectively suggest Tommy's inability to see (in dark or *avidya*) the impersonal Truth and his consequent greed (red) for personal material prosperity. Nevertheless, the grey colour of his eyes, which lies between "white and dark," stands for "humility" (temperance) and "modesty" (balance). As the colour of ashes (dust/death), grey also signifies "deliverance" and "divinity" (see Ferguson 272-73) in opposition to greed and avarice. We may note as an aside that Hindu monks apply ashes to their naked bodies to mark the mortal nature of the body and their sensual lives burnt into the fires of abstinence. His grey eyes signify the two contending impulses—the material self aspiring for money and the metaphysical self yearning for illumination—that are implicitly at war with each other within him. In addition, Wilhelm is forty-four years old and has a "fleshy, blond" body (*SD* 44), but still appears "younger than his years" (*SD* 9), and has a "charming face" and a "sweet smile" (*SD* 9). His fleshy body suggests his subservience to sensual desires (animal instinct), but his attractive face and appealing smiles outwardly signify his inner instinct for grace (modification) conducive to transcendental realization. Though he has distanced himself from the "lurid looking" "outcasts," "imperfect," and "disfigured" humans, he does indeed harbour, deep within him, a swelling sea of selfless love for them. At some point, he suddenly rises to a very Vedantic awareness that "[t]here is a larger body [Whole], and from this you cannot be separated" (*SD* 90). Vedanta further points out, "There is only one life and one world, and this one life and one world is appearing to us as manifold [out of sheer ignorance]" (Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta* 25). Earlier, he passed through "an underground corridor" beneath Times Square:

> a place he had hated and hated more than ever now […] And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat, and darkness […] all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them. One and all he passionately loved them. They were his brothers and sisters. (*SD* 91)

However, this "sudden onrush of loving kindness" (*SD* 91) soon fizzles out under the sway of his life's hectic affairs. On the day of his reckoning, Tommy once again recalls the episode and wishes in his inmost heart to "go back to that ["larger body" of the "outcasts"]. That's the right clue and may do me the most good. *Something very big. Truth, like*" (*SD* 91; emphasis mine). Though Wilhelm sees no end to his painful ordeal, he still harbours a secret hope of recovery somewhere deep within him. Tommy has a "brooding nature," and at times delves into profound introspection to learn the meaning of his struggle and to leverage his self-confidence:

> But, at the same time, since there were depths in Wilhelm not unsuspected by himself, he received a suggestion from some remote element in his thoughts, that the business of life, the *real* business—to carry his peculiar burden, to feel shame and impotence, to taste

> these quelled tears—the only important business, the *highest* business was being done. (*SD* 61; emphasis mine)

Amid such agonizing conditions, Tommy carries on with due repentance, resilience, and resignation; it implies a slight possibility of his liberation from the fret and fever of life. At that particular moment he is subject to a severe test of his moral endurance amid an onrush of unrelenting adversity. The protagonist of another of Bellow's novels contends that the test of the common man's endurance is the "principal question" of modern times: "The strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity measured by his ordinary life" (*Herzog* 106). A possible answer to this question lies in the Vedantic mystique of "March on!" As Vivekananda observes, "It is […] development, that is the great aim. The struggle is the great lesson. Mind you, the great benefit in this life is struggle. It is through that we pass" (*Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* 224). Wilhelm's self-controlled persistence therefore supports his sinking morale and augurs well for his future: "He had made mistakes, but he could overlook these. He had been a fool, but that could be forgiven. The time wasted—must be relinquished. What else could one do about it? Things were too complex, but they might be reduced to simplicity again. *Recovery was possible*" (*SD* 84; emphasis mine). Some of these faint flickers of Wilhelm's "true soul" indicate that he has not altogether lost his capability to realize the spiritual truth.

Wilhelm commits yet another mistake, the last in the series, to make quick gains because he is "badly strapped for money" (*SD* 44) and "could not rest but would be crushed if he stumbled" (*SD* 44). Tommy gives Dr. Tamkin, a fellow sojourner in the hotel Gloriana, his last seven hundred dollars for investment in lard shares despite his father's warning and his own fears against it. It was because "Wilhelm himself was ripe for the mistake. […] And so, from the moment he tasted the peculiar flavor of fatality in Dr. Tamkin, he could no longer keep back the money" (*SD* 63). Tommy risks the last bit of his money in the belief that Tamkin "would get through this crisis too and bring him, Wilhelm, to safety also" (*SD* 103). Hence, this is a "day of reckoning" for Wilhelm: "a day, he thought, on which willing or not, *he would take a good close look at the truth*" (*SD* 103; emphasis mine). The decision pushes Tommy to the end of his rope, where he feels "choked and throttled" (*SD* 81). He is utterly nervous and unable to maintain his semblance of poise: "He was wrong to suppose that he was more capable than the next fellow when it came to concealing his troubles. They were clearly written upon his face. He wasn't even aware of it" (*SD* 18). In this insecure state, Tommy is low on his self-confidence and looks up to others for help. Vedanta says that we live in a selfish world and "our expectation of help from others in the time of crisis is a self-sweet delusion. It comes to no good" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 22). The Vedantic credence is relevant in Tommy's case as he receives no help either from his blood relatives or his so-called friends. First, he reaches out to his father for financial support in good faith that the latter would not disappoint his only son. However, his father gives him numerous sug-

