

CONSCIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

'The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of the people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that this center is really everywhere. It is within each of us.'

Black Elk

The Mystical Experience

Throughout the ages, mystics have experienced a direct perception of the primal, underlying reality of pure, undifferentiated Consciousness that gives birth to the vast phenomenal world and the myriad expressions of existence. By transcending the duality of the subject-object perception experienced by most people, mystics realize the fundamental unity of all that exists as timeless, universal consciousness. "The consciousness of the subject in a subject-object experience is the same consciousness that is the ground of all being." This is expressed in the Hindu Upanishads as "Thou are That."

Why in our ordinary experience do we feel separate? This separateness, insists the mystic, is an illusion. If we meditate on the true nature of our self, we shall find, as mystics from many ages and times have found, that there is only one consciousness behind all the diversity. This one consciousness or Self goes by many names. Hindus refer to it as the *atman*, Christians call it the Holy Spirit, or in Quaker Christianity, the inner light. By whatever name it is called, all agree that the experience of this one consciousness is of inestimable value . . . Mystics, then, are those people who offer testimony to this fundamental reality of unity in diversity. (1)

In higher states of consciousness it is possible to access deeper levels of reality and perceive the source of All and the unity of all existence. Buddhist teacher Stephen Batchelor describes his powerful mystical experience:

One evening at dusk I was abruptly brought to a halt by the upsurge of an overpowering sense of the sheer strangeness of everything. It was as though I had been lifted onto the crest of a great wave that rose from the ocean of life itself, allowing me for the first time to be struck by how mysterious it was that anything existed at all rather than nothing. "How," I asked myself, "can a person be unaware of *this*? How can one pass their life without responding to *this*? Why have I not noticed *this* until now?" I remember standing still, trembling and dumb, with tears in my eyes. (2)

Descriptions of mystical experiences by ordinary people have also been reported throughout the ages. Many were collected by Canadian doctor Richard Maurice Bucke in his seminal book *Cosmic Consciousness*, first published in 1901:

All at once I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire, an immense conflagration somewhere close by; the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterwards there came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all human beings are immortal; that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world, of all the worlds, is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain. (3)

Now came a period of rapture so intense that the universe stood still, as if amazed at the unutterable majesty of the spectacle. Only one in all the infinite universe! The All-loving, the Perfect One . . . In that same wonderful moment of what might be called supernal bliss, came illumination. I saw with intense inward vision the atoms or molecules, of which seemingly the universe is composed – I know not whether material or spiritual – rearranging themselves, as the cosmos (in its continuous, everlasting life) passes from order to order. What joy when I saw there was no break in the chain – not a link left out – everything in its place and time. Worlds, systems, all blended into one harmonious whole. (4)

Transcendental experiences of being connected to a vast, invisible, spiritual level of reality are powerful, immediate and personal: “The strong sense of the infinite, the belief in an unseen order of the world, the feeling of being in the presence of something divine are all *personal*. Qualities of this experience cannot be quantified or measured, like readings on a volt-meter, and thus cannot be transferred to others. The qualities must be directly experienced by the individual in unique moments.”

In his classic anthology *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley was struck by the fact that there was “miraculous agreement between humans of different race, different religion, knowing nothing about each other’s existence, separated by centuries and millennia, and by the great distances that there are on our globe.” He concluded that the mystical experience was essentially universal in nature and transcended time, place and cultural considerations.

In *Mysticism and Philosophy*, philosopher W.T. Stace identifies the salient characteristics of the mystical experience as universally described in different cultures and epochs throughout human history (5). “The central experience of mysticism is the perception of ‘oneness.’ The

borders between subject (the person) and object (the world) dissolve. Words used to describe it include: boundless, ceaseless, bottomless, nothingness, fathomless, infinite, void, empty, and absolute." The essential features of this 'inner enlightenment' point to the ineffable nature of such a transformative experience:

- Cannot be adequately expressed or communicated in words
- Transcends the normal boundaries of space and time
- Reveals a new and deeper view of reality
- Awareness of the unity of all that exists
- A sense that all things are alive and conscious
- Awe and wonder at the mystery and perfection of existence
- A profound feeling of the divine, holy and sacred nature of life

Such an experience defies attempts to describe it in words, concepts, symbols, images or even analogies, metaphors or myths. Mystics sometimes speak of directly apprehending reality in its primal 'suchness,' 'isness' or 'oneness' without further elaboration, leaving the mystery of the experience untouched and unexplained by normal means of communication.