gestions but no money, not even a word of sympathy or goodwill. He needs money to meet his own requirements in his old age, and Tommy is more frustrated than before. Out of sheer desperation, Wilhelm "turns" to Tamkin, his "second father," to secure a reassurance of sufficient returns from their investment in the stock market. In return, Tamkin amuses him with an unending farrago of ideas, which exasperates him and pushes him to the limit of his endurance. He feels "suffocated" and about to "burst" like an overfilled balloon, swelled with the air of his selfish dreams and desires. Wilhelm's isolation from other fellow men circumvents the expansion of his *prana* (inner energy), and his consequent dependence on others pushes him into an abyss of existential nothingness.

In *Seize the Day*, Dr. Tamkin is the most intriguing character, and therefore the most misunderstood by critics. Many commentators label him as a "charlatan," a "dupe," or a "trickster" after his deceptive dealings with Wilhelm, and therefore sympathize with Wilhelm as a "fall guy." It is because Tamkin's charlatanry is so engaging that the reader remains helplessly oblivious to the creditable aspects of his character. Indeed, Tamkin catalyzes the action and creates the situation expedient to Wilhelm's moral and spiritual recovery. Gilead Morahg therefore aptly remarks:

> There can be little doubt that Tamkin is an unabashed liar and manipulator. Yet despite his deceptions and machinations, he is a source of authentic values and redeeming ideas that precipitate Wilhelm's transformation by providing him with a conceptual key for a truer vision of external reality, of the internal self, and of a morally satisfying relation between them. (105)

In fact, Tamkin is a "positive sinner," a term Bellow uses elsewhere, whose trickery takes Wilhelm to the temple of the spiritual truth. Despite all his doubts, Tommy too vaguely believes that "Tamkin, for all his peculiarities, spoke a kind of truth and did some people a sort of good" (*SD* 69). It may be a tenuous suggestion that some of the statements Tamkin makes to intimidate and overpower Wilhelm, and thereby prevent him from turning hostile over an eventual decline in lard-shares, sound Vedantic. However, Tamkin does not follow these ideas himself, and Wilhelm does not fully comprehend them due to his chronic antipathy toward knowledge. Hence, many of Tamkin's ideas become mere meaningless verbiage. By making his characters treat this serious subject merely as a means of killing time in the stock market, Bellow takes a dig at modern Americans' utter insensitivity toward the transcendental truths of life *vis-à-vis* their fanatical infatuation with "holy money." Simultaneously, Bellow ridicules educated Americans as illiterate and their bookish knowledge as a farce in the practical conduct of life, a theme that acquires larger proportions in *Herzog* in 1964. For instance, Wilhelm mockingly ridicules Tamkin for his abstruse pedantry, which he is unable to understand: "With all the books he reads, how come the guy is so illiterate?" (*SD* 81). One can realize the Truth through personal experience, which is intuitive and epiphanic. For that matter, Tommy's jibe is fully consonant with the Vedantic view: "We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find we have not developed at all spiritually" (Vivekananda,

Vedanta: Voice of Freedom 197). In Bellow's view, in their disconnection from spiritual life, Americans have gone against their grain, and money has thus become the lone lord of their lives, their "soul's husband" (*The Adventures of Augie March* 359). Nevertheless, Tamkin's engaging ideas and absorbing conversation draw Wilhelm's attention away from himself—to something "deeper" than the "apparent life"—the soul without name, form, gender, colour, or smell (*SD* 78). Moreover, Tommy too is "a sucker for people who talk about the deeper things of life, even the way he [Tamkin] does" (*SD* 74). Actually, both of them, the "pretender soul" (Wilhelm) and the "perverted soul" (Tamkin, that is Tom's kin or Tommy's kin), are "a pair" (*SD* 66) joined together not only in their business enterprise but also by the "true soul." Even though Tamkin is a liar, a cheat, and a trickster, he still, like Tommy, shows certain redeeming signs in his random ideas. Wilhelm cannot consciously shed his long-loved pretensions under the dread of drowning into the depths of mediocrity. He fears in his existing situation that "[t]he waters of the earth are going to roll over me" (*SD* 83), so he must be pulled, pushed or lured out of his synthetic self for a redeeming sight of the real self. In his efforts to cheat, Tamkin unintentionally induces Wilhelm out of the darkness of his ignorant self and leaves him face to face with the inescapable truth of life. In this respect, Tamkin acts as an external catalyst for Wilhelm's inner soul's primal wish for the ultimate self-realization: the highest goal of one's life in the Vedantic view.

Tamkin first of all informs Wilhelm about the spiritual concept of time. He hypocritically tells Wilhelm: "The spiritual compensation is what I look for. Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That's the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real—the here-and-now. Seize the day" (*SD* 72). Tamkin's pseudo-philosophical ramble initially sounds empty, intriguing, and even opportunistic, but some of his ideas have a deep spiritual significance in the Vedanta metaphysics. As mentioned above, Vedanta admits no past and no future, and accepts only the present, the here and now: "This present is all that is. […] All is here right now. One moment in infinite time is quite as complete as all-inclusive as every other moment" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 15-16). Vedanta brings spiritual seekers into the here-and-now. One cannot expect to realize the truth of the divine pervasion in the past which is gone or in the future which is uncertain. One can do it only "here and now […] by giving up this piggish individuality, by not tying ourselves down to one little body, [by] knowing ourselves as one with all, living in all bodies, [and] perceiving through all minds" (Vivekananda, *Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 18; see also Ranganathananda 112-13). In his view of time, Tamkin thus points to the Vedantic moment of the ultimate Truth—transcendental and eternal—and eventually brings Tommy to that moment. Again, in bragging about his psychiatric services to the Egyptian royal family, Tamkin further tells Tommy, "But everybody is alike, common or aristocrat" (*SD* 73), which constitutes one of the cardinal principles of the *advaita*. The essence of Brahman or Pure Consciousness pervades the whole world indiscriminately, and every animate

or inanimate object is His reflection. The power status is a misnomer and power is a delusive play of *maya*. All humans are alike, equal, and one in the Vedantic parlance. We therefore should be guided by our own inner self. Hence, Vivekananda affirms, "Each man is the power. There is no king. I see everybody equally the same. I have not to take off my hat and bow low to anyone. Yet there is tremendous power in each man" (*Is Vedanta the Future Religion?* 9).

Tamkin then acquaints Wilhelm with the nature and kinds of the human soul. Even here, his stray observation entails intimate Vedantic implications. In Vedanta, there are two main souls: the *Jivatman*, covered or superimposed with the veil of *maya* and engaged with the world, and *Pramatman*, untainted by *maya*, Pure, True, Real, Sentient, Inert. *Jivatman* without superimposition is the same as *Pramatman*; both are essentially *One* and the *Same*. Tamkin informs Wilhelm that in the human heart, "mine, yours, everybody's—there isn't just one soul. There's a lot of souls. But there are two main ones, the real soul and a pretender soul" (*SD* 76). There are myriads of souls in the grip of *maya*, as many as humans and other animate creatures, what *Sankhyas* popularly call *Purushas*. They all have different embodiments (*upadhis*) and motivations depending on the nature of their *karmas* in their past lives, and the consequent nature of the preponderant *guna* (*sattav, rajas, ramas*) or quality in their present lives. The real soul loves the truth and the pretender avoids it. The pretender is a product of our social life as mired in attachments, dreams, desires, and ambitions. It is a superimposition over the real soul and is a lie and a deception in Vedantic philosophy. In Tamkin's view, "It is the main tragedy of human life [….] You are not free. Your own betrayer is inside of you and sells you out" (*SD* 76). When the true soul realizes that the pretender is a betrayer, it wants to remove the latter in order to be free from the slavery of sensory reality. In the same vein, Vedanta too advances a similar idea of two souls: the mutable or unreal soul (phenomenon), and the immutable or real soul (noumenon). The former is an accretion of our *karma*—our engagement with the worldly affairs (gross) under the spell of *maya*. The latter is an eternal essence of the divine (subtle) at the center of our self. Both work in two divergent ways—toward damnation and deliverance, respectively. The real soul may appear initially to lose to its variable counterpart, but it finally wins, and with its victory comes the realization of the transcendental Truth and the decimation of the temporal soul: "When we see the phenomenon [gross] around us, the noumenon [subtle] has vanished, but when we see the noumenon, the unchangeable, it naturally follows that the phenomenon has vanished" (Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta* 68). After the elimination of the gross element within the self, one becomes free from the shackles of the *samsaric* or worldly servility.