The mystical experience occurs within the innermost depths of one's consciousness – our essence or 'what we are born with.' According to Indian master Sri Anirvan, it can be realized within oneself through either simple intuition of the Self (or Ultimate Reality), or through conscious love. "The basic ground of mystic life is always an interior movement leading to a deepening and broadening of consciousness that contacts and assimilates true reality. It means sensing the real and becoming the real and discovering the link of pure Existence within non-existence or the Void."

In mystical states of consciousness "time and timelessness meet in the heart." It is a return to the natural state where functioning takes place as pure being in a return to original Spirit. Advaita Vedanta teacher Jean Klein: "In the total absence of yourself there is presence. It is a presence beyond space and time. The objects in your life constantly change, but the subject never changes. It is the eternal, silent background which you must live knowingly."

Silence is our real nature. What we are fundamentally is only silence. Silence is free from beginning to end. It was before the beginning of all things. It is causeless. Its greatness lies in the fact that it simply is. In silence all objects have their home ground. It is the light that gives objects their shape and form. All movement, all activity is harmonized by silence . . . Silence has nothing to do with the mind. It cannot be defined but it can be felt directly because it is our nearness. Silence is freedom without restriction or centre. It is our wholeness, neither inside nor outside the body. Silence is joyful, not pleasurable. It is not psychological. It is feeling without a feeler. Silence needs no intermediary. Silence is holy. It is healing. There is no fear in silence. Silence is autonomous like love and beauty. It is untouched by time. (6)

The origin, nature and metaphysical meaning of the universe revealed in mystical states of consciousness reconciles and unifies the cosmological world-views of both science and many traditional spiritual teachings. Dr. Christian Wertenbaker:

According to mystical perception, the universe is a great living organism. Like the human organism, its life is self-sustaining by means of a vast and complex metabolic cycle, within which are many sub-cycles, wheels within wheels, levels within levels of interacting vibrations. Unlike the human organism, however, the universe doesn't depend on anything from outside. One half of the cosmic cycle is manifested as the outer world and is the subject of scientific scrutiny. It consists of many semi-independent entities on different scales: galaxies, stars, planets, animals and plants, nested within each other. It is a movement of creation and dispersal. Its overall direction is to run down, but in the process myriad transient self-sustaining entities are created to live for a time . . . The other half of the cycle is not visible to science because it is manifest in the inner world of conscious beings. Consciousness reunites the dispersed elements, by the fact of their being perceived together. It is the way of return to the source. In the highest state of mystical perception, a consciousness is united with everything, merges with universal consciousness; perceiver and perceived are one. Yet paradoxically this is not an annihilation of the self: the self and the greater Self of the universe are one, but the self retains its own identity. (7)

Spiritual Traditions and Consciousness

At the core of the world's spiritual traditions is a 'source teaching' or 'primordial science' which articulates the development of human consciousness and the laws that govern this process. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman hints at the contours of this great spiritual task: "The central idea is that the ultimate source of truth and meaning is the Universal Self within ourselves. Once one begins to study what it really means, this idea can be detected in different articulations and contexts at the heart of all the world's great spiritual philosophies and religious traditions, including the religions of the West in their mystical or esoteric expressions."

The idea of the Self that is our real self is not meant to remain only as an idea. It is meant to call us to an entirely new kind of life within the everyday life we are now living. It is a representation in words referring to an actual force that occupies a very central place within the scale of forces in the universe itself. The idea tells us that a human being is meant to live in conscious, palpable relationship to this force – not to settle only for thinking about it, or feeling great interest in it or a sense of wonder about it. In such a case, our socially conditioned sense of self, what we call the ego, would remain with its illusions intact, having absorbed a great idea into itself, while imagining it had transcended itself. (8)

One of the goals of traditional spiritual teachings is to expand our consciousness from an identification with familiar, everyday existence to a deeper recognition of the ultimate source and foundation of phenomenal reality. Sri Anirvan: "The real purpose of all ancient spiritual teachings is to invite us to turn our gaze inward to the source and origin both of the 'outer' universe of phenomena and of the 'inner' universe of consciousness, to find the ever-present and eternal simultaneity of what is usually seen as a flow of separate events in time; and above all, to fathom the ultimate mystery of our selfhood."

This inner process is a conscious endeavour to grow by harmonious assimilation, through the broadening of awareness in order to harmonize with the environment. "The individual must penetrate into the very depths of his own being before he can hope to have a glimpse of the secrets of the world-being or an intuition of the pure Being whose Void sets the stage for the drama of the world and the soul."