Tamkin's incidental Vedantic ideas reach their culmination in his short poem for Wilhelm (*SD* 80-81). The poem, "Mechanism vs Functionalism: Ism vs Hism," appears ridiculous and comically absurd at a casual glance, but seen closely in the context of Tamkin's other views and Vedantic ideas, it turns out to be a testament of salvation for Wilhelm and others like him. The poem is written on a paper that has

"ruled borders in red" (*SD* 80). In Vedantic context, red symbolizes energy, action, courage, and bravery (*rajoguna*). Tamkin tells Tommy that "the hero of the poem is sick humanity. If it would open its eyes it would be great" (*SD* 81). He further points out that we are all a divine product of nature: "If you could have confidence in nature you would not have to fear. It would keep you up. Creative is nature [….] It shapes leaves. It rolls the waters of the earth. Man is the chief of this. All creations are his just inheritance. You don't know what you've within you" (*SD* 81). He therefore admonishes Tommy, who is very much a part of sick humanity, to search for the *essential* divinity lying deep within himself rather than in the material world. On realizing his own uniqueness as an endless repository of nature's primal creative power, he would find his worldly preoccupations utterly superficial and senseless. In that case, Wilhelm would have all the joy, beauty, and cosmic bliss at his sole disposal. Following the awareness of the inner strength, Vedanta observes, one attains "infinite purity, freedom, love, and power" (Vivekananda, *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* 231). Furthermore, Tamkin tells Tommy that his inner, unknown power and glory are no simple things. He is at the best of them as an embodiment of God's own Spirit; therefore, he is the King of the "earth-moon-sea." Finally, Tamkin exhorts Tommy to open his eyes and see the way to the foot of Mt. Serenity, the cradle of eternal peace, freedom, and wisdom. In serenity, says Krishna in the Gita, "prasade sarva-dukhanam hanir asyopajayate/prasanna-cetaso hy asu buddhih paryavatisthate" (Vyasa, *The Bhagavad Gita* 2: 65, 166).[7] Tamkin's allusion to Mt. Serenity reminds Wilhelm of Mt. Everest in the Himalayas: "What does he [Tamkin] mean by Mount Serenity? Could it be a figure of speech for Mount Everest?" (*SD* 81). Even earlier, Mr. Perls had invoked India in his conversation with Tommy and his father, to which Wilhelm had expressed an unexpected but suggestive astonishment: "Mangoes—India? What did he mean, India?" (*SD* 44). This passage indicates that Bellow perhaps had India somewhere in the back of his mind while writing *Seize the Day*; he had earlier referred to Brahman and Shiva in *Dangling Man*. Or, maybe, he obliquely implied a connection of *Seize the Day* with the Indian philosophy of Vedanta. It is indeed opportune here to situate yet another of Tamkin's remarks in the Vedantic context: "If love is love, it's free" (*SD* 87). In Vedanta, love is free, impersonal, without bondage and bargain. For instance, the love of Shiva (Shakta) and Parvati (Shakti) in *Shivpuran* or Krishna and Radha in *Bhagavat Puran* is essentially the selfless (*niskam*) infatuation of the individual soul (*jivatman*) toward the Super-Soul (Brahman or *Pramatman*) and vice versa. This transcendental love externally manifests as *jivatman*'s dispassionate allegiance to all other embodied souls without any give and take (*nisswarth*). According to Vedanta, "The first test of love is that it knows no bargaining. So long as you see a man love another only to get something from him, you know that that is not love. It is shopkeeping" (Vivekananda, *Vedanta: Voice of Freedom* 194). True love, by contrast, is pure, selfless, and free. Love for others without a selfish motif unites all humans into One humanity and each entity inevitably belongs to It. This Vedantic view also lends substance to another of Tamkin's thoughts, "I am only on loan to myself, so

to speak. I belong to humanity" (*SD* 103). As an individual or *jivatman*, one is on loan to oneself temporarily from the lender Whole (Brahman or *Pramatman*). The gross body is on loan from the five cosmic *tattavas* or elements: ether, air, fire, water, and earth. As soon as the borrowed body returns to its source, the dust or *tattavas*, borrowed divine essence returns to the lender to whom it originally belonged. Each becomes one with its origin. Oneness is all.

Wilhelm's fear finally comes true: he loses the last bit of his money in the stock market, and Tamkin disappears, leaving him in the lurch. He surfaces out of nowhere like a mystery man, and he vanishes mysteriously in the anonymous crowd, like Allbee in *The Victim*. Tamkin thus becomes kin of all the world, since the nameless crowd (humanity) symbolizes the cosmic allegiance of each person to every other in the world, irrespective of all human-created demarcations. Now the trickster plays the last trick to treat Tommy's ailment of ignorance, egotism, and isolation. After Tamkin disappears, Wilhelm goes through some more disheartening experiences. He makes yet another desperate bid to persuade his father to help, but the latter again refuses (*SD* 116-17). In response to his estranged wife's pressing demand for more money, he telephones her to beg for mercy but gets a painful reply in return (*SD* 120-21). In Bellow's mystical view,

> The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, and peace. See that you are stripped of all creatures, of all consolation from creatures. For certainly as long as creatures comfort and are able to comfort you, you will never find true comfort. But if nothing can comfort you save God, truly God will console you. (*Mr. Sammler's Planet* 203)

Wilhelm's father's harsh rebuke and his wife's heartless rebuff bring him to the brink of tears. This series of rude shocks loosens his synthetic veneer and leads him closer to his real self. It is now difficult for him to carry on further with the burden of his "pretender soul." Wilhelm is presently left all by himself—alone, bereft of father, mother, sister, wife, children, blood relatives, friends, money, profit, and loss. He has crossed into a state of involuntary renunciation, of "total nothingness." In his present condition of complete non-attachment, he becomes open to the revelation of the universal Oneness. At the moment, Wilhelm's mental condition is somewhat similar to that of Lord Krishna's disciple Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna shows Arjuna His *virat roopam* (Cosmic Form)[8] only after the latter has become totally non-attached to the sensual world. Only then is Arjuna able to fully understand and accept the divine message of Cosmic Oneness: "tatraika-stham jagat krtsnam pravibhaktam anekadha/apasyad deva-devasya sarire pandavas tada" (Vyasa, *Bhagavad Gita* 11:13, 599).[9]

Unable to endure the loss, Tommy goes after Tamkin to claim the latter's share of the investment. While frantically searching for his secret sharer in the stock market, Tommy unmindfully walks out on Broadway, amid "the inexhaustible current of millions of every race and kind" (*SD* 122). He cannot find Tamkin, the disguised messenger of the great Truth, in the stock market, a congregation of greedy self-

seekers overtly joined by a material motive (*maya*) of profit. On Broadway, he enters the "great crowd" of millions inherently bound by a common human kinship: something huge and all-encompassing. In his real life, Tommy remains surrounded by his enchanting dream of wealth, wife, children, and a "separate destiny." Ironically, however, here in a surreal, dream-like realm of tremulous flux, Bellow says, the "facts" of life "have their turn." He finds his own problems writ large on each face which reflects "the refinement of one particular motive or essence—*I know. I spend, I strive, I design, I love, I cling, I uphold, I give way, I envy, I long, I scorn, I die, I hide, I want*. Faster, much faster than any man could make the tally" (*SD* 122; emphasis mine). On Broadway, Wilhelm identifies himself with everyone and everyone with him. As he comes to know that he is not the only one suffering in this woeful world (*samsara*), his grief is distanced, depersonalized, and generalized, and his plight becomes a "small matter" (*SD* 90) for him. It further draws him nearer to his true soul that loves the Truth. The massive spectacle sweeps him like a huge deluge and he spontaneously flows with the "larger body" of ordinary people, the anonymous crowd of his "brothers and sisters" from whom he had drifted away while passing beneath Times Square a few days earlier (*SD* 90-91). Afloat in the vast sea of humanity on Broadway, Wilhelm experiences a mystical illumination, an ecstasy, and the *broadening* of his narrow vision. The Broadway sidewalks appeared "wider" to Wilhelm, streets "immense," surroundings "gleamed," and although "the sun appeared like a broad tissue, its actual weight made him feel like a drunkard" (*SD* 122-23). The *ananda* or bliss of oneness with other fellow men breaks him out of the dark coverings and consequently he is able to see things more clearly:

> I'll get a divorce if it's the last thing, he swore. As for Dad—as for Dad—I'll sell the car for junk and pay the hotel. I'll have to go on my knees to Olive [his estranged love interest] and say, "Stand by me a while. Don't let her win. Olive!" And he thought, I'll try to start again with Olive. In fact, I must. Olive loves me. Olive— (*SD* 123)

He no longer wants greed to win over grace. Bellow does mention Olive earlier during Wilhelm's talk with his father (57), but he withholds her name perhaps for a larger suggestive purpose in the present context. The olive tree is customarily known for its fruitfulness, and its branch is taken as an emblem of truce or peace. The image of the pigeons that Wilhelm ignored in the beginning (*SD* 7) and of olive/Olive in the end (*SD* 101, 123, 125) conjoin to convey the growth in his consciousness. It indicates that the delusion of Tommy's greed has receded, enabling the peace to prevail and the Truth to shine in his soul. Wilhelm is now willing to recognize his situation and make peace with things as they are, like Allbee at the end of *The Victim*. His cry for Olive indicates a resurgence of feelings in his heart and a wish to restart his life with her "based on love."