The postulate of a higher, subtler, and wider consciousness forming the substratum of the phenomenal being is not an unwarranted assumption, because even the sense-mind, which may dogmatically refuse to look beyond its bounds, is unable to carry on its normal functions without a tacit intuition of an infinity beyond the finite, an unmanifest beyond the manifest, or as the ancients would have put it, a vastness of the Void as the source of all thoughts and forms. The concept of a substratum is thus a subjective necessity in our dealing with any level of existence . . . The substratum-consciousness is there, silent and secure in the depth of the being providing the life movement with a *telos* [ultimate aim or purpose], projecting the dream of an ideal on the mind's screen, supplying the deeper spiritual aspiration with the vision of a God. It is not as yet a palpably perceived reality, but its pressure on phenomenal consciousness or its insistent will-to-become cannot nevertheless be denied. (9)

The development of a refined consciousness, in which reality is apprehended in its entirety, can be facilitated by the transmission of higher, spiritual knowledge through non-intellectual means in the form of intuitive perception: "The truths of the soul are to be experienced, not just speculated about." In many spiritual traditions, myths, fables and teaching stories are employed to communicate objective truths which touch the mind and heart of humanity:

Spiritual ideas, ideas meant to move and actually guide men and women toward the work of inner liberation and transformation, were relatively rarely expressed in ancient times in the language of rationalism. Great ideas from authentic spiritual traditions embodying a genuinely higher kind of knowledge were almost always communicated through myth and story and powerful imagery – just in order to allow the teaching to touch the feeling heart, rather than submit to capture and encapsulation by the head, where such knowledge would ultimately serve only to fortify man's illusions about himself and his egoistic impulses toward his neighbor. (10)

Traditional spiritual teachings speak of consciousness as the primary reality underlying phenomenal existence and bridging the worlds of matter and spirit. In Hinduism, *Brahman* is the universal consciousness, “the one without a second, the ground of all being.” And in Buddhism, *Dharmakaya* is the one consciousness which illuminates both the material and spiritual realms of existence. According to Islamic cosmology, human consciousness is derived from the ‘Divine Intellect,’ the source of all light: “Human consciousness is an incredible thing, and the most direct proof of the non-physical nature of our existence. We don’t need any other proof for the existence of God than to understand human consciousness.”

One of the principal vessels of Western esoteric knowledge concerning the transformation of consciousness has, historically, been the teachings of the Gnostics:

Perhaps the main aspect of these Gnostic religions is what has been seen as their claim to possess and transmit a special kind of knowledge (the Greek term is *gnosis*) which differs markedly from what the word represents in the modern world. Gnosis is a term meant to designate what we may call *transformational* knowledge – knowledge the possession of which transforms the intrinsic character or level of being of the individual. Such knowledge is not simply knowledge as it is understood in the modern world, namely a property of the intellect alone. Gnosis, on the other hand, transforms the knower as well as that which is known. It would not be entirely amiss to speak of gnosis as representing a mystical conception of knowledge. Taken in this sense, the word gnosis refers to a universal and fundamental aspect of every great spiritual and religious tradition the world has ever known. (11)

Throughout the ages, various schools of Buddhism have given particular emphasis to the primary role of consciousness or awareness in our perception and understanding of reality. They point to the fallacy of regarding the so-called external world as existing independent of our own direct experience and offer a new perspective: “Instead of automatically interpreting sensory experience as independent objects, we perceive it for what it is – sensory experience, neither more nor less.” Western Buddhist teacher Ken McLeod elaborates:

What we are – pure being, empty awareness, Buddha nature – is obscured by the presence of habituated patterns of perception, feeling, and thinking. The practice of mind training takes the raw ore of awareness and experience and refines it, progressively eliminating the impurities that cloud perception and trigger reactions. As impurities are removed, direct open awareness manifests more and more clearly. The sense of separation created by the subject-object patterns of perception begins to subside, and we enter into the mystery of being. As the sense of separation diminishes, we know what arises in experience fully and completely. Our relationship with what we experience moves into balance, a movement that has two aspects: compassion and emptiness. Emptiness refers to knowing what experience is – groundless, open, and indefinable. What we do is not based on personal agendas or the need to maintain a sense of

self. Instead, what we do arises from the direct perception of the present. At this level, compassion is the natural manifestation of awareness. The unity of compassion and emptiness is awakening mind. (12)

Other Eastern spiritual teachings, such as Advaita Vedanta, also indicate that the world of phenomena only exists in the light of consciousness and point to pure awareness as our true nature. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: "Realize that all happens in consciousness and you are the root, the source, the foundation of consciousness. The world is but a succession of experiences and you are what makes them conscious, and yet remain beyond all experience. It is like the heat, the flame and the burning wood. The heat maintains the flame, the flame consumes the wood. Without heat there would be neither flame nor fuel."