Wilhelm pursues Tamkin fervently as if driven by an uncontrollable drive deep within him. The collective pressure of his earlier and present mistakes propels him toward his soul's growth and enlightenment. As Tommy runs after Tamkin, he comes

increasingly closer to the moment of his final reckoning. While on the lookout, he first comically mistakes someone else for Tamkin in the lavatory. Later, he gets an uncertain glimpse of him from the street, "speaking so earnestly, with pointed shoulders, to someone under the canopy of the funeral parlor?" (*SD* 123). The image of Tamkin, a trickster and trade guru, talking business beneath the canopy of a funeral parlour suggests that human life and all its breathless strivings, the whole enterprise of "getting and spending," "profit and loss," fall under the overarching dark shadow of death. Wilhelm shouts to Tamkin as a last effort to save himself from drowning in the deluge of the world's business, but the policeman (a public servant) and "pressure of the crowd" together push him "from the street into the chapel" (*SD* 123), from the worldly *motion* into a metaphysical *stasis*. The messenger disappears from sight, dispatching Tommy on way to an unusual insight: an epiphanic revelation of the inscrutable Truth. The mist of *maya* (appearance or unreality of the material world) vanishes and reality rises. The funeral parlour (or graveyard) symbolizes the cessation of body consciousness and silencing of tumultuous desires, which is naturally followed by the emergence of a spiritual awareness. In the chapel, Wilhelm finds himself standing in a row of the unknown mourners, slowly moving past a coffin, "gazing at the face of the dead" (*SD* 124) in it. He too moves with others

> slowly, slowly, foot by foot, the beating of his heart anxious, thick, frightening, but somehow also rich, neared the coffin and paused for his turn, and gazed down. He caught his breath when he looked at the corpse, and his face swelled, his eyes shone hugely with instant tears. (*SD* 124)

The sight mortifies his "synthetic soul" and magnifies the "real soul"; his heart beats "rich[ly]" and eyes shine "hugely" in the dark but cool parlour. The dead man seems

> as though he had sunk into the final thought. Now at last he was with it, after the end of all distractions, and when his flesh was no longer flesh. And by this meditative look Wilhelm was so struck that he could not go away. In spite of the tinge of horror, and then the splash of heartsickness, he could not go. He stepped out of line and remained beside the coffin; his eyes filled silently and through his still tears he studied the man as the line of visitors moved with veiled looks past the satin coffin towards the standing bank of lilies, lilacs, roses. With great stifling sorrow, almost admiration, Wilhelm nodded and nodded. (*SD* 124)

Here, Tommy *studies* the real book of life which alone can reveal the concealed truth. "Death is," in Bellow's mystical view, "the dark backing that a mirror needs if we are to see anything" (*Humboldt's Gift* 256). Wilhelm's "horror" and "heartsickness" compare to the initial responses of a child's first time in school. But, in spite of his "great stifling sorrow" (*SD* 124), he admires the reflection on the dead man's face, as if the latter has lastly found the eternal peace that he deeply desired in life. Tommy sees in the anonymous dead man's face the same secret fatality and fascination that had drawn him toward Tamkin (*SD* 63). The dead man, sunk in his "final thought," appears to mock the vanity of all human wishes—the culmination of earthly fret and fever, blood and mire, struggles and strivings, and dreams and desires. After

deliverance from all worldly attachments ("distractions") and temptations ("flesh") comes eternal peace and meditative tranquility. Wilhelm is deeply struck, stilled, and silenced by the serenity on the dead man's face, which he has been breathlessly seeking all the while.

The dead man's expressive features, such as his thoughtful mood, serene face, and meditative look, give an impression as if he were lying alive in the coffin. Contrarily, Tommy's insipid outlook of fixity ("struck"), stillness, and silence make him seem as if he were standing dead beside the coffin, as if the dead had come alive to reveal the Truth, and the living had gone dead, to be reborn in a new light. To borrow an expression from W.B. Yeats, the "mirror become[s] lamp" ("Introduction" xxxiii), as Tommy gets a glimpse of the inner glow in the "dark" (123) of the funeral parlour. The nearby bank of "lilies, lilacs, roses" symbolically beckons Wilhelm's spiritual rebirth (spring). His close identification and virtual exchange of position with the anonymous dead man stimulates his subdued compassion and humanity:

> Standing a little apart, Wilhelm began to cry. He cried at first softly and from sentiment, but soon from deeper feeling. He sobbed loudly and his face grew distorted and hot, and tears stung his skin. *A man—another human creature*, was what first went through his thoughts, but other and different things were torn from him. (*SD* 125; emphasis mine)