Although the world appears to be external, outside ourselves, in actuality it is within us as primal, universal consciousness: "Awareness is all-pervading, unchangeable, timeless, here and now. You can never localize awareness. Awareness is completely autonomous, dependent on nothing."

Generally we think that an object exists outside ourselves, that it has an independent existence, but that is only a belief. It is not based on experience or fact. The so-called object outside us needs consciousness to be perceived. Consciousness and its object are one, so you create, you project, the world from moment to moment. When the body first wakes up in the morning, at the same moment the world wakes up. You project the world; it is you who creates the world from moment to moment. (13)

In certain spiritual disciplines, the consciousness of the aspirant must pass through a number of successive 'levels of refinement' to reach enlightenment or awareness of pure Existence. In his writings (14), Gurdjieff metaphorically speaks of four stages of inner development in order to access the 'matrix of universal energy' or Void. The four stages are: plurality of 'I's, a single 'I,' no 'I' and the Void. The essence of this transformational process is that "there are higher levels of conscious identity calling to us within ourselves. Work on oneself is necessary in order to touch and then establish within ourselves this transforming conscious relationship."

Sri Anirvan, in his writings (*Inner Yoga* and *To Live Within*), describes the spiritual progress of the disciple through four stages of development reflecting a maturation of consciousness, in a schema very similar to that of Gurdjieff:

1. Primordial ignorance
2. The plane of the ego with pleasure and pain in all their forms
3. The 'I' that makes it possible to observe oneself
4. The Void that is everything and nothing

Sri Anirvan taught that the transition from the lower stages to the two higher stages is the crucial step in the evolution of consciousness: "An active meditative state in all the circum-

stances of life (to become the witness of oneself in the midst of life), leads to a voluntary withdrawal from the mechanical association of ideas from which most reactions arise, producing a conscious self-control characterized by a personal discipline and voluntary sacrifice (sometimes called 'natural intelligence')." He expands on this process of spiritual alchemy:

Gurdjieff often speaks about the plurality of 'I's. In substance he says: 'Bring all the 'I's to the 'I' of essence, knowing in advance that in the place of essence you may find an 'I' who will try to fool you!' Likewise every master of Samkhya speaks about the plurality of 'I's. He will say, in different ways, that at the start, the 'I' towards which all the 'I's converge is only theoretically the Void. Through a meticulous discipline you draw close to an 'I' from which you can calmly observe yourself. From there the world is seen with all its mechanical movements; from there, for brief moments, you may have a glimpse of that 'I' which is the Void. The next step cannot be taught by any book. It must be lived degree by degree, and lived with the Master holding one's hand. It is the slow discovery that finally there is no 'I' but only 'that which is active' in you. At that moment something can take place, but the vision is so fugitive that the least movement can destroy it. It is there, both inside and outside. We experience it and see it at the same time. We also see the mechanicity of all those things that come from nowhere and go nowhere. If we do not see this with eyes full of wonder, we then have an impression of self-extinction. But if we find ourselves in the midst of unexpected miracles, the movement of *prakriti* [the creative principle] ceases for an instant, and we are totally one with an impression of life and of a spiritual radiance. (15)

To facilitate this process of the inner development of consciousness, it is necessary to consciously work with, and transform, external impressions and events: "Every disciple in his quest is fully aware that the personal discipline he has accepted has a practical aim which is the complete union of human consciousness with the highest reality. The goal is to transform the mental, vital, and even the physical nature of his being, down to the smallest cells in the body, in order to attain to the understanding of the ultimate reality."