Though Tommy may still be reluctant in mind, his heart betrays his invisible kinship with the unknown dead man. The dead man is separated from his mundane desires and material possessions, and has surrendered even the last thing one would always insist on retaining: his life itself. Tommy, too, has been losing all his life, especially what he cherished most. Caught in a whirlpool of nothingness in the chapel, he once more tries to clutch on to love for protection; he again thinks of Olive for support and safety from Margaret, and in the bargain, he is even willing to part with his life: "And Olive? My dear! […] You must protect me against that devil [Margaret] who wants my life. If you want it, then kill me. Take, take it, take it from me" (*SD* 125). At this point, Wilhelm's will to life is minimal and he is left his barest elemental self, without any protestations, pretensions, prestige, attachment, ego, or false sense of honour. His mental state is like that of Gautama in the garden scene at the royal palace: stark revulsion toward the illusory business of the world (Campbell 264). A similar cosmic gloom, stark sense of *vairagya* (dispassion), and an acute feeling of *virkti* (detachment) from the empirical world fill his mind at the moment. Wilhelm is now open to enlightenment, an inward journey into the nethermost recesses of his primal self where all worldly distinctions and dualities dissolve into elemental nothingness:

> Soon he was past words, past reason, coherence. The source of all tears had suddenly sprung open within him, black, deep, and hot, they were pouring out and convulsed his body, bending his stubborn head, bowing his shoulders, twisting his face, crippling the very hands with which he held the handkerchief. (*SD* 125)

Tommy's hot (purposely repeated twice) face and hot tears indicate that he is changed from within by the newly aroused human warmth in him. The sight of the dead body,

to borrow another expression from W.B. Yeats, breaks the "bitter furies of complexity" ("Byzantium" 281). It silently twists, turns, wrenches, and wrests Wilhelm's body, mind, and thoughts of all egotism, arrogance, and estrangement from his fellow men. Here, Bellow's use of such gravid words as "pour," "convulse," "bend," "bow," and "cripple" suggest an external pressure and an internal force battering Wilhelm to break his moral resistance. Unable to hold on, Tommy lets go, fully and completely: "The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all his heart" (*SD* 125). By grieving, "with all his heart," publicly for a fellow man, Tommy fully extends himself to the "larger body" of humanity and accepts his allegiance to his fellow humans as absolute. He alone, "of all the people in the chapel, was sobbing. No one knew who he was" (*SD* 125). Wilhelm thus weeps for himself, for the anonymous dead man, and for all those in the world who would die. He is one with them in birth, as a manifestation of the same Super Soul (Brahman); and he is one with them in death, the "great leveller" of all human inequalities. One mourner implicitly refers to this unity by speculating that Tommy is "perhaps the cousin from New York they were waiting for?" (*SD* 125). Another mourner further affirms: "The man's brother, may be" (*SD* 125); and yet another remarks, "Oh, I doubt that very much [….] They're not alike at all. Night and day" (*SD* 125). He implies that, regardless of the differences, they are essentially equal partners in the common human fate of Birth and Death. Whatever one aspires and desires between these two immutable realities of every mortal life is merely an illusion or *maya*. Hence, the dead man and Wilhelm, who is mortal too, are kissing cousins and twin brothers. The dead is the *day* luminous with the radiance of Reality; the living is the *night* immersed in the dark of *avidya* or ignorance.

The light dazzles and drowns Wilhelm into a hallucinatory sea of mist, music, and mirthful tears: "The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself at the *center* of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears" (*SD* 126; emphasis mine). Tommy finds the centre, the still point, amidst the *kaalchakra* (circular movement of the mourners around the dead) of *samsara*, the ever-flowing crowd of fellow men in the funeral parlour and the ever-fleeting phenomenon of human life in the universe. The earlier references to the "round" and "circular" shape of his face (*SD* 9, 10, 16, 19) have fully realized their symbolism. His linear journey finally turns around and comes to a conclusion. The unending search for material comforts ends as a *mandala* (circular figure) or *shunya* (nothingness)—a state of infinite spiritual bliss. There is a great deluge of ecstatic tears and blissful music in celebration of his enlightenment. The celebratory flowers, lights, music, and tearful rapture turn it into a sort of cosmic carnival that is, in a way, reminiscent of the ecstatic gods rejoicing in heaven over Gautama's enlightenment as the Buddha (Campbell 274-75). The "heavy sea-like music" ferries Wilhelm into the farthest reaches of his submerged self: "He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need" (*SD* 126). Wilhelm sinks through the tattered fortifica-