Become your own architects and lay the foundations of a solid structure in which everything will be in its place. It is by progressively studying our reactions to shocks from outside that we can measure our progress and see what remains shaky in ourselves. The only way to recognize your real 'I' is to see your reactions in detail, one after the other. That is the surest guide for penetrating toward the inner being. The duration of a reaction clearly seen is the only moment when mind and matter, soul and body, are not cut off from each other. It is a moment of your own reality. We must learn to recognize these impressions, to welcome them or to reject them . . . The man who penetrates willingly into the plane of evolution thus creates impressions related to it, which then accumulate. Because of this he enters within the evolutionary will. Then ensues a definite rhythm of births and deaths until the

substances utilized are refined and purified. The level of consciousness changes at each stage, for many degrees of perception mark out the path of evolution. (16)

For each of us, consciousness is the ultimate source and foundation of existence. Thoughts, perceptions and actions appear and disappear in the silence of consciousness, which remains eternally present as the timeless background of all that is. Jean Klein: "If all that we think and do did not refer to the ultimate we would not have sacred music, poetry, painting, sculpture and so on. There is music to glorify the ultimate, poetry to glorify the ultimate, painting to glorify the ultimate." When we perceive that the underlying reality of all human beings is the same universal consciousness, we come to a deep feeling of unity and oneness:

There are two aspects to unity: actual oneness and multiplicity in oneness. The most important is the recognition that our very homeground, our origin is one. It is not a composed oneness, but actually is oneness. It is called by many names: consciousness, stillness, our original nature. It is present when all aspects of individuality are absent. When there is no more object, it is there as presence. Presence is the absence of anything . . . Our original nature which we have in common with all, is when the 'I' stands without any qualification. This unqualified 'I' is presence, consciousness. It is our homeground out of which all phenomenal existence arises and into which it returns. Before we can be united, or even truly related, we must accept intellectually, even before we have the living experience of it, that our homeground is one. This is the only *a priori* conviction that can ever work in solving the conflict in our world society. It is the only workable structure, because it is the only truth. Out of this truth comes authority. Truth is the only sovereign. Truth is ethical, functional and aesthetic. It is the fundamental knowing that consciousness without objects is our original nature and that to take ourselves for individual personae is the sole cause of conflict and suffering. (17)

The Flowering of Consciousness

Our understanding of the "why and how" of existence is inextricably related to our level of consciousness and being. Without the development and refinement of consciousness our ability to comprehend the psychological and cosmological laws governing the inner and outer worlds of reality is limited:

In every age men have tried to assemble all the knowledge and experience of their day into a single whole which would explain their relation to the universe and their possibilities in it. In the ordinary way they could never succeed. For the unity of things is not realisable by the ordinary mind, in the ordinary state of consciousness. The ordinary mind, refracted by the countless and contradictory prompting of different sides of human nature, must reflect the world as manifold and confused as is man himself. A unity, a pattern, an all-embracing meaning – if it exists – could only be discerned or experienced by a different kind of mind, in a different state of

consciousness. It would only be realisable by a mind which had itself become unified. (18)

The refinement of consciousness through spiritual practice leads to a transformation of the ordinary, ego-based self into a more inclusive, universal understanding of oneself and the world. "The only avenue to intrinsic well-being or happiness is to abide as the pure consciousness that 'sees' and 'experiences' the world without any selfish seed of desire." The ultimate goal of traditional spiritual teachings is self-transcendence through compassionate, selfless action.

According to Gurdjieff, humanity needs to fulfill its destiny and universal purpose in the great scheme of creation through the development of conscious love and intelligence. "We human beings are on earth under some unknown sacred obligation – we are not here for ourselves alone, we are here to serve something greater than ourselves."

Human beings are capable of touching a deeper level of reality beyond our normal thoughts, emotions and sensations which create the ordinary sense of "I" or personal self. The aim of spiritual work is to expand consciousness and spiritualize all forms of activity. Jeanne de Salzmann describes this transformative experience: "When I feel a wish to *know*, to be free to enter into contact with this reality, a space opens, and in this space the energy comes together to form a whole. Suddenly I feel myself as another being. This moment of unity is a complete change in my consciousness of myself. Nothing remains of my usual way of thinking and feeling."

I begin to see that I live torn between two realities. On the one hand, there is a reality of my existence on the earth, which limits me in time and space, with all its threats and opportunities for satisfaction. On the other hand, there is a reality of being that is beyond this existence, a reality for which I have a nostalgia. It calls to our consciousness, across all the disappointments and misfortunes, to lead us to serve Being, to serve the "divine" in ourselves. If my life is lived only to subsist, the essential being is veiled, obscured. Even if I subsist in an intelligent, reasonable way, I do not see the true sense of my life – I have no direction. I am entirely drawn toward outer existence and thus prevented from becoming conscious of my authentic being. On the other hand, if I feel another reality, under the force of this impression I forget my life and withdraw into isolation. Thus the world claims me without caring about inner life, and my being calls me without caring about the demands of worldly existence. These are two poles of one larger Self, one same Being. I need to find a state in which I am more and more open and obedient to an essential force in me, and at the same time to express this force and let it do its work in the world. (19)

By engaging and working with the challenges and obstacles inherent in everyday living we can experience the fullness and interdependency of life. Spiritual awakening opens the heart and intuition and reveals levels of consciousness beyond the workings of the normal everyday

mind. In the words of Sri Anirvan: "To an integral view, the universe is the joy of the pure Being crystallized through self-expression. This is the essential nature of man, though it is distorted by a sense of limitation, so that we do not feel limitless and wide but are cribbed, confined and restless . . . Yet we know of a truly creative higher-mind which exists germinally within the ordinary mind. It is a living consciousness – a pure sensation in which the subject is the object. To know is then to *be*. Existence and consciousness are One – a harmonious whole."

The quest is integral in character, a striving to make a fully conscious life operate here and now. Obstacles come from the narrow outlook that considers reality not as a whole but as split up into matter and consciousness. In other words, the Totality in which all polarities melt, has been distorted into a 'whole' divided into two parts, with the result that 'the Integral truth' has ever remained baffling and elusive. It is man's destiny to realize unity, which means realizing the Self, for the one is the manifestation of the other in degrees as well as multiplicities. The journey is through the multiplicities and oppositions caused by ignorance and onward to the shores of knowledge. The world is the field of experiment for man's quest for Unity. (20)

One of the consequences of higher consciousness is acceptance of the whole of life just as it is, as the mind and heart open up to receive the myriad expressions of phenomenal existence. "Serenity within oneself and a right relationship with life and other people becomes a way of being. One learns to look at the movement of Great Nature in all its manifestations without interfering or reacting to its movements, living in the very heart of life without being affected by it."

The adept finds his point of support in his own inner attitude, in a conscious effort to understand 'what there is.' To reach this attitude, he makes use of everything that he has discovered, everything that he has experienced up to the time when he begins his search. His material consists of events in his life which enlarge his plane of consciousness, harmonize the microcosm that he is, and reveal the relation existing between the known universe and the unknown universe around him. He has an attitude of openness. He questions and he observes. He searches within himself for a familiar sensation so as to face the perfect and absolute cosmic Law which unfolds. He knows that it is through overcoming obstacles that the inner being will make a fresh effort to obtain a wider level of consciousness. To hold to this openness entails attentive vigilance and an immense work of amassing details upon details until the first of them are clearly perceived. To lead such a life is to live a prayer. (21)

When pure consciousness is revealed as one's fundamental nature, actions cease to arise from the egocentric self and are, instead, executed in a spirit of detached, unselfish compassion. "The purified body-mind is used as an instrument for benevolent action in the world, while, at the same time, the ego-personality is transcended through dispassionate acts of conscious self-surrender. As a fully liberated being one is now able to engage life spontan-

ously and innocently yet animate freely a full range of feelings, emotions and passions without being overtaken by them and without causing harm to others.”

The psychological, ethical, and social implications of this kind of identity-transformation are, needless to say, immense. Yoga does not destroy or anesthetize our feelings and emotions thereby encouraging neglect and indifference toward others. On the contrary, the process of “cessation” steadies one for a life of compassion, discernment and service informed by a “seeing” that is able to understand (literally meaning “to stand among, hence observe”) and is in touch with the needs of others. (22)

As consciousness progressively expands to encompass a more comprehensive view of reality, there is a re-orientation in which ego-based subjectivity is replaced by a panoramic awareness: “You are the world. You are not isolated from the world. The world appears according to your point of view. From the standpoint of the senses, the world is only sense perception. From the standpoint of mind, the world is mind. But when you take your stand in consciousness, in globality, the world is consciousness.” This holistic perspective engenders a new way of engaging with life. In Taoism the realized human being is the embodiment of the principle ‘harmony with nature and all other beings.’

It is like the man of Tao who acts according to Heaven. His volition is non-volition. His acting is non-acting. His practice is non-practice. A man of Tao does not act according to codified morality, what society expects, or ideas and learned sentiments like nationalism, prejudice or economic or political ideals. In other words, there is no interference with what he has discovered in global view of the situation. He is a citizen of the world, not a specific nation, and acts for the good of the world. He is the world and its suffering is his suffering. Its joy is his joy. The man of Tao, being without ego, is humble. And in this humility he never takes advantage of the weakness of others. (23)

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