tions of his pretensions into what Bellow calls the "quiet zone," the unknown depths of his true soul ("inescapable self"), to the fulfillment of his heart's primal longing for unity with the other "outcasts," "unfortunate," and "disfigured." Wilhelm undergoes a "sea change" like a sunken fertility god. His watery (spiritual) metamorphosis into a new life smooths his surrender to the undeniable truth—the inviolable cosmic code of the universal brotherhood. In this epiphanic moment, the dualities of life dissolve and the experience-experienced-experiencer become one. The bliss (*ananda*) of oneness with other humans liberates Wilhelm from all bondage, grief, sorrow, and sensual temptations of the temporal world. Wilhelm's pretender soul (*Jivatman*) mingles with the true soul (*Pramatman*) and he becomes a *jivanmukta*—"liberated while living." Tommy now knows that "[b]eneath the external chaos lie the regions of the human and the divine which confer peace, harmony, purpose and simplicity, if he will cease social striving and simply surrender to being human" (Cronin 24). In that case, "ism" becomes "hism" with the addition of "h"—*human, humane, humanity.*

Conclusion

Seize the Day stands out as Bellow's manifesto of man's spiritual and moral evolution project. Wilhelm leaves his college in search of a rich sensual life. Like a pilgrim driven by an inner prompting, he crosses through several stifling and shocking situations. Each of them, from Hollywood to the stock market, jolts his sensibility, relaxes his egotism, and pushes him toward further moral refinement. Wilhelm's change happens spontaneously: "this false life which we have assumed—with the ideal [which Bellow calls 'ideal constructions']; but this false life must go, and the real life which always exists, must manifest itself, must shine out" (Vivekananda, *Practical Vedanta* 12). At the end of his journey, which can be seen as a kind of shock therapy, Wilhelm is left as an everyman longing for spiritual growth and the moral expansion of his consciousness. Vedanta believes that there is no evolution in Pure Consciousness (Brahman). It never grows, never shrinks, and always stays the same: infinite and indivisible. However, Pure Consciousness manifests in different structures (names and forms) and in different degrees, which *individually* undergo the evolutionary process under the impulsions of the inner self. According to Vedanta, Pure Consciousness appears divided in different bodies but actually "exists undivided in all divided things" (Ranganathananda 105); it is One and the Same everywhere. The admission of this transcendental Truth induces the clarity of vision (*buddhi* or discrimination) and thereby inculcates the qualities of compassion, charity, grace, and goodness. The moral virtues thus acquired by transcendence are most essential today for universal peace, harmony, and unity: "Loving and helping each other, all shall attain the highest welfare" (Ranganathananda 111). In the context of Vedantic philosophy, Wilhelm's voyage from Broadway to the funeral parlour and his consequent epiphanic intimation act as a parable for modern humanity in two related respects.

First, Pure Consciousness eternally pervades every animate and inanimate object in the world like thread in a necklace. Hence, we are all the same, equal, and united as humankind. Second, the *atman* or embodied soul unfolds and evolves spontaneously and irrepressibly. Therefore, we should facilitate its expansion by mutual compassion to sustain our cosmic oneness with all other humans. No one is ever separate from the whole.

Notes

1. Hereafter cited as *SD*.

2. For a psychoanalytical analysis, see Weiss; for a sociological study, see Echelberger; for a philosophical interpretation, see Chavkin; and for a cultural examination, see Weber.

3. Here Vivekananda explains at length how the idea of human equality permeates American society, with the example of a reluctant immigrant to America shaking hands with the President within a few days.

4. "Brahman alone is real and the world is an illusion. Jiva is not different from Brahman."

5. Bellow persistently decries racial discrimination and instead propagates the creative force that is called *Atman*, Super Soul, or God. He thus counteracts the division of the world on racial lines with a doctrine of universal unity, of the oneness of all of humankind on common human grounds.

6. In *Bhagavad Gita* 2: 62-63, Krishna tells Arjuna, "dhyayato visayan pumasah sangas tesupajayate / sangat sanjayate kamah kamat krodho bhijayate / krodhad bhavati sammohah sammohat smrti-vibhramah / smrti-bhramsad buddhi naso buddhi-nasat pranasyati" ("While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises. From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool"; 163-64).

7. "For one [thus dipped in serenity], the threefold miseries of material existence exist no longer; in such satisfied consciousness, one's intelligence is soon well established."

8. Finally in Chapter XI, Slokas 10-34 of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna reveals to Arjuna His Transcendental Form (Virat Roopam) wherein the latter sees all times as One and the entire universe, with its myriad divisions, all gathered together in One Cosmic Whole (589-616).

9. "At that time Arjuna could see in the universal form of the Lord the unlimited expansions of the universe situated in one place although divided into many, many thousands."

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